

Feminist Inclusivity in the Movies: A Semiotic Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This study considers the extent to which female inclusivity is reflected in the narratives of films, specifically focusing on selected Hollywood and Nollywood films that incorporate Afrocentric aesthetics within their storylines. On these notes, the study aims to the elements employed by filmmakers in the select films to deconstruct gender roles in film, how the elements are used in the select films to convey female inclusivity and whether the elements as used can depict female characters as active agents or passive subjects in films. To achieve these, relevant studies are reviewed, and the feminist film theory is adopted to establish the theoretical framework. The qualitative analysis approach which uses a semiotic lens to examine the signs, codes and conventions used to convey gender roles, identities and power dynamics is employed in the synoptic discussion of the selected films; *Black Panther*, *Coming to America* and *Apaye*, and for the analysis of their intertextuality, rhetorical tropes, modality critiques, connotations and denotations as well as the paradigms present in the films. The study reveals that *Black Panther* and *Apaye* portray more female characters in their narratives that exhibit greater independence from masculine influence, in contrast to *Coming to America*. The study posits that the value of male-oriented film contents is not undervalued. However, it is imperative to advocate for the promotion of diversity within the genres of films and to implement a more inclusive casting processes in order to attain gender balance within each genre.

Keywords: Feminism, Film, Afrocentricity, Female Inclusivity, Signs

INTRODUCTION

Women are widely portrayed as weak vessels that need to be protected by men. While the men are mostly presented as sole providers and protectors, women are most often presented as caregivers and receptors (Belknap, 2020). These stereotypes have long existed, people have come to see them as normal and this tends to limit the potentials of women in the society. The media have also helped to reinforce these stereotypes as they most often present women as helpless, very emotional and in need of rescue while men are made to seem aggressive and emotionally detached (Wood, 1994, cited in Ramos & Gonzalez-De-Garay, 2021).

Women are not always weak, helpless or as emotionally attached as the society through the media make us to believe. Many women have broken the jinx and have excelled in different spheres of life but the narrative is not often in their favor. For instance, the British monarchy reflects a shift in attitude towards gender parity. The monarchy was at a time a patriarchal institution, where male heirs customarily inherited the throne until the emergence of Queen Elizabeth II who ascended to the throne after the death of her father and holds the record of the longest-reigning monarch in British history.

Another influential public figure in history is Margaret Thatcher, the first female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom who emerged after a long reign of male leadership. Thatcher had a very strong personality and implemented policies that reduced government influence on the British economy and promoted free markets. Indira Gandhi served four terms as Prime

Minister of India. Mary Slessor played intriguing and multifarious roles in Scottish history and made significant impact in Nigeria. Mother Teresa is known for her dedication to charity. Margaret Ekpo was an extraordinary African woman who played a pivotal role in Nigeria's fight for independence and women's rights. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is a notable African politician and economist who served as the 24th President of Liberia, making her the first elected female head of state in Africa. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is a Nigerian-American economist and international development expert who has held several high-profiled positions in the public and private sector. She is the current Director General of the World Trade Organization. These strong personalities have shown the strength of women and their ability to take the lead and do well in positions of leadership but the society and media tend to play down on the personalities of women and portray them as a class of people who must operate under the cover of men.

Terry (2018) analyzed the power of a stereotype, looking at how Americans represent black women in film. He examined how black women are depicted in popular films, shedding new light on the ways in which black women are portrayed in films and attempted to deconstruct the dehumanizing representation of women. Terry tried to institutionalize more accurate visual accounts of femaleness by revealing the inaccuracies of the dominant paradigm and concluded that cinematic representations of black womanhood are socially and politically damaging. To depart from this status quo, there is a dire need for feminist inclusivity in the media, especially in the movies to portray women in a better light. Feminist inclusivity goes beyond just having more women on screen. It requires deliberately creating a film culture that celebrates women's stories and acknowledging the multiplicity of their experiences.

Feminist inclusivity can be used to promote gender equality and representation in the film industry (MacNeill et al, 2018). By presenting women of different backgrounds, ages, races, sexual orientations and abilities, films can present diverse and complex female characters, and portray women in multidimensional roles that go beyond stereotypes. By portraying diverse gender identities and nonconforming characters, films can challenge societal expectations, promote inclusivity, and break down traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Films should tell stories that empower and inspire women, showcasing their strength, resilience, and achievements. By underscoring women's accomplishments and celebrating their voices, films can contribute to a more inclusive and even-handed society.

Some films are currently striving to deconstruct the myths surrounding gender roles in the society and to project women in a better light. Some of such films are *Black Panther*, *Coming to America*, and *Apaye*. This article is out to analyze female inclusivity in the select films using a semiotic lens to examine the signs, codes and conventions used to convey gender roles, identities and power dynamics. Semiotics allows for a deep understanding how certain visual and aural elements shape societal perceptions and norms. By engaging in a semiotic discourse, we are critically analyzing and challenging certain misrepresentations and encouraging the film industry to embrace wider female inclusivity.

Objectives of the Study

This study examines;

1. The elements employed by filmmakers in the select films to deconstruct gender roles in film.
2. How the elements are used in the select films to convey female inclusivity
3. Whether the elements as used can depict female characters as active agents or passive subjects in films.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent decades have witnessed the rise of feminist representation in film, which has sparked a debate on the role of cinema in shaping a society that is both vulnerable and unable to meet its needs and maintain its stability. According to Katz et al. (2017), films play a big part in society and can positively influence people. They often act as a witness to communities by depicting socioeconomic reality through visuals and attitudes. Films have a major role in shaping society by providing a platform for many ethnicities and cultures to express themselves. Hu and Bartneck (2008) argue that cinema culture may be so captivating that it assimilates into other cultures and, in rare cases, becomes an integral part of such communities. However, movies may also serve as representations of social concerns and the use of stereotypes or the portrayal of minor characters, who might not even realize they are emulating real-life problems, are common ways this reflection manifests itself (Nelmes, 2012).

The first step in analyzing films with strong, independent female protagonists is to agree on the ideology of "strong and resilient female character." Scott (2007) argues that there are symbolic and social functions for the idea of a "strong" character in gender representation. This argument proposes that films that focus heavily on gender issues tend to highlight strong female characters. according to Dill and Thill (2007) strength is not a static quality that can be applied to any character without considering the context in which she is shown. The selected films in the current study all revolve around the idea that a female character's power may be shaped by her actions in relation to the surroundings, rather than only by her mental or physical attributes.

One of the most important ways to promote feminist inclusion is to show strong, independent women. This is true not just of physically strong people, but also of those who are mentally strong, emotionally resilient, and unwilling to give up. According to Slimani et al. (2016), mental strength is the ability to effectively handle a situation by utilizing one's experience, personal traits, and previous knowledge. Therefore, it is possible that the positive representation of this quality is an attempt to challenge the idea that qualities and characteristics are often linked with men or women. Those characters that are mentally tough often break gender norms and social expectations. They often face situations that are set up to make fun of them and force them to give up. Some of the most effective tactics for achieving gender parity include questioning traditional notions of masculinity and femininity and speaking out against male dominance (Budgeon, 2014). A major feminist issue is the analysis and critique of traditional gender roles, which seek to dismantle and ultimately eradicate dominant ideas of masculinity.

All films with feminist-inclusive themes strive to do one thing: give the audience more agency. This includes depictions of strength and tenacity, as well as those that fight discrimination and celebrate triumphs. Patrick (2009) argues that gaining a voice and agency are crucial steps in the female empowerment process. The power of one's voice may take many forms. The ability to speak clearly and be heard might be the literal meaning. In the context of feminism, vocal activities help women establish their subjectivity, authenticate their opinions and experiences, and ultimately affirm their humanity (Patrick, 2009). Encouraging subjectivity is essential for achieving empowerment and a voice (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010). One of the most important ways that women's subordination to men is maintained, according to Ferguson (2023), is through the rejection of subjectivity. The historical view of women as an "other" compared to the male ideal casts doubt on their acknowledgment as whole persons.

Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) found that collective action was the most effective way for people to show their empowerment. When women band together, they often have a stronger collective voice that may affect personal and societal change. Struggles to elevate

women's status have persisted throughout history and made great strides in the twentieth century (Bucur, 2018). Similar to how men establish their own subjectivity by active participation, collective action utilizes a pluralistic approach (Ludwig, 2016), empowering women to do the same. It is not strange that movie scenes of women's collective action as a means of empowerment may be envisaged within the context of the dominant culture, given that film itself is a reflection of the society it originates from.

However, collective action, which often involves many acts targeted at institutions, is a necessary first step towards lasting reform. The ultimate measure of women's empowerment is their ability to take charge of their own destinies and to change the systems that keep them in a subordinate position (Pichanot, 2021). Göhler (2009) argues that one way to think about power is as the ability to do things and get what you want out of them. This may be accomplished in two ways: directly or by influencing other people. The idea that women lack empowerment and may get it through power acquisition has been voiced by feminists both tacitly and explicitly.

Nnaemeka (1995) asserts that the feminist movement is often criticized for being seen as an expression of anger and rebellion. While post-feminism culture has mostly embraced women's film and feminism, he claims that feminists have used intertextuality and satire as cultural weapons. Weitz (2016) cites examples of nations that have adopted post-feminist film that has strong female characters and feminist themes. Based on true stories told by women, films such as *The Aviator* (2004) and *Erin Brockovich* (2000) have captivated audiences. Their accounts, however, give the impression that women could not have achieved their full potential unless they were able to break free of patriarchal conventions. There are ongoing assertions according to Ramos et al (2021) that feminism and women's achievements are becoming more accepted in society. These stories show women to be strong and resilient, and the films do not reduce their accomplishments to "feminine wiles."

Various levels of audience views towards women have been studied, including societal, group, and individual viewpoints, in relation to the proliferation of feminist inclusive films in the past ten years. There has been significant progress in recent years, but according to Lemish's (2010) research on gender portrayals in cinema and television, there is still a chronic shortage of female representation relative to males in various roles. Women are often portrayed in a positive light because of their sexual orientation, attractiveness, youth, or intimate relationships with men. Mc Crudden (2017) asserts that media depictions of women have an abundance of sexualized and/or provocative clothing.

Undoubtedly, individuals' lives have been profoundly impacted by the few films that include strong female characters and feminist concepts. These films often depict powerful women with unique personalities. Films featuring strong, self-reliant women who speak their minds have begun to stir the industry's standard images of female characters. Every facet of society feels the effects of these unorthodox women. In addition, it has broadened women's responsibilities beyond the traditional nurturing role to include more aggressive and independent tasks. Plakoyiannaki's (2008) research supports the idea that seeing media depicting non-traditional gender roles could lead to a greater acceptance of those positions. Kharroub (2016) found that viewers' attitudes towards gender equality shifted, leading to a reduction in gender-stereotypical beliefs, after sustained exposure to a television program featuring a female heroine who deviates from normal gender norms. The evaluation of films may be easily extended to evaluate unusual portrayals of women in film, with same results.

There is a clear pushback to the dominant male-centric ideological mainstream from feminist inclusive films, especially from the financially motivated Hollywood film industry (Kessock, 2019). Producers, studio executives, and audiences are hesitant to embrace societal transformation and lack knowledge about the importance, complexity, and consequences of feminism. As a result, the path towards genuine inclusivity is obstructed by intricate and

often intentional obstacles. MacNeil et al (2018) convey an emerging concern that the current trend of making films that include feminist themes is just a marketing ploy to cash in on a larger audience and cater to social shifts, rather than an attempt by filmmakers and the industry to change their ideology. Film depictions of women are frequently superficial, and there has not been a clear feminist period in Hollywood that reliably shows women in a way that reflects their real status and the variety of their experiences (Erens, 1990, as cited in Stacey, 2013).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on feminist film theory. Feminist film theory emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by women's studies and second wave feminism (Gilmore, 2008). Focusing on the function of female characters in various film storylines and genres, feminist film theory emerged in the US in the early 1970s, drawing heavily on sociological theory. How women are portrayed in films and how it relates to broader historical contexts are central questions in feminist film theory. The theory has developed and shifted to look at both modern filmmaking techniques and historical films as the medium has grown. Mulvey (2012) notes that the substantial impact of semiotics on cinematic depictions of women has been brought to light by feminist research.

Historical cinematic products, according to feminist film critics, have largely taken a macho stance, which has served to perpetuate male-centric social standards. A lack of female participation and control is responsible for the preponderance of male-generated meanings in films. This has led many to believe that film mostly reflects the male-generated social consciousness and that it has become an extremely powerful propaganda instrument (Gilmore, 2008). The prevailing patriarchal historical background in most societies means that when male viewpoints take center stage, they inevitably support male-dominated institutions and ideals while marginalizing women.

To promote a skewed view of society standards and goals, these films are often made in a way that seems genuine and unconnected to the macho bias. This sheds light on the prevalent mentality and how it contributes to the lack of feminist inclusivity in film. Film is a platform for the representation of human behavior, feelings, and experiences. It has long been believed that men are naturally better able to put women's emotions and experiences into words or play a better framework role (Smith, 2022). Howbeit, cinematic depictions of women have been profoundly impacted by feminist film theory, but it has done so in line with its dominant view of women, ignoring the fact that different groups of women have experienced denials in different ways and have been able to mount little resistance (Gilmore, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

The meanings present in the select films for the study are analyzed using a semiotic approach. Semiotics provides a potentially unifying conceptual framework and a set of methods and terms for use in film analysis (Inyang, 2017). This study summarizes the films, analyzes their significance via the lens of their essential symbols, and emphasizes the horizontal and linear connections within them.

Darliati and Mahmud (2020) state that the field of semiotics includes the study of how representations and messages influence the development of nonverbal and visual languages. Using semiotic approaches, this research seeks to investigate the interpellation of ideologies between producers and audiences as well as the interplay between signals, connotation, meanings, ideology, and metalanguage. The signifier is a representation of the sign; the signified is the entity that receives and processes the meaning sent by the signifier (Danesi, 2004). One way to look at myth is as a system of second-order signals that explain the

characteristics of denotative signs. Meaning (myth) follows a structure similar to that of denotation and connotation. Jafar et al. (2021) separated myths into two types: connotative and denotative. Hence, meanings can be either denotative, which only restates the original meaning, or connotative, which adds new meaning to the message. This research approach works well for the study since it allows the researchers to look at the films' cultural and social effects.

SYNOPSIS OF SELECT FILMS

Black Panther is a 2022 feature film directed by Ryan Coogler. Here, T'Challa, faces internal strife when he takes over as king of the fictitious African nation of Wakanda. After his father dies, T'Challa returns to Wakanda to become king as his father had intended. Unexpectedly, a mighty enemy emerges, putting T'Challa's leadership and identity as Black Panther to the test in a conflict that threatens the fate of Wakanda and the whole world. With his new power as king, T'Challa has the constant difficulty of finding the best way to exact justice as he seeks revenge for his father and the wrongs done against him. On rare occasions, T'Challa thinks it would be best if Wakanda took a more active part in international affairs and shared its knowledge and technology with the rest of the world.

The young king faces treachery and danger; to defeat his enemies and protect his subjects, he must rally his allies and unleash the full power of Black Panther. T'Challa must free Black Panther to save Wakanda and the world from two enemy operatives—one of whom is Ulysses Klaue and the other a US government operator who is Ulysses Klaue's son—who plot to use Vibranium to start a new global war. Dondo Gorilla is a difficult parallel reality that Black Panther must traverse; therefore, he must adopt his alter identity and recruit his sister and a CIA operative to help him. Their goal is to find and capture the person or people in New York who stole a weapon from Wakanda that was meant for the Vibranium. When their group is apprehended by the enemy, the older sister steps into the role of Black Panther, letting the younger brother and spy escape to notify Wakanda. The climax happens amid an all-out attack on Wakanda, building to the final showdown when Black Panther and the eldest sister manage to foil their enemy's plans.

Coming to America is a 1988 romantic comedy that tells the story of Prince Akeem. Crown Prince Akeem Joffer, a 21-year-old from the prosperous African country of Zamunda, is feeling exhausted from his lavish lifestyle. To fulfill his need for self-improvement, he is on the lookout for an independent woman who can accept him for who he really is, not his social status. Accompanied by his loyal companion and aide, Semmi, Akeem sets out for the New York City neighborhood of Queens. They signed a lease for a rundown apartment in the Long Island City neighborhood, claiming to be foreign students from low-income backgrounds. However, they are on a mission to find Akeem's wife. Lisa McDowell possesses all the qualities that Akeem desires in a woman, and he meets her on his journey. With the hope of winning her heart, Akeem assumes an entry-level position at a nearby fast-food establishment known as McDowell's. Darryl Jenks, Lisa's sluggish and easily irritated boyfriend, complicates matters further.

After what happened in the first film, Akeem and Semi set out to find Akeem's children. It is thought that a monarch may only pass the kingdom on to a male, so the Zamundan tradition calls for a search for a male heir to the throne. Word on the street is that Akeem has a kid living in the US. Akeem finds his son, Lavelle Junson, in Queens after returning to the United States. Lavelle, the ticket scalper, shows signs of both shock and hesitation when asked to acknowledge Akeem's claim to the title of King of Zamunda. Akeem tells Lavelle that he must return to Zamunda with him because he wants Lavelle to be a prince and inherit the kingdom of Zamunda. Lavelle has three kids, and relocating to Africa would entail abandoning them.

To facilitate a change to Zamunda's laws that would allow female heirs to take the throne, Akeem is determined to utilize every means at his disposal to ensure a male successor. The moment Lavelle lands in Zamunda, he is met with an absence of hospitality. General Izzi plots to take the throne of Zamundan. However, if there is no male heir to the realm, Izzi will have the right to be crowned. To ensure the institution's continued existence, Akeem decides to set up a royal wedding for Lavelle, in which he would wed a woman from a noble family. As part of his royal engagement, Lavelle crosses paths with Izzi's daughter, who is trying to win him over. Unfortunately, Lavelle ends up vomiting towards the end of the meeting because he was poisoned with a fruit that makes men less sexually active.

Apaye is a 2014 Nigerian biographical film produced by Emem Isong and directed by Desmond Elliot. The story follows Yepayeye, a mother of six, as she deals with the results of her husband's promiscuous behavior, which leads him to leave her for a young girl. The well-being of her six children depends on her providing them with food, clothes, and shelter. After all her hard work, sickness shows up; her father's love gives her the strength to overcome it. Despite going through a difficult time of separation, loneliness, and sadness, she perseveres in her job search and finds a position at a secondary school via her faith and prayers. There is no end to her boundless and incomparable joy.

Reviving her hope, she takes on the role of a mother figure to disadvantaged students, providing food and shelter and speaking out for those who are less fortunate. Her new position makes her more generous and makes her love for children even more apparent. She returns to the same situation after being dismissed from her job, which is unfortunate. Managing six children gets quite difficult at this point. Due to the children's maturity and unemployment, this stage of her life is marked by an abundance of melancholy, tears, and emotionally taxing events. Because she knows there is a heavenly entity that sees, hears, cares, and gives her answers, she will not rest until she has accomplished her goal, even if it takes a long time to find out if it benefits her.

INTERTEXTUALITY OF SELECT FILMS

The movies under review are selected based on certain shared characteristics. The use of Afrocentric visual themes in *Black Panther*, *Coming to America*, and *Apaye* makes for distinct sensations in each picture. In *Black Panther*, the fictional 'African' nation of Wakanda is portrayed as a futuristic utopia that has managed to escape the shackles of colonialism and slavery. It shows Black superheroes as just as powerful, wise, and fair as their white colleagues. In *Coming to America*, Prince Akeem Joffer from the legendary 'African' kingdom of Zamunda, sets off for Queens, New York, in search of true love and independence. The film delves into the concepts of custom. Within this framework, Prince Akeem argues that love and individual agency are more important than the African custom of arranged marriage. Meanwhile, *Apaye* narrates the true story of a woman who lives in a traditional African polygamous household and who faces challenges in supporting her children. Within the realm of African mysticism, T'Chaka and T'Challa have a conversation on the ancestral plane realm in the film *Black Panther* and it is a memorable moment with the father and son. *Apaye* also demonstrates Africa's belief in the penetration of the supernatural when the young Yepayeye's mother appears to her in the bush and starts singing to her, to her full glare and hearing.

A critique of America through the eyes of African royalty is a common theme in both *Black Panther* and *Coming to America*. *Black Panther* presents Wakanda as a colonial-era African nation that has been untouched by its past and is legitimately powerful. Conversely, Prince Akeem's home country of Zamunda is shown as a stylized and exaggerated version of a wealthy African nation trying to commodify its traditions. *Coming to America* features Prince Akeem and Semmi's recurrent character approach, in which they repeatedly play

different parts. Prince Akeem, the barber Clarence, the stage manager Randy Watson, and the Jewish patron of the barbershop Saul were all played by Eddy Murphy in this staging. The use of repeated characters is a method used in *Apaye's* narratives. Here, the narrator and protagonist are both played by Yepayeye in this story. Contrastingly, Prince Akeem (Eddy Murphy) plays many parts, while Yepayeye (Clarion Chukwura) keeps to two roles. This technique is also used by T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) who is the Black Panther and the film's protagonist.

RHETORICAL TROPES AND MODALITY CRITIQUE

Film rhetorical tropes are concerned with the narratives and persuasive elements employed in a film to establish believability and film modality is the deliberate encoding or construction of the information shown on screen to convey it to the viewer (Inyang & Essien, 2022). The select films portray their worlds via the use of several tropes.

In *Black Panther*, Prince T'Challa succeeds to the throne after his father dies, and the plot bids farewell to an T'Chaka's role. Meanwhile T'Challa has difficulties in uniting his family and realm as Black Panther and in determining their destiny together. While there has been a great deal of discourses and criticisms about the film's symbolic and allegorical elements (Sewchurran, 2022; Bucciferro, 2021; Faithful, 2018). The narratives' choice to reveal the hidden African country of Wakanda on a worldwide scale gives birth to several allegorical interpretations. One way in which African Americans give back to their communities is by sharing what they have learned and the technologies they have developed to help other African Americans who are struggling. Another interpretation of the film is that it is our moral duty to help the African people and their descendants escape the poverty and despair that they have endured since colonization uprooted and exploited them. There is figurative and symbolic weight to the film's examination of leadership in an uncertain setting. To alleviate suffering for oppressed people across the world, this film stresses the critical need for courageous and perceptive leadership.

One of the most common rhetorical devices in *Coming to America* is irony. The film takes a humorous look at the American ideal through the eyes of Prince Akeem as he travels from the wealthy kingdom of Zamunda to Queens, New York, in search of true love. Since he thinks he will avoid the superficiality of planned weddings in Zamunda by forming a true relationship with an American woman, Akeem's early ignorance of American society is ironic. But his encounters with other people, such as the opportunistic Reverend Brown and the materialistic women who patronize a local business, highlight the complexity of American culture. Satire is another rhetorical element used in the film. In satirizing traditional ideas of nobility and privilege, the film uses Akeem's decision to be a lowly employee at McDowell's to criticize masculinity and authority. In addition to using rhetorical devices, *Coming to America* critiques modality in its portrayal of sincerity and introspection. Moving to America is more than simply a change of scenery for Akeem; it is also about his quest for personal growth and autonomy. The protagonist's interactions with characters like Lisa McDowell and his loyal attendant Semmi cause him to question his identity and ideals, which leads him to reconsider his royal position and the responsibilities that come with it.

A key rhetorical device in *Apaye* is the concept of resilience. Through it all, Yepayeye shows remarkable resilience in the face of her traumas, whether it is the loss of her daughter "Suam," an abusive relationship, or the responsibility of raising her children on her alone. Her dogged will to persevere and thrive despite overwhelming odds serves as a powerful rhetorical device that strikes a chord with audiences and highlights the themes of resilience and perseverance throughout the film. *Apaye* also makes use of the rhetorical pattern of contrasting tradition with modernity. In particular, the film explores the tension between traditional gender roles and expectations and more contemporary societal norms. Yepayeye

fighters against traditional gender roles throughout her life as she tries to break free of her controlling marriage to Emman and carve out her own path. All this contrast highlights how complex cultural identity is and how people will always fight for their own autonomy in a changing world. The gender gap in *Apaye* is one area where the film offers a critical examination of modality. This film sheds light on the difficult situations that many people, especially women, face within the Nigerian society by investigating issues of poverty and female exploitation for child delivery. By following Yepayeye and her children through their struggles and triumphs, the film encourages viewers to think critically about societal problems and the need for change.

CONNOTATIONS AND DENOTATIONS

Camera angles have a significant role in the field of cinematography. A wide variety of these techniques were used in *Black Panther* to show vulnerability as well as power. Capturing images from low angles was one of the main techniques used. This particular shot employs a downward perspective, resulting in an exaggerated perception of the subject's size. Both T'Challa and Killmonger are shown on screen through this angle many times. This angle is first seen at T'Challa's water ceremony, when he becomes king. The camera directs its gaze towards T'Challa, including a waterfall in the backdrop and conveying associations of authority.

For the aim of setting the scene, filmmakers often use high angle shots as the first shot. *Black Panther* and *Coming to America* make the use of this specific shot. The royal family's lavish lifestyle in Zamunda is shown in *Coming to America* using high angle shots. In *Black Panther*, the first use of a high angle perspective takes place in Oakland, where the young prince is having a conversation with his father about a planned motive.

Coming to America has several aerial shots. One of the most noteworthy instances arises when Akeem has his first hair cutting experience. As the camera focuses on his hair, a panoramic view reveals that, regardless of the location, the hairdresser has previously performed a similar hairstyle. The use of wide shots in *Coming to America* helped to portray majesty and power. Viewers are given a complete understanding of the grandeur of the Zamundan palace and its surroundings using wide shots, which also highlight the importance of Akeem's childhood. The wide shots do a good job of showing how superior Akeem is in comparison to his people.

In *Apaye*, the scene where Yepayeye counsels her six children to consistently turn to God when confronted with life's uncertainties, a diverse range of camera views were employed. Here, the high-perspective picture is used to capture the mother. However, it takes a different turn when Suam mentions Yepayeye's brother, who lives in London, who offers to pay for their education if they take his surname instead of their father's. Before returning to the high-perspective picture, the camera zooms in to catch Suam's face. Zooming in on the image allows the audience to observe the fleeting change in Suam's expression just before her siblings, who decided to take their mother's name as their surname, voice their disapproval.

PARADIGMATIC ANALYSIS

Paradigmatic analysis involves the evaluation of the suggestions embedded in a film and any other work of art. *Black Panther* has exemplified the significance of accurate portrayal of women and girls in the media by featuring women of many ethnicities alongside the protagonist who is Black. A wide range of women with different appearances, talents, and personalities are included in the film. Rather of playing a supporting role to the male protagonists, the film's female characters take center stage, and this is crucial to overcome dominant gender preconceptions in narratives by showcasing women's leadership and heroism. The film *Black Panther* offers a new and hopeful take on femininity through its

depiction of women, which challenges stereotypes and provides a refreshing alternative to mainstream representations of women.

According to Deardeuff (2019), the film's female characters, especially the warrior women, represent strength and independence, breaking the stereotype of Black women in cinema as passive victims. First and foremost, the film focuses on Wakanda, a nation that is portrayed as progressive and inclusive. The film's portrayal of female characters successfully demonstrates Wakanda's commitment to gender equality and rejection of traditional gender norms. It is evident by the presence of female warriors, especially Okoye and Nakia, that this is the case. Kessock (2019) claims that the Dora Milaje's uniform combines modern designs with aspects of traditional African clothing. Along with their depiction as skilled combatants, this blends gender roles from different eras.

Black Panther's female heroine, Nakia, played by Lupita Nyong'o, defies traditional gender roles by embodying a strong and independent character. By always choosing to act in accordance with her own beliefs and goals, Nakia demonstrates her independence. She works underground for the Black Panther as both a War Dog and an agent. She explains that her duty as a War Dog is to help her nation in her own special way. In a collaborative union with the male protagonist, Nakia defies traditional gender stereotypes by fighting side by side with the Black Panther. The changing views on women's roles in contemporary film are mostly illustrated by her portrayal. All three of the women who surround T'Challa—Nakia, Shuri, and Okoye—are shown in the film as being of equal status to him. They are quite capable of taking care of themselves and often step up to the plate to be T'Challa's carers. Particularly relevant to this claim is Okoye, leader of the Dora Milaje, who derives immense joy from her unfaltering devotion to the monarchy. It is possible that gender norms and the dynamics of male characters dealing with women in popular media are changing since these women are both his loving partners and competent, intelligent people with a strong sense of identity. Clearly, T'Challa values and respects their opinions since he never makes decisions without consulting them. This is a radical change from how most mainstream action films present things.

Coming to America has a wide array of female characters, most of whom have minor roles. The film presents a stereotypical image of a subservient and docile woman whose value is predicated on her ability to find a husband. Patrice, Lisa's sister, and her friends' personalities make this very clear. Even though it is meant to be a comedic relief, this scene grossly stereotypes American women. On the other side, an outstanding female character in the film questions how Black women are typically portrayed. The character of Lisa McDowell, who works part-time at her father's business, McDowell's, is shown as very intelligent, independent, and well-educated. While standing in sharp contrast to the created stereotypes linked with Black women, Lisa is portrayed as having qualities that any father would want for his daughter. Lisa's character grows in every way; she has a solid belief in herself and knows exactly what she wants out of life. Lisa's ability to act is demonstrated by her unwavering commitment to marrying Akeem and even as she tries to convince him to abandon his cultural traditions and give in to her wishes.

Like *Black Panther*, *Apaye* challenges the concept that women can only play supporting roles in film by casting a female protagonist in the lead role. As with males, the film convincingly demonstrates that women are strong at heart and can show remarkable endurance when faced with adversity. The story follows Yepayeye as she grows up, challenging the stereotypical depiction of women in Nollywood and drawing attention to the social belief in women's emancipation. Besides Yepayeye's primary role, it is through the choice to share her marriage with a close family that Yepayeye's cousin (a secondary role) demonstrates strength, tolerance, and support to Yepayeye. Emman made Yepayeye learn a lot from this experience since it infuriates her to see her husband having affairs with other

women. Her ability to bounce back from setbacks and persevere in the face of future hardships was strengthened by these experiences. Changes in family relationships and personal transformation are important themes in the film which depicts how the strength of a woman can navigate through changes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the future, there will be a growing exposure to films from many cultures yet portraying an extent of Afrocentric aesthetics, as seen in the films examined in this study. The persuasive power of film is highly successful in shaping individuals' thoughts and attitudes. With the growing recognition of the existence of divergent perspectives from our own, it is reasonable to anticipate a heightened receptiveness towards films with several cultural portrayals within the global film industry. It would be more important than ever to look to films and other forms of media for answers or new takes on global issues like gender, race, and ethnicity as we live in a more interdependent world.

The issue of gender balance in film remains a major one. There may be more female characters in films now, but that does not mean they reflect society's values or challenge the male-centric narratives that have long dominated the industry. While it is crucial to enhance the representation of women in film by reducing the presence of male characters in supporting parts, it is also necessary to closely monitor the range of roles that women can assume. It is possible that women may be directed towards low-risk, low-reward roles with limited opportunities for professional progression. Again, if most film directors are male, it is probable that the narratives they create will adopt a male-centric viewpoint. This is seen in the excessive sexualization of women on screen and the absence of strong female role models in the film industry. However, it is important to note that male-oriented film production should not be considered less valuable. Instead, it is crucial to promote diversity in the genres of films produced and provide a more inclusive casting process to achieve gender balance in each genre.

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