

Nollywood and the (Re)Construction of Femininity in Female Narratives: A Critical Appraisal

Charles Okwuowulu

Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu Alike, Nigeria

Abstract

Before the upsurge of female directors in Nollywood, film critics decried the bizarre portrayal of the feminine gender by most male directors. Women are believed to be portrayed as gossips, temptresses, seductresses, evil-doers, distractors etc. It was then supposed by many that such erroneous portrayals will stop once female directors came onto the scene. Presently, a substantial number of female directors have taken up the camera as filmmakers in Nollywood; nonetheless, the portrayal of women seems to be the same. From Amaka Igwe's *Rattle Snake* (1994) which presented the subjugation of the feminine gender in widowhood practices, to Chineze Anyaene's *Ije* (2010) in which the same widowhood practices resurface, Kemi Adetiba's films, *Wedding Party* (2016) and *King of Boys* (2018) in which women are portrayed in precarious light to *The Women* by Blessing Egbe (2017) which highlights feminine vices, this paper argues that the (re)presentation of female characters in most Nollywood films by female directors, instead of breaking the chauvinist stereotypical female construct by male directors, continues to reinforce it. This assertion is based on the analysis of three randomly selected Nollywood films by three female directors who have significantly impacted the Nollywood industry, such as, Amaka Igwe's *Rattle Snake* (1994), Kemi Adetiba's *King of Boys* (2018) and Genevieve Nnaji's *Lion Heart* (2018). The paper affirms therefore that gender representation in films is a function of the patriarchal structure and its construction of the female in Nigerian society which Nollywood films continue to reinforce.

Keywords: Nollywood, Feminine Image, Female Directors, Female Narratives

Introduction

The issue of feminine consciousness in Nigeria was birthed after the 4th World Beijing Conference in 1995 which made the issue of gender equality fundamental in both the political space and public sector with a recommendation of 35% for women in political positions, power and decision-making (Amobi, Hussein and Akinuliola, 2018, p. 13). With this consciousness, one of the criticisms often faced by Nollywood presently is supposedly the misrepresentation of the feminine gender by male filmmakers. Obi Okoli (2020), a Nollywood filmmaker, describes the filmic portrayal of women as exactly as they are: wives, mothers, subordinates, breadwinners, leaders, tricksters, prostitutes, frauds, kind-hearted and so on and therefore sees no issues with the controversial nature of female (mis)representation in Nollywood. Unlike the previous notion of limited female directors in Nollywood, an avalanche of celebrated female directors such as Amaka Igwe, Kemi Adetiba, Tope Oshin, Mildred Okwo, Jade Osiberu, Patience Oghre-Imobhio, Omoni Oboli, Blessing Effiom Egbe, Genevieve Nnaji, Judith Audu, Emem Isong-Misodi and others, have emerged. Their emergence aroused the curiosity of this researcher towards examining female representations in their films, as feminist critics have hitherto attributed the bigoted feminine image in Nollywood films to male-chauvinist machination. This study is therefore interested in investigating to what extent this female mis-representation has changed with the emergence of female directors.

Creative Works and Feminine Representations

The binary between male-chauvinist and feminist/womanist ideologies has always been mirrored in the films and literature of various cultures and periods where the struggle is present. In discussing the issues of anti-feminine bias in classical literature, Katie Wilcox (2018) agrees that the dearth of female playwrights prior to the seventh century orchestrated the misrepresentation of women. Thus, feminist critics in their classical literary engagement decry the filthy male representations of feminine characters. Wilcox believes that the non-existence of women playwrights in the classical era became the key subject of discourse of the early feminists (p. 1). She is thus disparaging about the stereotypical portrayal of the femme-fatale characters in texts. Citing Barry, she deduces that the feminine characters as portrayed by male chauvinist playwrights are:

Not actual women, but are instead, versions of women created by men to be what men think women actually are, and by analyzing the roles in

which men place those fictional women, we can examine the “cultural” mind-set in men and women which perpetuates cultural inequality (2018 p. 2).

Wilcox in a paper titled “Feminist Literary Criticism and *Lysistrata*” therefore affirms that the dearth of female playwrights in the classical era caused feminist critics to analyse feminist engagements of classical texts with reference to male-feminine-character portrayals in their criticism. Quoting Sue Ellen Case’s article, “The Greek Creation of Female Parts”, Wilcox believes that this absence of women playwrights became central to early feminist investigations (2018, p. 2). Thus, the issue of the eccentric feminine character as a male construct emerged in academia. Consequently, Wilcox argues that the feminine character as male construct is stereotypical and as such deceptive. In addition, Shapiro in recognition of the societal construct of the feminine gender underscores some particular role expected of women in the society. Citing Mahalic and others, she observes that:

Two different sets of expectations related to women exist; behavioural and physical. Various normative messages associated with femininity include “be nice, focus on relationships, be attractive, be thin, nurture others, be silent, defer to men, and be domestic (2017, p. 38).

The seeming feminine fragile physique and tender nature helps to accentuate the masculine perception of the female as a weakling. Brooke Shapiro, alluding to N’Guessan, affirms that the supposed feminine fragile physique may not actually underscore them as weaker sex. The notion of women as weaker sex is a societal construct which stems from gender chauvinistic ideologies. Accordingly, gender relations make the woman a constructed “other”, placing her fragile physique as inhibition towards the execution of forceful tasks and as such wrongly and purposely considered as a weaker sex. Out of this assumption that women are weaker and more fragile, a plethora of expectations for women are raised (2017, p. 38). Shapiro thus believes that the inclusion of more feminine script-writers will change the subservient way in which women are being portrayed in the films.

Voyeurism is the most probable concept towards underscoring the female image in films. This concept sees film as a vehicle for transporting human (feminine) nakedness which often arouses sexual desire in the spectators. Hence the concept of voyeurism, as articulated by Laura Mulvey, is a recurring imprint in Hollywood cinema, for instance. Interrelated with the concept of *scopophilia* (sensual pleasure in looking at others

naked or in a sexual act), Mulvey explains that cinema often employs this motif to sustain viewership and fulfil the primeval wish of gratifying looking. Thus, film characters (mostly women) are constantly objectified as sexual stimulant for the audience through nakedness/positioning and posturing. Accordingly, the notion of active (male) and passive (female) connotes this pleasure of looking with the image of the passive encrypted with sensual motifs signifying a *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Thus, femininity is frequently objectified in sexual dual codes embodying erotic sights as sensual motif within the onscreen characters and as viewer's erotic objects. Mulvey therefore explains that masculine pleasure in staring at a sexual advance by a fellow man on a woman justifies man's character as active pleasure "*seeker*" whereas the female gender is passive pleasure "*seeker*" (Mulvey, 2006, pp 62 – 65).

Nollywood feminist critic, Ola Uchendu (2020), argues that the issue of the objectification of women as sexual objects in Nollywood (with the advent of digital filmmaking revolution) is not a case of male directors versus female directors. Both the male directors and female directors, being products of the same society, are shaped by masculine ideologies which drive most African societies. Thus, the demeaning of the feminine image in Nollywood films is rather the function of the masculine-driven society than that of just the male directors. Therefore, against this background, this research challenges arguments by Shapiro, Mahalic and Wilcox which presuppose that the inclusion of female filmmakers will change the narrative. To highlight Uchendu's assumption of influence of the patriarchal African society, the ideas of key African feminist scholars and creative writers, such as Buchi Emecheta (1988), Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), Flora Nwapa (1986) come to mind. These scholars/artists seeing the highly patriarchal nature of African society have argued models of feminism which could suit the African context as they did not feel that global mainly Western feminism was fully equipped to handle female-male dynamics within the African socio-cultural contexts.

Conversely, Harrow (2016) underpins the scant nature of an African feminist model in African cinema prior to the digital revolution in filmmaking. Harrow observes that before the digital revolution in films, filmmakers were preoccupied with the redefinition of African images as presented by the European filmmakers (2016, p. 235). Thus with the attainment of independence, there was a paradigm shift as male dominated African filmmakers often, if not always, portrayed women as victims, oppressed, weak or dominated. This is reinforced by the advent of the digital filmmaking revolution, with male filmmakers continuing to portray women as:

Sexually desirable, naïve, perverted or lesbian (*Jezebel*, Safo, 2007), prostituting themselves [*Jenifa*, Ayinde, 2008) as conduits to power, transmitters of sexual diseases (*Thunderbolt*, Kelani, 2000), or betrayers corrupted by the desire for wealth (*Osuofia in London*, Ogoro, 2003). They are close to power and luxuriate in the objects money provides (*Beyoncé*, 2006) [Harrow, 2016, pp. 235-239].

From the foregoing, Nollywood filmmakers have been heavily criticised by many film scholars/critics, particularly Emily Godspresence (2011), Ali Ako (2012), Aondowase Boh (2012), Joshua Agbo (2012), Aduku Idachaba (2012), Femi Shaka and Ola Uchendu (2012), for their stained feminine representations. Amobi, Hussein and Akinuliola (2018) in a comprehensive study examine the root cause of what can be adduced as the reason for feminine misrepresentation in films. Their study focuses on the crew roles in Nollywood films which they observe are seemingly an exclusive preserve of men. According to them, women play minor crew roles, such as costumiers, make-up artists, designers, camera operators, welfare officers which have further entrenched bizarre feminine portrayals in films. The roles, of film directors, producers, editors and cinematographers seem to be the exclusive preserve of men who invariably control what is put in front of the camera. Accordingly, the study reveals the ratio of women to men in crew roles of film production. In the Directors Guild of Nigeria (DGN), women constitute 5% of the membership, 15% in Association of Movie Producers (AMP) and 2% in Film/Video Producers and Marketers Association (FVPMAN). Cumulatively, they make up 9% in the distribution of the key film association that determines what is put in front of the camera (Amobi, Hussein and Akinuliola, 2018, p. 25). Thus, that women rarely function as film directors, producers, editors and cinematographers has in no small way undermined their self-confidence in the society and the industry following the assumption of the influence of the people behind the camera towards determining what is put in front of the camera (Amobi, Hussein and Akinuliola 2018, pp. 14 – 18).

However, Maureen Eke explains that the progenitors of Nollywood developed a unique industry peculiar to the prevailing economic situation of the period (2012, pp. 1-2). Accordingly, these trajectories of African socio-cultural frameworks formed by economic factors where men are thought to be the providers for the family are often replete in Nollywood films. Thus:

If Nollywood video films reproduce the cultures of their creators, then, it follows that such cultural (political or otherwise) tenets will and may affect

the nature of the representation of women in the films (Eke, 2012, p. 12).

With the foregoing analysis on the patriarchal nature of most African societies, this paper is curious to determine if such bizarre portrayal of women in Nollywood is as a result of the dearth of female directors as some scholars claim/argue. Like the feminists of classical studies believe, is it hypothetical that the redefinition of the feminine image in Nollywood film can only be achieved with the rise of female directors? The question is whether a holistic study of female films will affirm a paradigm shift in feminine representations. Analysis will therefore examine feminine image representation by female directors using Laura Mulvey's *scopophilia* concept and Harrow's yardsticks of the feminine image as sexually desirable, conduits to power, betrayers corrupted by the desire for wealth and power. The paper is also interested to examine the conformity of image as presented by these female directors to Emecheta's feminism with a small 'f', Ogundipe's "Stiwanism" and Flora Nwopa's moderate feminist model which explore issues of motherism and womanism as reflective of African cultural values.

The Feminine Image in Amaka Igwe's *Rattle Snake*

The foundation for a feminine representation in Nollywood films was laid by Amaka Igwe, a female director who contributed in modelling Nollywood narrative techniques in its formative years. Having produced and directed a number of films, such as *Rattle Snake* (1995), *Forever* (1997), *Violated* (1996) and many others which helped to establish the Nollywood industry, the attention of this researcher is however drawn to one of these works, *Rattle Snake*, to examine her feminine image representation as the film was a huge commercial success in the mid-1990s. *Rattle Snake* centres on the family of Louis (Ejike Methuselah), a civil servant who gets his promotion after a long wait. The narrative establishes Louis' family members who are engaged in pantomimic actions which reveal Louis's wife, Nancy (Ndidi Anyanuka), a slim beautiful lady as a home keeper. She easily provides Louis's car key when he needs it, as well as nurture her children - preparing them for school, assisting to locate their lost school bags and other items. Nancy's roles conform to Wilcox's notion of the stereotyping of the female character as the embodiment of certain role expectations in the society. According to Wilcox as previously cited, the behavioural and physical expectation of women is for them to "be nice, focus on relationships, be attractive, be thin, nurture others, be silent, defer to men, and be domestic (2017, p. 38). This buttresses the ideas of 'motherism' and 'womanism', African variants of feminism. However, in

spite of this portrayed nature of Nancy, she is also represented in the story as a person with an unflinching/insatiable quest for money. This highlights the negative representation of women in Nollywood films which Igwe exaggerates in the film.

At the beginning of the film, Nancy complains about the money given to her for family up-keep by her husband shortly before Louis goes to work. Thereafter, she fondly entertains Odinaka (Nkem Owoh), her husband's brother, who usually visits the house whenever the members of the family are not around. Nancy apparently falls for the empty promises of Odinaka, a seeming fraudster who makes persuasive sexual overtures towards her. A few days later, Louis dies of a presumably poisoned drink. Shortly before Louis' death, Nancy's feeble nature is further highlighted in the narrative as she abandons her husband who is critically ill in the hospital and follows Odinaka to the eatery. This action portrays her as well as other feminine characters as callous beings. However, the narrative conceals the nature of the relationship between Louis and Odinaka as their first encounter in the film takes place when Louis is already unconscious.

Following Louis' death, an elaborate funeral ceremony which seemingly foregrounds the culture and burial rites/traditions in Igbo land ensues. Beyond the colourful display of masquerades and dances from various groups, the film highlights some widowhood practices often seen in some Igbo hinterlands. Nancy, the deceased's wife is made to seat in a barricade which restricts her movements while mourning her husband. This barricade heightens her emotional state, especially in the scene in which Odinaka beats her son, Ahanna, for not handing over the money received from sympathisers to him (Odinaka). Being in such a barricade, she is speechless and helpless though her gestures show her detest of Odinaka's actions. No doubt, such widowhood practices as building a cage for widows still exist in some parts of Igbo land; and the replication of such in a film by a foremost female Nollywood director without making an aversive statement on or critique of it, thus reinforces rather than dissuades such barbaric traditions. Had such a representation come from a male director, perhaps feminist critics would have asserted that it is geared towards perpetual feminine enslavement. The paper therefore wonders why a female director should project such negative widowhood practices without making any statement why it should be discouraged.

Again Odinaka's request to take Nancy to Lagos barely one week after Louis' burial so that Nancy could sign Louis' gratuity (Nancy being Louis' next of kin) generates serious conflicts as all the villagers believe that it is a taboo for Nancy to leave for the city so soon after her husband's burial. These stern reactions against this purported visit to Lagos

which all consider as taboo goes to a great extent to institutionalise widowhood practices as motif in Nollywood films. Of course, Nancy having been portrayed as a weak character has no choice but to follow Odinaka to Lagos. Their stay in Lagos lasts more than usual, while Ahanna (Francis Duru) and his siblings who are Nancy's children, suffer in the village. Ahanna finally goes to Lagos after so many months of waiting for their mother who presumably had gone to Lagos for a few days. On getting to Lagos, he mistakenly overhears in a discussion by their neighbours that Odinaka had killed Louis, his father, for his wealth. To support this, Odinaka had sold his father's properties and relocated to a new apartment with Nancy, his mother. Ahanna traces them to the new apartment and discovers to his greatest dismay that his mother, Nancy, is pregnant for his uncle, Odinaka. This confirms the gossip he had heard. He therefore immerses himself into the city and while trying to irk out a living, becomes a hooligan.

The narrative equally later shows Odinaka as maltreating Nancy. Following what seems a form of poetic justice, Nancy begins to regret her actions, believing that it would have been better for her to be poor and happy than leave in fear amidst affluence. As a full grown bandit, Ahanna later pays a vengeful visit to Odinaka. As Odinaka attempts to run, and in Ahanna's effort to shoot him, Odinaka uses Nancy as shield. Thus Ahanna kills his mother and in fury, he stabs Odinaka mercilessly with a knife. This film, which was a huge commercial success, undoubtedly laid the foundation for feminine representation in Nollywood films. In spite of Nancy's good qualities, her unflinching quest for materialism leads to her doom. However, Igwe portrays a feminine character who leaves her three lovely children in the village and travels to Lagos to be pregnant for her husband's younger brother. *Rattle Snake* illustrates Laura Mulvey's *scopophilia* concept in Odinaka and Nancy's sexual escapades as well as Harrow's affirmation of debased feminine image portrayals as sexually desirable betrayers corrupted by the desire for wealth and power which Nancy's character represents. True as these portrayal may seem of the actual feminine identity in the Nigerian society as supposed by Obi Okoli (as cited above), Igwe's *Rattle Snake* which is one of the seminal films in Nollywood, it can be claimed, helps to institutionalise the model of the feminine image in Nollywood films.

The Female in Kemi Adetiba's *King of Boys*

Just as in *Wedding Party 1*, Kemi Adetiba in *King of Boys* starts the narrative with a glamorisation of women. Eniola's (Sola Sabowale) birthday celebration is introduced with a drone shot which is intermittently em-

ployed from scene to scene to establish the aesthetically beautiful metropolitan locale which defines Eniola's class in the society. Kemi (Adesua Etomi) follows her mother, Eniola, around during the celebration, contextualising her as a favorite daughter. The birthday party introduces the cream of the society, comprising the political and bourgeoisie class, and projects Yoruba culture (dances, songs, greetings and a glamorised dress sense) satisfactorily. The *Owambe* culture, as it is popularly called, is spiced with mock gossips against Eniola, the celebrant, by some women. The portrayal of the gossip scene is an aspect which feminist critics often decry as deprecatory in feminine portrayals.

As Eniola makes her birthday speech, her bodyguard whispers to her and she quickly leaves the party, bidding her daughter Kemi to take care of her guests. Eniola's son, Kitan (Demola Adedoyin), had previously been portrayed as having no fondness for either his mum, Eniola or Kemi, his sister by refusing to come down for his mother's birthday party. Shortly after the message by her bodyguard, as Eniola leaves the party venue, Senator (Joshua Johnson) approaches Kemi, reminding her of her mother's promise of an appointment. This scene again foregrounds the political undertone of the narrative as well as Kemi's deadly personality/character traits:

Senator: I hope you guys have not forgotten your promise.

Kemi: (*Confidently and sarcastically*) Senator, my mother didn't get to where she is today by breaking her promises... there has been no official appointment yet, so until then, we wait.

Senator: That's fine, that's fine, but, I just want to remind you, a deal is a deal and it won't be good if you break it.

Kemi: (*Confidently*) Remind! With all due respect, Senator, you of all people should know that my mother doesn't take kindly to threats, and be mindful the way you talk. We will get to you after the announcement has been made as promised, so until then, Senator, try to stay out of danger. After all, Lagos can be a very dangerous city as you and your family must know. Enjoy the rest of the party, sir (*walks away, leaving the senator bemused*) (0:09:46-0:10:41).

Sequentially, Eniola walks into a dark room where Chief David's daughter's kidnapper is undergoing torture. The kidnapper has been bruised from severe torture, occasioning a visual contrast from the con-

vivial birthday party to a bloody gangster scenario as Eniola walks in. Seeing the battered kidnapper, Eniola pretentiously takes pity on him, asks whether he has eaten, even slaps one of her boys for starving him and in a swift contrast again, personally kills the kidnapper with an axe for failing to tell her (Eniola) who sent him to kidnap Chief David's daughter. Again, in a swift transition shortly after the brutal murder of the kidnapper, she plays a motherly role of asking her boys what they would eat and drink. These two actions; Kemi's subtle threat to the senator and Eniola's murder of the kidnapper portray in a very bad light, the two female characters that drive the narrative. The actions of the two, Eniola and Kemi, though they did not demonstrate Laura Mulvey's *scopophilia*, but they certainly concur with Harrow's yardsticks of the feminine image as betrayers corrupted by the desire for wealth and power. Perhaps, the issue that needs to be resolved is to determine between Mulvey's *scopophilia* and Harrow's women given to excessive wealth and power, which is a better way of portraying the female character.

Eniola's actions of the brutal murder of a kidnapper which contrast with the convivial birthday party, sets the tone of the narrative which leads to the subsequent scene inside a boutique, where a bride comes to buy her wedding cloth. Eniola, the owner of the boutique, acts the God-fearing mother-figure, admonishing the bride that God is a solution to every problem which contrasts with her mean character as seen in the preceding scenes. In this scene, Eniola uses the boutique to masquerade as her source of wealth instead of her ugly deals earlier suggested in the narrative. One thing worth mentioning in this scene is the glamorisation and admiration of female clothes, an aspect of Mulvey's *scopophilia* which is also vivid in *Wedding Party 1*, another of Adetiba's film mentioned earlier.

The narrative/genre is a mixture of politics, gangster and crime detective. On the one hand, Alhaji Salami (Jide Kosoko) is portrayed as a drug baron and a captain of a gangster group in Lagos. Believably, Eniola's friendship with Alhaji Salami ruins him as Eniola kills him and his family to inherit his wealth as well as position in the gang. Again, this conforms to Harrow's propositions in the portrayal of females/women as betrayers in quest of wealth and power. After overthrowing the captain of the gangster group, a whopping forty percent is returned to Eniola by the gangsters on every crime committed. This leads to the subsequent tussle for the leadership of the gangster group after a protracted period as mainly seen in a rebellious fight by Makanaki (Reminisce), who wants to ascend to Eniola's captain stool.

However Eniola's bigger problem comes from her involvement in politics which wins her many enemies; the latter fearing her revelations

might ruin them frame her and she is convicted and condemned to be executed. While awaiting her fate, Eniola's prison house is set ablaze by her political enemies but she is later saved by the now disillusioned Inspector Shehu (Paul Sambo) who had been instrumental in putting her in prison. She supposedly travels to the United Kingdom and starts a new life, setting up an eatery/drinking joint. The narrative makes two stunning revelations as Kemi, seen previously as being or having been shot dead, is seen pregnant and living with her mother, Eniola, in the UK. Again, Makanaki who had assumed the captainship of the gangsters is shot dead by Odogwu Malay on what seems to be an instruction from Eniola who later continues as the captain of the gangsters, holding meetings through social media platforms. The film has strong elements of betrayals. Amaka, Kitan's girlfriend, pretends to be in love with him but snitches and spies on Eniola's family on behalf of Makanaki. This is yet another portrayal of women in a bad light. Thus Amaka betrayed Kitan's love for mere materiality thus conforming to Harrow's feminine perceived mischiefs. Kitan commits suicide after killing Amaka, his supposed lover, for betraying his love.

The narrative highpoint is perhaps the potent crisis between Eniola's present and past irrepressible personalities rendered in a series of flashback sequences. This offers adequate background to Eniola's deadly past which of course is a great indictment on femininity - how she married, killed her husband and acquired powers. This climaxed in the conversation between Eniola past and present. She is seen in a psychotic state while in prison, recalling her active past which is compounded by the juxtaposition of Kemi and Alhaji Salami ghost's tormenting her. Eniola had masterminded the accident which killed Alhaji Salami's family in order to inherit his wealth as well as succeed him as a gangster captain. While wooing her, the director presents the image of Alhaji Salami eating material food and suggestively salivating for sexual-intercourse. The young Eniola (Toni Tones) is placed before Alhaji Salami's eyes which Adetiba realises by the juxtaposition of her sexy posture in vantage position elucidating Mulvey's *scopophilia* concept of *to-be-looked-at-ness*. The low camera angle on Alhaji Salami's face from Eniola's sexy posture gets him salivating in sexual desire as he eats his food. In this scene, women are portrayed as seductresses and power-seekers as Mulvey and Harrow suggest; but they are also presented as objects to be looked at (the male gaze) and consumed. This is again highlighted by Eniola's willingness to transport drugs for the mere attention of her man friend, Alhaji Salami.

Reversing the Feminine/Female Image in Genevieve Nnaji's *Lion Heart*

Dedicated to Amaka Igwe and directed by Genevieve Nnaji, *Lion Heart* (2018) is the story of a transport company in a comatose state. The managing director of Lion Heart, Chief Ernest Obiagu (Pete Edochie), takes ill and his daughter, Adaeze (Genevieve Nnaji), having been working with her father for the past seven years hopes to succeed him as the managing director. Against her hopes, Chief Ernest appoints his younger brother, Godswill Obiagu (Nkem Owoh), to act on his behalf. Shortly after his arrival, it becomes obvious that Lion Heart is indebted to various banks to the tune of nine hundred and fifty million naira (N950,000,000). The company is to pay within one month or risk losing its assets. Godswill proposes a merger with Maikano Transport Company in Northern Nigeria, while Adaeze has different options, such as a loan extension, and borrowing more to service the loan. For twenty one days, Adaeze's options fail, leaving them with only Godswill's option which succeeds at the dying minutes.

While the company was facing these financial challenges, Samuel Akah (Kalu Ikeagwu) invites Igwe Pascal (Kanayo O. Kanayo) to buy off the company. This becomes the worst fear of Adaeze and Godswill as they risk losing everything with such a buyout. Unlike many Nollywood films which tend to indict the feminine nature by ascribing negative value to the female character, *Lion Heart* presents the female characters in a modest amiable way. Akin to Emecheta's feminism, Ogundipe's "stiwanism" and Flora Nwopa's moderate feminist model, Adaeze and Abigail, her mother, are presented as having quintessential qualities which neither portray them as core feminists nor as weaklings or male objects. Firstly, Abigail (Onyeka Onwenu) is presented in the light of what Emecheta (1988), Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), Nwapa (1988) explicate as core womanist idea of the true African woman, which is to maintain the home front. This is highlighted in her mediating role, ensuring a good rapport between her husband, brother in-law, daughter and son. She respects and relates to everyone for what they are. Although Chief Ernest despises his son, Obiora (Chibuzo Zubuike-Phyno), because of his chosen career as a musical artist, Abigail follows him to the studio to encourage him. Again, during Lion Heart's financial tribulation, Abigail admonishes her daughter, Adaeze, to persevere, giving her instances of the challenges her father had previously faced to take the company to its present level. Above all, Abigail stands by her husband during his sick period.

On the other hand, Adaeze's character is not subject to Mulvey's *sco-pophilia* and *sensualization* of the feminine body. The narrative valorises Adaeze's mental prowess rather than her body; a quality and strength

that privilege her over her brother, Obiora, who is an artist. That she feels bad when their father, Chief Ernest, appoints Godswill to oversee the company shows her human nature, given to flaws which is natural for every human being. In spite of her misgivings against Godswill's new position, she works with him towards saving the company from the financial mess. During the process of sourcing for funds to free the company, she does not yield to the purported sexual overtures by her former boyfriend who had promised to give her five hundred million naira (N500,000,000.00), half of what they were looking for, and neither does she just emotionally succumb to the apparent overtures from Maikano's son, her new business partner through the merger between their two companies.

Ultimately, the film is a motivator which presents and leads the audience towards possible solutions to every problem, efforts and prayer inclusive. The perseverance of Adaeze, her moral values and her hard work as portrayed in the film negates the negative portrayal of the feminine gender in most Nollywood films either directed or produced by other female directors.

Conclusion

The three films directed by women portray feminine characters from female perspectives. While *Lion Heart* and *King of Boys* present strong feminine characters as heroines of the narratives, *Rattle Snake* presents a very weak feminine character. While *Lion Heart* in its feminine portrayal, develops a hardworking focused female character who wants to succeed by hard work, *King of Boys* presents two strong female characters given to serious vices. Eniola and Kemi are seen in various interplays of destructive gangsterism, and as seductresses and other vices. Adaeze in *Lion Heart*, although pretty and desired by men, is on several occasions, especially when she is in desperate search for funding to redeem her father's company, enticed by men who pretend to help her. She does not succumb to all the overtures and eventually succeeds through hard work and concerted efforts. Virtually all the female characters presented in *Lion Heart* are seemingly blameless in their character construction. In *King of Boys*, on the other hand, the two major female characters are given to serious vices. Thus, regardless of having drawn significant attention to the substantial role of women in films, *King of Boys*, does that in a negative manner, supposedly supporting the negative portrayal of women in films. Again, *Rattle Snake* presents a very weak female character, Nancy, who caves in to the sexual overtures of her husband's younger brother because of her unflinching materialism which later leads to her doom. In *Rattle*

Snake, Igwe portrays a feminine character who leaves her three lovely children in the village and travels to Lagos to get pregnant for her husband's younger brother.

This paper has established that, contrary to arguments that the inclusion of more women in the Nollywood production line will result in the redefinition of the feminine image in Nollywood films, the representation of the feminine image is rather a product of the interaction between the prevailing filmic cultures influenced by the economic factors and tradition of a people/society. So far, from observations and analyses, the only film by a Nollywood female director which has portrayed women in a good light is *Lion Heart* which conforms to Emecheta's feminism with a small 'f', Ogundipe's "Stiwanism" and Nwapa's moderate feminist model, all of which explore issues of motherism and womanism. Perhaps, Uchendu's advice on ensuring a deliberate and conscious awakening is what is required for Nollywood female directors to begin to do things differently. According to her, a female director cannot do things differently just because she is a woman. In fact, without the cooperation of both men and women, feminist consciousness cannot be reinvented in Nollywood images (2020). This study therefore concludes that the presence of female directors alone cannot change the negative portrayal of women as often argued by some scholars, and therefore calls on all filmmakers, male and female, to rethink the representation of the feminine image in Nollywood.

References

- Amobi, T.I., Husseini, S. and Akinuliola, O. (2018). Power play and the representation of women behind the camera in Nigeria's Nollywood industry. *Novena Journal of Communication*, 6,12-29.
- Aduku, Idachaba (2012). Under their shadows: An examination of female domination of Nollywood. *Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture*, 10 (1), 96-102.
- Agbo, Joshua (2012) Rethinking the female body language, image and identity in Nollywood. *Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture*, 10 (1), 218-229.
- Aondowase, Boh (2012). Nollywood and national development; Redefining women's role. *Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture*, 10 (1), 128-141.
- Ali, Ako (2012). Nigerian women and political Re-orientation in the 21st Century: The Nollywood imperative. *Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture*, 10 (1), 142-151.

- Emecheta, B (1988). Feminism with a Small 'f!'. in Kirsten H. Petersen (ed.), *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writer's Conference*, Stockholm Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 173–181.
- Emily, Godspresence. (2011). Motherhood and the meaning of life; A study of the video films *Cold Hearts* and *Mothering Sunday*. *Journal of the Literary Society of Nigerian*, 3 (1), 111-122.
- Harrow K.W. (2016) Women in African Cinema” and “Nollywood Films”: A Shift in Cinematic Regimes. *Journal of African Cinemas*, 8 (3), 233-248.
- McGowan, T. (2007). *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan*. New York: State University of New York Press
- Mulvey, L. (2006). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In Sue Thornham (ed.) *Feminist Film Theory*. Washington: New York University Press. 57-69.
- Nwapa Flora (1986). *Women are Different*. Enugu: Tana Press: Africa World Press.
- Obi Okoli (2020). “Female Image in films we make in Nollywood”. Interviewed by Charles Okwuowulu and Charles Emokpae. January 28th. February 20th.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, Molar (1994). *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations*. Africa Word Press.
- Shaka, F. O. & Uchendu, O.N. (2012). Gender representation in Nollywood Video Film Culture. *The Crab: Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*, 7, 1-30.
- Shapiro, B. (2017). Examining portrayals of female protagonist by female screen-writers using feminist critical discourse analysis. *The young researcher*, 1 (1), 37-47. Retrieved on 2 June, 2018 from [http:// www.theyoungresearcher.com/papers/ShapiroPdf](http://www.theyoungresearcher.com/papers/ShapiroPdf)
- Uchendu, Ola (2020). “Femininity in Nollywood”. Interviewed by Charles Okwuowulu and Charles Emokpae. January 28th.
- Wilcox, K. (2009). Feminist Literary criticism and *Lysistrata*. In *Agora*, 18 (3) 29-47. Retrieved on 2 June, 2018 from <http://digitalshowcase.lynchburg.edu/agora/vol18/iss2009/3>

Filmography

- Ayamama* (2016) Dir: Chris Eneaji with Wale Ojo, Majid Micheal, Adesua Etomi, Tessy Theresa, Ime “Bishop” Umoh. Produced by Emem Isong

Ije. (2012) Dir, Chineze Anyaene. Starring Genevieve Nneji, Omotola Jalade Ekeinde, Producer- Chineze Anyaene and Paula Morino.

King of Boys (2018). Dir; Kemi Adetiba's with Adesua Etomi, Sola Sobowale, Illbliss, Reminisce, Paul Sambo, Osas Ajibade, Toni Tones, Sani Muazu, Demola Adedoyin and Akin Lewis

Mr. & Mrs. (2010) Dir, Ikechukwu Onyeka. Producer, Chinwe Ekwuagu. Starring Nze Ikpe Etim, Joseph Benjamin and Barbara Soky.

Rattle Snake (1994) Dir; Amaka Igwe with Nkem Owoh, Ann Njemanze, Francis Duru, Bob Manuel Udokwu, Ejike Methuselah, Ernest Obi and Julius Agwu

The Women (2017). Dir; Blessing Egbe with Katherine Obiang, Ufuoma McDermott, Kate Henshaw-Nuttal, Omoni Oboli.

Two Brides and a Baby. (2011). Dir: Teco Benson with Stella Damascus, Kalu Ikeagwu, O. C Ukeje.

Wedding Party (2016). Dir; Kemi Adetiba's with Iretiola Doyle, Stephen Damian, Daniella Down, Emmanuel Edunjobi, Adesua Etomi-Wellington.