

Nigerian Female Filmmakers' Representation of Men in Nollywood Films

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Abstract

This paper examines the representation of men by female filmmakers in Nollywood, by focusing on how these representations challenge or reinforce existing gender stereotypes. Historically, Nollywood has been dominated by male filmmakers, whose narratives often strengthen patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles. However, the increasing number of female filmmakers offers an alternative lens through which male characters are depicted. Five films written, produced, and directed by prominent Nigerian female filmmakers were purposively selected based on their thematic relevance. They are: Omoni Oboli's "Wives on Strike", Kemi Adetiba's "King of Boys", Funke Akindele's "Your Excellency" and "Omo Ghetto the Saga", and Biodun Stephen's "Tiwa's Baggage". Findings show that these female filmmakers portrayed the male characters in diverse ways such as oppressive, toxic masculine, sexual predators, physically-attractive, determined and driven, high net worth individuals, and ineffectual. The nuanced representation of men by female filmmakers in Nollywood serve as a critique of societal norms and offer an opportunity to reimagine gender dynamics. While challenging toxic masculinity, oppression, sexual predators, these representations aim to foster a more inclusive understanding of masculinity. However, the female filmmakers paid minimal attention to creating identities for male characters in ways that do not conform to traditional expectations or disruption of patriarchal frame.

Keywords

Male representation, female filmmakers, Nollywood films, gender stereotype, patriarchal frame

Introduction

Film is a "powerful medium that conveys the values and beliefs of contemporary societies." It has become a subject of intense scrutiny because of its roles in reinforcing and perpetuating gender-based stereotypes (Cloete in

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Doghudje, 2020, p. 84). In an attempt to use its films to mirror society, Nollywood has historically reinforced stereotypes on gender roles, especially on women who are negatively affected and are subjected to ridicule and shame under the guise of entertainment or male pleasure (Okafor, 2017). The film industry is assumed to be one of the most influential mass media tools, shaping people's perceptions of gender identities as well as reinforcing "unrealistic, stereotypical, and limiting perceptions of gender identities" (Wood, 1994, p. 31).

One prevalent theme in Nollywood films is the portrayal of women in roles that objectify them, depict them as weak, and emphasise their dependence on men. Other stereotypical themes that are reinforced and persistent in Nigerian films remain the image of men, often represent as independent, successful, and breadwinners, which is reinforced and highly persistent in Nollywood films (Alola & Alola, 2020). This suggests that character portrayal in Nollywood has, over the years, been exaggerated, and this has informed thought processes that have become the norms and beliefs of the society. Hence, the gender environment has been tilted in favour of men, revealing them to be superior or dominant. In fact, over the past two decades, Nollywood has not experienced significant changes from the traditional representation of women and their societal roles (Alola & Alola, 2020).

Moreover, women in the industry have been marginalised both on and behind the screens. Even in contemporary Nigerian society, women still play subjugated central roles where they are portrayed as weak, prostitutes, sex slaves, unreliable, irrational, and dependent. Nollywood continues its penchant for showing women as successful and influential in social and domestic settings as dangerous and are doomed for destruction (Okafor, 2017; Onyenakeya, Onyenakeya & Osunkunle, 2019). These typecasts have found expression in the society as females are viewed for their domestic and vain attributes, and are confined to these limits. This development has formed the basis of social discourse on gender equality and informs the actions of feminists today who constantly push for a drastic change in the existing narrative (Okunna in Doghudje, 2020).

There has been a significant shift in the film production landscape in recent years, with an increasing number of female filmmakers emerging and making significant contributions to the Nigerian film industry. These female filmmakers have brought unique perspectives and narratives to their work, often challenging traditional gender roles and representations. According to Alao (2011), within the first decade of its inception, Nollywood was a male-dominated one. Therefore, the men set the agenda and framed the images. However, the 21st century has witnessed significant advancements in Nollywood, including technical aspects of production, scripting, budgets, international collaborations, storytelling, and expanding global audiences. One notable development is the increased participation of women in the Nigerian film industry, particularly as directors and producers. Prominent women in the

industry, such as Funke Akindele, Omoni Oboli, Kemi Adetiba, Biodun Stephen, Jade Osiberu, and others, have transitioned from acting to taking on roles in scripting, videography, directing, and production, among other areas (Ejem, Nwokeocha, Abba-Father, Fab-Ukozor & Ibekwe, 2022).

This development has propelled a new group of female directors spearheading the movement to challenge patriarchy, while establishing a level of gender balance and creating cinematic content that reflects a more accurate reality of women and men in their films. Some of these films directed by female directors have been revealed to challenge the norm and question the truth of many of the age-long views about the depictions of gender in the Nigerian film industry (Doghudje, 2021). These generations of female filmmakers have taken up the challenge to re-narrate the experience of the female gender.

The representation of gender roles and identities in film has always been a subject of scholarly interest. Studies on gender representation in Nollywood films have centred on the portrayal of women in films, primarily by male filmmakers. Few studies have focused on the portrayal of women by female filmmakers, and even fewer studies have focused on the representation of men by female filmmakers within the Nigerian film industry (Ukata, 2020; Soetan, 2024). This is based on the assumption that the authentic picture of gender representation in Nigerian films becomes clearer only when the roles assigned to women against the dominance of men are analysed. The discrepancy in the representation of gender in the films has been attributed to the unequal representation in the number of female filmmakers against male filmmakers.

Before now, Nollywood has always been a male-dominated industry with the issue of the lack of female auteurs in the film industry. Currently, there is a significant rise in the number of women making significant contributions to the film industry in writing, directing, producing, videography, and many other aspects. With this increase, came a generation of female auteurs who took on the initiative to challenge patriarchal stereotypes of the female gender in Nollywood, by attempting to reconstruct the female persona in a way that radical departs from the stereotypical gaze of patriarchy. While previous studies have examined gender representation by male filmmakers, there is limited research on how female filmmakers in Nollywood portray male characters, particularly in ways that challenge patriarchal norms. Consequently, this study examines how female filmmakers in Nollywood's portrayal of men introduce new narratives that challenge entrenched gender norms and reflect evolving identities in Nigerian society. It is against this backdrop that this study attempts to proffer answers to the following research questions: a) How do the female filmmakers portray male characters in the selected Nollywood

films? And, b) How do the female filmmakers in Nollywood construct male characters in ways that challenge traditional patriarchal portrayals?

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Film Theory

Feminist film theory as the theoretical exploration and investigation of the position of women within film culture. As film studies became a proper and acceptable discipline of study, the women's movement, especially from the late 1960s to the early '70s, experienced the presence of feminist sensibility within academia. The theory was primarily concerned with examining and interrogating the picture and place of women in film, exposing their discrimination and the myths about women that circulated through the pervasive images on the big screen. The theory progressively started interrogating women's subjectivity, desire, and the male gaze and their multifaceted contribution to film culture as directors, editors, designers, producers, and so on. It also steadily became more inclusive and paid more attention to the interrelatedness of sex, race, and class (Miraka, 2020).

Critiques of early feminism, including black feminists and third-wave feminists, considered the need to re-examine the multi-layered ways that film addressed its spectators. They also went further to reveal the importance of theorising identity and, as such, urged it to be both more universal and, at the same time, more aware of the relationship between the universal identity and the particular identity. The different ideologies within femininity had various specific expressions, but these ideologies resonated because of their relationship with universal ideas (Walker, 1995; Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1984; Davis, 1981).

Since feminism began as a response to the contradictions of women in society, it takes the investigation of the relationships between the particular and the universal female identity as one of its primary assignments. Therefore, the questions of where spectators entered the text, how this occurred, and how it affected spectators have become essential for how film interacts with ideology. Feminist film historians have made a particular contribution to the "theorisation" of film history (or the "historicisation" of film theory). Without losing sight of the issues of gender, spectacle (gaze), and so on, that characterised the first wave of feminist film theory, they have built up a more nuanced and grounded concept of spectatorship that leads directly to the question of the audience (Neroni, 2016; Mulvey, 2010).

It was Christine Gledhill who first identified and denounced the ahistorical approach in the early feminist film theory and who proposed a more socio-historical approach that would bring text, context, and spectator together. In light of this, understanding popular culture, how it is accepted and consumed by audiences, and how it affects them was the new strategy for feminist film criticism and theory. Thus, away from the stifling accounts of the cinematic

male gaze, masquerade, and impossible identification positions for women spectators, the feminist film theory began to address questions of feminine subjects and the active desire for the identification of female audiences and characters (Miraka, 2020).

The concept of identification began as a foundational term in film theory. For this reason, it functions as an umbrella term for several issues within the theory. However, theories of identification tend to consider how the spectator identifies with the main character. Identification also addresses how the spectator generally invests in the film process. These theories present such questions as: "What is the relationship between the spectator and their enjoyment of the film? Is identification the vehicle for the enjoyment of the spectator and her investment in the trajectory of the film?" Feminist film theory contributed to this discussion by arguing that identification was a politically charged process that reinforced gender stereotypes, sustained hierarchies, and in general, contributed to the oppression of women. This argument had a significant impact on film studies itself. It also began a debate, which continues today, about how feminist film theory should be defined and whether the very concept of identification is helpful for feminist film theory (Neroni, 2016, p. 19).

Since the 1970s, a new wave of interest in the contributions of women behind the camera has emerged. This has been an attempt to revisit and challenge film history, to rewrite it by reemphasizing women filmmakers as well as women in all sectors of filmmaking, and recover the history of those women that had been hidden for too long within the film canon, thereby building a tradition of women in film for future generations to have access to. The evolution of the theory continuous accumulation and analysing of knowledge around the role and the position of women within film culture, including both their presence before the camera and their creative contributions behind the camera. It is the history of reading against the grain, revisiting, and remodelling film history in order for it to be more accurate and complete for the next generations to navigate and be inspired. From the sociological examinations of the first feminist texts and throughout the following decades, feminist film theory has utilised an interdisciplinary approach toward understanding the relationship between women and film. It has expanded its scope to accommodate evolving socio-historical circumstances and varied social groups (Miraka, 2020).

Bringing female-directed films to the limelight continues to be just one aspect of feminist film theory. This theory can be used to just as quickly analyse any film for its feminist or patriarchal ideas and explore the various ways that women are forging their identities amidst the contradictory ideals within the social order (Neroni, 2016). The application of the feminist film

theory helps the researchers to interrogate how Nigerian female filmmakers in Nollywood use their films to push the feminist agenda and break the stereotypes surrounding the portrayal of men in Nollywood. This theory offers a critical perspective on the representation of gender in film and explores how cinema can be a powerful tool for promoting gender equality and dismantling patriarchal structures. By examining their cinematic works through a feminist lens, the study seeks to uncover the ways in which these filmmakers challenge and subvert traditional gender norms and stereotypes, particularly those surrounding male characters.

Methodology

The study employed qualitative content analysis research design to examine the content of five selected Nollywood films written, produced, and directed by female Nollywood filmmakers. The films were purposively selected based on the following parameters. One, they were written, produced and directed by females. They are: Omoni Oboli's, "Wives on Strike", Kemi Adetiba's, "King of Boys", Funke Akindele's "Your Excellency", and "Omo Ghetto the Saga", and Biodun Stephen's "Tiwa's Baggage". Two, films were equally selected owing to their thematic relevance to the study. Also, the purposive sampling technique was employed to select three prominent female Nollywood filmmakers who were interviewed about their perspectives on the representations of men in their films. They are: Ms Temitope Bolade-Akinbode, Samuella Elumelu and Amarachukwu Odoezika. Contents of the films were thematically analysed, while data from the interviews employed constant comparative technique.

Findings

Research Question One: How do the female Nollywood filmmakers portray men in the selected films?

Nollywood Films?

This research seeks to find out if in an attempt to shatter the stereotypes surrounding female gender, the female filmmakers create new identities for both the male and female characters, which might be inconsistent with social norms, by placing men in more subjective, non-conventional roles and women in more powerful and independent roles. The contents of the films were analysed based on the following thematic issues:

➤ **Men as Nurturing**

The stereotype that usually surrounds men is that they are unwilling brick walls because they are perceived to lack empathy and can hardly express any emotions. However, they are also portrayed as nurturing who are

vulnerable, emotional, empathetic, compassionate, emotional, domestic, and supportive. They can also be loving, playful, nurturing fathers. For instance, In Funke Akindele's "Your Excellency" the main character, Chief Olálékàn Àjàdí is depicted as a man who genuinely loves his family. He frequently refers to his wife, Kémi, as *Iyawo Oga*. It is generally observed that there is always an atmosphere of conviviality between Chief Àjàdí and his wife, Kémi. An excerpt is presented thus:

Chief Àjàdí: *Ah. Mabinu, iyawo oga* (don't be upset, my darling wife), you have come again.

Just as he is about to leave the house, he says:

Chief Àjàdí: You're fired!

Kémi: *Ah. Awon girlfriend yin lo fire* (your girlfriends are fired).

Chief Àjàdí: You're fired! You're fired!! You're fired!!!

Also, Chief Àjàdí is portrayed as a loving husband and doting father, despite his influential status and wealth. He appears vulnerable in his relationship with his wife, openly shares his plans and intimate thoughts with her. Furthermore, Chief Àjàdí confidently acknowledges that he confides in his wife before taking critical decisions, which he is not ashamed to admit to his friends. Chief Àjàdí takes pride in being a caring and sensitive husband, without any sense of guilt. This is reflected in his conversation with Mallam Ali when the DAC party invites him for discussion over the prospect of becoming the party's flag bearer. Their conversation is reproduced as follows:

Mallam Ali: *Ah, Chief Àjàdí, just leave it to us. All you have to do is say yes! The fund, the campaign and that's it.*

Chief Àjàdí: I will have to talk to my wife and to my partner, Fred. Then I will make a decision.

Mallam Ali: Just feel free, go ahead and tell her about everything, and while you are at it, tell her that she will soon become the first lady of this country.

Chief Àjàdí: Are you serious? I will!

Despite his confidence, wealth, and high social status, Chief Àjàdí remains a good husband who has a good relationship with both his wife and all his children. Even when his wife makes an obvious mistake that could have cost him his political career; he handles the situation with equanimity.

➤ **Men as Oppressive**

The *King of Boys* by Kemi Adetiba describes the typical portrayal of male dominance and evident male disapproval of the superiority of women. The film details the life of an underground kingpin who struggles her way to the top while actively resisting male dominance. Ààre is a character that typically exemplifies the tyrannical nature of men. He is a political bigwig with tremendous influence. Despite Ààre's blatant act of betrayal of renegeing on his promise to recommend Alhaja Eniolá Sàlámì for a political position, he feigns ignorance and acts bewildered at Alhaja Sàlámì's emotional outburst. Ààre not only disregards the impact of his actions, but also seeks to undermine Alhaja Sàlámì's rightful emotional response by making her feel entitled and powerless. The following conversation contextualises this:

Ààre: Eniolá! Ah! Have you forgotten the man in whose presence you stand? It is me, Ààre! Whatever I say cannot be questioned. Whatever I do can never be questioned! My word is law! Eniolá!

Alhaja: Sir? I apologise sir. I was out of line.

Ààre's oppressive tendency against Alhaja Sàlámì is influenced by the perception of power and masculinity that are deeply rooted in patriarchal norm. Ààre considers himself to be inherently superior and believes that his power and authority confers on him the inalienable right for his decisions not to be controverted or questioned; whatever he says, is incontrovertible and irreversible.

Similarly, Funke Akindele's "Omo Ghetto" highlights the dominance of men, even when they find themselves in the same situation as women. The film presents the physical and mental torture that women experience from men. The character, Aza, is portrayed as not only oppressive but also deeply misogynistic, exhibiting patterns of brutalising and disrespecting women. Aza's ill-tempered nature reveals his uncanny disposition of undermining; verbally and physically assaulting them. For example, Aza exhibits these traits at the club scene where he and Obi Wire threaten the waitress who is just doing her job. The excerpt below attests to this:

Waiter: Hello, are you ready to order now?

Aza: Are you mad? I said later.

Waitress one: You keep saying later, but you've been here for the past one hour. You've not bought any drinks.

Obi Wire: Come! Do you have mucus in your brain? He said later. When we're ready we'll call you. Why are you making a scene?

Aza: Leave her now. She wan beat me.

Waitress two: These ones no get money o.

Obi Wire: Na your papa no get money. We *dey* hear you, with your face like back of pot.

➤ **Men as Toxic**

Toxic masculinity reveals the harmful behaviours and attitudes associated with traditional male gender roles. Men are represented as vengeful, manipulative, ill-tempered, insecure, insensitive, egotistical, and selfish. In Kemi Adetiba's "King of Boys", the character Makanaki embodies the toxic traits of selfishness, ruthlessness, and manipulation. His desire to usurp Alhaja Sàlámi's power and wealth leads him to speak rudely and arrogantly to her. Makanaki demonstrates a complete disregard for Alhaja Sàlámi's accomplishments and the effort she has put into building her empire. His behaviour reflects a sense of entitlement and a willingness to undermine others, especially a woman, to achieve his inordinate ambition. Makanaki's actions reveal a lack of empathy and an opportunistic nature, as he seeks to exploit any opportunity to gain power and control. His arrogance and disrespect towards Alhaja Sàlámi highlight the toxic dynamics of power struggles and the lengths some men would go to achieve their self-centred ambitions. Their conversation is reproduced as follows:

Alhaja Sàlámi: How can I be happy when some small rats want to eat and destroy all that I, we all worked for?

Makanaki: Na who be rat?

Alhaja Sàlámi: Akórédé, we're mates now *abi*? That I have to wait for you? What a pity! You have taken your finger, dipped it in pepper and poked your mother in the eye with it.

Makanaki: My name is *Makanaki* and I have no mother.

It is worthy of note that Makanaki addresses Alhaja Sàlámì in Yoruba as he would address his peer or a younger one. He speaks to her without the appropriate honorifics befitting of an elder.

➤ **Men as Incompetent**

The portrayal of men as incompetent takes into account the ineffective, subordinate, weak, and incompetent nature of men as demonstrated in the selected films. The character, Kìítán, in “King of Boys” is another incompetent and ineffectual character, whose irresponsible lifestyle has severe consequences, ultimately leading to his sister's death, his involvement in a murder, and eventually, his suicide. Despite his evident incompetence, Kìítán unashamedly demonstrates a sense of entitlement about his mother's estate. His consistent display of thoughtlessness and glutton for recklessness are traits that makes mother not to have an ounce of trust and confidence in him.

Kìítán's actions and behaviour showcase a disregard for the well-being and safety of those around him. His irresponsible choices not only lead him to tragedy, but is also responsible for the loss of the trust and confidence his mother and sister reposed in him. This lack of trust speaks volumes about his character and highlights the consequences of his recklessness. This is evident in the conversation Kìítán has with his mother at the dining table:

Alhaja Sàlámì: Please just give me 10 minutes, I need to discuss an important business with your sister.

Kìítán: So you can discuss an important business with her, but you can't discuss it with me?

Alhaja Sàlámì: Get out!!! What is the matter with you, Kìítán? Must you weary me every time I speak to you? How many sons give their parents *wahala* the way you give me? Are you doing drugs again? Get out!

Kìítán's consistent track record of imprudence is evident in various aspects of his life, including his involvement in a car accident while driving under the influence of drug. Rather than acknowledging his wrongdoing, he responds with insults and fails to take responsibility for his actions. This pattern of behaviour reflects his overall incompetence and lack of accountability. Kìítán's return to Nigeria after living abroad is marked by drug use further exemplifies his reckless and irresponsible lifestyle.

The round table meeting following Alhaja Sàlámì's death also highlights the portrayal of male incompetence and ineffectiveness. Despite

their individual status and influence, the male characters present are intimidated by the presence of Alhaja Sàlámì, who assumes a dominant position within the group. They obediently follow her orders, indicating their subordination to her authority.

➤ **Men as Sexual Predators**

Men are very often portrayed as sexual predators that sexualise women, objectify them, and are ready to sexually take advantage of them. This representation is evident in “King of Boys”, when Alhaja Sàlámì visited Ààre at his house in company of her daughter, Kémi. Ààre sees Kémi and looks at her lustfully, such that he is distracted from the conversation he is to have with her mother. The following confirms the sexual predatory nature of Ààre.

Ààre: *Ahnahn.* Who is this? Is this not Adekémi of yesterday that used to look like a boy. The work of God, you cannot find it. Look at how God has put everything one by one in every place and everything is perfect. *Ehh.* She's our child, our daughter.

As she leaves the room, his eyes lustfully follow her out, as he keeps muttering, "the work of God..." Another instance of the sexual predatory nature of men is when Ààre stares at young Eniolá's butt while he eats, then he asks her if this is what other men have been enjoying. In his words:

Ààre: *Ahnahn.* Eni! You will hurt me. Is this what *Alaaru* has been enjoying?

➤ **Men as Physically Attractive**

In Funke Akindele's “Your Excellency”, Michael Idehen, the presidential candidate gains popularity not only for his competence and intelligence but also for his physical attractiveness. His appearance and well-built physique generate a significant amount of attention, leading to controversies regarding his relationship status as many women aspire to be associated with him. In fact, there is an incident where someone secretly records him during a gym workout, with the video focusing on his muscular body, which causes a social media frenzy. This incident leads to numerous requests about his relationship status and expressions of interest from the female gender. This video contains a close up shot of Idehen's body focusing on his muscles and physique.

Also, in Biodun Stephen's "Tiwa's Baggage" and Funke Akindele's "Omo Ghetto", men are depicted as hyper-masculine, whose bodies contribute to the traditional masculinity and shape audience expectations of men as powerful protectors. For instance, in "Tiwa's Baggage" there is a close up shots of Lolu shirtless and dancing, emphasising his well-defined body. In fact, Both Lolu and Olly are physically attractive men. In "Omo Ghetto", Lefty constantly comments on the 'sexiness' of Femi Stone, referring to him as a 'fine boy' and as her 'superman'. The character, Femi Stone, is handsome, tall, and well built.

➤ **Men as Determined/Driven**

Men are naturally represented as rational, competent, ambitious, independent, career-driven, and excellent. A good number of the men in selected films are driven, ambitious, and determined to achieve their dreams. They put in the hard work required to excel, and play their role responsibly. This career-driven nature of men in the films is attributable to them achieving great feats. For some characters, this drive to excel is fuelled by the desire to take care of the needs of their immediate families, while holding their heads high up in the society. This drive leads them to be responsible husbands and fathers. For example, in Funke Akindele's "Your Excellency", Chief Àjàdí's drive pushes him to win the election in order to make his country better. There is a genuine passion and dedication to his incoming role as the president because he genuinely loves his country and wants to be a great leader.

On the flip side, the over-ambitious nature of some men leads them to make inconsiderate, self-centred, and sometimes brutal decisions. One of such characters is Makanaki in Kemi Adetiba's "King of Boys" who in a bid to take the crown and forcefully take over from Alhaja Eniolá Sàlàmi is willing to go to extreme lengths; such that he murders her daughter, kidnaps the Chief Justice's family and wastes the lives of innocent people.

Another character, whose ambitiousness leads him to take brutal steps, is Femi Stone in Funke Akindele's "Omo Ghetto". He emotionally and financially takes advantage of both Lefty and Rose by pretending to love them while lying to them in order to extort them. He repeatedly betrays Lefty, disrespecting her and insulting her intelligence.

➤ **Men as High Networth Individuals (HNI)**

For some men, their confidence comes from their competence, wealth, influence, and social status. For these men, these elements contribute to their dominant and sometimes, misogynistic personality. They disrespect women and expect them to cower at their social relevance and wealth. One of such men is Ààre in the film, "King of Boys" who expects that Eniolá Sàlàmi ought not to challenge him because of his socio-political influence,

and wealth. Even after he betrayed Alhaja Sàlámì, Ààrè still expects unquestionable loyalty.

Another example is the character, Femi Stone in the film, “Omo Ghetto”, who believes that his education and qualifications make him better than Lefty. He explicitly states that if it had not been because of what he hoped to gain from Lefty, he has no business being in a relationship with her likes. His exposure, educational background, competence, and intelligence give him a superiority complex.

Research Question Two: How do the female filmmakers in Nollywood construct male characters in ways that challenge traditional patriarchal portrayals?

The objective of this research question is to discover from some female filmmakers in Nollywood if by their films they deliberately attempt to challenge patriarchy by forging new identities for their characters, particularly the male gender. To answer this question, three prominent female filmmakers in Nollywood were interviewed.

When asked of their knowledge of the involvement of women in the Nigerian film industry, the first interviewee notes that women are now more involved in the film industry, and have made significant contributions to the creative process of filmmaking in Nigeria. Women are now pillars within the industry, and they take seemingly masculine roles. In her words:

To be honest, I'm not even sure this is a topic because women are involved in the industry on all levels. From execs who make the decisions e.g. people like Mo Abudu and Wangi Mba Uzoukwu (former DSTV MD and currently the Head of Nigerian/Local Originals for Prime Video) to directors like Kémi Adetiba and Jade Osiberu, to producers like Isioma Osaje, Joy Grant-Ekong, Judith Audu and Ted Abudu, to screenwriters like myself, Diche Enunwa and Dami Elebe to even female cinematographers like Amarachukwu Udoezika, to editors like Victoria Akujobi... our influence is obvious and impactful.

The second interviewee further corroborates this by saying that the industry which used to be male-dominated, is now opening up more and more to women. She asserts that women are taking up the challenge and getting involved. There are women who now do even better than their male

counterparts. To her, women in the industry are more efficient and detailed and do better jobs than the men. She is of the opinion that women in the industry are there to create a balance.

When asked of their opinion regarding the agenda behind the involvement of women, feminist or otherwise, the three interviewees were of the opinion that they did not think that the involvement of women is particularly driven by any feminist agenda. They all expressed the belief that it is mostly driven by passion, a desire to tell compelling stories, and standing up to the restrictions that societal stereotypes have placed women as regards what they considered to be a "male dominated" industry. The first interviewee has this to say:

Honestly, I don't think so. I think these women are passionate about storytelling and are willing to go to any lengths to do it. I haven't heard any discriminatory stories against men when women are the ones controlling things. In fact, a lot of times, they work with men... and quite amiably too... most times.

The third interviewee lends her voice to it thus:

I don't think it's driven by any agenda, I just think we are in an age where women are no longer accepting stereotypes, so we have women who are willing to take on the traditionally male dominated careers. Women are no longer bound by stereotypes and they are willing to explore their opportunities.

The interviewees also acknowledge the efforts of pioneering women in the industry such as Amaka Igwe, Kemi Adetiba, Tope Oshin, and Mo Abudu who have attempted to change the representation of women, paved the way for more women in the industry, and have even trained men in the industry, further challenging the male-dominated Nigerian film industry. The second interviewee elucidates further:

I think that without even trying, women have gone on to change the notion. We have the likes of Kemi Adetiba for example who are directors, producers, female camera men. Gone are the days when, you hardly see a woman in the camera room, but now you see more women behind the scenes as camera women, producers, lights, etc. So I think they're changing the notion without even trying. Sometimes, I work with an all-female crew. It just shows you that women have infiltrated the industry. There's gradually becoming a balance.

Responding to the same question on how women have changed the notion of patriarchy within Nollywood, the first interviewee has this to say:

It is true that men have before now dominated the industry, but I think that some women have gone ahead of us to change the narrative and pave way for the names I mentioned above and someone like me. Someone like Amaka Igwe was the only woman in her time doing amazing things in the midst of men. She created the popular show, “Checkmate.” She trained men like Chris Ihidero, who till tomorrow still accredits his success to what this icon of a woman taught him. Another person who paved the way is Tope Oshin. When she started, she had to work with a studio and was the only female director in the midst of men. I recall her telling stories of how some men would want to ‘rubbish’ her just because she’s a woman, but because she knows her onions, that ‘rubbish’ ends up turning to ‘respect.’

In my opinion, I think these women have fought most of the battles, and it is on their shoulders that the women of today ride. It is possible there's still some patriarchy, but I doubt it's not anything that the leading women of today cannot handle. Such men would be put in their place if it were to ever become a subject.

In light of their portrayal of women in their films as a recreation of identities that are different from the stereotypes that have been associated with patriarchy, the interviewees highlight a deliberate deviation from stereotypes associated with patriarchy. They mentioned that they aim to create dimensional characters that radically depart from traditional gender roles and instead use their characters to reflect the complexities of real life. On one hand, the second and third interviewees completely agree that they deliberately portray their female characters as a departure from patriarchal stereotypes, even drawing examples from the films they have written. According to the second interviewee:

For my short film, “The Flip Side”, the story was about a female detective who went undercover to a hotel and then had to get out. The typical Nigerian film would suggest that I give that character to a man, but the

woman was the one in charge and she did a good job. In that movie, I could say that I challenged stereotypes and gave the female character so much power that would naturally be attributed to a male character. So yes! I would say that it is different from the stereotypes.

However, the first interviewee insists that sometimes, she crafts her characters in a way that her stories demand her to, even if that means stereotyping her female characters. Here is what she says:

Yes! For now, it is. I say for now because if a story requires me to portray women as one of the stereotypes associated with patriarchy, I will. For me, story is king, although I always, as much as I can, shy away from stereotypes and single stories. For example, "Fine Wine" is a story of a young girl who falls in love with an older guy. The stereotype is to call her a 'runs girl,' but there are people who genuinely fall for older men and are not with them for their money. That's the story of "Fine Wine."

When asked what identities for their male and female characters that they attempt to portray, the second interviewee gave a definite answer stating that as part of her creating identities for the female characters, she would always portray women as "decisive and not always as a 'damsel in distress', as ground breakers, and social and economic influencers".

On the contrary, the first interviewee states that while she may not intentionally disempower male characters, she prioritises storytelling that would challenge patriarchy only when it serves the narrative regardless of the gender involved. In her words:

I do not think of identities as a storyteller, I think of characters. Who are they? What are their likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, flaws, goals, dreams, desires, conflicts—all of which caters to the story I want to tell. I don't just decide and say I want a power chic or I want a stay-at-home mum and then go with the flow, no! The power chic has flaws the same as the stay-at-home mum. In fact, the power chic can be an entrepreneur running her business, but going through issues as all entrepreneurs do, while the stay-at-home mum has an online hobby of editing and makes more money from that hobby than the power chic!

Bottom line, I don't portray identities, I portray characters; real life, living, breathing, relatable characters which is one of the essential tools of powerful and compelling storytelling.

Responding to the same question, the third interviewee states that for her, what matters most is striking a balance between the male and female characters, especially as it concerns gender roles, without necessarily tilting in favour of a particular gender. She was also of the opinion that the issue of gender stereotypes is a delicate one. She claims that sometimes, the portrayal of stereotypes in her films is unintentional because of the kind of society we live in where men are always placed at the top of the social hierarchy. This was what she had to say:

I think that generally, you can't run away from it. This is a society that portrays the male gender as 'lord and master', and so somehow, these things influence our story telling whether we like it or not. There's an unintentional attempt at wanting to portray that. I don't even know if it's wrong or right, I just think that subconsciously, society has influenced us to think in a certain way.

The interviewees also shed light on the portrayal of men in relation to their female characters in their films. They mention that the dynamics of the relationship between male and female characters may vary, with instances where one gender may hold more power over the other and also instances where both genders are at par. With regards to this, the third interviewee had this to say:

There's no deliberate thought process to it. I just go where the story goes. If I'm telling a story that requires a man to be high and mighty, I will tell that story. If I have a story that requires a woman to be that instead, I would tell the story. There's no deliberate aspect to it. I just go where my story goes, really.

The first interviewee affirms this by stating that most times both the male and female characters are at par, while other times, the female character has been at the mercy of the male character, and vice versa. However, in response to the same question, the second interviewee admitted that her male characters are

portrayed as "protectors and social and economic influencers". Similarly, when asked if they deliberately write their scripts to portray the male characters in a disempowered position to the female characters in an attempt to challenge patriarchy, both the first and third interviewees have contrary opinion. They both reiterated that the crafting of their characters was majorly in line with the stories and the intended themes. The first respondent reiterated this thus:

No, I don't! I am not patriarchal in my thinking; neither am I a feminist. I do not deliberately put a male character over a female one, or a female character over a male one. I write stories that I know my audience can connect to. I also design my characters with needs, desires and motivations. As human beings, we are all a product of our environment, experiences and temperaments. I factor all these into the creation of a character. If the character needs to challenge patriarchy because it serves the story, I will make the character do that - and I can decide it is another man challenging this, not a woman.

Finally, the respondents described the role of female auteurs in Nollywood as exceptional, breaking stereotypical limits, and expanding the scope of women's involvement in the film industry. They contribute to the growth of the Nigerian film industry and challenge existing notions that limit women's capabilities. The third respondent affirms this in her response:

Generally, I would say that one of their roles is to create a balance and then to open the young up and coming ones to newer possibilities. Like I said, years ago, you wouldn't think of female director, or a female producer, or a female camera man, but now we have more and more women in this industry. I think their role is majorly just setting the pace for the ones coming behind, and to create a balance. Like I said, I would always work with women or I would always like to work with women. Their output is somewhat different from males. There's a lot more attention to detail that a woman brings that a man doesn't.

Overall, the interview responses highlight the commitment of female auteurs to challenging patriarchy through their story telling and gender portrayals. They strive to create new identities that defy stereotype and present nuanced roles which contribute to a more inclusive and diverse Nollywood.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: How do the female filmmakers portray men in the selected films?

The comprehensive content analysis of the selected Nollywood films reveals various ways in which female filmmakers portray men. The findings demonstrate that the filmmakers still adhere to traditional gender roles and stereotypes by portraying men as domineering, brutalising, incompetent, sexual, responsible, affluent, and physically attractive. It is important to note that these findings are simply reflective of the entrenched gender norms that over the years characterised gender representations of male and female. And interestingly, the female filmmakers did not make any attempt to subvert these stereotypes. Also, some of these portrayals were used to reveal the weakness of patriarchy, and the importance of reinforcing the need for Nollywood to drop gender stereotypes and the reinforcement of toxic masculinity in the Nigerian society.

The portrayal of men cuts across different gaze which include “violent protectors or avengers” (Shroeder, 2018), “players or “womanisers” (Feasy, 2008), “knowledgeable and authoritative” (Anderson & Stewart, 2005), “inept and clueless in family roles” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004), and “immature, irresponsible or comically incompetent” (Nixon, 2001). Findings show that some male characters demonstrate instances of toxic masculinity, where they exhibit harmful behaviours and attitudes to themselves, and especially to the women around them. Manipulation, selfishness, insensitivity, and lack of empathy are some of the toxic traits depicted in films like “Wives on Strike”, “Tiwa's Baggage”, and “King of Boys.” These portrayals highlight the destructive nature of toxic masculinity and its impact on individuals and relationships. The female filmmakers also portray their male characters as tyrannical and oppressive in films like Omoni Oboli's “Wives on Strike” where she highlights men who exhibit misogynistic behaviour, dismissing the opinions of their wives, and asserting their authority in the household. These portrayals reflect the patriarchal reality of Nigerian society, shedding light on the subjugation of women within the family. These women play second fiddle to the men and are usually portrayed as weak, completely dependent on men and subordinate to men, unable to make any rational decisions without men, and subjected to male pleasure (Amonyeze, Nwafor & Agbo, 2023; Osakpolor, 2021; Ebekwe, 2019; Okafor, 2017).

Furthermore, the analysis uncovers portrayals of male incompetence, where men are depicted as ineffective, subordinate, weak, and unreliable. Films like “Wives on Strike” and “King of Boys” feature male characters who fail to

grasp the significance of women's issues and prioritise their own personal desires over the concerns raised by women. These portrayals shed light on the societal tendency of men to downplay or ignore the legitimate concerns of women. Such portrayals are also one of the few unconventional representations of men. In both films where men were represented as ineffective, the women were placed in more powerful roles, highlighting the intentionality of some female auteurs to deliberately place their male characters in disempowered positions while empowering and elevating their female characters. This depiction can be referred to as a direct challenge to the stereotypical and traditional representation of men in Nollywood film. These findings negate the claims of Alola and Alola (2020), Okafor (2017) and Anderson & Stewart (2005) that men are portrayed as able to make rational decisions and sound judgment. In other words, masculinity is tied to authority, experience, and rationality. It is typically women who are depicted as incompetent, weak, and subordinate (Onyenankeya *et al.*, 2019).

In terms of nurturing portrayals, male characters were depicted as vulnerable, emotional, empathetic, and supportive. Funke Akindele's film, "Your Excellency" portrays men who genuinely love their wives and children, engage in playful and loving conversations, and exhibit qualities of nurturing fathers. Such portrayals challenge the stereotype of men as emotionally distant and uninvolved. For instance, Jeffords' (1994) in the cinemas of the 1980s that the image of men was constructed as "emotionally stoic, detached or unfeeling, which reflects cultural expectations that men should avoid vulnerability and prioritise strengths over emotions." Also, in Douglas & Michaels (2004), fathers are depicted as inept or clueless in family roles. This bias paints men as irresponsible caregivers, reinforcing traditional gender dynamics that assign domestic competence primarily to women.

In addition, the results show the sexualisation of men in some of the films. For instance, in "King of Boys" the lustful gazes and predatory behaviour of men are replete. Men are portrayed as sexual predators who objectify women and are ready to take advantage of them. Studies have shown that film frequently sexually objectify women and commonly feature men ogling women's bodies and losing their senses in the presence of a beautiful woman (Martin & Kazyak, 2009; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund & Tanner, 2003). This portrayal often reinforces gendered expectations that men are primarily driven by desire and lack emotional depth in relationships, limiting their capacity for genuine connection with the female gender (Feasy, 2008).

Furthermore, men in the selected Nollywood films were represented as high class and ambitious men. Men have naturally been represented as rational, competent, ambitious, independent, career driven, and excellent. Men are generally portrayed in a more empowering light, taking up professional, leadership roles. They have also been often portrayed with behavioural roles that describe them as rich, wealthy, and successful in their careers (Alola & Alola, 2020). This reflects the societal norm that men are expected to be the

rational, competent, and ambitious. Generally, within the context of Nollywood, the male gender is typically portrayed as the higher and empowered gender fit for leadership roles in the society.

Lastly, the analysis reveals instances where male characters are portrayed as physically attractive. Films like “Your Excellency” and “Tiwa's Baggage” feature male characters who are eulogised for their handsome appearance and well-built physiques. These portrayals reflect the emphasis on men's bodies and sexual appeal in media (Yoo, 2012). Although most analyses have previously been focused on women, modern media also tend to emphasise men's bodies and sexual appeal (Ward, Seabrook, Manago & Reed, 2016).

Research Question Two: How do the female filmmakers in Nollywood construct male characters in ways that challenge traditional patriarchal portrayals?

The responses highlight the evolving landscape of the Nigerian film industry. The analysis of the responses discusses the diverse roles of the female filmmakers, including writing, directing, producing, and cinematography. The responses emphasise the significant contributions made by women in different aspects of filmmaking, challenging the traditional male dominance in the industry. There are more women with significant involvement in the Nigerian film industry taking up roles such as script writers, videographers, directors, producers, and more technical roles (Ejem *et al.*, 2022). The involvement of female filmmakers is not driven by a specific feminist agenda, but rather by a passion for storytelling and a desire to contribute to the industry. This implies that women's participation in the Nigerian film industry is not primarily motivated by feminism or any other agenda to pushback against patriarchy, rather by a genuine desire to contribute to the industry's growth and development. Although not all female filmmakers identify as feminists, their films offer fresh storytelling perspectives (Raimono, 2022; Neroni, 2016; Trier-Bienick, 2015; DiBattista & McDiarmid, 2014).

The female filmmakers consciously deviate from the stereotypes associated with patriarchy in their portrayal of women. Their goal is to create multidimensional characters that emphasise strengths, weaknesses, and complexities that challenge traditional gender roles. In other words, the primary preoccupation is the portrayal of characters as real and relatable, with their own desires, conflicts, and aspirations. Nonetheless, these filmmakers often showcase narrative structures that prioritise female experiences and the complexities of identity (Raimono, 2022; Neroni, 2016; Trier-Bienick, 2015; DiBattista & McDiarmid, 2014).

Finally, the role of female filmmakers in Nollywood is recognised as exceptional. Results from the analysis of the interviews show that female filmmakers are actively involved in the creative aspects of filmmaking and have played a pivotal role in breaking stereotypical narratives. By expanding their involvement beyond traditionally 'feminine' departments, they have contributed to the growth and diversification of the industry. Their efforts challenge existing notions and pave the way for a more inclusive and diverse Nigerian film industry. This further supports the claims that female filmmakers challenge and redefine traditional representation of the female gender, contributing to a more diverse and complex depiction of female identity, especially in films (Raimono, 2022; Neroni, 2016; Trier-Bienick, 2015; DiBattista & McDiarmid, 2014).

Conclusion

The representation of men by female filmmakers in Nollywood offers a nuanced portrayal that transcends patriarchal conventions. The re-imagination of male characters in the films through lenses of vulnerability, emotional depth, and collaborative dynamics contribute to a broader discourse on gender roles in Nigerian society. The portrayal of men is achieved in diverse ways that both challenge, and to some extent, reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes. These films not only redefine masculinity but also create a space for more balanced and inclusive narratives within the industry. This shift not only enriches Nollywood's landscape but also reflects broader social movements toward gender equality in Nigeria, making a significant contribution to both cultural discourse and filmic enterprise.

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