

NEGOTIATING WOMEN'S SPACES AND POWER RELATIONS IN THE HOME: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF OKOH'S *THE GOOD WIFE*

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Abstract

Gender inequality in the domestic environment continues to rear its head despite global advancement and awareness in gender and development issues. Women have traditionally been marginalised from the structures in this environment where masculinity is linked to leadership/headship within the African tradition. In this realm, there is an obvious display of injustice in the gender hierarchy. This paper will discuss the struggles and challenges women face in breaking through traditional stereotypes of gender division of space in the home environment using the Nollywood film, *The Good Wife*, directed by Okey Zubelu Okoh and produced by Chinney Love Eze, who is also the Screenplay writer. The movie which was released in 2015 features a combined array of both new and relatively old generation of movie actors and actresses like Frederick Leonard, Yvonne Jegede, Oma Nnadi, Daniel Lloyd and Ayo Adesanya. Feminist film theories which have vast potentials to reinvigorate and energise the discourse will be employed to critically analyse spaces ascribed to women in the film. These theories which will be used to deconstruct the epistemological foundations of patriarchy will also seek for strategies for transforming gender disparity and gendered behaviours in these spaces. This attempt will move the discourse on gender relations in the home beyond mere rhetoric to tackling the gendered configuration therein.

Introduction

I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen, and my living room and the *other* room (President Muhammadu Buhari).

The quotation above, part of which makes up the title of this work, stands out as one of the most sexist remarks ever to have been insensitively made by an incumbent president about his wife. While on an official visit to Germany and standing next to his host counterpart, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Buhari ironically made such a superior-posturing remark when asked by journalists about comments his wife had made regarding his government. While it may be a reaction to criticism from his wife about his government and leadership at the surface level, Buhari's comment which is in a way displayed a sense of gender insensitivity, implicitly reflects his perception and disposition

not just about the place of his wife but that of every other Nigerian woman, especially in an era when there is a global awareness and advocacy towards gender equity and equality.

Critically speaking, the statement in question suggests a dual level of oppression and subjugation for women in Nigerian society: first, that the place of the woman in the society where she must function is the domestic domain comprised primarily of the kitchen, the living room and of course the other room (referring to women as good only for sex); secondly, that although the woman enjoys some form of dominion and jurisdiction in those places, she is only allowed to do so by the man who holds prime ownership of them and also her being. Hence, besides the confinement of the woman to the home, her functionality within such “domestic sphere” is even still dependent on the space granted her by the “boss” (man) to operate in that capacity as a “domestic officer”. He stresses “MY living room”, “MY kitchen”, emphasising his ownership of the space and the woman’s subordinate position within it.

Against the backdrop of such suppression and the various forms of discrimination against women in many aspects of their lives, the Millennium Declaration and MDGs moved for the advancement of women’s right to gender equality in the world. “Eight of the key commitments set out in the Millennium Declaration came from the MDGs, the third of which is to “*promote gender equality and empower women*”. In addition, the Beijing Declaration and Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also did open new window for the promotion of women’s rights which have resulted in several gender sensitive laws, constitutional provisions, policies, judicial decisions, government structures and resource allocations across the world today. However, despite these global efforts and many more towards gender equality which have yielded positive results over the years with women emerging from the shadows politically, economically and socially, women in this part of the world (mainly West African Sub-Region) especially Nigeria, continue to suffer different forms of marginalisation, discrimination and oppression in their lives.

In Nigerian likewise in other parts of Africa, women remain disadvantaged and disparaged regardless of the fact that they constitute about half of the nation’s population. As a result of the gender inequality occasioned by the patriarchal nature of the society, women are made to play second fiddle to the men. They are to be silent, seen and not heard; they are seen as decorative objects, incidental as opposed to the essential – the man who is the subject and the absolute. Amobi avows:

In spite of the general belief, that an estimated 50% of Nigeria’s population is made up of women and girls...the gender disparity in access to paid employment is still very much alive. This disparity which dates back to the pre-colonial era finds its roots and continues to thrive in the African traditional culture, Christianity and Islamic religion both of which preach submissiveness on the part of women. Traditional African society has stipulated clearly different roles for men and women and both sexes grow up knowing exactly what society requires of them (394).

From the cradle, boys and girls are socialised into different gender roles which will greatly influence the roles they perform when they grow up and become adults. Given the process of socialisation which entails boys and girls being engaged in activities that are classified as masculine and feminine respectively, Amobi further observes that:

The boys would eventually become husbands performing the functions expected of them by society and the girls would become wives – both performing functions according to the norms of society but not necessarily to suit their individual aspirations. While society places the woman in the home, specifically in the kitchen, it places the man in the hunting and fighting fields... Boys grew up knowing that they had to be strong, hardworking and wise so that they could take care of their wives, children and society. Girls on the other hand grew up knowing that they had to be hardworking and submissive so that they could find good husbands who would take good care of them. In other words, it was not up to them to make their lives successful but up to their future husbands and this notion robbed them of the initiative, ambition and creativity to make a choice which would make a difference (395).

These socially constructed (gender) roles which men and women are seen to play are often propagated and perpetuated by the media particularly film. The media remains a potent tool, force and agent of ideological representations in the society capable of shaping popular beliefs and perceptions. Through representations, with the media as a catalyst for socialisation, mass mobilisation and advocacy has the power to influence social attitudes either positively or negatively. The concept of representation implies “the social process of making sense within all available signifying systems: speech, writing, print, video, film, tape and so on” (O’Sullivan 199).

The Nigerian movie industry it appears has predominantly over the years promoted gender inequality given the negative portrayal and stereotypical representations of women and femininity evident in majority of the movies produced. In them, women are blatantly represented as people with low moral standing, subservient and dependent on men and fit for domestic rather than professional as well as career roles. They are glaringly degraded through various roles and forms of behaviours and are also given restricted voices which further intensify their vulnerability. Their perceived visibility is not without prejudice and negative stereotypes since what they mostly do is to play supporting roles for the natural order (Amobi 402). According to Patrick and Ekpenyong:

The Nigerian media is guilty of misrepresenting the woman folk. Most critics view them as agents working for the consolidation of women stereotyping and their marginalization in the society. This is so as their contents utterly trivialise or relegate women to secondary and inferior positions in the society (102).

Sharing similar thought, Chika is of the notion that the media, especially the fecund Nollywood, is one of the altars where the image of the African woman is

sacrificed. Through representations which do not reflect changing attitudes (presently noticeable in the Nigerian society) but that which rather upholds and promotes unjustified stereotypes, women are depersonalised and traditional prejudices tend to be reinforced. Therefore, by negatively portraying Nigerian women as passive, evil, dependent and subservient, the Nigerian mass media reinforces the stereotyping of women in the society (103). The media, as a result of the role it plays in the construction of women, has continually come under intense scrutiny for stereotyping women and under representing them. Describing the litany of prevalent images of women in the media, a UNESCO report reads thus: “the glamorous sex kitten, the sainted mother, the devious witch, the hard faced corporate and political climber” (13).

Despite the unprecedented growth and success of the Nigerian movie industry over the years, the content of most of the movies continue to reinforce gender disparity in their portrayal of women rather than reflect messages primarily aimed at correcting societal ills. Common images to be found in Nigerian video films are largely masculinist and patriarchal in form. As observed by Fram-Kulik, “films and videos could be considered a language of their own, but the language they use still symbolises the same binary order that has dominated our society with its phallogocentric perspective” (2). Correspondingly, Patrick Ebewo remarks that, “Nigerian movies perpetuate sex role stereotypes and reflect the patriarchal social values dominant in Nigerian society” (49). “The general impression is that women are negatively portrayed” (48), most likely for the male gaze.

From the early days of Nollywood film production to the present, the industry has not stopped presenting audiences with negative, objectified and stereotypical portrayals/images of women as sex objects, weaker vessels, domestic servants and the likes. They are very rarely portrayed as company executives and professionals; “rather they play domestic roles where they cause family problems or rifts, engaging in diabolical acts in a bid to either secure a husband, child, wealth or fame” (Amobi 403). While, in contrast, men are often depicted as leaders in different spheres of life in many of these films, women’s role are mostly captured in domestic spaces, showing them as a marginalised group whose functions derisively revolves around those of being housewives, mothers as well as other familial/matrimonial related roles.

Clearly, Nigerian movies, more often than not, are a reflection of the system of patriarchy and thus continue to nurture and reinforce male chauvinism in the country through representations that are biased towards men and unfavourable to women. Male dominance of the movie industry in Nigeria, like many other industries, means that Nollywood’s depictions of women “adhere to patriarchal structures, but with time, have masked these messages under the façade of female empowerment and independence” (Dutt 3). Corroborating this notion, Kord and Krimmer posit:

They show us what we are, what we were, and what we could, should, or (do not) want to be. When at their best, movies give birth to new visions of female strength and freedom. At their worst, movies ridicule, denigrate, deny what real women have long achieved, and replaced it with spectres from the past (cited in Dutt 3).

However, because the media, as an agent of socialisation, is generally believed to be the main setters of public agenda, it can equally be utilised to challenge these stereotypical and negative images of women. Through counter or alternative representations being placed high on their agenda, the media, particularly film, can be employed to change the imbalance in gender relations in Nigeria through sustained advocacy which can serve as a very potent tool for deconstructing and/or dismantling the patriarchal configuration in the content of Nollywood movies vis-à-vis the propagation of gender inequality. In doing so, as Norma Iglesias puts it, “cinema creates and disseminates important symbols that we use to (re)shape representations” (225).

Against this background, this paper examines the portrayal of women in the Nigerian home video film, *The Good Wife*, to ascertain the nature and degree of domestic oppression/marginalisation the woman suffers and to essentially negotiate for her spaces and power relations in the home front beyond the kitchen, the living room and the other room.

Theoretical Framework

Film theory and criticism has been greatly influenced by feminism as a social movement. Hence, the emergence of feminist film theory in the early 1970s was with the aim of understanding cinema as it was taken by feminists to be a cultural practice that both represents and reproduce myths about women and femininity. Since its inception in the 1970s, feminist film theory which is a product of ‘Second Wave’ feminism, a feminist movement that began in the 1960s, has provided the impetus for some of the most exciting developments in Film Studies. Central to feminist film theory and criticism are issues of representation and spectatorship. On the one hand, feminist film theory criticised classical cinema for its stereotyped representation of women and, on the other hand, debated possibilities for an alternative (women’s) cinema that allowed for representations of female subjectivity and desire. Several theoretical approaches were therefore developed to critically discuss the sign and image of the woman in film and also to open up issues of female spectatorship.

However, feminist film theory, informed by a (post)structuralist viewpoint, soon moved beyond reading the meaning of a film to analysing the deep structures of how meaning is constructed. Thus, in making use of insights from a Marxist critique of ideology, semiotics, psychoanalysis as well as deconstruction as theoretical frameworks, feminist film theory is of the claim that cinema goes beyond merely a reflection of social relations but actively constructs meanings of sexual difference and sexuality. According to Smelik,

Early feminist criticism in the 1960s was directed at sexist images of women in classical Hollywood films. Women were portrayed as passive sex objects or fixed in stereotypes oscillating between the mother (“Maria”) and the whore (“Eve”). Such endlessly repeated images of women were considered to be objectionable distortions of reality, which would have a negative impact on the female

spectator. Feminists called for positive images of women in cinema and a reversal of sexist schemes (1).

From the point of view of semiotics, Claire Johnston was one of the first critics to offer a sustained critique of stereotypes of women. She draws on the notion of myth by Roland Barthes to examine just how classical cinema constructs the ideological image of the woman. Johnston examined the myth of “woman” in classical cinema and argues that the sign “woman” can be analysed as a structure, a code or convention, representing the ideological meaning that woman has for men. Whereas in relation to herself, she means no-thing in the sense that women are negatively represented as “not-man”. This means that “despite the enormous emphasis placed on woman as spectacle in the cinema, woman as woman is largely absent” (Johnston 25-26). As the study of signs and symbols basically, semiotics or semiology as it is also called can show how ideology operates in film through its textual codes. In the words of Chaudhuri, “a semiotic reading of a film analyse show its meanings are constructed at a deeper level, through the interplay of its codes of lighting, editing, scale of shot, camera angles, dialogue, and narrative” (24).

Although semiotics shifted the focus of feminist film theory away from a naïve understanding of stereotypes of women to the very structures of gendered representation in visual culture, it was psychoanalysis that brought about the renowned concept of the male gaze. Of the several approaches to the analysis of media contents, particularly film, within feminist film theory, the psychoanalytic perspective has remained one of the dominant influences and paradigms since the late '70s. Therefore, feminist film theory's psychoanalytic perspective is a major theoretical premise for this study. In its historical context, the psychoanalytic work of early feminist film critics is revolutionary, providing a powerful, radical alternative to sociological approaches at the time. In sociological approaches, feminist film critics assess films according to the degree to which images reflect the reality of women's lives and experiences.

As explained by Gledhill, the initial interest by feminist film critics in psychoanalysis, as well as semiotics and structuralism, represented a “critical shift from interpretation of meaning to an investigation of the means of its production.” It is difficult to discuss psychoanalysis as an approach to feminist film criticism without turning to Laura Mulvey's approach to film studies via psychoanalysis and feminist film theory since her 1975 article, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, is the first to consider cinematic spectatorship and apparatus theory particularly within the context of feminism, calling for the destruction of visual pleasure as a radical, feminist weapon against patriarchy (7-8). According to Kotsopoulos:

The term “apparatus theory” refers to work of French theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry ([1970] 1986; [1975] 1986 and Christian Metz (1975, trans. 1982) who, drawing on psychoanalytic and semiotic theories of language, ideology and subjectivity, discuss cinema as an institutional apparatus, that is, as a standardising machine whose main function is to reproduce the dominant ideology via structures of fantasy, dream and desire, which the mechanics of

cinematic representation (e.g., the immobile spectator, the dream-like screen, etc.), it is argued, are particularly adept at rendering (12).

Somehow, semiotics led to a way of understanding how images work as signs, Mulvey believed that psychoanalysis was best situated to unlock the mechanics of popular mythology and its raw materials' (xiii). Reflecting on her work fifteen years later, she posits:

Psychoanalytic theory provided... the ability to see through the surface of cultural phenomena as though with intellectual X-ray eyes. The images and received ideas of run of the mill sexism were transformed into a series of clues for deciphering a nether world, seething with displaced drives and misrecognised desire (xiv).

For her, psychoanalysis renders the frustration women experience under 'the phallogocentric order.' In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Mulvey draws on Althusserian, Freudian and Lacanian ideological currents in contemporary French film theory (currents that were simultaneously influencing other British film critics such as Pam Cook and Claire Johnston) to reveal how filmic text communicates as well as promote dominant and sexist ideologies through an active male gaze.

Within psychoanalytic feminist film theory, as argued by Mulvey, the primary function of cinema, specifically classical Hollywood, is to trans-historically reproduce and reinforce sexual difference through the image of the woman. Shedding more light on Mulvey's thesis with regards to this image of the woman, Kotsopoulos comments:

Woman functions as 'object-to-be-looked-at,' an image made to the measure of male desire through voyeuristic or fetishizing mechanisms that reduce or contain the threat of Otherness her lack of penis poses to the male spectator. The cinematic reproduction of sexual difference works on behalf of the assumed, universal, male spectator, making him the subject of the voyeuristic or fetishising look that has sadistic mastery over the object woman (13-14).

In other words, women are depicted in sexually objectifying as well as stereotypical and demeaning roles where they are constantly looked at and displayed for the pleasure of the male spectators.

As further pointed out by Mulvey, Hollywood movies use *scopophilia* (sexual pleasure through viewing) to communicate through a patriarchal system. In this way, the woman "become(s) the images of meaning rather than the maker of meaning." This, according to Ross, is evidenced throughout numerous films (including Nollywood movies) where women are "undermined by lingering close-ups" of their voluptuous and curvaceous body figures and tightfitting cloths which are all "made to order for the male gaze." In such depiction and representation "... 'Woman' is defined solely in terms of sexuality, as an object of desire, in relation to, or as a foil for, 'Man'... mainstream

cinema is constructed for a male gaze, catering to male fantasies and pleasures” (Chaudhuri 2).

While Mulvey’s pioneering and ground-breaking essay may have been written more than four decades ago, many of the insights therein is still applicable to film production today for the obvious fact that the representation of the woman as an object and spectacle to be looked at still pervades visual culture in virtually all countries of the world, including Nigeria. Another paradigm in feminist film theory is the concept of the female voice as explored by Kaja Silverman in her book, *The Acoustic Mirror* (published in 1988). In the book which is about the female voice, Silverman, through a critical re-evaluation of both psychoanalysis and semiotics shows just how sexual difference is constructed through film soundtracks. Pointing out that the feminist critique of cinema has largely been confined to the image tracks, particularly to the ways in which woman is constructed as an object of the male gaze, she extended her analysis to the soundtrack and argued that classic cinema is obsessed with the sounds produced by the female voice (Silverman 309). Her thesis is captured more succinctly by Chaudhuri thus:

Women’s voices are invariably tied to bodily spectacle, presented as ‘thick with body’ – for example, crying, panting, or screaming – and insistently held to the rule of synchronisation, which marries the voice with the image. But while women may scream, cry, prattle, or murmur sweetly in the course of any film, they have little or no authoritative voice in the narrative; their speech is characterised as ‘unreliable, thwarted, or acquiescent (45).

According to Silverman, the maternal voice in cinema serves as an “acoustic mirror in which the male subject hears all the repudiated elements of his infantile babble” (81). The maternal voice, although at times viewed in a positive light as a symbol of bliss and plenitude, is mostly viewed negatively, as a symbol of impotence and entrapment.

Subsequently, in the wake of the revolutionary 1960s, feminist film theory became concerned not only with a critique of classical cinema but also with the question of a feminist cinema that would deconstruct the negative and stereotypical representation of the woman and femininity. There was call by feminists for a counter-cinema that would reconstruct the image of the woman on screen which led to the gradual emergence of women filmmakers who began to develop films in the effort to create new and progressive forms of visual and narrative pleasure (Smelik 4). A feminist cinema, thus, according to Mulvey, is a counter-cinema rooted in avant-garde film practice that would “free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialects and passionate detachment” (26). As further pointed out by Smelik, “the idea was that only a deconstruction of classical visual and narrative codes and conventions could allow for an exploration of female subjectivity, gaze, and desire” (4). Without doubt, films have power that move far beyond pure entertainment. Therefore, by creating new forms of visual and narrative pleasure, they can sway our collective imagination and influence our perceptions on crucial issues related to race, class, gender, power relations etc. It is on the strength of this that this study uses the movie, *The Good*

Wife, as a paradigm to negotiate space for the woman that transcends the domestic sphere.

Synopsis of the Movie, *The Good Wife*

The Good Wife can be described as a feminist movie that tells the story of a devoted wife who is abused emotionally, physically and mentally by her husband, but in the end reclaims her agency and asserts her, locating herself in a space beyond the kitchen, the living room and the other room. It is written and produced by Nollywood actress turned filmmaker Chinney Love Eze and directed by Okey Zubelu Okoh. Starring Yvonne Jegede, Fredrick Leonard, Oma Nnadi, Ayo Adesanya and Daniel Lloyd amongst others, the movie underscores the oppressive experiences of some women in the domestic spheres. In most cases, this abuse is by their husbands.

The Good Wife is a narrative about a couple, Susan (Oma Nnadi) and Fred (Frederick Leonard), who have been married for ten years. Although they once loved each other and were happy especially while they were dating, their lives together as husband and wife is far from peaceful and cheerful. While Susan, against her aspiration, is relegated to a full time housewife despite her qualification as a graduate, her husband, Fred, works full time. They have a six year old daughter, called, Mariam, who is very fond of Susan but detached from Fred as a result of both his uncaring attitude towards her (he forget her 6th birthday) and abusive character towards her mother. Fred disrespects his wife and wants her to remain just a housewife. When Susan becomes frustrated with his constant humiliation, she asks him for some money to start up a business; he declines and accuses her of being promiscuous and seeking an opportunity to mess around with her numerous lovers. Following constant physical, emotional, mental and also sexual abuse/oppression, Susan on two different occasions impulsively runs away to Priscilla's (her friend) house. Priscilla, whose home is a safe haven for Susan every time she is abused, is not happy with the way Fred's treats his wife, even though she is related to him. She becomes a source of strength and support for Susan. In her (Susan's) absence, Fred's mistress, Bola (Yvonne Jegede), whom he was having extramarital affairs with and got pregnant, decides to move into the house. Although an illiterate, Bola is a match for Fred and would not tolerate his excesses. Her hostility and inimical behaviour in the house causes Mariam, the little girl, to run away and is hit by a car.

By virtue of the support and encouragement she gets from Priscilla, Susan gradually regains herself and begins to forge ahead with life. Also, as divine providence will have it, while she was still in the house with Fred she gets reunited with an old friend and class mate, Daniel (Daniel Lloyd), after a very long time. This re-acquaintance ultimately paves the way for her employment when she applies for a job and turns up for the interview after being shortlisted. Daniel is surprisingly yet favourably the employer who wastes no time in employing her as a Personnel Manager where he works as Human Resource Manager. In addition to their professional relationship, they eventually got emotionally involved. While Susan experiences love and happiness again, Fred is left devastated as Bola carts away his thirty thousand dollar and informs him through a letter she leaves behind not to bother looking for her and the baby.

Women's Confinement to the Kitchen, the Living Room and the other Room and the Quest for Space

From the opening scene of the movie, *The Good Wife*, Susan is immediately shown as an unhappy wife who is enslaved within the domestic sphere. Trying so hard to endure a loveless and an oppressive marital institution, she sits on the couch in the living room in the night worriedly waiting for Fred (her husband) to return. In her sitting position, she waits in vain until she falls asleep. When Fred finally returns at past six in the morning and visibly disgusted at the sight of her sleeping on the couch, he spitefully wakes her up with a kick to the leg.

Fred: So you slept off? Right?

Susan: Where are you coming from by this time?

Fred: You're questioning me – where am I coming from? Yet you went to sleep. So you didn't see me and you went to sleep?...

Susan: Fred, it is only fair of you to let me know your where about.

Fred: O really!

Susan: I have been sitting here, this is past six am.

Fred: And who are you throwing the pity party for?

Susan: You should have at least called me or sent an sms.

Fred: Is it? And you think it is in your place to question me in my own house Susan? Huh? I'm not in the mood for this drama. Your husband is hungry make something for him to eat. And please make it spicy and hot. Don't make me cold food cos he won't like it.

This dialogue from the opening scene of the movie clearly describes the existing power relation between Fred and Susan. While Fred is the head absolutely in charge of the home and the entire domestic territory therein, Susan is a housewife in the mould of a slave who is only given the authority to operate or function in designated spaces in the home. She is confined to both a demeaning and subservient position. She is to be seen in the house and not heard; she is a servant who must carry out the biddings of the master (her husband). She is always at fault and the one to blame even when she is innocent of any wrongdoing or offence. In one particular instance, Fred unfairly blames Susan for trying to turn Mariam, their daughter, against him when in fact his negligence and uncaring attitude is the reason for Mariam's unhappiness and refusal to eat. Mariam is offended that her father (Fred) failed to remember her 6th birthday (as well as her age) and to buy for her a birthday present.

Susan once had a job but perhaps because she needed to raise and care for Mariam (as a baby), she was asked by her husband to stop working and she did. However, seeing that their daughter is now grown and attained an age that would afford her ample time to do something productive, Susan begs Fred for some money to start up a business but he turns her down and accuses her instead of seeking an opportunity to spend time regularly with men.

Susan: Fred you see now that Mariam is grown up, I have enough time for myself. So I need little sum of money so I can start up a little business.

Fred: Really? So you want me...to chunk out a reasonable sum of money and give to you so that you can go out there and start a business and then use that as a license to go out on a daily basis to frolic with your numerous partners.

He accuses her constantly of infidelity despite her innocence. She is a victim of an everyday ill-treatment that entails, amongst other things, being cursed, scolded and yelled at mostly without provocation. All Susan desires by asking to start a business is a productive life outside of the domestic sphere but Fred does not budge on his decision. He says to her:

Fred: Susan, my decision on this matter is final and my answer still remains no. There is nothing you do right now that can change that decision. Alright? So you can kneel down there and cry me a river for all I care, I don't have a broken coin to give to you.

Dejected, demoralised and with tearful eyes, Susan looks at herself in the mirror, reminisces on the good moments they shared while they courted and could not believe the woman she now sees in the mirror:

Susan: (*Crying.*) This is not the life I envisaged for myself. This is not the life Fred promised me. Where did I go wrong?

Susan's case is further compounded when she steps out of the house to get some groceries in a nearby supermarket and eventually bumps into an old friend (Daniel) who then drops her off at the house. Fred, who has always suspected and accused Susan of cheating on him, is infuriated at the sight of her alighting from another man's car.

Fred: Who was that man that dropped you off?

Susan: He is an old friend I ran into at the supermarket.

Fred: Really? And since when did you start hanging out with your old friends, male ones for that matter Susan?

Susan: I just ran into him and he offered to give me a ride.

Fred: You're a lying prostitute Susan!

His overbearing character and overreaction spurs him into making irrational decisions, the implication of which is that Susan's business/undertakings would forever be limited to the house – the kitchen, the living room and the other room.

Fred: Alright, I'm going to make it really easy for you since you want to stop driving... so that you have the liberty to walk on the road, wriggle your waist, shake up your buttocks so that men will see you, would offer to

give you a ride and you oblige them. As a married woman, I will make it really easy for you; I am confiscating your car. Henceforth, you are not allowed to leave the confines of this house and that is final.

Being locked up is what Fred calls this action of his towards Susan, it means Susan will no longer have to take Mariam to school or bring her back home let alone run errands. Her duty in the house has become more outlined – cook, keep the house clean and always perform her wifely duty in the other room at nights regardless of her physical or emotional state. In one of such nights while she sleeps and obviously exhausted from the numerous chores she has had to perform all day, Fred inconsiderately comes into the room for love making:

Susan: What do you want?

Fred: I want you baby.

Susan: Fred please I don't feel well. I'm not in the mood for...

Fred: You don't have to be in the mood darling. You're my wife so I can have whenever I want.

Susan: I am your wife not a prostitute. Besides, I do not feel well.

Fred: O stop it you don't have to... (*Begins to force himself on her.*)

Although she was brave enough to resist Fred's advances on the night, she was physically assaulted. Susan's domestic ordeals in this movie are similar to what another character with the same name suffers in the movie *Mr. and Mrs.* Susan in *Mr. and Mrs.* is also assaulted verbally, physically, emotionally, sexually, and so on. By her chauvinistic husband Kenneth. Despite being a graduate of Law, she is confined to the domestic domain where she is expected to remain from sun-up to sun-down. Her primary duties, similar to those which Susan is expected to perform in *The Good Wife*, is to keep the house tidy, cook fresh meals daily for a fastidious husband who does not eat stale food and also to sexually gratify him at nights whenever he wishes.

As a result of the physical assault on Susan, because of her refusal of sexual intimacy with Fred, she runs away to Priscilla's house. Although a cousin to Fred, Priscilla never allowed their family bond to cloud her judgement as she feels strongly that Fred, been an abusive and irrational husband, does not deserve Susan. She is forthright in rebuking Fred over his maltreatment of Susan and even threatens to have him locked up. Susan, however, returns home after Fred pleads with his cousin Priscilla who in turn leaves the decision to return home or not up to Susan.

Soon afterwards, Susan is compelled again to run off after she is accosted on the road by Bola (Fred's mistress) and she goes back home to confront him. She is surprised to learn that Fred has a mistress who is pregnant for him and wants some explanation but he feels emasculated for his wife to challenge him in this regard. This to him challenges his masculinity. As a result, he does not hesitate in battering her. While at Priscilla's place this time around, Susan gradually begins to pull herself together as Priscilla begins to counsel and encourages her:

Priscilla: ...It was a good thing you left before it got too late. Fred had no right abusing you emotionally, physically and mentally the way he did. So by leaving my dear, you did... the right thing. Don't go blaming yourself for leaving Mariam. When you're strong enough, we are going to fight for full custody of her.

While Susan stayed with Priscilla, Bola moves into her home to take her place although without Fred's does not fully approve of this. Fred isn't happy about it but there's little or nothing he can do because she is a match for him as a *no-nonsense* and an aggressive person. She becomes a thorn in Fred's flesh and does not tolerate his excesses like Susan did. When Fred turns off the television Bola is watching in the living room and demands to know why she did not prepare any meal, her reaction is contrary to the way Susan would have reacted – Bola is disrespectful, haughty and uncompromising:

Fred: Alright, I'm just coming from the kitchen and there is no food. I spoke to my daughter she said she hasn't had something to eat since she came back from school why? Why didn't you cook?

Bola: That's all? That's why you turned off my film? (*Gets up and takes a sitting position on the couch.*) Fred I'm tired. *Oremi*, I can't cook today. I'm very tired.

Fred: Bola, what do you mean by you are tired and you can't cook today. What then are you here for? No, tell me of what use are you to me because you don't wash, Bola you don't clean and you hardly cook. So what are you here for then? Tell me of what use are you to me Bola except that you sit down there every day staring at the TV set and at the end of the week you ask me for money. Of what use are you to me?

Bola: Fred ... look at my condition. I can't be...

Fred: (*Very aggressive.*) Will you spare me that rubbish! You're pregnant my foot. Are you carrying Jesus Christ in that tummy? Or you're trying to tell me that pregnant women don't cook? No tell me is it that you're playing stupid or just lazy?

Bola: (*Reacts sternly.*) Eh ehn eh ehn... *a bumio*. Don't insult me o! ... Do I look like your house girl? If you're looking for a house girl I will go to *Orile* and bring one come for you. *Abi*? In short I don't have time to be arguing with you here. (*Starts walking out on him but is held back by Fred.*)

Fred: You don't walk out when I'm talking to you. You stand and listen to me, do you hear me? Next time you walk out on me I'll break your neck (*Throws her to the couch.*) Are you mad?

Bola: (*Shocked.*) ... Fred, are you mad? ... Your generation has gone mad. You're a bastard Fred.

Fred: (*Attempts to slap her.*) Bola you...

Bola: What do you want to do? Slap me? You can't. (*Leans her face forward*) *Oya*, take it. *Oyana* slap me. I will show you that I was born in *Orile*. I

will deal with you in this life.... I will show you.... There is no woman that will born you and make you to slap me. You're a bastard...bastard man, idiot.

In another incident, she yells at him for coming back late – something Susan would normally keep mute about:

Bola: It shall not be well with you. You're an irresponsible man. Shebi it is now that a responsible man should be coming back to his house, by this time of the night?

Sometimes too, she is superficially polite about it:

Bola: ...I don't like this way you are doing this things. I have been sleeping on the couch...last night awaiting, you did not come home, you did not even say you should come... be it four or five (*looks at wrist watch*). Look at the time – eight o'clock... because when me and I get married I don't want any irresponsible character like this in the house.... So, I just want to tell you now in peace so that we know how to handle this situation because this your irresponsibleness is just... (**Fred begins to walk away.**) You are walking away so I should talk to myself?... It will not be good for you! *Oloshi!* Irresponsible bastard! Imagine the time you are coming to the house? You don't like peace talk... you will suffer.

Bola's no-nonsense attitude and meanness know no bounds. She forces Mariam to wash the dirty dishes and in the process she breaks one of the plates. She is scolded by Bola who threatens to beat her and out of fear she runs away from the house and is then hit by a car on the road. Fred is livid to learn of what has happened and even begins to regret his involvement with her.

Fred: What kind of a human being are you?

Fred: Bola you are wicked. You know sometimes I wonder even to myself why I got into this mess with you. And hard to think that you are part of the reason I treated my wife the way I did. And you turn out like this? You are despicable!

While Bola's relationship with Fred disorganises his life, Priscilla's relationship with Susan empowers and inspires her, re-awakens her self-esteem. Priscilla informs Susan of a job vacancy a friend told her is being advertised and encourages her to apply as it will enable her regain her self-esteem if she is successful. She applies, performs brilliantly in the test and is shortlisted for the interview. At the interview she is shocked to be the first to be called in. To her surprise Daniel, her old time friend and class mate is the one presiding over the interview. Daniel the Human Resource Manager in charge of

recruiting competent hands in the work place, immediately offers her the job, bringing the entire interview process to a close. Having a true friend (Priscilla) by her side that is supportive and with a job secured, Susan's life is back on track again as she begins to experience happiness and derive fulfilment. Her closeness with Daniel also means that she is gradually experiencing what it means to be truly loved. Priscilla tells her while she makes up for her date with Daniel:

Priscilla: I am so happy you have decided to live again. Life is too short mourning over a man who is probably having fun somewhere. You need to find true love again. You deserve it. So go have yourself some fun girl.

Susan finds her self-confidence and self-worth through the help of Priscilla. When she visited the house and demanded to see their daughter, she does not appear as the frightened, inert and docile house wife that Fred once had a hold over and controlled like a puppet. Thinking it was business as usual, he slaps her but he is immediately stunned when Susan swiftly retaliates by slapping him twice using both hands. Excitingly, Bola is standing behind Fred and gives Susan thumbs up for her bold reaction.

With life being made a living hell for him by Bola, Fred finally realises his mistakes and sees the need for Susan in his life. His ego eventually paves the way for an unreserved apology when he was at the hospital to see Mariam:

Fred: (*Remorsefully.*) Susan I'm sorry. Susan I'm really sorry. I'm sorry for the way I've treated you in the past. I'm sorry for the things that I have done to you. I'm not proud of those things. Please find it in your heart to forgive me. I'm willing to make amends I beg you. Sorry for every pain that I have caused you, please.

Although the apology may sound genuine, it is perhaps coming a little too late as, in Susan's own words, "no amount of apology can erase the pain you caused me and my daughter." Susan has found fulfilment (as a worker) and so rejects the temptation of returning to a man as well as a house that holds for her memories of enslavement and captivity. Besides, her blossoming intimacy with Daniel which makes her happy again is a relief capable of obliterating from her memories the loveless relationship with Fred which left her abused and dehumanised. The happiness she finds without Fred shows that the world does not end when one leaves an abusive and oppressive relationship but that life goes on and that the better life she deserves can be found away from such relationship. In contrast, while life gets better for Susan, Fred's life is shrouded in misfortune. He returns back home from the hospital to find out (through a note) that Bola has absconded with his thirty thousand dollars and his supposed unborn baby.

Conclusion

Over the years, the image of women in Nollywood video films has been that of negative stereotypes which is capable of negatively influencing the perception of the society about

women. This trend has made the treatment of women in films a critical subject of inquiry that has continued to occupy the realm of discourse with many feminist scholars and critics questioning the sexist depictions as well as negative stereotypical representations of women in Nollywood video films either as whores, sex objects/emotional objects of gains, passive and docile house wives in the mould domestic slaves, desperate and materialistic spinsters, gold-diggers, diabolical and scheming to say the least. Such portrayals demands to be countered, especially in a world where women's access to and active participation/ representation in the power arena socially, politically, economically and otherwise remains greatly restricted and which in turn undermines their status and roles.

Therefore, there is the dire need and urgency for a counter-cinema or an alternative video culture to the dominant male-oriented regular Nollywood video film narratives given that the media as a potential agent of socialisation and of social change is a major view that continues to form the nucleus of discussions especially of the relationship of the media to women's issues. As part of efforts to counteract the masculinised and hegemonic film industry in Nigeria which has for long been in the habit of producing movies with biased depictions and stereotypical portrayals of women, female filmmakers are gradually emerging from the shadow and rising to the occasion to deconstruct as well as to reconstruct the image of the Nigerian woman in these films. Such is the case of, amongst others, *Mr. and Mrs.*, which is a 2012 Nollywood video film, written and produced by Chinwe Egwuagu and *The Good Wife*, which served as a paradigm for this study, produced and written (screenplay) by Chinney Love Eze.

With the gradual emergence of female filmmakers either as producers, writers or directors, and so on, even though the number needs to greatly increase, the responsibility lies most with the (few) women behind the camera to champion the cause of reconstructing the image of Nigerian women according to present realities of women's positive undertakings and potentials in the society either in the home front, workplace or political domain. The few women in the business of filmmaking at the moment should as a matter of necessity engage their male counterparts in the industry creatively and constructively on the need to respect womanhood and avoid exploiting women's image through negative stereotypical portrayals. By getting women to tell their stories from their own perspectives, the image of the Nigerian woman in films can be more accurately refashioned in accordance with present realities and bring about more positive and dynamic representations. Through a resolute counter-cinema, the image of the Nigerian woman in Nollywood video films will no doubt be redeemed since the media, especially film, are potent instruments for creating and strengthening images of reality, which according to Gerbner, Gross and Signorelli provides a concentrated system of storytelling that surpasses religion in its power to change or shape perceptions (80).

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