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**Nollywood: The Role of Women Filmmakers in National Security
and Development**

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Abstract

Women are often regarded as agents of social change, this implies that the slogan: “women are their own enemies” is a product of women’s outright negligence of their willpower and reluctance to change perennial practices that impede the transformation and improvement of their social status and everyday life. The negative profiling and stereotypes of dehumanizing roles played by women on screen which are validated and re-established through repetition become the raw materials for Nollywood women filmmakers to re-create a new and realistic identity for Nigerian women. Against this background, the cultural practices that devalue women, as projected in Nollywood films will be questioned, and the need for women filmmakers to deploy new modes of promoting the downplayed traditional and cultural practices that validate the role and place of women as contributors to national development and promoters of culture and national security should henceforth be centre-stage of feminist discourses and women’s film. In the quest for a re-positioning of women in society, the Duty theory will serve as the theoretical framework for this discourse. Thus women are encouraged to exhibit their social-civic responsibility as security agents and watchers and builders of our nation.

Key Words: Cultural practices, security, women filmmakers, Nollywood, national development

Introduction

Since the inception of video filmmaking in Nigeria, which has established the Nigerian video film industry, Nollywood films have gained wide viewership especially within the African continent, ranking it the third largest filmmaking industry in the world. Much as this development gives a global recognition to the input and contributions of Nollywood to the entertainment industry through its depiction of the African continent, there is an urgent need for the repositioning of Nollywood for the promotion of the place of women in socio-political, cultural and traditional activities, security and national development. This, of course, lies at the door step of female filmmakers in the industry. Since issues bordering on security have become recurrent and central to the safety of women globally, time has come for Nollywood female filmmakers to use their creative prowess to craft films that help promote our cultural heritage at the same time projecting ways females (whether young or old) should be protected for the development of our nation. In this light, reference would be made to films like *Troubled King 1 & 2* (Mariana Isiguzo, 2013), *Living Dead* (Ekenna U. Igwe, 2004) and *Yesterday* (Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, 1998) to have a glimpse of cultural practices that devalue women and pose a threat to their security and by extension, to national security and development.

Theoretical Framework

Duty theory derives its origin from the Greek word “deon” meaning duty. This refers to responsibilities and obligations required of us humans.

Duty theories base morality on specific, foundational principles of obligation. These theories are sometimes called *deontological*, from the Greek word *deon*, or duty, in view of the foundational nature of our duty or obligation. They are also sometimes called *nonconsequentialist* since these principles are obligatory, irrespective of the consequences that might follow from our actions. For example, it is wrong to not care for our children even if it results in some great benefit, such as financial savings. (Fieser, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

According to James Fieser of the University of Tennessee at Martin, USA, Duty theory is believed to have been championed in the 17th century by a German philosopher, Samuel Pufendorf. He explains that duty theory was divided into four parts, which are further classified into sundry categories such as: “duties to God, duties to oneself, and duties to others.” A further classification of “duties to others” brings about Absolute duties and Conditional duties. This discourse focuses on the third type of Absolute duty which is “promote the good of others.”

To accentuate the concept of duty theory, it will be appropriate to make reference to Kantian duty based ethics which is seen as a moral obligation:

The theory of deontology states we are morally obligated to act in accordance with a certain set of principles and rules regardless of outcome. In religious deontology, the

principles derive from divine commandment so that under religious laws, we are morally obligated not to steal, lie, or cheat. Thus, deontological theories and duties have existed for many centuries. Immanuel Kant, the theory's celebrated proponent, formulated the most influential form of a secular deontological moral theory in 1788. Unlike religious deontological theories, the rules (or maxims) in Kant's deontological theory derive from human reason (Kantian Duty Based (Deontological) Ethics, 2013).

A juxtaposition of Kantian duty based ethics and Samuel Pufendorf's duty theory are driven towards the need to perform certain duties or obligations as human being. Upon this assumption lies the responsibility of women filmmakers to address the inadequacies and misrepresentations and denigrating cultural practices projected on screen to deliberately highlight the major and pivotal roles women play in our culture.

Reflections of Denigrating Cultural Practices in Films Selected

Firstly, it will be appropriate to see culture as dynamic and malleable. As Okoh notes "no culture is divine or natural. Every culture is created by human beings. Every culture is learned and acquired. No human culture is immune to changes. But as man acquires more and more knowledge, the cultural products he produces grow and change" (Okoh, 2008, p.5). Herein stands the place of feminist film critics who, having recognized the cultural products that do not favour women in cinema, propose a feminist perspective to film narratives. In the same vein, an attempt to reposition Nollywood for national security and development must consider the omissions by Nollywood filmmakers which are obvious in the negative stereotypes and under-representation of women's contribution to nation building as well as the misrepresentations of the woman's image. All these must be corrected for national security and development to become a reality. This understanding lends credence to Okoh's assertion that "every cultural products and traditions are evaluated from time to time as human beings seek to improve their conditions or situations – moral, social, political, intellectual. The desire to improve their conditions will often involve having to take a critical look, consciously or unconsciously, at what has been inherited from the past" (Okoh, 2008, p.8). Cultural practices which are represented in Nollywood video films where widows are made to undergo dehumanizing widowhood rites project women as a laughing stock. The subjugation of the woman's image to perpetual objectification for viewers' pleasure is a practice that needs re-evaluation as one of the measures of repositioning Nollywood for the security of women's lives and Nigeria's image before the global audience, thus Nollywood requires culture change not culture revolution.

Culture change does not mean the same thing as culture revolution. Culture change refers to the elimination of a feature of a traditional culture that has become obsolete and dysfunctional. It also means the acceptance of new element into an existing culture which thus gives a different outlook to the contemporary culture. Culture revolution involves the renouncement of the entire complex system of a cultural tradition. This is practically unrealizable. For, if one understands culture to embrace

the total way of life of a people, it would be absurd to agitate for the elimination of the way of life in its entirety (Okoh 2008, p.8-9).

Okoh's submission indicates that cultural practices that denigrate women must be expunged for a new image of woman to emerge on our screens. Only then would we achieve a national outlook that portends a secured people in a nation set for development and global competitiveness.

Cultural practices of widowhood rites where grieving wives are subjected to sundry inhuman treatments must be jettisoned. This practice is replicated in films like *Yesterday*, *Mother's Cry* and *Living Dead*. Nnenwa in *Mother's Cry* and Patricia in *Living Dead* respectively are to be stoned to death, simply because they are women. Nnenwa, a widow, is accused of stealing a chicken to keep her son, Ejike alive, while Patricia is accused of witchcraft and is also to be stoned for killing her assumed dead husband, who later appears in the company of policemen to prove that he is not dead, but that he has been mistaken for the dead man.

In *Living Dead*, Chris (Kanayo O. Kanayo) suddenly adopts a lifestyle of drinking and sometimes falls by the roadside while his wife, Patricia (Edith Azu) goes to work and tries her best to pay the house rent and caters for the family. Patricia inadvertently becomes the breadwinner of the home at the loss of Chris's job. In spite of her sacrifices, her in-laws, especially Adaobi (Franca Brown) would not let her have peace because she (Patricia) is not yet pregnant. Adaobi calls her a witch and a diabolic woman who has subjected her brother to a house-man while she, Patricia, works so as to assume authority in the home. Patricia finally becomes pregnant and laments over the absence of her husband who is assumed to have been brutally murdered by ritualists, having stayed late in the night, drunk. Adaobi and family members shave Patricia's hair, wash the corpse for her to drink and make her to swear of not having a hand in her husband's death. Patricia could not fathom the reason for her misery. The village women beat her up, tear off her clothes as they say to each other "let us teach her our tradition and custom". However, when her mother-in-law confronts Adaobi and her team for this wicked act, Adaobi replies: "mama, she has killed your son, my own brother. If you will allow it, me, Adaobi will not allow it."

The shame and pain Patricia goes through in the village propels her to say to her friends: "I came ready to face them, ready to face the humiliation." She adds that "I want to prove to them that I didn't use him for rituals." Patricia also says, "I know they want nothing short of disgrace and death for me." She is called a witch and her penalty is that she be stoned to death. According to one of the women in the "Umuada" group who are responsible for all the calamities meted on Patricia, "Patricia is only going through our traditional burial rite." As the villagers stone her, Chris appears with a group of policemen explaining that he was detained for drinking and has been mistaken for the dead man. Realizing it was a mistaken identity, Patricia asks Adaobi, "I hope you have satisfied yourself. I also hope that you are satisfied that I'm neither a witch nor I killed your brother for ritual." Despite a proposal for marriage made to Patricia by her former male friend, and the attempt by Alex (Patricia's brother) to make her forget about her wayward husband, the self-sacrificing spirit in her (Patricia) would

not let her forsake her husband. This demonstration of faithfulness and resilience and courage in women as seen demonstrated in the character of Patricia deserves commendation.

Nigerian women who have lost their husbands in cultures where similar practices are prevalent have sundry heartbreaking tales to tell. However, in line with marital duty and sanctity, Patricia explains to Alex that Chris was a good man and that he only started drinking when he lost his job, and that “why shouldn’t I help pick him up now that he is down?,” “besides my child should have a father,” because she is now three months pregnant. Despite her painful ordeals, Patricia decides to go through more sacrifices of her image in order for her unborn child to have a father. This experience is akin to Okerri’s submission that “No man can be tolerant enough to accept a wayward wife but a woman is characterized by suffering, toiling, and pains, and she is compelled to stick to her marriage vows especially when a child is involved in the relationship” (Okerri, 2006, p. 62).

Their plight is clearly stated by Femi Shaka in his article “History, Genres and Texts of the Emergent Video Film Industry in Nigeria,” where he observes that

Characterization is also handled along the traditional lines of gender hierarchy in African society, such that the male seems always to be the subject in narrative with the female functioning as an object of male spectacle or vilification, serving more to be seen than heard. Where women are characterized as very loud and adventurous as in *Glamour Girls* (Kenneth Nnebue, 1993); the femme fatale image is made to read as a signifier for waywardness and promiscuity (Shaka, 2002, p. 22).

The culture of representing women in films both as objects of admiration and symbol of suffering and toiling has strongly revealed the magnitude of insecurity and threat to their existence in a patriarchal society. These kinds of practices should be expunged from our culture by female filmmakers who should see it as their duty and responsibility to project the beautiful sides of women. Okome however pushes the blame back to women as the perpetrators of their own plight. He asserts that women constitute the bulk of video audience yet, they are a contributing factor to the stereotypes:

While women constitute the bulk of video audience and are said to indirectly dictate thematic preferences for the entire popular public of the video film, the discourse of their presence is anything but flimsy constructions based on the notions of inherited stereotypes of women perpetuated by male patriarchy. Women are objectified and expressed in the artistic configuration as bodies of desire and pleasure (as cited in Yeseibo, 2004, p. 45-46).

Living Dead may have been a film produced from a man’s point of view with the intentions to perpetuate patriarchy; however, it will be more worrisome to see films produced by women projecting women within the trajectory of cultural practices that debase women. In this light, the film *Troubled King 1&2* (2013), produced by Mariana Isiguzo, and Uche Nancy as the associate producer will be briefly examined.

Debasing Practices in *Troubled King* 1

In *Troubled King*, women leadership is represented in its worst form where a mother, Patience Ozokwor is portrayed as a thug and gangster leader of the slum dwellers. On the other hand, in the urban scenes, King Donald (Kenneth Okonkwo), a reigning king and a doctor is portrayed as a terror and a bullying husband who whips his wives for meager offenses like breaking of car light. For example, Queen Adaku receives severe flogging from her husband, the King for breaking his car light and she cries, complaining to her mate: “why did he have to beat me up like I’m a child?”

The King has a problem impregnating his four wives who have not been pregnant for the past seven years. In desperation for acceptance as the King’s favourite, one of his four wives, Lisa fakes a pregnancy and becomes the darling of the King which results to his banishing Constance, one of his wives from the palace and dissolving their marriage, because she slapped his “pregnant” wife Lisa in reprisal. Constance is happy to be out of the palace and for leaving “that brute of a King.” In exhibiting his male audacity over his wives, King Donald refuses to accept a refund of his bride prize from Constance’s father, and he bans him from coming to the Palace. King Donald, despite his life of affluence and opulence, there is no peace in his palace, thus he flogs Queen Ada for breaking the headlight of his car, sends Queen Constance home for fighting with Queen Lisa and finally deals with Queen Lisa for faking her pregnancy.

The film *Troubled King* is written by a Nollywood female screenwriter who is expected to adopt a feminist point of view in creating her female characters. Her film reflects a patriarchal culture of negative stereotyping and exploitation of women which re-emphasizes a male’s point of view in film narration. Women should utilize the film medium to their own advantage to experiment with alternative modes of narration to reposition women in culture. Thus, the film medium, like other creative art media should serve as potential avenues to test women’s creativity.

In *Yesterday*, the cultural practices that pose danger to a woman’s security are divers and numerous. Elo (Liz Benson) at the loss of her husband was subjected to the following: black clothes were given to wear, she was locked in an ash-filled room without taking her bath, she sat on the floor for days. Also, she was starved of food, almost raped by her late husband’s elder brother, and her son was taken from her during her forceful confinement, the bath water from her husband’s corpse was given to her to drink (which she refused to drink), etc. similarly, the house built by her husband was confiscated by her husband’s elder brother, Matthew (Ejike Asiegbu) and other painful experiences are some of the cultural practices that pose danger to women’s security inhibiting them from contributing their quota to national development.

Cultural practices that depict the true strength and life of Nigerian women ought to be projected to the world to appreciate the diverse nature of our ways of life and the sacrifices and contribution of women to the development of the African continent. As duty theory

obligates us to carry out our responsibilities, a challenge is thrown up to women filmmakers to take up the responsibility to transform the culture of stereotype into a creative process where a regenerated African woman emerges into becoming the new media image. Thus the onus to promote a new culture for women in films lies in the hands of Nollywood female filmmakers. In this regard, these ambassadors of our culture, who work behind the scene, should work in collaboration with actresses as agents who helps to deliver or achieve this goal. This collaboration puts Nollywood actresses in this position as the vehicle or instrument through which our cultural heritage is shared, promoted and transported. In simple term, the duty to promote and transform culture lies at the door steps of the actresses who are a veritable medium and tool through which cultural practices embedded in any society are transmitted to the viewing audiences around the world.

There is therefore a required synergy between actresses and women filmmakers, more especially feminists, towards ensuring achievable results. By so doing, such films that lay more emphasis on practices that highlight the pivotal role of women in the Nigerian society would certainly help secure the dignity of the African woman before the world. Also, filmmakers from other cultures of the world would have a glimpse of the place and role of women within the Nigerian culture. The absence of this true image of women has reflected in Aidoo's query on journalists' representation of the African woman:

But there is no doubt that, ever since, the image of the African woman in the mind of the world has been set: she is breeding too many children she cannot take care of, and for whom she should not expect other people to pick up the tab. She is hungry, and so are her children. In fact, it has become a cliché of Western Photojournalism that the African woman is old beyond her years. She is half-naked; her drooped and withered breasts are well exposed; there are flies buzzing around the faces of her children; and she has a permanent begging bowl in her hand (Aidoo, 1998, p.39)

The implication of Aidoo's submission is that the continuous representation of African women in this light by western media could tarnish the realities of our women's strength and abilities. In this light, Okerri observed that the portrayal of the female folk in association with bitterness, anger, sorrow, regrets and sometimes death has never given a positive image of womanhood (2006, p.62). These experiences which could be termed, in Elo's words, in *Yesterday*, as "wicked", "crude" and "inhuman" show that the battle against gender inequality must continue to rage until there is a change in favour of the female folk. In Elo's words, "this is not a question of feminism, no. It is a question of cleansing society, a question of getting rid of those obnoxious and barbaric practices to debase womanhood and mankind" (as cited in Okerri, 2006, p.63). Okerri further expressed that women seem to be helpless in this battle because these practices are embedded in our custom and tradition. Asking the question "of what essence" are these practices to women and our culture, Okerri opines that "even if such practices are customary, we are all aware that culture is dynamic, therefore there must be a change." She cites Elo's reactions to her experiences in *Yesterday* that: 'I'm sure no

gentleman here would allow his wife, mother, sister to be dehumanized and traumatized' (as cited in Okerri, 2006, p.63).

The negative images of women in cinema put them at a disadvantaged position making them susceptible to assault. This again poses a security challenge to the female folk whether as a child, a grown woman or an aged mother. The realization of the effects of media is reflected in Herbert Gens (1974) assertion that "there is no doubt that the media have an effect on society" (as cited in Dennis, 1978, p. 78). In the same vein, Martin Joly, validates Gen's observation of the powerful influence of the media on society with particular reference to repetition of certain visual images:

the memory of an image will also be the more forcible the more the visual message has been repeated: repetition and ritualization can alone make up for the impossibility of contemplating the animated, sequential image, whether we are speaking of an image in the cinema or, even more particularly, in the media. This raises the problem of film analysis and its potential effectiveness in the comprehension of filmic signifying processes (Joly, 1996, p.48).

In sum, Liking's observation reflects the conscious or unconscious perpetuation of the misrepresentation of the African woman by African filmmakers. Here lies the importance of duty theory where it behoves on Nollywood women filmmakers to identify the mundane structures that perpetuate these stereotypes and begin to create new identities for our women.

Women Filmmakers Obligation in Transforming and Promoting Culture

As earlier stated in the abstract, the negative profiling and dehumanizing stereotypes played by women on screen which are validated and re-established through repetition should be the raw materials for Nollywood women filmmakers in re-creating a new and realistic identity for Nigerian women. By so doing, the status of African women would be elevated just as Beatrice Stegeman enjoins all women to be:

The new woman who promotes a theory of personhood where the individual exists as an independent entity rather than a group member, where she is defined by her experiences rather than her kinship relations, where she has a responsibility to realize her potential for happiness rather than quantitative financial worth, and where she must reason about her own values, rather than fit into stereotyped traditions (as cited in Njoku, 2001, p. 198).

This is because Nigerian women have contributed immensely to national security and development and their contributions are scarcely represented in Nollywood films. God'spresence (2013) has questioned this omission and calls for a collaboration of women from all sectors of society to see it as a duty to promote the achievements of women who have contributed to national development. According to her,

We have women like Farida Waziri, Dora Akunyili, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and a host of others whose positive impact have been felt in improving the state of the nation in

various sectors as shown in chapter three. How come we are not seeing a reflection of their contributions in Nollywood film? There is therefore a clarion call to women in academics, in government and organizations for the advocacy for female empowerment to join forces with feminist film critics in correcting these anomalies and give support (financially and otherwise) to female filmmakers to produce films with a balanced and objective view on women's activities in their cinematic narratives (God'spresence, 2013, p. 188).

Female filmmakers in Nollywood are herby saddled with the responsibility to produce films that project the cultural practices that give women their pride of place. As ambassadors of culture, their films are viewed by audiences in other cultures across the globe and their films should be the window and mirror to the African continent showing the diverseness and richness of our cultural heritage. In this vein, Nollywood actresses are also saddled with the ambassadorial task since they are the direct agents of this dissemination of our cultural identity. To achieve this aim, a synergy of the various departments of film production, ranging from acting to costume, make- up, directing, etc. should effectively synchronize to tell the true story of the Nigerian woman and the African culture.

The perpetuations of cultural practices that devalue women in Nollywood films are questionable. Who are the producers of these films, men or women? Are the female producers comfortable with these images, why do they play along? As a duty, Nigerian feminist film critics are also expected to question the modus operandi of film narrative in Nollywood. This therefore calls for a synergy between theory and practices where Nollywood women filmmakers and actresses would work collaboratively with feminist film scholars to discuss trends in feminist discourses on the representation of women in cinema. This platform would help to build up the foundation of awareness because it is obvious that female filmmakers in Nollywood have not yet realized their role as pivotal in projecting women's identity in a most realist way. Similarly, the actresses contribute in perpetuating a denigrating image of women by not rejecting roles that deny women of their social status thus:

Suffice it to say that the awareness for Nollywood actresses to deliberately turn down roles or adjust scripts that are continuously in the negative stereotypes of women is alien to most of them. The desire to promote the status of Nollywood to a world renowned film industry and also for personal recognition may have downplayed on the image of the Nigerian woman and the African society. Known as the third largest movie making industry in the world, caution is required here to not just proliferate the market with films without painstakingly writing and producing films that acknowledge the true identity and positive impact of women in societal development (God'spresence, 2013, p. 188).

This goes to show that women filmmakers need to understand that the onus lies on them to deploy new modes of promoting the downplayed traditional and cultural practices that

validate the role and place of women as contributors to national development and promoters of culture and national security.

Using Culture to Secure our National Pride

The historic epoch tagged FESTAC '77 which was the climax of African cultural exhibition of the diversity of talents, artefacts, artists, religion and culture which took place in Lagos, Nigeria has never been erased from the memories of those who participated, those who viewed and those who were told by oral tradition or those who read or watched the documented historic event. This second World black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) which held in Lagos in 1977 and was jointly organized by the Nigerian government and UNESCO had a potpourri of participants and guests from all races including Africans and African-American participants. However, FESTAC 77 had the following as its main objectives:

1. To ensure the revival, resurgence, propagation and promotion of Black and African cultural values and civilization,
2. To present Black and African culture in its highest and widest conception,
3. To promote Black and African artists, performers and writers, and to facilitate their world acceptance and their access to world outlets,
4. To bring to light the diverse contributions of Black and African peoples to the universal current of thought and arts,
5. To promote better international and interracial understanding among men (Admin, "FESTAC '77).

Just as FESTAC 77 served as a potent platform in disseminating the rich cultural heritage of Africa to other participating cultures and audiences so also responsibility lies on Nollywood women filmmakers and actresses to promote African culture and depict the achievements of the true African woman adequately as well as secure and protect her dignity. If women filmmakers do not rise up to this task of cultural transformation in their films, the woman's image and dignity will remain in oblivion as the global audiences would continue to see her in denigrating stereotypes.

Conclusion

This work has examined films that present a culture where women are dehumanized and concludes that such representations portend great danger to their security and contributions to national development. This work has adopted duty theory which tells how people act in certain ways as a matter of responsibility on their part. The role of women filmmakers in Nollywood was evaluated as paramount in the transformation of the Nigerian culture and dissemination of same. In sum, this work emphasizes that the pivotal role of Nollywood women, as filmmakers and actresses strategically presents them as ambassadors of African culture and image-makers of the African continent. However, this work sees the need for

awareness to be created through feminist discourses, exchange programmes and roundtable discussions between filmmakers and film scholars. This clarion call therefore requires African feminists to work collaboratively with Nollywood women filmmakers in this cultural transformation and reformation obligation.

Recommendations

In order to re-position Nollywood for national security and development, the following measures have been suggested:

- ❖ The pivotal roles played by women toward national development should be incorporated into Nollywood films especially those produced by women.
- ❖ More of women's activities which showcase diversification in women's abilities like sports, academics, bread winning, etc should take centre stage of women's films
- ❖ Women's roles in Nollywood films should reflect their cultural roles in modern Nigerian society
- ❖ There should be a synergy between academics, feminist film critics and Nollywood women filmmakers to understand the omissions and loopholes both in their films and men's films to chart out new measures in repositioning the Nigerian film industry for an improved identity before the global audience.
- ❖ Issues of security of the girl-child and women should be taken seriously so as to protect these preservers of continuity from kidnappers, rapists, insurgencies and other forms of violent situations that threaten their security.
- ❖ All in-human and detestable cultural practices that subjugate women must be proscribed through a gradual and continuous representations of new screen images that depict women as promoters of proactive leaders and builders of society.

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