

Gender Consciousness, Feminine Revolt and the Nigerian Home Video Film: Case of *Scars of Womanhood*

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Abstract

Gender consciousness and feminine revolt as exemplified in the Nigerian Home video film are results of the female struggle for the rights of women. The issue of women rights has become a world phenomenon as women of almost all the civilized world have stood up and with one voice have rejected male domination and have also rejected some forms of traditions that are inimical to their well being. The Nigerian Home video relies on the cultural norms and values of the Nigerian societies. The video film *Scars of Womanhood* shows that the traditions are set to negate the rights of women and must be abandoned especially where they touch on women health and well being. The video film dwells on women circumcision or female genital mutilation. The film shows that tradition is set by men to control the sexual urge of women the obnoxious set of values in a world dominated by men even where and when such dominance is detrimental to women. The video film makers support women in denouncing this practice. This paper clearly takes sides with the resolve of the women to reject male chauvinism and traditions that are negative to the welfare of the women folk.

Introduction

There is no gainsaying that the Nigerian Home video film has become the dominant technological medium of popular culture and entertainment in Nigeria today. It has become a means of communication and transmission of social and cultural values. It reflects self and other consciousness. It has become a means of expression as imbued in the realities of the times.

Apart from the entertainment mission of the video films, the film consciously imitates reality and the focus is to jolt people with the intention of bringing about a desirable change. We thus can see the Nigerian video film as an art, a socializing activity and a means of learning. Most of the films take their themes from the Agenda setting which emanate from the inherent problems in the Nigerian society. The inherent problems of the Nigerian nation as beamed by the press and other topical issues are themes the home video filmmakers dwell on. The agenda so set become the means society mirrors itself. Haynes (21) asserts that, "Video are produced on several distinct bases, and have a variety of forms, styles, and themes as well as language of expression."

Film Impact and Theoretical Framework

DeFleur talks about a cultural norms theory (288) of media effect. In this theory, DeFleur shows that the media not only act directly on individuals, but also affect the culture, the

stock of knowledge and the norms and values of such a society. Thus the makers of the Nigerian Home video have taken DeFleur's cultural norms theory into consideration as they have taken a very sensitive issue that borders on tradition and change. The video film *SCARS OF WOMANHOOD* has clearly captured the essence and has called for a massive change in the attitude and practice by the people as the practice of female genital mutilation only lead to deaths and other health complications.

The Nigerian Home video reflects on one or more aspects of intense economic, political and social struggles in our society. The films have therefore become effective means of social criticism. That is, the film makers' opinions or attitudes towards the prevailing social issues in the society are taken into consideration. The Nigerian home video is used to mirror the larger Nigerian society with the sole aim of forcing a change in social behaviours.

The Nigerian video film has also been seen as an instrument for correcting social ills. It is an established fact that people fashion their lives to suit what they have seen or heard. The video maker being aware of this, in the process of entertaining his audience simply passes the information which the audience reacts to while taking corrective lessons. However, negative attributes are equally passed on to the audience. Akorede (54) opines, "for the artist to be effective in his society, for him to be the peoples teacher and to produce works that are socially relevant, he has to portray and interpret the historical, sociological, political, economic and cultural issues of his time."

Thus the film in our study criticizes the societal short comings. The film *SCARS OF WOMANHOOD* criticizes female circumcision as being dangerous and barbaric. Produced and directed by Reginald Ebere, *SCARS OF WOMANHOOD* exposes the ugly trend that had been the lot of the womenfolk forced on them by tradition and by society. From reports,, facts gathered from journals, newspaper articles and peoples experiences regarding the issue of female circumcision, the Nigerian video filmmakers have shown this obnoxious practice and have urged the society to see the dangers the women face due to this age old tradition.. In 1993, one Mrs. Helen Omagbemi, a Nigerian and an illegal alien in the United States of America was on the verge of being deported. She challenged her deportation and sort asylum on the grounds that her two daughters would be circumcised according to tradition if they ever set foot on Nigerian soil. A hue and cry was raised across the Nigerian states. Mrs. Helen Omagbemi was labeled a cheap trickster. But the American government listened to her entreaties and granted her and her children asylum.

In 1996, a magazine report alerted the world to the fact that no less than one million women world wide died annually as a direct result of complications and effects arising from the cruel and brutal custom of female circumcision. Also in 1996, women in Egypt went up in protest over what they called the dehumanizing tradition of female circumcision or female genital mutilation. Nobody listened to them and the tradition still lives unabated. Tradition still seeks to perpetuate itself even when very negative effects of such traditions are known. The idea of female circumcision stems from the erroneous idea that the less sexual satisfaction women get from the act, the less promiscuous they will be. This belief has no scientific proof nor any moral stand. The issue of female genital mutilation is that of the male exerting its gender powers over the female gender. The use of the barbaric act as stemming from tradition makes it even worse. The question is, whose tradition? Is it the male tradition to still dominate the women? This issue calls for attention because the

sexual act is supposed to be equally enjoyed. But so-called tradition has made it possible for the men to determine how much sex the woman must enjoy or not enjoy at all. But nothing is done to the men who are free to marry many women and keep concubines. This tradition clearly shows women barely existing in a men dominating world. The film *SCARS OF WOMANHOOD* therefore tries to create the gender consciousness and clearly revolt against this obnoxious male dominance which equally leads to female deaths or complications in health.

Scars of Womanhood: The Story

The video film *SCARS OF WOMANHOOD* by Contech Ventures and Carvers Studios, directed and produced by Reginald Eberé sharply criticizes the barbaric practices of female genital mutilation or circumcision. The film opens with Tamuno secretly watching the circumcision of her sister. She could not bear the horrifying sight. She runs away from the scene into the bush. At that point she resolves and makes-up her mind not to be involved in the act or agree to be circumcised because of what she saw. In a discussion with her friend, Tamuno expresses her disapproval of circumcision. Her friend likened circumcision to pregnancy, but this is not conceded to by Tamuno who talks about the possibility of bleeding to death.

The Amanyarabo introduces his son Wari to the idea of getting married, telling him that he and Tamuno's father had agreed that Wari marry Tamuno. Wari hesitates initially, but he proceeds to get familiar with Tamuno. He later meets with the elders and Wari's intentions are made known and supported by his asking Tamuno to be 'ready'. The readiness, by tradition means that Tamuno undergo the process of circumcision. Tamuno runs away from the house when Mba visits. Mba is the 'home doctor' who does the circumcision. This results in Tamuno's mother being abused by Mba. Wari meets Tamuno by the fire side telling stories to children. He expresses his dissatisfaction for Tamuno's refusal to be circumcised. He further explains to Tamuno the implications of her action as she will be labeled an outcast and her action will bring shame to her family. Tamuno stands her ground saying that a girl should not be made to pass through the brutality of circumcision because of tradition. She agrees to face the consequences of her resistance. Tamuno's sister joins in persuading Tamuno to accept the traditional values of womanhood and agree to be circumcised. She tells her about her own circumcision, now pregnant and that her husband is proud of her. She reminds Tamuno that it is taboo not to be circumcised before marriage and that marriage is most honourable in their tradition. Tamuno refuses and states clearly her rejection of that aspect of tradition.

Wari now connives with Tamuno's mother Ibinabo and gets medicine from a native doctor that sedates Tamuno and the circumcision is done. Something goes wrong and serious bleeding occurs that Mba is not able to control. Tamuno is taken by boat through the creeks to the city to a white 'witch' doctor, their last hope for Tamuno's survival. The white doctor expresses fears about Tamuno's survival due to the amount of blood she lost. She told them that everything that could have gone wrong went wrong, and that it is not possible for Tamuno to be a mother having lost her womb in the process of circumcision. Tamuno dies in Wari's arms.

Gender Consciousness and Female Revolt

The entreaties of Tamuno's mother, sister and Wari fall on deaf ears as Tamuno rejects the idea of being circumcised. She challenges tradition in her revolt to free herself from the shackles of circumcision. Tamuno is strong willed and believes so much in her self. Her self consciousness equally transcends her gender. Her revolt is against the rules set by men in a men's dominated world. When Wari threatens to look for another wife if she still refuses to be circumcised, she stands her grounds and tells Wari that if he loved her, he should take her as she is. Wari tries to persuade her to change her mind and tells her of the implications and curses that will befall her if she still insists on not yielding to the demands of tradition. Nobody will push her against her wishes and her will. She stands firm and challenges tradition. Thus in conversation with Wari she clearly shows gender consciousness and revolt against the laws of man.

WARI: Now listen to me you big headed creature, if you want to bring shame and disgrace to your family, shame in the eyes of the community,--- that is entirely your business. But no girl I am going to marry will refuse to go by the signals of our tradition.

TAMUNO: Tradition my foot Wari. What kind of tradition seeks to destroy a girl before making her a woman; tell me. Has anyone used a razor on your private part before?

WARI: I am a man.

TAMUNO: Listen to me man. I am a woman and only I know what is good for my body. Only I know whether I want to go through the butcher's knife, and I refuse to be brutalized just because tradition says so. If what I am going to do will bring shame to my family, Wari, if my decision not to be circumcised will make me an outcast, I do not mind, only allow me, let me do what my mind tells me to do.

Tamuno is a girl of strong will power. She believes in herself and what she stands for. She fits snugly into what Marilyn French sees as a feminist. French addresses female experience and affirms that:

Feminism is the only serious, coherent, and universal philosophy that offers an alternative to patriarchal thinking and structures... feminists believe that women are human beings, that the two sexes are (at least) equal in all significant ways, and that this equality must be publicly recognized (442)

The film *SCARS OF WOMANHOOD* denies that women are human beings as they must stick to a tradition dictated by patriarchal thinking and structures. Wari will not allow himself to be cut with a razor because he is a man. But believes that Tamuno must be made to be mutilated just because tradition says so and she is a woman. Mabel Eriviechoma has clearly asserted that women in Africa have woken up and like Tamuno, they are saying no to male dominance and male power. She asserts:

In Africa, women like Ame Zingha, Queen of Metamba in Central Africa, Mme Kathilili of Kenya, Nawal El-Saadawi of Egypt, Fumilayo Ransom-Kuti, Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Kambas of Bonny... Winnie Mandele of South Africa, Yaa Asandewa of Ghana; and several like them – before and after – have defied inhibiting patriarchal tenets and asserted themselves positively in spheres beyond the domestic (84)

Tamuno is stubborn and heady. Though the film shows her as such, it however does not teach the audience to be stubborn or heady, rather it urges people to believe in themselves. The character is urging people to stand firm and reject what tradition dictates for them. It particularly urges the women to challenge the chauvinistic character of men especially where it has to do with what affects the women's health and womanism.

Wari is portrayed as a typical traditionalist who believes in the patriarchal supremacy and female subjectivity. He represents the chauvinistic world where men determine the fate of women. Where men are free to sample the women but must control even the level women enjoy sex. The issue of women circumcision is to control women libido and by men. The traditional men like Wari who is to be the next Amanyanabo insist on having the power to dominate, control and dictate for his wife just because tradition says so. However, everything goes wrong and they resort to modern medication when tradition fails. But it is too late, Tamuno dies in Wari's arms, a victim of tradition.

Instrument of Revolt

The film maker uses the instrument of revolt through Tamuno to stress that society must not accept anything because tradition says so, or because we were born into it. The revolt here indicates a mind to question and not accepting the status quo when there are doubts and room for subjectivity. The revolt element here is a critical mind, analyzing situations and the ability to reject things when they are found to be irrelevant or infringing on our human rights. The government is also criticized for not enacting and implementing enabling laws to check some excesses imposed by tradition. Thus, it leaves her citizens to the mercy of tradition which are dehumanizing and discriminatory. Female genital mutilation or circumcision should not be looked at as a way of life dictated and accepted by tradition. The revolt against it, its rejection and abandonment must not be left as feminist fight for women alone. It must be seen as a crime against womanhood and the society at large.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Home video film has been a veritable means of exposing some of the obnoxious traditional practices that have impeded development and sometimes have led to serious harm and even death. It shows the female helplessness in a patriarchal world. Scars of Womanhood shows the struggle of the female gender. It asserts a consciousness and revolt against the horrible practice of female genital mutilation or circumcision. The character Tamuno who is the nerve centre of the film, shows and typifies gender resistance against male chauvinism and dictates. She is the role model of womanhood and exemplifies the feminist movement in resisting what the male gender and tradition impose. Though she is tricked into what she resisted, she dies with a conviction that tradition and male dominance are things of the past.

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NIGERIAN VIDEO FILM

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