

Nollywood Movies and the New African Woman's Narrative: A Review of *My Name is Kadi* and *House Husband*

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Abstract

In recent times, the Nigerian movie industry, Nollywood, has delved into producing movies that portray the new Nigerian/African woman's narrative of gender relations, allied issues as well as their implications. This study evaluates two Nollywood's movies: *My Name is Kadi* and *House Husband* that portrays the contemporary Nigerian woman. The two movies and observations therein, constitute the primary data, while related internet and library print materials make up the secondary data. The study employs qualitative method, content analysis, descriptive and interpretive tools. The analysis shows the changing filmic role of the Nigerian-African woman who is self-assertive, vociferous, fearless, resilient, innovative, revolutionary and demands to be treated first as a human being before being seen as a woman. The paper concludes that movies are viable literary mechanisms for depicting, pursuing and realising new world order in gender relations and allied matters. The paper calls on scholars, government, filmmakers, the media and other concerned bodies to sustain the positive narratives and character constructions around the female.

Keywords: Nollywood Movies, New African Woman, Self-Assertive, Revolutionary, Fair Treatment.

Introduction

Gender inequality spans ages and has snowballed into multi-dimensional solution-finding paradigms for elitist women in particular and other concerned individuals and groups in general. The movement for gender equity is globally regarded as feminism. As an ideological new world order, feminism consistently seeks and demands fairness, equal considerations, treatments and opportunities for women and men alike in society. The ideology attempts to find lasting solutions to cultural, religious and patriarchal challenges facing women globally. Ezenwanebe (2005) has noted that in Nigeria, feminism is accepted with contempt and reservation, with its ideals largely misinterpreted by both men and women. One reason for the derision is that many men are scared of what radical feminists use feminism to do in the West with feminism been pirated with gender streaming. The idea of gender streaming is one that takes up feminist perspective and approach to preach and display the turnaround of the gender ills suffered by women from men, which results in the negative perception of feminism by many men, particularly African men.

Following the movement and the proclamation of the universal human rights by the United Nations, significant changes have been recorded over the years. Yet, there are continuities. The war against the continuities of misogynistic ills against the woman is wedged by different individuals and agents of the society. The Nigerian Nollywood is one of those

agents engaging in the thankless task of pursuing new world orders in gender relations and cultural practices. Reflecting on the misogynistic ills against women in society, Michael (2022) notes that 'the masculine tradition, which dominates the consciousness and subconsciousness of most people in society, does not ascribe any status to women' (p. 165). It is against the foregoing backdrop that this study is undertaken.

Aim and Objectives

The study aims to project Nollywood's filmic portrayal of the new Nigerian woman. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Show a paradigm shift from the erstwhile assigning of docile roles to actresses to active and assertive ones;
- ii. Portray that Nollywood ascribes deserving (i.e. non-gendered) status to women in their filmic portrayal of women through the schema of characterization;
- iii. Draw evidence from extant literature to project that the age-long gender profiling and marginalisation of the African woman birthed the new African woman.

A Systematic Review of Some Extant Literature

Women constitute half of the world's population and are known to contribute significantly to all spheres of society, but they are still largely unacknowledged, unappreciated, often stereotyped, dehumanised and most times denied rights and opportunities enjoyed by men in society. Meanwhile, women's contributions to humanity in all spheres of life have been affirmed by many studies (UNDP, 1997; Abraham, 2012; Ochelle, 2014; Besong, 2017 & 2021; Dibie, 2017). Women globally have suffered different kinds of gender ills on varied issues for centuries. Studies show that Western women in the past faced gender ills much more than African women have consistently suffered overtime (Acholonu, 1995; Grimshaw & Fricker, 2002; Asouzu, 2009).

Michael (2022) affirmed that 'the patriarchal society order and the sexiest view of history have no place for women no matter how much their contributions are to the making of history' (p. 165). He emphasises that 'this is in spite of their numerous contributions to the leadership and shaping of the society' (Michael, 2022, p. 165). Gilligan (1987) also challenged the sexism in scholarship and the misrepresentation of women and their nature as women, maintaining that 'women also have the natural ability to be independent in all spheres of life' (p. 41). Baler (1987) argued that should Gilligan's perspective of care be integrated into a theory of justice, a more positive revision of morality will surface. Baler's opinion is very relevant to our position here, because it shows that there are strong oppositions against presenting domestic care as a main virtue rather than justice.

As Besong (2021) noted, 'regardless of the physical differences between males and females, it is illogical to exploit such differences to promote gender stereotypes' (p. 82). Chimakonam (2018) also laments the epistemic marginalisation of women in African society at large. As he rightly argues, 'all the denials women suffer in the society have a common source; the power to control knowledge creation, acquisition, evaluation,

regulation and dissemination in the society' (p. 9). In contrast, Uduma (2018) opined that 'African women have not been and are not being marginalised; because there is no evidence to show that early literature is a male dominated discipline' (p. 220). There is a contradiction in Uduma's position here because pre-colonial African society was predominantly an oral society with/out any significant written tradition. Given that reality, how would the societal status of women have been recorded then for use in this era of literacy? This question begs for answers from Uduma and his likes. Similarly, Balogun (2018) claimed that Yoruba women were not marginalised in pre-colonial Africa, which shows that African women were not marginalised until the coming of the colonialists.

Afella (2016) quoted the denigrating remarks about women from the Islamic holy writ and Hamdun Dagher's work, which are of feminist concern. Some of the remarks read as follow: 1 out of 99 women are found in heaven, while the rest 98 are in hell fire; anyone is more deficient in intelligence and religion than women; men should beware of women for the first temptation among the children of Israel was caused by them; men perish when they obey women; 'woman is a vile beast, and I think that women were created for nothing but evil'; bad omen is in three things: horses, woman and the home (Afella, 2016, pp. 159-161). Others include: the woman has two things to cover her: grave and marriage, and grave is better; women are unclean creatures; three things corrupt to prayers: women, dogs and donkeys; a man's prayer is interrupted if a donkey, black dogs and women pass by nearby; woman is all evil, the most evil thing about her is that she is indispensable; God does not regard a woman who does not thank her husband, since she cannot do without him; etc. (Afella, 2016, pp. 161-3). Obviously, the above annotated quotations highlight the chronic patriarchal descriptions of the woman, which are all false and misleading.

Chinweizu (1990) deviated from the common blame game argument often put forward by many scholars, which often portrays only men as sexist. He argues that 'it is actually women who dictate, control, influence and, or seduce men for their benefit' (9). To him, the woman uses lots of tactics that are often different from those employed by men to dominate, subjugate and control men. He cites the example of how mothers tend to use emotional blackmail to enslave and make their children succumb to their biddings; thereby having more control over the children than their fathers. This analogy does not substantiate his argument because mothers have never stopped fathers from deploying any tricks to get their children's attention. Invariably, Chinweizu (1990) attempted to dismiss the one-sided feminist argument that only men are sexist. This paper partially agrees with Chinweizu's position, but would like to stress that in spite of all the ways and tactics mentioned by him above, the man has more advantages and is more fortunate to control, exploit, relegate and marginalise the woman than vice versa. All of this is due to age-long established structures instituted in society by patriarchy to exploit the woman. Held (1985) has noted that both male and female essentially have the same essence or nature, and so should be treated equally in the society.

As Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (1999) have observed, Hobbes was expectedly more likely to grant joint rights and authority to both sexes. Instead of doing that, he disappointingly

followed the patriarchal trail or traditional patriarchy. Although Hobbes accepted the idea of sexual and gender equality, which was revolutionary in itself by the seventeenth century standards, he did not, in any way, vehemently reject nor attack patriarchy openly. Hobbes saw his common wealth as a creation by the fathers. Locke (1960) has argued that 'women consented to man's domination by marital contract, which originated ultimately due to a curse placed on them by God' (p. 83). For Locke, marriage, therefore, has a supernatural foundation with a curse on the woman and a natural foundation of the marriage institution. But in the *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Locke tried to give more status to women in civil society than Hobbes. Locke contended that women are not properties because: (i) they have power over the children in the absence of the father; (ii) that even though marriage makes them subordinate to their husbands, they have the power to choose to leave the marriage; (iii) that women also enjoy respect and honour from their children who are subordinate to them.

Osborne (1979) has queried Augustine for the head role ascribed to man, which draws from his having been created first with the possession of a peculiar ability that the woman lacks. She accused Augustine of describing the said peculiar ability as the power of generation. To Reuther, (1998), Augustine is guilty of androcentrism for seeing the female gender as defective and lacking the fullness of human nature, for which she has to be perpetually ruled by the male whose conditions are unlike those of the female. Based on gender profiling of the woman, Augustine assumes that she is incapable of leadership in church and/or the state. Reuther is right for faulting St. Augustine, because both sexes were created to complement rather than compete with each other. That is why without the woman, there can be no procreation, and vice versa. In relation to this, Hobbes (1985) has argued in his *Leviathan* that 'in the state of nature, human beings are equal except that self-interest and brutish style of life makes life short and therefore more of survival of the fittest' (p. 223).

Locke (1960) further observed that women are not property but are shareholders of landed property mainly in respect of labour, which is in cultivating land. The theory of human nature in the state of nature is presented differently by Rousseau, unlike Hobbes and others. Rousseau (1979) presented the theory of human nature in the state of nature differently. He opined that humans are by nature simple, free, innocent, good and compassionate. He submits that it is the creation of civil society that transformed humans into corrupt and self-seeking beings. Rousseau's view of women is betrayed in his work *Emile*, where he expresses his bias about the kind of education a girl-child should receive. His claim in *Emile* is that the girl-child as compared to the boy child is not capable of learning fast, because she is domestically inclined naturally. So, he advised that the girl-child, unlike the male child, should be protected and/or excluded from the corrupt society during the processes of her educational training so she would not imbibe negative traits as she grows up. As much as Rousseau's concern for the girl-child's well-being is justified, it is however wrong and prejudice for him or anyone to think that the girl-child is created for nothing but marital-life and domestic activities, as if these are the only purposes of her existence.

Mary Wollstonecraft, the pioneer of what is today referred to as feminism, in 1792 challenged the Western society, particularly Western leaders, to put an end to the rejection and exclusion of women from important matters of humanity. Her book on the rights of women gave rise to feminism. Wollstonecraft (1792) argued that many of the supposed differences between the sexes were either fabricated or exaggerated, and thus, should not be used as basis for differentiating rights and roles. For her, the imposition of different educational expectations on men and women is unjust, counterproductive and dehumanizing for having the intent of creating less productive humans with artificial weak characters and qualities merely on the ground of the linguistic label 'female' (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.103). Wollstonecraft points out that both sexes have the capacity to reason; hence both sexes ought to be educated to enhance their rationality, which she considers as the ability to act as fully responsible moral agents.

Analysis of "My Name is Kadi"

The film, *"My Name is Kadi"* portrays many women who struggle and find it difficult to live within the confines of society due to gender specific roles assigned to them as women. These crop of women rebel against and confronts the society by trying to dictate and tailor their lives to suit their own perception and prescriptions of life, not those of a stagnant archaic society. The movie revolves around the eponymous character, Kadi (Aisha Mohammed). Kadi is a no-nonsense combat-ready girl of about twenty-four years. Kadi is fearlessly in asserting herself in protection of her rights and, in some cases, that of fellow women. She wants society to judge her first as a human being rather than as a woman. Her position and confrontation with people stems from the notion that since culture is man-made, all gender discriminatory norms around the woman could and should be changed. Kadi dares to intercept as well as navigate these challenges without getting scalded, as she struggles to (re)present, (re)construct and (re)define herself in a society that refuses to see her beyond her gender. She also attempts to show how these norms inhibit her advancement and progress as a woman because she is of the notion that patriarchy or male-control has grave implications for the progress and wellbeing of women. The narrative also subtly suggests that there are many men in society who like and are attracted to tough, brave, outspoken and independent women. As portrayed in the narrative, Kwem, a widower with a nine year old son, does all he could to win Kadi's love in spite of her strong and assertive personality. The character of Kadi is projected as a unique woman, one of the very few women who have the courage to break away, shake-off, refute, purge and liberate themselves from the shackles of retrogressive notions around the woman. Kadi consistently challenges the labeling of the woman as a weak and inferior being. Consequently, Kadi is presented as tough, nonchalant about people's opinion about her, and deals with situations as they come. With this mindset, Kadi is often in conflict with her mother, Mrs. Hamilton (Tina Mba).

To further buttress her resolution not to 'take shit' from any man, Kadi justifies the need to embark on what many people would see as a pointless and unnecessary act of revenge. Kadi

goes on a mission to put Tyler in his place for having the guts to reject her sexual advances. The fact that Kadi is the one that proposed a relationship with Tyler first instead of the otherwise, is a reflection of her radical approach and feminist tendencies to life as opposed to dominant patriarchal dictates where it is unacceptable for a woman to propose or initiate a heterosexual relationship with a man. She plots to and finally avenges Tyler's earlier humiliation, insult and embarrassment to her. She symbolically expresses the pleasure and anticipates the joy she would get when she eventually *takes her pound of flesh from* Tyler for rejecting her love and for telling her that she is not his 'spec.' Hence, as part of the plot, Kadi lures Tyler to have sex with her only to stop half way into the act, just to remind him of their earlier encounter, where he had told her that she is not his 'spec.' So, Kadi ridicules him and wonders aloud how he still found his way into her arms after his insults. As Kadi berates Tyler in revenge, she says:

First of all, there is no us.
I would have given you a chance.
But you did not perform well, so I spaced you.
Sexual non-performance deserves no pardon.
You should be castrated. Let me break it down for you.
You are a disappointment, a criminal case in bedmatics.
I guess you were right when you said that I am not your spec.
Now, see the way you are sweating.
I just dished you a definition of wash up.

Further, as part of her mission to correct some abnormalities and misconceptions about the Nigerian woman, Kadi boldly confronts a man for embarrassing his girlfriend at a restaurant. In expressing her anger over the guy's denigration of the young girl, Kadi refers to her menses in order to heighten the humiliation symbolically with blood flow. She says: "I am in my period right now. You better go and apologise to her, cos the more she cries, the more my period flows." The word 'period' is employed here to signify the new era of the new Nigerian woman who revolts against misogyny and other prejudice against women and the girl-child in contemporary society. The character of Kadi, represents the new Nigerian woman who fights for herself and that of fellow voiceless women in society to challenge the status quo with an attempt to change the usual narratives.

Analysis of "House Husband"

The narrative of "*House Husband*" is about the unrecognized, undervalued and unappreciated efforts invested and contributions of women to the stability of the society through the home and the unrecognised efforts invested in it. Chude and Kyana are married with three children. While Chude is a very successful business man, Kyana, as a house wife, is frustrated and overwhelmed by the amount of sacrifices she has to make to keep the family together. These sacrifices are greatly undervalued and unappreciated by her husband, Chude. Based on the frustration, Kyana decides to teach him a lesson so he would learn to appreciate her contributions to the well-being of the family. To achieve this, Kyana

with the help of her best friend, Idara, hatches a plan where Chude is forced to trade places with her. In this change of place and responsibilities, Kyana leaves the house every day for work while Chude stays at home to take full charge of running the home. At the end of the narrative, Chude regrettably realises that the duties performed by he and Kyana complement each other as it ensures there is peace, harmony and stability at home reverberates in a balanced society. He also realises to his chagrin that every aspect of human life has its peculiar challenges and that no one position or career is greater or more important than another. On realizing this, Chude passionately apologises to Kyana and pledges to help and support her with domestic chores and other responsibilities where needed.

The movie articulates the important but often neglected contributions of women to the stability of society. Chude - (Kenneth Okolie) depicts a typical man or husband in patriarchy who holds and promotes the wrong notion that some tasks or chores are gender specific. On the other hand, Kyana - (Belinda Effah) represents the contemporary Nigerian woman who knows her worth and asserts her rights first as a human being before being a woman. From this chauvinistic perspective, Chude nonchalantly establishes the major conflict in the movie.

The African society has gendered domestic tasks and responsibilities to the extent that most men do not attempt to assist women in carrying out the traditional roles apportioned to them. Meanwhile, women assist the men in carrying out their own traditional roles without any form of appreciation or acknowledgment. Chude and Kyana aptly act out the foregoing situations. In a bid to avert depression, Kyana turns the table around. Kyana goes to stay at Idara's house to gist and pretends to be at her new workplace, leaving her husband with their children to do the domestic chores. She succeeds shortly and gains both physical and mental freedom from the patriarchal strictures she finds herself in as her husband soon gets tired of taking care of the children as well as handling domestic chores and apologises to Kyana for taking her sacrifices and contributions to the family for granted. Another thematic pursuit of the movie is the need for women to support, encourage and positively collaborate with one another to fight against any form of injustice and unfair treatment to expedite change in society. Further, the movie obviously attempts to create the awareness and enlighten viewers as depicted by the heroine, Kyana, that a successful relationship is strongly based on the commitment, sacrifices, understanding and mutual respect for each other.

Conclusion

The two movies - "*Kadi*" and "*House Husband*" frown at female subjugation and oppression as it depicts the contemporary Nigerian woman as a fearless, assertive and expressive heroine engaged in fighting for her rights and liberation. Kadi and Kyana are portrayed as women that are wakeful conscious of the ability to liberate themselves from the quagmire of certain archaic and egocentric notions about the Nigeria woman. Kadi does not only resolve to fight for herself but to also defend fellow women who are oppressed in society.

Thus, the character of Kadi is deliberately and rightfully projected as fearless and confrontational. Kyana on the other hand, is subtle, constructive and non-violent in achieving and bringing forth the same change and self-liberation she so desires. By this, Kyana particularly teaches couples how to love and respect each other without gender bias. In the resolution of the conflict in 'Kadi' and 'House Husband', viewers are made to realise that movies are viable literary mechanisms for depicting, pursuing and realising new world orders in gender and interpersonal relations, and other spheres. That though Kadi and Kyana applied different tactics to achieve their aim, both of them were able to accomplish their desired goals and succeed in installing contemporary acceptable global gender issues. As such, it is quite clear that movies are viable literary mechanisms for depicting, pursuing and realising new world orders in gender and interpersonal relations, and other spheres. Therefore, this study recommends that:

- i. Government should make and execute laws against gender-based crimes against women and men;
- ii. Filmmakers, literary artists and scholars should keep on writing and satirising gender ills in pursuant of new world orders;
- iii. The media and other agents of socialisation should sustain the task of correcting gender wrongs and recreating gender constructs for posterity.

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Film

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