

Re-Inventing the Self in Omoni Oboli's *Wives on Strike: The Revolution*

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Abstract

Over the years, the Nigerian woman has been examined from different perspectives by scholars. Recently, there have been scholarly works including Nollywood movies - (Nigerian filmmaking industry) that identifies and portrays a new crop of the Nigerian woman as radically opposed to and/or moving to reposition herself from centuries of being presented and perceived as docile, subservient and passive. This paper encapsulates and strategically depicts the contemporary Nigerian women as strong, courageous, as well as resolute as they resist, take charge and take control of their lives as projected in 'Wives on Strike: The Revolution' 2018 by Omoni Oboli. The Dyadic Power Theory was used in the analysis of the paper. DPT attempts to explain the concept and perception of power and its interplay in relation to people. The paper deploys qualitative method, content analysis, descriptive and interpretive tools in the analysis of the movie. The movie projects that women and the girl-child should be equally treated and empowered with options like the man to install and enable progress in society. That, women will achieve more in society if they collectively unite to advocate and assert their rights. In conclusion, the paper charges the Nigerian filmmaking industry - Nollywood, the media, other agents of socialisation and the government to continue to encourage, tackle, and promote positive gender relations in society.

Keywords: Re-Invent, Assertive, Collective, Resistance, Women.

Introduction

Women are often depicted as neglected, marginalised and maltreated in many scholarly works. They are projected as suffering different forms of gender-based violence in the hands of men especially. To that end, this study seeks to make an exposition of how the theatre genre depicts women's efforts to assert and purge society of negative gender perceptions about them. The central argument of the paper is that the theatre genre engages with, depicts and satirises different themes, societal issues through the medium of theatre to bring positive change in society. Despite being neglected, marginalised and subjected to various kinds of gender-based abuses, women are known to have contributed immensely to all spheres of life (UNDP, 1997; Abraham, 2012; Ochelle, 2014). Women are known to constitute half of the world's population and have contributed significantly to humans, the non-humans of the ecosystem, phenomena and the society as a whole (UNDP, 1997). Patriarchy can be said to be responsible for the age-long extant perceptions about women and the unfair treatments meted to them across cultures globally. Patriarchy is the

same reason the fundamental human rights of women are often trampled upon with impunity in society.

The Nigerian filmmaking industry - Nollywood, satirises and unveils the culture of Nigeria as it entertains, educates, informs, instructs the populace. Against this backdrop, this paper theatrical depicts through the movie – “Wives on Strike: The Revolution” by Omoni Oboli, a crop of contemporary Nigerian women who radically move to assert and reposition themselves from centuries of being made to dance to the tunes and rhythms of patriarchy in an attempt to project that they are not weak vessels as often portrayed, depicted and perceived in society.

Conceptual Clarification

Awake (2013) described violence as a worldwide epidemic, crossing cultural, economic, and social groups. This paper observes here that since many incidents go unreported, there is no doubt that the situation is worse than what statistics reveal. For World Health Organisation [WHO] (2002), violence is any intentional act of using physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community with the intent of harming, hurting, injuring, killing or causing pains and psychological trauma to the victim or oneself. The most commonly quoted definition of gender-based violence against women is that of the 1993 UN's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which defines it as:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Clearly, the above definition highlights the implications or attendant effects of gender-based violence – (hence GBV) on women, the girl-child and society at large. ANROWS (2015) defines GBV as any act by either males or females that threatens persons of the opposite sex in/directly, being in forms of physical assault, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, social isolation and any behaviour that causes the victim of the violent act to live in fear. The above definition is closely related to Harrison (2014) and Oyelade (2012) shared description of violence against women – (hence, VAW) as any physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological actions and/or threat against women, or any form of behaviour that threatens, frightens, isolates, terrorises, hurts, injures, wounds or attempts to control women, which have negative consequences or impact on them. Mshweshwe in Baloyi (2022) defines domestic violence as a consequence of men's desire to exercise power and control over their female partners, a behavior that has been legitimized and justified within the patriarchal system.

Wallace and Seymour (1999) argued that sometimes domestic violence may lead to the death of the victim. Basically, the term GBV describes or is concerned with violence perpetrated by males or females on the opposite sex based on their sexual differences while VAW is concerned with violence perpetrated on women by men because they are women.

In other words, VAW is one-sided or misogynistic in its conception of gendered violence because women suffer violence by men because they are women.

Theoretical Framework

The Dyadic Power Theory as propounded by Boyd Rollins and Stephen Bahr in 1976 and revised by Norah Dunbar in 2009 is considered suitable for this study. The theory emphasises the perceived power of partners in a relationship. It assumes that the way each partner uses power in a relationship is dependent on his/her perception of power. Hence, a partner who perceives power from a particular perspective is most likely to exhibit behavioural traits based on his/her perception of power. Invariably, this paper argues that DPT goes beyond marital relationship with its power encapsulated by the theorists to explain power in gender relations and interactions across society. Dunbar (2009) agreed that relationship power obtains in all affectionate or romantic relationships, because it is what determines how the partners relate and the ways in which they take decisions. Intergroup and interpersonal relations of various contexts are also characterised by relationship power.

Normative marriage is a thing of gender relations and roles by two persons of the two heterosexual opposite sexes— male and female. Definitely, in the exercise of power, resistance or compliance follows up. In our case, women push out or revolt against the patriarchal power allowing for VAW, marginalisation, relegation, abuse of rights and negative practices, such as child marriage. In the movie, Papa Amina shows relationship power to Mama Anima and even Amina. Alhaji shows relationship power to Papa Amina in terms of wealth and power. The Dyadic Power Theory is therefore apt for this study.

Evidence of Gender-Based Violence from Extant Studies

Issues of gender-based violence against women are present across many cultures globally. Studies have shown that Western women had suffered gender-based violence much more than women in the continent of Africa have suffered overtime (Grimshaw & Fricker, 2002; Acholonu, 1995). According to Grimshaw and Fricker (2002), "there were times in Europe and America that women were not allowed to go to school; and at such times it could be said that men dominated everything; they were the only preachers, philosophers, doctors, historians, manufacturers, etc." (p. 552). They add that 'during such times, andocentrism was the order of the day' (Grimshaw & Fricker, 2002, p. 552). The above issues surrounding violence against women could be said to have propelled and fuelled the rise of feminism in the West where it spread to other parts of the world. Acholonu (1995) opined that African women neither experienced sexism nor complained of being marginalised until the advent of colonialism where they encountered gender ills, got introduced to feminism and started agitating for their rights.

Hooks (1984) stated that "the problem of female marginalisation also exists in broader systems like racism" (p. 22). Spellman (1988) observed that, "sometimes the issue of women marginalisation or gender inequality goes beyond sexist considerations to include

marginalisation based on social class and things of this sort" (p. 52). The implication of the foregoing is that tribalism, which is very pronounced in Nigeria, is one aspect of feminist problems. Nigerian women suffer this phase of marginalisation in different contexts that include the workplace, places of worship, educational, socio-economic, cultural and political spheres, and so on.

Witt (2005) opined that the exclusion and marginalisation of the theoretical contributions of women as well as the devaluation and suppression of their standpoints is misogynistic. She states that misogyny is what had made feminists in different fields, such as science, social science, philosophy, etc. to adopt "adding women" approach (Witt, 2005, p. 2). Supporting Charlotte Witt, Harding (1996) argued that because of the injustice of excluding women from philosophical history, the urgency for women to rise up to the challenge of making their contributions known became a dire necessity (Harding, 1996). Chimakonam (2018) speculated that women are marginalised in the fields of education and philosophy among others. In contrast, Uduma (2018) proposed that "there is no evidence to prove that philosophy is a male dominated discipline" (p. 220). Moreover, in reference to pre-colonial Nigerian women who held significant positions and were accorded relevance and honour in various spheres of life, Acholonu (1995) argued that African women were never marginalised until the advent of colonialism. Acholonu's (1995) and Uduma's (2018) positions tallies with that of Chinweizu (1990), who holds that women are rather the ones who use their feminine tricks and pranks to manipulate, marginalise and command compliance from their men and children.

Ameh (2012) informed that men also suffer gender violence from women. That, it is society that does not give adequate attention to violence suffered by men from women however severe and/or critical it might be (Ameh, 2012). That, such cases are usually underreported or downplayed due to shame and social stigma attached to it. The shame and stigmatisation is due to centuries of misconceptions and entrenched misogynist beliefs that only men are capable of perpetrating violence on women. This misleading concept stems from patriarchy that alleges that the man is naturally more powerful than the woman due to his masculinity. Hence, an abomination for him to suffer and report any form of violence as perpetrated on him by a woman. Second, such a man would be considered a weakling and ridiculed should he ever summon the courage to report the abuse. Third, female perpetrators of violence against men often turn the narrative against men in their favour by whipping up the sentiments and support of people as women.

Held (2002) aptly submitted that both males and females have the same essence or nature, and so, should be treated equally in society. The narrative of the movie, "Wives on Strike" as produced and directed by Omoni Oboli validates the above viewpoint. The movie portrays as well as portends that since men are not forced into marriages, women or the girl-child should not be forced either into any form of marriage.

Girl-Child Marriage, a Form of Domestic Abuse in “Wives on Strike”

The movie depicts human rights advocacy against child marriage as well as other forms of GBV and VAW. The story revolves around the family of Papa Amina, Mama Amina and Amina, their thirteen-year-old girl-child. Though Mama Amina is educated with a Teacher Training Certificate of Education and in spite of Papa Amina struggles to fend for his family, he still objects and insists that it is the tradition and culture for women to be full time. Without the consent of his wife, Papa Amina plans to give Amina's hand in marriage to a rich Alhaji, who is in his late 50's. As soon as the plan gets to the women in the community, they spread the news and mobilised themselves for a national protest through the instrumentality of strike because of the child marriage which is an abuse and the infringement on Amina's fundamental human rights as human and a female.

In revolt, wives sought and gained the support and collaboration of all the prostitutes in the community. All the women agreed to a national strike of abstaining from sexual intercourse with all the men in the community. Protesting against this gender ill, the sexually starved men are left with no option but to conform to the demands of the women thereby bringing the proposed child marriage to an abrupt stop. At the end of the narrative, Mama Amina is also allowed by Papa Amina to start a trade to support and supplement his efforts at fending for them. The implication of the filmic action of the women is that women can always realistically end any form of bias, oppression, suppression or subjugation against them. Thus, it is within their power to end any form of prejudice against them. It is quite interesting that women in the movie were depicted and demonstrate the power of their sexuality. This implies that women have innate abilities, inner intelligence to tactically maneuver and deploy as a mechanism to achieve her goals and cause positive change in society.

Suffice it to say, Papa Amina represents parents, especially menfolk who tend to exploit women and the girl-child for financial gains in total disregard for the overall well-being. By inference, it is obvious that “Wives on Strike: The Revolution” has the Northern part of Nigeria as setting as the names of the three major characters - Amina, Papa Amina and Mama Amina suggest. Also, the film demonstrates that since ill treatments meted out on women are sustained by men across generations in patriarchal cultures (Gwan-Nzekwu, 2008), women need to intentionally – (individually and collectively) resist attempts to unleash gender-based ills on them.

The satirical film criticises gender-based ills against women in general and attempts to portray that it is inhuman to force an under-aged child, especially a girl into marriage. This is because marriage should be a union that both parties are matured enough to give their consent. Therefore, one cannot help but imagine why Papa Amina would arrange to give Amina's hand in marriage without even discussing it with his wife, Mama Amina. This behaviour is a characteristic display of extreme patriarchal tendencies, a situation where the man's words and actions are final and unquestionable. In this vein, Papa Amina is resolute on giving Amina out in marriage to the old man regardless of his wife's plea thus:

I beg Papa Amina, help me think this thing.

Please! no kill me. I beg!
How I go deh sleep for bed for night wen
I no say my pickin no happy.
Let her mature small. She no deh run anywhere.
She go marry Alhaji. I promise!
Make she just grow small, at least turn to woman.
Wen she don full as woman, even Alhaji go
enjoy am more like that as...wife.

Yet, Papa Amina would not consider her plea. Hence, Mama Amina is forced to tell her friend, Madam 12.30 of the predicament thus: "As my husband no gree listen to wetin I deh talk, I don give up." Madam 12.30 encourages her to fight for Amina's well-being and charges her thus: "You go fight for your pikin. Abi no be you born Amina?" Meanwhile, marital issues arising from and surrounding child marriage could be disturbingly troubling. Hence, the need to speak against child marriage through a popular mechanism like movie. The thematic focus of "Wives on Strike" by Omoni Oboli is child marriage and how women can strategically resist it and any obnoxious form of domestic abuse. The movie calls on women to collaborate to advocate for and upturn child marriages and other allied vices aimed at the woman and/or the girl-child in society. Against this backdrop, all women, including the sex workers in the community mutually resolved to revolt and advocate for an end to child marriage. The women in the community were able to clearly define their goals, weaponised and used sex as a viable strategy or means for seeking and attaining justice for the woman and girl-child specifically. By implication, the women succeeded in introducing and installing a new world order for every female through persistence and diligence. Invariably, "Wives on Strike," subtly insinuate that women should realise that they have the innate power or abilities of handling, tackling, and resolving issues that could easily move society forward positively.

The Need for Resistance

The increasing spate of violence against women in society makes it imperative to wedge war against it, using different mechanisms. One of the most popular mechanisms is the film genre through satirical portrayal. It is reported that at least 300–350 women are killed annually either by their husbands, former partner, boyfriend, or male relations (Shija, 2004). Regrettably, most of the cases are either swept under the carpet by the police or are simply considered as family issues that should be resolved at family level without the involvement of law enforcement agencies (Shija, 2004). The Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety [ANROWS] (2015) reports that stories of violence against women are usually underreported, misrepresented and sometimes reversed to make the female victims look like the perpetrators instead.

Eliminating violence against women is important and necessary because of the need to change the unfavourable practices and assumptions around them. Resisting it would mean surmounting the cultural challenges that consistently confront women in society or pave

way for marginalisation. Resistance is necessary in order to make it obvious to both males and females that they are equal human beings that deserve equal opportunities and treatments in every contexts at all times. This is mandatory in order to let both gender, specifically males, know that oppressing a woman because she is female, is a crime against women and humanity in general.

The resistance is imperative in order to abolish negative stereotypes against women and in protection of their fundamental human rights because a society devoid of GBV and VAW is undoubtedly better than one with it. A speedy resistance to gender-based acts of violence against women and the girl-child can rapidly be achieved and completely controlled or eradicated if awareness is created on the issue to draw attention of society to the menace. The resistance will also show that women are equally as important as men in society. The movie is a call for cultural and social changes from negative practices rather than sustaining them. It also supports and validates the fact that strikes indeed are viable mechanisms of achieving or attaining goals against all forms of oppression, suppression and coercion in society. To a large extent, "Wives on Strike" successfully projects and depicts that the achievements of women will be limitless once they collectively rise to challenges confronting them. That with proper action, cases of gender-based violence, abuses and other vices targeted at women and/or the girl-child that militates against them in society would profoundly reduce or naturally disappear.

By exposing gender-based acts that violates the rights of the human person, resistance is attained. Human well-being is undoubtedly better with resistance to GBV and VAW. The resistance is necessary in order to attain newness in gender relations and mutual understanding between males and females in relationships. It is a mechanism for saying 'No to Violence against Women' at home, workplace, school, church, mosques, and so on. The movie is a grand reminder to women that they need to resist any form of violence against them even from fellow women. The movie serves as a medium of rousing consciousness to and ensuring complementary gender relations between males and females across all societies.

Filmic resistance is necessary because as Tascon (2012) stated, movies allow for symbolic interactions between humans and film visual art, a form of communication that also serves as a vehicle for attaining changes in society, including human rights. Movies are acceptable means of communication. The theatre genre allows us to use the visual arts to communicate, spread or disseminate varied messages in society.

Conclusion

The paper identified and encapsulated a new crop of the Nigerian women as radically opposed to and positioned to reclaim their place and/or image from men for centuries of being subjugated and treated as commodities as depicted in the movie. The movie used Nigerian as a microcosmic representation to highlight the challenges faced by women and the girl-child in society through a popular, entertaining, informative and educative medium like Nollywood movie. It depicts and projects that women and the girl-child should be

equally treated and/or empowered with options like men in society. The movie enjoins African women specifically to endeavour to entrench smooth and balanced gender relations by collectively advocating for the fundamental human rights of woman and the girl-child. The gains of the paper charge the Nigerian filmmaking industry - Nollywood, the media, other agents of socialisation and the government to continue to encourage, tackle, and promote cordial and unbiased gender relations in society.

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