



Feminist ideals in Nigerian home videos: The case of *games women play* and *emotional crack*

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Abstract

*The filmic creative experience, being in the realm or purview of artistic precinct, targeted at addressing the issues in the social milieu from whence it draws its materials, must be constructed with the issue of resilient topicality in mind. Its relevance, over the ages, therefore, is dependent on how close-knitted its affinity is with the stark realities of life. Hence, it remains merely utopian if its theme(s) is/are incongruent with, or alienated from crucial issues (political, economic, and socio-cultural) within the social construct of its immediate society. It is in light of this that, this paper has adroitly handled the burning issues of feminism using *Games Women Play* and *Emotional Crack*, both of which, though produced more than a decade ago, are still highly invaluable in addressing the issue of feminism, as well as some other social misdemeanours that plague the African marriages today. This is against the backdrop of the fact that some Nigerian Home Videos become hackneyed and go into obscurity as soon as they are produced. This paper, relying on the episodes in these two videos, highlights the fact that extreme feminism is a hydra-headed monster capable of robbing homes of their marital bliss and wrecking it. We, therefore surmise that feminism, a counterpoise to men chauvinism can only thrive in homes if love and understanding are upheld within the ambiance of equality.*

KEYWORDS: Feminist ideals, social misdemeanors, Home videos, Chauvinism, Marital bliss

Introduction

It is important to set out on this discourse with an understanding of feminism. Haralambos, Michael, Martin Holborn et.al. highlight a distinction between the concepts of inequality and social stratification. According to them,

The term social inequality simply refers to the existence of socially created inequalities...Social stratification is a particular form of social inequality. It refers to the presence of distinct social groups which are ranked one

above the other in terms of factors such as prestige, and wealth. Those who belong to a particular group or stratum will have some awareness of common interests and a common identity. (19)

From the outset of human existence, there has always been one form of social inequality or the other. In most African nations, for instance, the headship of the home as well as the leadership of the social cum political construct of these egalitarian societies has always been in the hands of the men-folk. Women, in such communities, are meant to be seen and not heard. Culture, and or tradition, in this case, dictates the codes of conduct that either tally with or, are at variance with this generally agreed-upon inferior status of women. Women, in such social set-ups, accept this status unquestionably and would even resist any form of reversal, which, as far as they are concerned, may be seen as abominable.

The Biblical account of the creation of man, as recorded in Genesis, (2: 21-23), is demonstrative of a seeming pre-ordained inferiority status of the woman in any social set-up. The problematization of the issue of that extracted rib of man from this account is not of import to this study. However, noteworthy is the fact that this account, coupled with the Paulan injunction in Ephesians (5:22-24), is today held sacred amongst Christians the world over, as one of the major tenets of a true Christian home. The friction this has caused in various homes, if relatively compared to the larger society is simply a case of a microcosm of a macrocosm.

Furthermore, The Bible, (as a result of Eve's disobedience to God's commandment concerning the tree at the centre of the Garden of Eden), presents, so it seems, a Divine blue print on the cultural position as well as duties of women: "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desires shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" Genesis (3: 16). This, indubitably, has been the crux of some women's self-abasement throughout the ages. According to Michael Haralambos et al (91), "Sociologists would regard the above quotation as a mythological justification for the position of women in society. Many women might see it as an accurate description of their status through the ages...." However, the roles of some women much later in the Bible are clear illustrations of the dynamism that characterizes human socio-cultural setup. For instance, in Genesis, (16:3-4), Sarai prevailed on Abram, her husband, to impregnate Hagar (an Egyptian), their maid; and later compelled him to disown and banish both the mother and child from their homestead. These domestic roles of Sarai (being domineering) and the roles of Deborah and Esther in the Bible, as a Judge and an influential queen respectively, are obviously in contrast with the above divine dictum of implied women's subjugation to men's authority.

Thus, cultural values are dictated by the socio-cultural conditions prevalent at a time and not by some lopsided laid down principles. *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies* maintains that "Racial and cultural identities are constantly

changing, reinventing themselves from within and being reinvented by interaction with other cultures". This, it is further reiterated, "... is not, as essentializing theories of race would have it, an undesirable process of dilution or infection; it is the basic, healthy life process of all cultures (65). Arjun Appadurai (12) is of the opinion that thinking of culture as a fixed static unity implies that culture is an object that can be "discretely studied and quantified", which makes such a position problematic. He, however, comes up with the concept of "situated difference", which projects the idea that cultures are in a state of flux and never wholly predetermined or fixed. This also seems to be Ewvwerhoma's standpoint in her views on the concepts of feminism, hegemony, freedom and the like. She observes that:

Sex differences exist at the workplace, in the family or community. Female role models are ... crucial working out these differences that often lead to organisational or inter relationship conflict. As more women come into limelight every day and are more successful in their endeavours, having such women as mentors can help develop the concerns of women. This is because upcoming women look up to many of the successful or established women as sources of inspiration and proof that women can indeed get to the zenith of their careers (Ewvwerhoma 59).

Matthew Umukoro, in his foreword to Mabel Ewvwerhoma's *Female Empowerment and Dramatic Creativity in Nigeria*, gives a concise and lucid insight into the emergence of feminism as a social concept that has traversed virtually all spheres of human endeavours. In his words,

Since 1975- declared by the United Nations as International Women's Year- there has been an upswing in the global ferment of female activism, which traverses all fields of human endeavour, from the art of politics to the politics of art. A mass movement which originated from Europe, feminism was initially founded on the shifty sands of a superfluous doctrine tagged women's 'liberation' (freedom from fictional fetters?) before being firmly anchored on the more credible ideology of women empowerment and self-determination in all spheres of public life (Ewvwerhoma, vii).

Emeka Nwabueze (141), however, argues that the movement for women advocacy started to gain magnitude during the French Revolution. According to him, as early as 1790, a renowned philosopher, Antoine Nicolas Condorcet wrote an essay on the admission of women to full French citizenship; and two years later (i.e. in 1792), a British scholar, Mary Wollstonecraft, published the first great document on feminism titled, *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*. This extraordinary thinker, as Nwabueze describes her, argues against educational restrictions which she maintained, kept women in a state of "ignorance and slavish dependence". Irene Isoken Salami-Agunloye, albeit, argues that Feminist theory did not begin with Mary Wollstonecraft as many

have proclaimed. According to her, "... the first woman to write about the rights and duties of her sex seems to have been a Frenchwoman Christine de Pisan (1364-1439)" (172).

Earlier, the classical Greeks had the consciousness of sex differentiation as well as role delineation along this line. An artistic reflection of this Athenian society is evident in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, a comic play aimed primarily at ending the Peloponnesian war through the means of sex deprivation. The women in *Lysistrata* make the case that they live under tyranny when they are forced to go without their husbands for extended periods of time and are not given any say in the matter, or even allowed to hear the proceedings surrounding the wars that rob them of their loved ones. The men, meanwhile, accuse the women of tyranny simply for occupying the same decision-making position that is normally reserved for the men, without taking any more power than the men previously had. It is generally viewed nowadays that since the men were accusing the women of tyranny for simply doing what the men had been doing, had the play been written nowadays it would be viewed as a negative critique of a male-dominated society. The play seriously addresses the problems that male decision making creates for society and suggests that things would be better with women in charge. Yet it was written by a man. Had the play been written nowadays, it would have been viewed as a negative critique of a male-dominated society.

In the play, an Athenian woman named Lysistrata has asked women from throughout Greece to cooperate with her in executing the plans she has to end the war. The first part of the plan requires the women to vow to withhold sex from their husbands until the men make peace with their neighbors. The second part of the plan, which Lysistrata reveals is already underway, involves a band of older women seizing the treasury stored in Acropolis; without money, politicians can't wage war (Course Hero, 2016).

The subjugation, oppression and the deprivations of woman's rights and freedom, on the one hand, and the perpetration of the evils of patriarchy in almost all cultures of the world, on the other, is a global phenomenon which needs to be addressed. Feminism, therefore, is a movement aimed at the arousal of the consciousness in women toward the review and a reappraisal of the inimical status quo. Irene Isoken (171-2) is of the opinion that the feminist campaign is centred on issues such as "participation rights, reproductive rights, domestic violence, and other types of violence against women, equal pay for equal job, sexual harassment, street harassment, maternity leave, gender discrimination, rape, harmful traditional practices etc." According to Violet Okokor, feminism "...has evolved into gender studies, challenging the subordinate position of women in many societies. It alleges that women are discriminated against and treated as appendages by/to the men; and that there is need to bridge this gap"(30). She quotes Berg as cited in Emenyi (2008:72) as maintaining that the ideology has given the woman "... freedom to decide her own destiny, freedom from sex-determined role, freedom from societal oppression and restrictions, freedom to express her thought fully and to convert them into action." Nwabueze (140) puts it more succinctly when he opines that feminism is the concept of paying significant

attention to women's rights as well as their positions in society. According to him, it advocates equality between men and women, especially, with regards to political, social and economic considerations. It arises out of the belief that women were considered unequal to men, and insists that there is need to redress this unfortunate situation. The objective was, in the words of Nwabueze, "...to ensure that women gained equal rights with men" (141). However, Tina Chanter calls for intelligibility in the quest for equality with men. According to her,

There are however a number of reasons to be wary of defining feminism as a movement to achieve equality. If we assume that feminism aims to accomplish the equality of women with men, the question arises, which men? With whom do women want equality? Presumably feminists are not striving to be the equals of oppressed, disenfranchised, or disadvantaged men. It becomes clear then that an inexplicit assumption built into the idea that feminists should strive for equality with men is that women seek equality with privileged men (8).

Cameron, Deborah and Don Kulick seem to maintain strongly that "Feminism is a political movement concerned with advancing the interest of women, and the key social relation it theorizes is gender" (52).

In this exegesis, we identify with the commonsensical standpoint that feminism should not merely be seen as a directionless and petty antagonism against men. The institutionalized patriarchal tendencies which are enshrouded in oppressive and hegemonic ideals form the nexus of feminist attacks. Of course, an assessment of some of his movies where there are feminist undertones, it is obvious that Lancelot Imasuen is not in that school of thought that peddles man-woman enmity in the name of feminist praxis. Watkins, Gloria sees this as "The wrong minded notion of feminist movement which implied it was anti-male carried with it the wrong minded assumption that all female space would necessarily be an environment where patriarchy and sexist thinking would be absent. Many women, even those involved in feminist politics, chose to believe this as well"(2). Like Watkins, Lancelot, in such films, sees feminism from the point of view of freedom from both psychic and political subjugation. Pathetic enough, such subjugation can even be subservient in nature. Sexist, racial or any other form of bias which poses a threat to human cum woman freedom is the target of feminist attacks; not the men folk. Watkins, who even claims to be the most radical feminist ever imaginable, asserts that, as a teenager, the first patriarchal voice that made her depressed, suicidal and uncertain of any meaning there is in life was her mother's! (x). According to her,

Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. This was a definition of feminism I offered in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* more than 10 years ago. It was my hope at the time that it would become a common definition everyone would use. I liked this definition because it did not imply that men

were the enemy. By naming sexism as the problem it went directly to the heart of the matter. Practically, it is a definition which implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult. It is also broad enough to include an understanding of systemic institutionalized sexism. As a definition it is open-ended. To understand feminism, it implies one has to necessarily understand sexism (1).

That feminism is drawn combat between the sexes is a parochial and misleading perception of the concept. This view is, unfortunately, what most extremists hold, thereby perpetrating hatred between the opposite sexes.

To justify the fact that feminism is not merely a battle of the sexes, we may draw allusion to the position of a popular male feminist dramatist in Nigeria, Femi Osofisan. In an interview with Olosope, when asked whether there are real equivalents/examples of assertive women as recreated in his plays, his answer is in the affirmative as he asserts: "... the answer to your question is a definite yes: there are in reality such strong women all around us. All that my plays do is call attention to them in order to redress what I believe is a conspiratorial distortion of history made by chroniclers, and also provide what I hope would be inspiring models to our young women" (Olosope, 22). Apart from this, Osofisan sees womenfolk as among the socially deprived or disadvantaged lots; and uses his plays as media to be the voice for these voiceless lots. In a paper, titled "Literature and the Cannibal Mother", presented by Osofisan, as a Keynote Address at the 2nd International Women Writers' Forum, on the theme "Writing to Right Women", on the 6th of July, 2000. He asserts:

Indeed ever since I started to write, I have been deeply concerned about the sorry plight of women in our society and elsewhere. Quite independently of any feminist movements, I have always tried to expose and denounce the wrongs which our society inflicts upon women, just on account of their gender, [That is why I wrote plays like *A Restless Run of Locusts*, *Altine's Wrath*, *Fires Burn but Die Hard*, *Tegonni*, and so on, as well as novelettes like *Wuraola Forever*.] I have found myself impelled to do this, not because of any external pressures, but rather because, given the kind of writer that I am, I am always spontaneously drawn to social injustice and to its victims... Easily I find myself in alliance with the struggling poor and the helpless wretched of the earth. In a gerontocratic society, I am on the side of the young; in a patriarchal society, the suppressed women are my heroes (Osofisan *Literature and the Pressures*, 6-7).

Having established a brief background to aid an understanding of the feminist ideals, let us now delve into analysing Lancelot's *Games Women Play* and *Emotional Crack* along the lines of these precepts. But, before then, it is only germane at this juncture to take a brief biodata of the enigma. Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen was born on the 20th of June 1971, to the family of Chief and Mrs. Godwin Imasuen. He hails from Urhokuosa town of Uhumwonde Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. He had his primary education at Oguola Primary School, while his Secondary education was at Eghosa Grammar School, Benin City, Nigeria. Popularly known as *De Guvnor*, Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen is a Nigerian film producer, director, and scriptwriter with 25 years of experience. He is the CEO of Lancelot Imasuen Media Network (LIMN), a public speaker, and a founding member of the Directors' Guild of Nigeria (DGN). Presently, he runs the Benin Film Academy (BFA), a unit of the Nollywood 101 Project, in partnership with Nigeria's Premier Private University – Igbinedion University, Okada. Lancelot rose into the limelight at the age of 26 with the production of the film *Yesterday*. Among his numerous home videos are: *The Soul that Sinneth* (1999), *The Last Burial* (2000), *Issakaba* (2000), *Private Sin* (2003), *Enslaved* (2004), *Moment of Truth* (2005), *Family Battle* (2005), *Games Women Play* (2005), *Behind Closed Doors* (2005), *Games Men Play* (2006), *Yahoo Millionaire* (2007), *Sister's Love* (2008), *Nollywood Babylon* (2008), *Entangled* (2009), *Reloaded* (2009), *Home in Exile* (2010), *Bent Arrows* (2010), *A Private Storm* (2010), *Adesuwa* (2012), *UdemeMmi* (2012), *Invasion 1897* (2014), *Wede* (2018), *The Wrong One* (2019), *Sacrosanct* (2019), *Love or Quest* (2019) and so many others, including his most recent outings *Love of Isiuwa*.

Imasuen's rewarding creative involvement in the Nigerian Movie Industry has earned him so many awards and nominations. They include African Movie Academy Award for Best Nigerian Film (2012), and the Best Film Award at Lekki International Festival (2019), to mention but two. His principle is, "Once you are not satisfied, you hunger for more effort, not minding the income, but, the positive outcome."

Feminist Ideals in *Games Women Play*

Games Women Play, screen-played by Emem Isong and directed by Lancelot Imasuen made its debut with a bang in 2005. It had an ensemble of the then-most popular Nigerian stars to parade. They include; Genevive Nnaji (Candace Basseyy), Omotola Jalade Ekeinde (Yvonne), Desmond Elliot (Arnold Temisan), Zach Orji (Damian), Bob Manuel Udokwu (Bill), Stella Damasus Aboderin (Emma) and Inilkpe (Ada).

In the early part of the film, we see Emma (Stella Damasus Aboderin) advising her son never to ever hit a woman. This early motherly coaching for a growing son is to create the impression of the sanctity of womanhood as a being to be cherished, loved and catered for. It is expected that this little boy, and the bulk of others, his age, watching the movie, will grow up under such tutelage to respect the status of the womenfolk; and most probably see them on an equal plane with total neglect to the above-mentioned Paulan injunction concerning the position of women in the family. This sense of equality and tenderness

towards the women folk is the very nexus of the concept of feminism. However, the already diminutive social status of women in our society is satirized in two episodes within the film. A typical traditional African man, for instance, watching the movie may likely cast aspersion on the women, who in a bid to assert their freedom, either wittingly or otherwise, end up tragically. The first is the episode where Yvonne (Omotola) is made to throw all caution and self-worth to the wind as she keeps pestering Candace's (Genevive's) fiancé – Arnold Temisan (Desmond Elliot) to accept a love relationship with her; all in an attempt to convince Candace that the fiancé is faithful to her. The game turns sour as Temisan and Yvonne end up caught in the web of a messy relationship that robs Candace and Yvonne of their most cherished long-standing friendship.

Again, when Emma (Stella Damasus Aboderin) senselessly refuses to confide in her husband, Damian (Zack Orji), issues relating to her past, a sudden twist of fate brings the past staring at her in the face as she loses every womanly sense of honour garbed in fidelity. She ends up flirting with her former husband under the roof of her current husband, thereby being guilty of bigamy. Having been caught red-handed in the act by her husband, this incident wrecks her marriage and leaves her psychologically devastated. This film's feminist inclination highlights the fact that a woman who relegates her naturally bestowed honour, and allows material things as well as self-conceit to rule her sensibilities, remains an underdog in the self-conceit of the male chauvinists. In other words, social constructs are not the only factor responsible for the "inferiorization" of women folk. Women themselves, from the issues raised in this film, are contributing factors to their pathetic low social status. For instance, when their prank turns sour, we could hear Candace rhetorically ask "I don't know why we women cause problems for ourselves?" This question is loaded with feminist inclinations toward self-evaluation. For instance, in the movie, one cannot understand the reason behind Ada's (Inilkpe's) incessant shameless advances toward her boss, Damian (Zach Orji), knowing full well that he is married, and more, so, to her bosom friend. Hence, the issue of self-esteem, which is a sine-qua-non for the attainment of equality of the sexes is what this film raises. Women should stop seeing themselves as mere sex objects to be tossed about in the hands of their male counterparts.

Pride, self-conceit, materialistic tendencies, as well as egocentricity are common features noticeable in the characters of this movie. The movie, like every other creative work of art, is a reflection of the goings-on in society from whence it draws its raw materials. In one of the episodes, for instance, we see Candace being instrumental in the loss of the job of a male make-up artist, Taye. A mere removable stain from Taye on Candace's "costly clothes" was not enough to have landed the poor man a slap, and seeing to his losing his job. This is a display of what may be termed negative feminism, which tends towards hatred for men. Candace ends up with emotional trauma because all her feminist endowments were deployed for negativity, especially against women. The statement made in this movie is simply that women should harness their feminine endowments toward a better and self-conscious humane relationship with the men folk. Peace, love, tolerance, and togetherness should be allowed to

be the existentialist catalysts between the sexes as the battle of the sexes will be consciously put at bay.

Radical Feminism in *Emotional Crack*

Radical feminism blames the exploitation of women on men, whom they see as the beneficiaries of the "dividends" of women's subordination. Valerie Bryson (1999) cited in Haralambos et al (101) say radical feminism sees women as an oppressed group who had to struggle for their own liberation against their oppressors - that is, against men. Pamela Abbot et al (33) argue that radical feminism is "concerned with women's rights rather than gender equality". It does not seek to minimize the difference between men and women, but instead believes that there is a "female or feminine nature that has been concealed and/or distorted throughout history; one that needs to be liberated and revalued".

Radical Feminists' concern with women's rights rather than gender equality in *Emotional Crack* is stretched to the extreme. Lesbianism is the outright result of such extremity. Even though Chudi (Ramsey Noah), in the film, is presented as a misogynist, who, at the least provocation, beats the wife, Chrystal (Stephanie Okereke), this does not translate into such a conflict in the home that should lead her into self-debasement. In Africa, lesbianism is taboo! In the film, Magdalene (Patience Ozokwo) vehemently condemns her daughter, Chrystal for taking such an abominable act as an option for self-consolation from the incessant domestic violence she suffers from her husband. Lesbianism is an extreme level of feminism in praxis. Camilla (Dakore Egbuson) who initiated Chrystal into it is already established in the film as completely alienated from the cultural values befitting a typical African young lady. This socio-cultural disconnect is evident in her lifestyle in the movie (smoking, lesbianism, excessive intake of alcohol, nightclubbing, and the like). Of course, it is not a surprise that she has to commit suicide towards the end of the film. This, indeed, is the statement Lancelot has made in this film. Foreign debasing lifestyles for our young women cannot survive the test of time. Most likely is the fact that if Chrystal, for instance, had not quitted that dirty lesbian inclination, she might as well have been made to die in the film. This is significant, as it is indicative of some sort of social cleansing, rooting out of evil socio-cultural traits that are capable of eroding the honour and esteem our young African girls are known for.

In these two films, as is the case in most of Lancelot Imasuen's movies, the central concerns have been cultural revitalization, and ethnic cleansing from the widespread tendency of post-colonial mongrelisation evidenced, most especially among our youths of today. Therefore, these movies, like every other creative work of art, expose such socio-cultural vices, holds them up in ridicule, and aim at effecting psychological edification that is hoped to subsequently usher in social transformation.

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