

Gender Representation in Nollywood Video Film Culture

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Introduction

Feminism has millennial roots going back to mythical figures like Liliath, to the legendary fighting Amazons of Greece and ancient Dahomey, and to classical plays like Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. Peter Barry was right when he said that the Women's Movement of the 1960s was not the beginning of feminism, though the feminist critical theory of today might be a product of the 1960s Women's Movements that swept through Europe and America before finally getting to Africa. What this implies is that the struggle for gender equality is a long standing struggle which women are not prepared to give up. For much of history and throughout the world, social and legal traditions have tolerated or even promoted the physical assault of women by men. In ancient Rome, a husband could legally divorce, physically punish, or even kill his wife for behaviours that were permitted for men.

Punishment of wives was called chastisement, a term that emphasized the corrective purpose of the action and minimized the violent nature of the behaviour. Under mediaeval English common law, a husband could not be prosecuted for raping his wife because the law provided that a wife could not refuse consent for sex to her husband. Experts argue that deep-seated economic and cultural beliefs allowed women only limited roles in society. The widespread belief that women are intellectually inferior led most societies to limit women's education to learning only domestic skills. Well educated, upper class men controlled positions of employment and power in society. Lack of economic and political powers play powerful roles in contributing to and perpetuating repeated abuse of women. Since women as a group tend to have less power in society, they are more likely to be victims and are less able to end abuse once it begins. Traditional beliefs, customs and laws restrict the roles women may play and limit their economic opportunities, contributing to their dependence on men. Some scholars assert that the process of socialization teaches boys and girls a belief system that devalues women, and creates a sense of female responsibility for the maintenance of the family (Llewellyn-Jones, 2002, p.45). Until the 19th century, the demand for equal rights to women met with only occasional protests and drew little attention from most people. Since most women lacked the educational and economic resources that would enable them challenge prevailing social orders, women generally accepted their inferior status as their only option. And this inferior status has continued to be portrayed in film. This study will argue that the prevailing patriarchal gender representation in the Nigerian video film industry, which is known internationally as Nollywood, is a reflection of the traditional social conditioning which permit the demonization of girls and women who stray from the path of 'true' womanhood; true womanhood being defined as passive, quiet, controlled, docile, dependent, constrained, accepting and acquiescent. The study will help to highlight the role of patriarchy and to demonstrate that men's attitudes and behaviour about control and power lead to the abuse of women. Two video films *Jenifa* (Mayideen S. Ayinde, 2008) and *Games Women Play* (Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, 2004) have been used to illustrate how patriarchal attitudes in Nigerian society have been inherited by the Nollywood video film culture, which is helping to glamorize the reigning patriarchal mentality that conditions women to derogate their own sex and cooperate in their own subordination and subjugation.

The Making of Patriarchal Image of Women

Case Sue-Ellen (1985, pp.111-116) has argued that in the 6th century B.C. both women and men participated in religious ceremonies in the worship of Dionysus but by the 5th century B.C. when the ceremonies were evolving into what is known as theatre, women disappeared from the practice.

According to her, scholars do not record any evidence of specific laws or codes forbidding women to appear in the songs and dances, nor is there evidence for specific date or occasion of the beginning of the omission. Margarete Bierber (1961, p.9), notes that it was part of Attic morality which banished women from the public life. This implies that the reason for this practice must be sought in the emerging cultural codes of Athens, rather than in specific political or theatrical practices.

Three elements of Athenian culture help us to understand the emerging theatrical conventions: The new economic practices, the new cultural project and the new genealogy of the gods. Among the new economic practices, the rise of the family unit radically altered the role of women in the society.

Ironically, the important role women began to assume within the family unit became the cause of their removal from public life. The family unit became the new site for the creation and transmission of personal wealth. The rise of metals as commodities and the small-scale cultivation of land made it possible for individuals to control their own wealth. Yet, while ownership became more individual and located within the family, it was limited to the male gender. Women were restricted to limited conditions of ownership and exchange. Within this new economy, women became a medium of exchange and marriage became an institution of ownership (Rubin, 1975, p.15). Marilyn Arthur has equally argued that the change in the organisation of wealth brought about a concomitant change in the organisation of political units. The household became the basic unit for citizenship. Citizenship was dependent upon family lines – a son was granted citizenship only if his parents were citizens, but without a son the parents could not retain their citizenship. This new condition for citizenship led to the strict definition and regulation of the sex life of the woman. The mother/wife assumed a new moral/legal dimension for the legitimacy and security of heirs and by extension, political membership in the society. Clear lines of reproduction were vital to the state, and this made adultery a crime against society rather than a sign of personal transgression. At the same time that the household became controlled by the needs of the state, its activities became totally separate from those which were considered the business of the state, the mark of the citizens, or the activities of public life (1977, pp. 67-68). Nancy Hartsock, in her book *Money, Sex and Power* comments: “The Greek defined the household as a private, apolitical space from the public, political space of the polis. The result was a theorisation of politics and political power as activities that occurred in a masculine arena characterised by freedom from necessary labour, dominance of intellect and soul, while the domestic space was defined by necessary labour and as a place where bodily needs were dominant” (1983, p.187). Since women were confined to the house, they were removed from the public life of the intellect and the soul; they became confined to the world of domestic labour, childbearing, and concomitant sexual activities. Actual women disappeared from the public life, lost their economic and legal powers and became objects of exchange. And one would add that the loss of economic and legal powers brought about the loss of personal will and an acceptance of a place of subjugation as the only means of co-existing peaceably. It was only a matter of time before this resignation to fate dictated by patriarchy became entrenched and socially conditioned as an acceptable convention for the place and duties of women in the society. The result was that women who did not conform became objects of social ridicule even amongst fellow women. Even in 19th century and early 20th century European literature, very few women are represented as working for a living (i.e. possessing economic power) unless driven by extreme necessity. It was derogatory to refer to a woman as a working class woman. Instead, the focus of interest was a woman’s choice of marriage partner which determined her ultimate social position and exclusively determined her happiness and fulfilment in life. Such depictions of women in film and literature served to create a social conditioning which gave growing young ladies the message that the only way to have respectability was to be able to marry a gentleman so as to become a lady. The result was that women directed all their physical and intellectual energies towards attracting husbands. Thus, whatever image of the female the men seemed to prefer, the women modified their bodies to conform in order to attract the attention of the men. Until the 19th century, the denial of equal rights to women met only occasional protest and drew little attention from most people. Since most women lacked the educational and economic resources that would enable them to challenge the prevailing social order, women generally accepted their inferior status as their only option. The situation in Africa was not too different from that of Europe. The few women in traditional African society that have been known to challenge patriarchal authority were mostly women of aristocratic background. In the colonial and post-colonial eras, such challenge was mounted by mostly women from the elite class. It was in attempt to expose this cultural mindset in men and women as a mechanism of patriarchal perpetration of gender inequality that the feminist projects of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s emerged. Since these decades feminist theory and criticism have undergone several processes and changes in focus and intentions.

The Female as Victim of Patriarchal Gender Role Socialization and Mental Enslavement

Parents behave differently towards their infant sons and their infant daughters. The different behaviour begins soon after the baby is born. The way in which parents (and other members of the immediate community) behave towards the child and the different expectations they have of the child, depending on the child's sex, imprints a distinct pattern of behaviour in the first three years of the child's life. This imprinting induces the child to behave in a feminine or in a masculine way. Once the child's brain is conditioned in this way it is difficult to reverse it. A child's masculine or feminine behaviour, depending on its sex has two components. The first is its sex-typing or its gender role. This is the way a person behaves to others to demonstrate he or she is a male or female. The second is even more important. This is the person's own awareness that he or she is a female or male – their gender identity. Until a child has developed a gender identity it is confused about its sexuality, and about its gender-role. The gender role of the child is fostered so assiduously by parents that the girl is induced to behave as a girl is expected to behave in a patriarchal society. When she behaves in this way she has developed a gender-identity. This means that she knows that she is a girl, and knows that she should behave in a specific female manner. At the adolescent stage of life when imaginations are easily fired, the male adolescents are encouraged by the society (parents, aunties, uncles) to think of their future careers. They are thus encouraged to be ambitious. Their mental energies are directed towards social and economic achievements. They receive all the supports of the society which act as catalyst to the achievement of their desires. They place a value on their desires because it depends on what they make of life in future in terms of economic achievements and general advancement in life. From that stage those who are politically inclined begin to form cliques and associations that may finally crystallize into a political movement or party. They begin to see themselves as future presidents, governors, senators, and statesmen. At this stage they are visualizing the types of houses and cars they would own, the kinds of clubs they would belong to, and as a finishing to the dream of accomplishment they can add to that dream a pretty woman who will be there by their sides to add colour and completeness to all their achievements. In this regard ambition and aiming high become the exclusive preserve of the male children. What is more? The male children are encouraged, advised, supported and even forced to pursue these dreams and ambitions with vigour.

But what happens with the female adolescent? First, the men, old and young begin to look at her with hunger, thirst and lust in their eyes. She is daily harassed, distracted and bombarded with flattery on the account of her beauty. Left alone she may not be conscious of her looks and her effect upon the male members of the society. But men force their attention upon her and bombard her with vain flattery until she cannot think of any other thing but her beauty. A sense of unhealthy pride in her sexuality is awakened. She begins to spend more time in front of the mirror.



Shots from Games Women Play

She begins to expect more flattery. Her emotions are in captivity. She may well forget every other thing in life. Moreover, right from before she forms her first words; she has been indoctrinated into the patriarchal society where the value of women lies only in their sexuality. Her worth is measured by first the shape of her body, second whose daughter she is and thereafter, whose wife she is. At the adolescent stage she may feel at the peak of her glory since this might be the only time that men may

bow to her in their lust and infatuation. She is still the responsibility of her parents and guardians even as the male child is. But while the male child is using his mental energies to establish a solid economic, social and political foundation for the future, the female child is experiencing a euphoria occasioned by vain flattery from the men folk. She wastes her time and energy gossiping about men and boys.

Her mental energy is expended thinking of and imagining a prince charming of a husband with whom she will live happily ever after. She gives no thought to the resources that will sustain that life with her prince charming. She gives no thought to unforeseen events and circumstances such as death and natural disaster. She gives no thought to her personal individuality. She gives no thought to possibility of her life without a man. Her individuality and personality are lost or subsumed in that of the man in her thoughts. In effect, she is totally and thoroughly lost without a man. She is helpless and hapless: In a word, a victim. What is more, she has been indoctrinated into the religion of women for the home and men for the public; women to serve man, women to cook and man to eat. At this stage gendered role playing has been thoroughly injected into her brain and blood stream. She is eager to conform and to please. But soon she realizes that in a patriarchal society, there is no pleasing anybody; there is no end to the rules. Rules follow rules and pile up until they become oppressive. By the time her eyes are open to the oppression, she is already webbed in, trapped in the fortress – a victim. In the view of the Islamic religion, woman is inferior to man and is his subject. And the Christian religion says that the head of every man is Christ and the head of every woman is man. And so both the secular and religious worlds agree that the woman is the subordinate and the inferior while the man is the boss, the head and the superior. Each girl child who passes through this world would at one point of her life or the other remember at the exact time she began to wonder if anything was wrong with being a female. That is the point of the rude conscious awakening that as a girl you are regarded as less valuable than your male siblings.

Women and Men: The Distinguishing Factors

There are obvious differences between women and men. But these differences are not factors of superiority or inferiority. Medical experts agree and explain these differences:

A woman is obviously different from a man. The anatomical differences are apparent at once, particularly in the development of a woman's breasts.... The more specific anatomical differences are of the genital organs. The male external genitals – the penis and the testicles – are absent in women, a fact which suggested to Freud that many of women's sexual problems are related to an envy for the absent penis and a complex that the testicles had been castrated. Woman was therefore a mutilated male, and inferior to man. Freud was more than unfair to women, and considerably confused about them, possibly because of his own upbringing in a traditional Jewish middle class family. He held that women had a smaller intellectual capacity, a far greater vanity, a constitutional passivity, a weaker sexuality, and greater disposition to neurosis.... At the same time he considered her enigmatic, her femininity a complicated process, her psychology involved. Studies over the past century have shown that Freud's view of woman as an inferior, mutilated male is incorrect, and his assessment of her inferiority and her instability is more an indictment of the cultural environment in which she is brought up, than her inherited make-up (Llewellyn-Jones, 2002, p.1).

What Llewellyn-Jones has tried to do in the above quotation is to explain the anatomical differences between men and women. She also refuted the theories of Sigmund Freud blaming Freud's errors on his Jewish traditional upbringing. The conclusion of Llewellyn-Jones findings is that whereas there are anatomical differences between men and women, the behavioural differences stemmed from patriarchal socialization. In other words, a woman behaves in a certain way because she is brought up to believe that society expects her to behave in that way. This does not imply that she is weaker than or inferior to a man, even if both women and men are brought up by society to believe this. Llewellyn-Jones further asserts that longevity studies have shown that the female is stronger than the male, less likely to be aborted when in her mother's womb, more likely to be born

alive, less likely to succumb to infection in the first years of life, and more likely to live beyond the age of 65 years. From the foregoing it becomes safe to conclude that given the same opportunities and environment free of inhibition a woman can succeed in most activities as well as a man. But in one activity woman is unique. The human female (woman) is a mammal. She carries her infant in the womb until it is sufficiently well developed to survive outside the womb; she suckles it and cares for it. This process of internal development of the infant is only possible because the womb is in a protected position, enclosed by the strong bones of the female pelvis. Unfortunately, this unique quality has been the most reason for her subjugation by patriarchy.

Victimization of Women: Process and Perpetration

One of the major observations in this study is that all women begin as victims. From infancy she is a victim of patriarchal brand of socialization which conditions her mentally and physically as a willing slave of man; as a recreational facility to man; as an ornament or a piece of art work to be viewed and admired. More often than not, films rely on cultural stereotypes in construction of victimization, characterizing women as seductive and scheming or vulnerable and naive. Research demonstrates that the media draws from cultural stereotypes in its depiction of women. Marguerite Hernandez (2006, p. 12), after analysing 50 television features came to the conclusion that they do little to challenge pre-existing understandings of women as victims and actually reaffirm the age-old understandings of woman as either good girl or bad girl. Our opinion is that victimization is attributable to patriarchal social system that oppresses and subjugates women. The subordinate position of women which is initiated by the way the two sexes are reared tends to be self-perpetrating. Women brought up in this way believe they are inferior to men in both intelligence and ability. Even when the work of men and women is of identical quality, women tend to denigrate that of their own sex and to rate a man's work more highly.

Why women perpetuate their sense of subordination is not an easy question to answer. Anthropologists have found that many repressed minority groups tend to adopt the attitudes of the stronger dominant group toward themselves. Women may do the same by accepting the submissive stereotype, and by this device are able to escape some of the anxiety which arises if they feel themselves to be oppressed. It is easier to accept the status quo than to rebel against it, particularly if you rationalise that because of your sex you can never achieve as much as a man, but you are better at nurturing activities, and have an important role to play in caring for children and looking after your husband.

This socialization difference does not stop at physical activities and services. But scholars have also noted that while women are socialized towards providing emotional and listening support in friendship, men on the other hand are socialized toward emotional suppression.. Signifying women as vulnerable nurtures and legitimates women's fear of their own victimization.

Women are established as the 'weaker sex' and should rely on men for protection, thus affirming dependence on men. Further, by representing the good girl/ bad girl dichotomy, Nollywood video film culture presents a code of conduct for women to follow in order to avoid victimization. The major lesson for women is 'act appropriately or suffer the consequences.' Women are not treated as ends in their own rights, but as instruments of the ends of others – reproducers, caregivers, sexual outlets, and agents of family prosperity. Patriarchy confers men with certain unspoken freedoms including the freedom to have sex with multiple partners, without society's condemnation or stigmatization. For women, virtues of submission, docility, self-effacement, self-sacrifice are emphasized and instilled, often meaning that she must remain devoted to her husband even if he seeks pleasure elsewhere. We need to reframe our understanding of stigmatization and discrimination to conceptualize them as social processes that can only be understood in relation to broader notions of power and domination. The process of stigmatization unfolds along the lines of power and powerlessness in all societies, thus stigmatization is an exercise of power over people. It serves to legitimate and reproduce existing social inequalities.

Patriarchal Representation of Women in Nollywood: A General Overview.

Gregory Austen describes Nigeria women as the sacrificial lambs of moviedom (www.naijarules.com/nollywoodmovies. Retrieved December, 2009). Perhaps, Nollywood representation of women is an extension of the patriarchal fictional construction, which, as we have

seen from the introduction of this paper, dates back to classical Greek drama. Several scholars have noted the issue of representation of women in Nollywood. Notable among them is Onookome Okome, a respected academic and film scholar. He has, on several occasions, spoken on aspects of the representation and objectification of women in Nollywood video films. He lamented that since the release of *Living in Bondage* the thematic preferences of Nollywood movies are based on the notions of inherited stereotyping of women perpetuated by patriarchy (Okome, 1997, p. 83).

And to discourage this negative trend Ekwuazi appealed to television commercial copywriters to present Nigerian women in a decent manner (2007, p. 250). The video film that launched Nigeria into the video film industry was the block buster *Living in Bondage* (1992) which was produced by Kenneth Nnebue. In this video film the docile, faithful and submissive wife (Merit) is used for money making ritual when her husband's attempt to offer a prostitute is foiled. Women are thus represented as dispensable property or goods. They are to be used in whatever form that appear most profitable, pleasurable or convenient. As Andy (Kenneth Okonkwo) is told by his cultist friends, the important thing in life is money; once you have money you can have as many women as you wish. So it would do no harm to sacrifice one or two of them to acquire wealth. After *Living in Bondage* came *Circle of Doom* (Okechukwu Ogunjiofor, 1993). *Circle of Doom* portrayed the evil woman in rivalry with the docile, honest wife over the affection and attention of their husband. *Glamour Girls I & II* (Kenneth Nnebue, 1994, ushered in the era of video films in English language perhaps designed to reach wider audience as *Living in Bondage* and *Circle of Doom* were shot in Igbo language and therefore appealed more to Igbo speaking audience. *Glamour Girls I & II* portrayed women as promiscuous and dishonest. Films that portrayed women as diabolical and demonic include *Jezebel I and II* (Francis Agu, 1994), *Evil Passion* (Zeb Ejiro, 1994) and *Nneka: the Pretty Serpent* (Zeb Ejiro 1994). The commercial boom in ritual film genre that demonized women encouraged more entrants to film production and the more bizarre and diabolical, the better the commercial success. One will not really blame the filmmakers of this era because the primary concern was money. The industry was clearly driven by the craze for money occasioned by mass unemployment. The emergent film industry provided a means of survival. 1995 saw the release of *Goodbye Tomorrow*, (Zeb Ejiro, 1995) which starred Hilda Dokubo among others. Also from Zeb Ejiro within the same year came *Just a Night*, *Tears for Love*, *Fatal Desire* and *Flesh and Blood*. From Amaka Igwe came *Rattle Snake I & II* (1995) and *Adanna* (1995). Also in 1995, Kenneth Nnebue came out with *True Confession*.

From the ritual genre which demonized strong independent women and victimized vulnerable docile women, the industry moved on to the epic genre which effaced women. The popular epic video films of the late 1990s and early 2000s include: *Battle of Musanga*, (Bolaji Dawodu, 1996), *Ikuku* (Emeka Ani, 1996), *Out of Cage* (Ndubuisi Okoh, 1999), *Sango* (Femi Lasoke, 2000), *Gazula* (Jude Okoye, 2000), *Ngene* (Ndubuisi Okoh, 2000), *Ekulu* (Ifeanyi Ikpoenyi, 2000), *Akum* (Andy Amanechi, 2000), *Vuga* (Simi Opeolu, 2000) among many others (Shaka, 2007, pp. 134 -138). In all these video films, whether the ritual genre or the epic genre, the images of women were predominantly negative. The last few years have seen a diversification in the types of video films produced in a particular cycle. We have witnessed the introduction of romantic love with such video films as *Tears in Marriage* (Micheal Jaja, 2000), *Sweet Pains* (Osita Okoli, 2006), *Rock My World* (Nonso Ekene Okonkwo, 2009), *Last Kiss* (Dickson Iroegbu, 2006), *Married to the Enemy* (Willie Ajenge, 2007) among others. Not even in the romantic love genre have women been appropriately represented. They are either portrayed as too jealous and scheming to feel any serious romantic emotions; or too spineless and emotional, crying needlessly at a man's promiscuity and betrayal.

Patriarchy is a deep rooted societal ideology almost as old as time. By mental, social and cultural conditioning the female is framed into two extremes of a divide. On the one hand, there is the docile, submissive, accepting, never protesting, never questioning, and quiet model of a woman. This is the dream desire of man in a patriarchal society. Mostly in the epic genre of Nollywood video films, women are represented as the complements of the men. The *Igwe* has to have a wife (*Lolo*) by his side to complement his royal status. Her duty as *Igwe's* wife is to give the *Igwe* a male child, decorate her body beautifully and appear by the side of *Igwe* at public functions where tradition demands that she wears a fixed smile, but never to speak beyond the acknowledgment of greetings and compliments. Even these obligations she can always carry out without speaking by mere nods of the head and broadening of the perpetual smile. If you catch the perfect *Lolo* speak, it would be on her knees, perhaps in *Igwe's* bedroom begging *Igwe* to grant pardon to a condemned slave or an erring son (*King*

of *My Village*, Emeka Nwabueze, 2006). This image of the Nigerian woman in video films is a fictional construct borne out of the repressed desires and imaginations of patriarchy. On the extreme left is the shrew, the tigress, the independent activist woman. This is the scheming, politicking, demanding, wayward rebel who would do anything including kill, and use any means, including diabolical means to achieve her aims and ambition. She is usually cast as single, divorced or widowed, but would have a lover on whom she spends money much the same way men spend money on young girls. This woman is the dread and nightmare of men in patriarchal society. There appears to be no middle way in Nollywood's negative representation of women. If a woman strives to achieve economic independence, or challenges obnoxious traditional policies of patriarchy, she is quickly moved into the frame of the extreme left. Commenting on character development in Nollywood, Femi Shaka posits that "characterization is handled along the traditional lines of gender hierarchy in African society, such that the female seems always to be subject of male spectacle or vilification, serving more to be seen than heard.

Where women are characterised as very loud and adventurous as in *Glamour Girls 1 and 2*, the *femme fatale* image is made to read as a signifier for waywardness and promiscuity" (2007, pp.123-143). Further, Shaka suggests that this patriarchal pattern of representing women in Nollywood, which is replicated in the traditional stereotypification of ethnicity and ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, is due to lack of experimentation in an industry driven essentially by commercial survival mentality imposed by the harsh economic realities of Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1980s and early 1990s (2007, pp. 123-143). However, it is doubtful if commercial consideration alone can account for the persistent and consistent negative portrayal of women in Nollywood video films. Rather, it appears that the answer for this trend must be sought in the fact that in most Nigerian subcultures women are victims of diverse harmful cultural practices. Widows are subjected to the most gruesome trial by ordeal to prove that they are innocent of their husbands' death; and such treatment of women have been the cause of outcry from various local and international organisations. The negative portrayal of women in Nollywood could be an attempt by the instruments of patriarchy to justify the wicked treatment meted out to women who lose their husbands to death. Such video films as *Circle of Doom* (Ogunjiofor, 1994); *Married to the Enemy* (Willie Agenge, 2007) and *Women's Cot* (Dickson Iroegbu, 2005) portray the Nigerian women as actually being guilty of killing their husbands and therefore deserve the harsh and wicked treatment meted out to them. *Women's Cot* in particular appears to present the message that whenever and wherever women are allowed to pull their strength and resources together, they use it to plan evil against their men. In this film women are represented as preferring their husbands dead than alive. *August Meeting* (Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, 2003) shows women baring all their fangs of meanness, wickedness and hatred, and unleashing diabolical mayhem against one another in bitter rivalry for the political post of president of the women's union. The men had to step in to ban the meeting to save women, as it were, from themselves. The portrayal here is that left alone, women are not intelligent and articulate enough to carry out projects motivated by good intentions without endangering themselves, like halfwits or toddlers at play who have to be constantly watched lest they harm one another or even themselves.



Gender Representation in *Jenifa* and *Games Women Play*

The opening sequence of *Jenifa*, a Yoruba video film with English subtitles, shows a medium shot of Jenifa (Funke Akindele) struggling in and out of what appear to be oversize and ill-fitting clothes.

Jenifa is a young lady who has spent most her life in the village, daily wishing that fortunes will smile at her to take her away from the village either by a rich husband/boyfriend or admission to the university. Admission to the university comes first so she prepares to take the university by storm. Camera cuts to tailor's shop where she instructs the tailor to shape and resize all her clothes because she is going to the university. This is a technique of the director to foreshadow the kind of life Jenifa intends to pursue in the university. Oversize and ill-fitting clothes are signifiers for the status of a maid (house girl) or village girl. Jenifa's status has changed and there is the need for her to keep up with her new status as a campus girl. But her parents are not financially capable of giving her the kind of life style she would prefer to live. Getting her clothes resized becomes her creative way of coping with a difficult situation. She is determined to change her status in life. Even on campus, she must belong to the 'big girls' clique.



In terms of setting and space representation, the opening shots establish the rural village setting marked by mud houses with thatch roofs. Of note is also the prevailing presence of lush natural vegetation, trees and shrubs that suggest preservation from the pollution of city life. The village setting is sharply contrasted with the university community as various shots allow us to make a visual tour of the buildings; classroom blocks, hostels, administrative buildings, paved streets and walkways. Jenifa's dressing in the village is also sharply contrasted with her campus dressing. She is portrayed not just as a campus girl, but rather as a misfit whose rural lifestyle still intrudes at ill opportune moments to the embarrassment of her more civilized and better socialized friends. Her dress sense is comic as she tries to measure up to the standard in order to be fully accepted in the circle of her campus friends. For instance, she wears a pair of pyjamas in place of leggings which her friends wear for lectures and appear seductive. Her speech is heavily accented. But her friends gradually groom her until she is refined enough to fit in. She even acquires some foreign mannerisms and begins to wear high-heel shoes and catwalk. And as typical of Nollywood patriarchal ideology, the only conceivable means for a woman to become 'big' is by prostitution. So Jenifa joins friends to sell her body to men in exchange for money. In her clique of friends, they cheat, steal, and use diabolical means to enslave men who beg them with millions of Naira just to sleep with them. They do not succeed for too long before nemesis catches up with them. Jenifa is rusticated from school and she catches the dreaded AIDS along with her friends. Only Tracy, the repentant soul among them is able to break out of the circle by eventually getting a husband after many aborted attempts

A feminist reading of *Jenifa* requires us to read the work against the grain, resisting not only the patriarchally intended condemnation of the characters (Jenifa and her friends), its internal sense of pathos and conclusions, but also the historical and cultural codes which surround it, including its treatment within film history. Instead of the intended condemnation, the feminist reader may feel pathos for Jenifa and her friends and all those girls who desire to have good things of life which money offers, but which are out of their reach mostly because they are women. The answer as to why wealth is concentrated in the hands of men is already answered in the introductory part of this paper. Means of production is controlled by men. In *Jenifa*, we are shown men who are stupendously rich, and young women like Jenifa who run after them selling their bodies as the economic, social and political power of women are made to revolve around the sexuality of women. The only valuable commodity they can sell to get a fraction of the money concentrated in the hands of the men is sex.

Yet, the same men who buy this commodity from them turn around to condemn their suppliers. The sources of the wealth of the men are not accounted for.

Wealth is part of cultural signifiers of men. So there seems to be an unspoken law that frees men from all moral obligations. There is no cultural code that restricts the man: for him, the end justifies the means, while for women, you can only attain societal respectability and wealth through the institution of marriage. And what is more, your purity must not be questioned before you can be made to succeed in getting married. Thus Tracy (Jenifa's friend) suffers repeated rejections as her sins keeps following her and finding her out each time she is about getting engaged for marriage. But there is no condemnation for the married men in the film who sleep with girls young enough to be their daughters and granddaughters. The patriarchal world order does not question why men should indulge in all manner of despicable vices.



The tragedy of the African woman as represented in *Jenifa* and in other Nollywood video films is that the woman exists in the frame of reference to the man. Thus, if the man is wicked, it is not because he inherited a gene of wickedness, or that he made a personal choice to be wicked; or even that his greed and desires have driven him to being wicked. It must rather be that there is a woman with naked evil urging him to engage in evil. Therefore, the gullible man in *Jenifa* who begs on his knees with three million Naira to have sex with Becky while his children are out of school because of school fees is portrayed as an innocent victim of a woman's wickedness. The condemnation is always on the women. But the truth of the whole situation is that the girls have normal desires. They desire to have money, to ride big cars and reside in mansions like those men they sleep with. Sexual favours in exchange for some of the luxuries of life become their only hope of achieving their dreams. Economic value of women is analogous to chattels of trade and property for sale. A girl's worth as a human being is reduced to economic level and everything depends on it; her parents' sustenance, payment of her brother's school fees, rehabilitation of other members of the extended family, as we see in *Jenifa*. The crave for material well-being and power to legislate existence, produces a society where the place of women is not just the kitchen, but the doorsteps of survival, depending on what the survival appears to be eventually; where the do-or-die battle ends invariably without a possible female emancipation. She is deprived her feelings of compassion, love, honour, loyalty, tenderness and fidelity, which women ordinarily offer.

In the film under discussion, Jenifa is obsessed with the desire to break loose from the shackles of social limitations imposed by patriarchal social conditioning and fictional image construction of the female gender. This obsession drives her to sleep with men, to steal, to cheat in exams, to tell lies; to cover up her tracks in diverse manners. She is like a drowning soul who is clutching at everything within reach to keep from drowning. In the patriarchal world order, there are a few possible means by which a woman can break out of the circle of perpetual poverty. One way is marriage to a wealthy man who can offer the luxury required to live well. The other way is acquisition of good education which will offer a chance of good job. But very often, university education is also reserved for the male child, and without the good education, good marriage might also elude one. The third option is to defy the patriarchal social order and grab whatever opportunity that comes irrespective of whether society approves or not. And for those women strong enough to go it alone, they suffer social stigmatization and hubris.

In *Jenifa* we are shown a truckload of female students carried off to a party where they become victims of ritual mass murder, with only a few of them escaping to tell the story. No comment is made about the boys and men who perpetrated this crime. There is no investigation, either by the police or by the school authority. We are rather supposed to condemn the girls as having been lured by greed for the huge sum of money attached to attending the party. The message of the film is clear in this regard: women are at the mercy of the men. The women who do not conform to stipulated conventions of patriarchy are bad women and a threat to patriarchy, and so would be destroyed by the instrumentality of patriarchy. No questions will be asked. There is no law that protects the non-conformist woman. She forfeits even her right to existence. *Jenifa* is a case in point in the issue of negative portrayal of women by Nollywood filmmakers. The intended patriarchal reading here is that university education corrupts young girls. This by implication means that Jenifa should have been left in her state of innocence in the village where she was safe from the temptations and seductions of campus life. Her tragedy is intended to be blamed on her exposure to university education. In as much as one understands the didactic intentions to discourage social ills in the university among young girls, yet such lopsided and negative portrayal can send the wrong messages and signals to the young men who, in actuality, constitute the greater menace to the peace and stability of the university campus life. They are in the majority in campus cults. Video films such as *Jenifa* appear to suggest to the young men that moral codes and rules are for the girls only, and so, they feel morally justified, even obligated to molest, kill, rape and use for ritual any girl that does not conform to conventions and moral codes. Such a message is a perpetuation of patriarchal social conditioning which has been the subject of investigation of feminist theorists and critics.

The next video film earmarked for analysis, *Games Women Play*, was released in 2004. It presents two storylines. The opening sequence of the film reveals an ideal family - a loving father and husband, a devoted mother and wife, and twin children all happily living in a posh home. However, the peace of this virtual paradise of a home is soon shattered by the arrival of Bill (Bob Manuel Udokwu), a friend of Damian (Zack Orji) and unknown to Damian, a supposed dead husband of his wife Emma (Stella Damasus). The snag is that Emma never mentioned it to her husband that she was once married prior to their chance meeting in the U.S which led to a courtship that in turn culminated in marriage all in quick succession. And Emma never knew that the Bill Damian was expecting was her supposed dead husband also known as William.



Emma found herself torn between loyalty to her stable home, and the strong pull of erotic love towards William who is her first love and husband. Meanwhile Damian exhibits rock-solid moral strength by resisting the amorous overtures and shameless flirtations of his secretary who incidentally is a friend of his wife. Damian gives his secretary the sack to drive home his point that he is not willing to let anything or anyone jeopardise the love, happiness and the stability of his family. His secretary's parting shot is a challenge for him to investigate what his wife does behind his back. Emma and Bill are caught in a deep passionate kiss. Emma's whole world comes crashing down as it were. Damian has no room in his heart for forgiveness and Bill claims no wrong doing in making love to his legal wife. The second storyline of the film involves Candace (Genevive Nnaji), Ivone (Omotola Ekeinde) and Emma (Stella Damasus) playing a game of seducing Timi (Desmond Elliot) for a price as a means by which Candace proves to her friends that her man has no eyes for any other woman but herself. The patriarchal undertone of this presentation is that women are weak-minded, silly and frivolous; always fighting one another over a man. Their game ends in Ivone and Timi truly falling in love with each other while Candace who insisted on the game cries her eyes out. Timi's dream of romance with Ivone foreshadows what the outcome of the game is likely to be. It is also a pointer to what Freudian psychoanalysis would call the repressed desires of Timi which is given expression in the dream state. This implies that Timi is already in love with Ivone, but his super ego rejects this feeling in his conscious state because of fear or consideration of his relationship with Candace Bassey. But in his dream state the unconscious is released from this inhibition and repression, so he gives full expression to his repressed desires. This second storyline brings out the frivolous side of Emma who has otherwise been shown as a personality with dilemmas and confusions, joys and complexities.

The desire for economic security plays a major role in shaping the character and personality of both Emma and William. First, both of them agree to the arrangement of paper marriage between William and an American woman to enable William secure legal documents that would enable him get better job and provide more comfort for his wife. Secondly, Emma's distraction and utter bewilderment at the news of the supposed death of William is more due to her total dependence on William economically than a sense of loss for a loved one. This does not imply that she had no feelings for her husband but that economic security scores higher than romantic feelings. This explains why she quickly grabs the opportunity to marry Damian within so short a period of her husband's supposed death without giving a second thought to what the world would say considering that she is a woman in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, when William turns up in her new home as a guest she is afraid to set the records straight for fear of losing her economic security which is provided by Damian. The same fear that prevented her from mentioning it to him in the first place that she was once married continued to hold her back from disclosing her relationship with William.

This video film is also a social commentary on the struggle for survival of Nigerians in the United States of America. Many Nigerians go through a lot of hassles just to secure an American visa or travel documents. Many do not give a second thought to what happens next when their temporary travel documents expire. It is rather a case of 'let me get there first.' And when the reality of the situation confronts them they resort to any available means of survival to save them from the embarrassment of repatriation irrespective of how unethical, unfair or degrading such means or strategy might be. So to survive in America William had to marry an American. The arrangement is usually for the marriage to be dissolved as soon as the man gets his legal documents as an American citizen. But sometimes, this arrangement does not work out as smoothly as planned. It is also obvious that the American women who agree to this arrangement are usually the wildest and most unscrupulous species of American women. They have no qualms about breaking the terms of the contract. In the case of William, he would have us believe that he was guiding against being discovered as a hoax marriage by the social security agents of government. So he had to actually move in with his contract wife and live with her as husband and wife for real. In actuality, economic stability and consideration seem to have shaped the characters and relationships of both Emma and her first husband William. First, he marries an American for economic reasons; secondly, Emma rushes into the arms of another man within a short while of her husband's supposed death; again for economic reasons. Thirdly, both of them fail to set the record straight in an honest way to Damian when they discovered the awkward and embarrassing situation. This reluctance to reveal the truth and set the record straight is borne out fear of losing the favour of the man who provides the economic

comfort of both. William was surviving on the goodwill of Damian, having absolutely no source of income when he came back to Nigeria, after he was released from prison. Also, Emma is totally dependent on Damian. She is a full time stay-at-home mother to her children and full time house wife to her husband. So the man who is providing all the comfort is being cuckolded as it were in his own house by his closest friend and his wife.

In terms of setting, time and space, the film is set in both United States of America and Nigeria. A framing situation in the present initiates a series of flashbacks showing how events lead up to the present situation. At the point when William tells Damian to discuss with Emma because two of them have a lot of catching up to do, discontinuity in progressive narration is established as we are taken back in narrative time through subjective/character flashback, which relates events in the lives of Emma and William in the United States of America before the supposed death of William. Emma's subjective flashback and the events related in the memory recall cover several years, whereas William has been around for only a few months. Another narrative technique observable in the video film under discussion is character reflection, which is achieved through a mirror surface placed in the mise-en-scene as when Emma looks into the mirror and talks to her reflection in the mirror, berating her reflection for being so weak: 'How could you? How could you look at your husband in the face every night he comes home from work after making love to another man?' In this instance Emma is both the subject and the object. Mental process narration is also utilized in the film under consideration. Mental process narration involves the representation of a character's dream or projected thoughts in space. In this instance, Emma fantasizes and desires the ground to open and swallow her. She makes signs with her fingers that suggest digging the ground as she crawls on the floor looking for a hiding place while the two men look on: Damian in hatred and disgust, and William in confusion and bewilderment; one wanting to kill her and the other wanting to save her. The dream technique is used to project into the future. For instance, Timi's dream of playing mock Chess game with Ivone is a projection into the future, hinting at what the possible outcome of the women's game of seduction would be.

Effective use of a combination of camera shots, movements and visual effects have been used to create suspense and anxiety, leading to a high point of excitement in the video film under discussion. For instance, when Damian leaves his office and is heading home, a long shot of the car on the road heading home, and a medium shot of Emma and Bill at home create anxiety in the viewer knowing that the secret affair is about to be discovered. What heightens this anxiety is the fact that Emma and Bill are not aware that Damian is on his way home. First, there is the shot establishing what is going on at home (i.e. Damian is going to catch his wife and his friend making love). Then there is a cut to the road also establishing the fact that Damian is actually on his way home. The high point of this sequence is when Bill orders Emma to confess her love:

Bill: Tell me that you love me
Emma: I love you
Bill: Say it like you mean it
Emma: I love you



This conversation is echoed by sound effect to Damian's hearing whose advancement towards home is shown repeatedly. The timing is such that as soon as Emma and Bill are locked in warm

embrace and passionate kiss Damian walks into the living room. The clock in the living room shows it is far past the time to bring the children back from school. This further enrages Damian. The excitement the viewer experiences here comes from the fact that Emma and Bill are not aware that Damian is on his way home; the viewer has more information than the actors in the film. Damian is the most ignorant of all of them. Another high point of excitement in the film is at Ivone's house when the seduction game has gone beyond a game. Timi walks in unaware that his fiancée Candace is concealed behind the bathroom door. Timi is the only ignorant party in this scene. He demands to know why Ivone has been avoiding him. Ivone's attempt to stop him from revealing further intimacy only makes him more insistent. It then dawns on Candace who has been watching from behind the door that her prince charming is human after all.

In this video film, Emma (Stella Damasus) does an excellent job of interpreting her roles, vividly creating the image and profile of a woman devoid of all economic powers by virtue of being married. Her life is subsumed in that of her husband such that when the news of the supposed death of her husband in a car bomb blast reached her, her whole world crashed. Her pain is not just the loss of a loved one but more of confusion and anxiety of how to survive economically, such that when she bumps into Damian who sympathises with her, she quickly grabs the opportunity for economic security, forgetting that she is supposed to be mourning her husband. When her supposed dead husband shows up in her new husband's house, again we are shown the perfectly confused and weak-minded woman, that women generally are taken to be. She lacked the will power and strength of character to face the situation and set the records straight. The sequence where she sits on the ground leaning on a wall is a signifier for her complete debasement.



To drive the message home, the word DOG is spelt on the wall against which she is leaning. Her final defeat and disgrace is completed in court when under cross examination by defence counsel, her utter moral laxity, bewilderment, confusion and helplessness are masterfully portrayed through impressive acting and interpretation of the role. Of course, she is judged harshly by the audience before the judge passes his final judgment, which is judgment of patriarchy. She is condemned in very strong terms by the presiding judge. We note that Emma's condemnation is based more on the fact that she is a woman than on the actual gravity of her offence. It is clear that if it were a man who found himself in Emma's situation, there hardly would have been a story. It is also noted that in the wrong doings of men, the story would most often end with the men being forgiven and restored by the act of simple repentance. In *Living in Bondage*, *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* and *Circle of Doom* the men are all forgiven and restored irrespective of the gravity of offence. But for women, patriarchy allows no forgiveness. Women must conform or pay for their sins in full.

Conclusion

This study has been made from the premise that gender is a social construct – dynamic socially maintained classification systems rooted in power relations and understood through performance and discourse – rather than inherently meaningful biological categories. While the biological differences between women and men are as given, these biological differences have little to do with the social roles, behavioural expectations, and life chances for males and females. In this vein, 'sex' refers to the biological differences between males and females while 'gender' connotes the cultural meanings

assigned to those biological differences. We have taken a general overview of gender representations/differentiation and explored the history of women liberation movements and feminist agitations against patriarchal practices of inequalities and the subjugation of women. We have also defined feminism, highlighting the different aspects adopted by different feminist groups; and tried to look at the history of feminism, and the politics of the systematic subjugation of women in history. We found the central tenets of feminist thoughts to be as follows:

1. Feminists view gender as an organising feature of social structure. Within this structure, gender is used to define roles and expectations in all domains from the work place to the family.
2. Women suffer from a restriction of choice. In other words, society is structured around gender in a patriarchal manner that places women in a subordinate position to men in virtually all domains (hooks, 2000, p.62).
3. Feminism places the experiences of women at the centre of research and tends to focus on the lived experiences of women.
4. Feminist scholars embrace a commitment to social change; it seeks to correct oppressive elements of society.

Feminist approaches are founded on the idea that society is patriarchal and privileges men over women in both the public and private spheres. Goode (1992, pp.287-310) states that men enjoy an exploitative position that yields unearned profits in power, money and prestige. Furthermore, Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1994, pp. 49-76) maintain that men hold a dominant position in society that affords them control over meaning and the language of social definition. This has manifested itself in role definitions that limit the true choices available to women. These role definitions based on differential gender privileges serve to reinforce and maintain patriarchy as it is recreated perpetually in interactions in literature and in Nollywood video film culture.

While giving a general overview of patriarchal representation of women in Nollywood film culture, we conjectured that the recurrent and consistent negative portrayal of Nigerian women in Nollywood could be an attempt to justify and continue to perpetrate some gruesome traditions of trial by ordeal which women are subjected to at the demise of their husbands as a way of proving their innocence. Film scholars and critics need to rise up and cry out against this trend to save the Nigerian woman from further character assassination and misrepresentation locally and internationally. In our readings of *Jenifa and Games Women Play*, we presented two perspectives or arguments. One is that the representations of most of the female characters are coloured by patriarchy. They do not reflect the true characters of Nigerian women with normal desires, hopes and aspirations. What is presented is rather a fictional construction of the patriarchal imagination of a wayward and morally bankrupt girls and women paying for their sins. The other argument is that in the unlikely situation that such characters are in any way possible of the Nigerian women, then they are still the product of the harsh and repressive patriarchal society where men dominate and make normal life impossible for the powerless female who is denied a decent existence for the simple reason of being a female: not possessing the phallus – the symbol of male authority.

In sum, we must note that film is a very powerful medium for the dissemination of information and the engendering of a particular ideology in the psyche of a people. It can be used to enslave or liberate, to unite and disturb an audience or even change their way of thinking. Such a transformation in attitude would signal the emergence of strategies for foregrounding women's reality in films. The imperialists used what they called the colonial film units effectively to engender Eurocentric ideas in the locals, thus glamorizing everything European and derogating everything African. The result of this kind of orientation made possible by the instrumentality of film technology is that the black world – including Nigeria, is still suffering from inferiority complex. The camera is a powerful instrument for brainwashing, for creating and inducing illusions of reality. It is a powerful instrument which can be used positively to reorient and liberate the mentalities of humankind. By appropriating certain filmic conventions and methods, subverting their customary usage and turning the lens of objectivity to represent women through unbiased looking glass, film directors (male and female) who call attention to their disruptions would be cancelling and deforming the structures that have held women framed, stilled, embedded and revoking the forms that have subjugated women. This reorientation ought to begin from the Nollywood video film culture, so as to correct the (mis)conceptions of several millennia about gender roles and gender identity. Humankind in general would be the better for it.

Until directors and screen writers of Nollywood cultivate alternative modes of representing women, their desires, emotions and qualities, until men/women relationship move into the realm of equal recognition of each other's values, strengths and weaknesses, until the Nigerian populace is purged of gender prejudice at the psychic and mental level, until men learn to recognise and respect the dignity and humanity of women as much as that of men, Nollywood video film culture will continue to be constrained by patriarchal ideology. Nollywood video film culture must be challenged not only on the basis of what it represents but how it reproduces meaning through representation.

Shots from Jenifa



Jenifa is caught cheating and walked out of the exam hall.

Shots from Games Women Play



Emma is judged and condemned for moral laxity.

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