



The Semiotics of Feminism and Nigeria's Cultural Identity in Nollywood: *Women's Cot* in Focus

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Abstract: This paper is a critical analysis of feminism as it relates to Nollywood – the huge movie industry of Nigeria and Africa. The contextual and textual methods of research as they apply to the production of the video film – *Women's Cot* – are adopted. The paper also theorizes about the concepts of semiotics/structuralism and culture, which elicits the syntagmatic and paradigmatic investigation of the film's scripts and video forms. Findings show that in spite of the challenges faced in the struggle for the emancipation of women from harmful traditional practices (owing to egoistic socio-political aggrandizement), *Women's Cot* is able to mirror the triumph of women's liberation from the cult of feministic diabolism. The paper recommends that in the fight against devious practices, women must extricate themselves from the cult of a few privileged women whose behavior portends no iota of altruism.

Keywords: Nigeria, Nollywood, *Women's Cot*, Cultural Identity, Semiotics, Feminism.

Introduction

The thesis of this discourse is on the relevance of feminism in the Nigerian cultural environment and the kind of cultural identity or image it has empathized, impacted and

given to the development of Nigeria in the 21st century. Should Nigerian women be debased through the film industry? The answer, *prima facie*, is unequivocally a “no”. How can the huge Nigerian film industry

positively project the nation's image to the outside world with special regard to women? Through a structural/semiotic reading/viewing and analyses of both the syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures of a popular Nigerian film, *Women's Cot*, it is possible to know whether or not Nollywood has dented Nigeria's cultural image, identity and heritage.

Theorizing Feminism and the Image Factor in Nollywood Films

Feminism as a concept can be approached from a number of perspectives. The *Webster New Explorer Encyclopaedic Dictionary* describes it as an organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests as well as the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes. According to the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, feminism is the humanistic theory which sees the relationship between the sexes as one of inequality, subordination or oppression and aims to identify and remedy the imbalance.

Feminism was coined in 1837 by radical French thinker and utopian socialist Charles Fourier to indicate support for women's equal legal and political rights with men. The definition can also be expanded to include not only the pursuit of legal and political equality, but much more general social and economic egalitarianism.

Feminists' argument for male-female parity is characterized as a response or set of responses to the oppression of women in all areas. Two perspectives - liberal and radical feminists - disagree regarding the direction the woman's movement should take: is it towards a deeper identification with female essence, or as a departure from the way women had been made to be by patriarchy? These constructive and essentialist views derive support from different theoretical sources. The essentialists emphasize that while men think in terms of rights, women are confronted with ethical issues and think in terms of responsibilities to others. Women are more caring because their psychological and physical ties to humanity remain unbroken. The constructivists are worried that the essentialists take an effect to be a cause and interpreting the subordination of women as natural.

Other types of feminism as summarized by Catherine Simpson (1981, p.66) are:

- Radical feminism which sees man's oppression of women as a central historical event.
- Bourgeois feminism which seeks to eliminate sexual discrimination and sex roles.
- Cultural feminism which hopes to embody a special enhancing female sensitivity.

- Marxist feminism which seeks to integrate a class of feminist analysis.
 - Black feminism which organizes the woman who must endure both sexism and racism that white women do often enact.
 - Lesbian feminism finds a central bond between women and women.
- This work relies on the following scholars to theorize feminism and the image factor in Nollywood films - Cowie (1977, pp.19-22), Mulvey, (1998, pp.585-594), McQueen (1988, pp.146-148), Okome (1997) and Omatsola (2008).

According to Cowie, sexism in an image cannot be designated materially as content the way denotative elements such as colors or objects in the image are reckoned. Rather, it is the development of what men and women are and their roles in society that produce the sexist images. She argues that sexism is not always there in the image but is produced through the process of signification coming into play on a number of connotative levels.

Referring to the problems of the relations of content/meaning to its form and of interpretation, Cowie argues further that images cannot, in fact, be treated as having homogenous content or meaning which can be taken as inherent. At child birth, the denotative and connotative levels of meaning play out as the woman, a mother, presents

a primordial positivistic image as caring, protecting and helping the child. It seems that in their ultra enthusiasm or overzealousness in drawing attention to the subjugation and sub-ordination of women by patriarchy, some radical Nigerian feminist scholars subdue the unique roles mothers have played towards the development of the child and invariably humanity from cradle to grave (Omatsola 2008, p.116).

According to Cowie, the relationship of a woman to a child is readily assumed to be that of the mother, from the archetype of the Madonna and child to the concept of the woman as the natural carrier of children. In line with this view, one should see in any typical Nollywood film about women the positive image of women affirming their roles as mothers in a society which treats them as second class citizens.

Cowie reiterates that the meaning of the image exists both internally (*diegetically*) and externally (*audientially*) in the intertextual space of all the other images of mothers and children. One could agree with Cowie that other positive images of women can be thought of not as insertion; that intertextual space can be part of the object of the film. Stereotyping becomes a function of the systematic coding of the image. "House wife" is pre-eminently a stereotype as no woman is actually married to a house.

Rather, the term is constituted on the notions of the home and its services.

Psycho-semiotically, some feminist scholars are perhaps irked by what they think are not too serious ways women's image are represented in the electronic media especially film and television. According to Mulvey, the paradox of phallogentricity is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to the world. Theorizing on scopophilia which is isolated as one of the component instincts of sexuality (a concept which means, taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze), Mulvey thinks that cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasure, adding that the convention of mainstream film is to focus attention on the human form, scale, space and stories. Below is the list of her not-too-good ways a woman's images are represented in cinema:

- 1). Women are looked at as image and man the bearer of the look.
- 2). In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.
- 3) What counts is what heroine provokes or rather the love or the fear she inspires in the hero. Traditionally, the woman displays her function on two

levels – as an erotic object for the character within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen.

- 4). Conventional close-ups of legs or face integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism.

Male and female feminists are equally dissatisfied with the way the women's image is represented on screen. According to Tuchman (1978), prime time television has found that women counted for only 26 per cent of the characters in all soap operas, serials and drama, games shows and quizzes. Sternglans and Serbin (1974) survey of popular children's television show that males outnumbered females 2 to 1. Males were typically aggressive, constructive and rewarded for action, whereas females were passive, deferential and rewarded for reaction. On the other hand is the campaign against the image of women as wives, mothers, and cooks; they are more valuable than just dishing fish fingers and baked beans.

Consistently, Nigerian video films portray the male gender as superior, given that they frequently dominate, make all the decisions, and generally "cut the shots" in the story-lines. In addition, males in Nigerian culture can mete out any amount of ill-

treatment to females and get away with it as curiously there are hardly any inbuilt correctors in the traditional systems to check this kind of behavior. In the case of Nigeria, Ajala (2014, p.53) notes that, the indifference of women and inability to be strategic about the future makes the matter worse. Popoola (2014, p.83) adds, saying that “a very important question women have failed to answer is the Nigerian woman herself.” Women have been so oppressed, marginalized and dehumanized by patriarchy in both the real audiential universe and the diegetic worlds of Europe, Africa and Nigeria. A lot of Nigerian films have actually mirrored most of the evil things women in Nigeria suffer. But how can the portrayal of feminism help to remake Nigeria and create a positive cultural identity? A syntagmatic and paradigmatic diagnosis of the Nollywood film *Women’s Cot* can assist in some way to provide answers to the questions.

Theorizing Cultural Identity

Before a semiotic study of *Women’s Cot* is carried out, it is imperative to subject the phenomenon “cultural identity” to critical and theoretical scrutiny. The word “culture” means many things to different people and schools of thought. The holistic school sees culture as the total ways of life of a people at a particular time and at a particular place as opposed to the definition of culture as the refinement of character, behavior and

comportment. According to Campbell et al. (2004, p.6), the idea of culture encompasses fashion, sports, architecture, education, religion and science. From the perspective of the mass media, culture is the symbol of expression that individuals, groups, and society use to make sense of daily life and articulate values, arts, beliefs, customs, games, technologies, and traditional institutions.

Culture also encompasses societies’ modes of communication, the process of creating symbols and systems that convey information and meaning such as Morse code, motion pictures or computer codes. Culture is, therefore, from this perspective, a process that delivers the values of a society through media products and other meaning making forms. The mass media are the cultural industries—the channels of communication that produce and distribute songs, novels, news, movies, internet services and other cultural products to a large number of people. If the cultures of a society are exported and distributed, the cultural identities of the people are also projected to the outside world.

Trilling (1965, p.XI) opines culture as a series of complex activities, which includes the practice of the arts and of certain intellectual discipline, the former being more salient than the latter. Trilling thinks that since culture comprises a

people's technology, manners, customs, religious beliefs and values (whether explicit or implicit), its modernity can be deciphered and valued. This presentation shares Trilling's view that a society's culture is modern if it affords sufficient material well-being for the convenience of life, the development of taste and when the members of that cultural group are intellectually mature. Such maturity will invariably bring about a good cultural identity.

Using Freud's theory as a paradigm, Hall (1994, pp.119-123) opines that human identities are sexual and the structure of human desires are formed on the basis of the psychic and the symbolic processes of the unconscious, which functions according to a logic different from that of reason. He reiterates that there is always something imaginary or fantasized about identity, which is always in process. Hall therefore sees cultural identity as a continuum. Rather than a finished thing, one should speak of identification and see culture as a continuum. Identity, he postulates, arises not so much from an internal perception as from external viewpoints.

Languages are not only aspects of culture, but central to cultural identity. Therefore, gate keepers (script writers, producers and actors) should be mindful of the type of language they transmit via the electronic mass media such as film,

television and the internet. This is because, according to de Saussure (cited by Hall, 1994, p.122), we are not in any absolute sense the authors of the statements we make or of the meaning we express in language; we can only use language to produce meaning by positioning ourselves within linguistic rules and systemic measures of our culture. The producers of our films should note that to re-image our films, language is a social, not an individual, system. One must resist the temptation to use language that can tarnish people's image and debase their culture.

Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Reading and Analysis of Feminism, Cultural Identity and Re-imagining of Nigerian Women in *Women's Cot*

The syntagmatic reading and analysis of verbal and non-verbal text involves studying their structures and their relationship with each other. Structural semioticians seek to identify elementary consequences within the text - its "syntagmatique" (Chandler 2004, pp.1-16). Metz (1992), a film theorist, is also concerned with syntagmatique, which he describes as the analysis of the form of the expression of cinematic signs and the intrinsic organization of these four elements - photographic image, recorded noise, phonetic sound and recorded sound.

The grande syntagmatique, according to Silverstone (1976), ignores the fifth - the written title, whereas Propp (1928) is concerned with formalism - the linearity of the spoken and written word. Levi-Strauss (1961) opposes Propp's formalism with his own structuralism, thereby rejecting the distinction between form and content, a distinction which tends to disqualify the necessary attempt to tie folktales to a particular social context. Bremond (1975), in his *logic de recit*, objects to both the imposition of a single linearity on the narratives by Propp and the denial of narrative possibility. He prefers the one which produces the logic of action in which a particular act can have a number of possible outcomes.

Greimas' structural semiotics (1966) is firmly Saussurrean. He approaches the problem of meaning both in terms of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures. Whereas syntagmatic analysis explores the "surface" structure of a text, paradigmatic analysis seeks to identify the various paradigms (or pre-existing sets of signifiers) which underline the manifest context of the text (in this paper the home-video text of *Women's Cot*). This aspect of structuralist analysis involves a consideration of the positive or negative connotative meaning of each signifier (see Omatsola, 2008, p.204). For the purpose of this work, a combinational neo-structuralist

approach becomes imperative. This involves the Peircean triadic models of signification, the Greimasean structural semantics, the Metzian grande syntagmatique and the Levi-Saussurrean binary oppositional approaches.

Denotative, Syntagmatic Reading/Viewing and Analysis of *Women's Cot*

Producer: Great Movies Production Company

Associate Producer: Joe Okoh

Director: Dickson Iroegbu

Main Cast: Zack Orji, Bukky Ajayi, Onyeka Silva, Ngozi Orji, Emma France, Rita Edochie, Florence Richard

Situation 1: Long shot of late Senator's sitting room (Home Paradigm)

Barely two months after the death of the Senator in a crash, the brothers of the Senator walk into the parlor and are seated. They tell Joyce (the late Senator's widow) that according to their custom and tradition, a woman cannot inherit any property. They also remind her that since she has only a female child by their late brother, the only thing she can do is to furnish them with information about the properties her husband left behind. They insist on having details of the millions the late Senator amassed in his life time. The widow, in close-up in utter consternation, tells them that her late husband's death is just too fresh for the family members to be thinking of sharing the properties which she and her late

husband worked hard to acquire. She vehemently refuses to engage them in any dialogue. She promises them that the matter will be taken to court. The siblings of the late senator leave the scene/frame in anger and consternation.

Situation 2: L/S of Adama’s Office (Work Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy) (*Overhead shot of Adama and Joyce already seated*). Joyce is pleasantly surprised that Adama has fore knowledge of her predicament. After listening to her complaints Adama advises her to ensure that all the assets of her late husband, home and abroad should be transferred to her coded and secret account. Adama assures her that a lawyer who is also a widow is available to fight for her rights and that even the judge is a widow.

Situation 3: L/S of Adama’s Office (Work Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Joyce walks into the frame and basks in the euphoria of having won the case in which sixty percent of her late husband’s properties is awarded to her and her only daughter. She thanks Adama for the assistance and opines that a sorority for less privileged widows should be formed so that they can attract funds from national and international agencies. They are also of the opinion that churches should be contacted for their assistance to save widows from their piteous predicaments.

Situation 4: L/S of Ezewanyi’s Palace (Home Paradigm/Inside

Dichotomy) Ezewanyi is elated and satisfied with the choice of Adama for the despicable use she intends to recruit her for. According to Ezewanyi, Adama is chosen for an assignment because she is pretty, intelligent and possesses a certain ruthlessness needed for the job. There is a close-up of a diabolical pot which contains fifty naira. She gives the amount to Adama and says, “to whom much is given much is expected”.

Situation 5: L/S of the parlor of Abigail’s late husband (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Abigail is accused of killing her late husband by his siblings. The three brothers-in-law try to seduce her on different occasion. But she refuses and repudiates them for such uncanny acts. Due to their failure to have sexual intercourse with her, they resolve that she must swear to an oath in the shrine that she was not the killer of her husband.

Situation 6: L/S of the village foot path close to the shrine (Outside Dichotomy)

Abigail is subjected to different forms of humiliation by the crowd of villagers, calling her the murderer of her husband, which she consistently denies. She is led to the shrine by her brothers-in-law. On their way, Joyce sees them and disrupts the proceedings. She insists that Abigail who is a Christian, did not kill her

husband and cannot appear before any shrine to swear to an oath.

Situation 7: L/S of Adama’s Sitting Room (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Joyce and Abigail visit Adama. Joyce explains to Adama the ignominious ordeal which Abigail has suffered in the hands of her brothers-in-law, including their attempts to make love to her. When Abigail complains about these sexual advances, Adama suggests that she should yield to their requests because that is the only way she can manipulate them and get full control of her late husband’s properties. According to Adama, sex provides the best route to the acquisition of power.

Situation 8: Adama’s Parlour (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy) Joyce forms the *Widow’s Cot!*

The non-governmental organization (NGO) also has a foundation which can attract funds from government, private national and international agencies and churches. It is a noble sorority. Joyce is elected the acting president.

Situation 9: L/S of Adama’s Parlor While Adama and Joyce discuss the sorority, Tobi (Adama’s “sugar-son”) enters the frame. When Joyce learns that Tobi is a lover to Adama, she questions Adama’s sense of impropriety for dating a young boy. Adama explains that it is better to

have a young boy who you can manipulate and control than to have a married man whose wife can pose a problem. Adama reiterates that what the eyes do not see the mind does not bother about.

Situation 10: L/S of Joyce’s Residence (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Franca and Tobi enter the frame. Long shot of Joyce already seated in the parlor. Close-up of her astonished face when she sees Tobi in the company of Franca (her daughter). Close up of her face showing that she recovers quickly from the surprise. She hides her surprise. Tobi, a successful university microbiology student, is also Franca’s lover. Later Tobi exits the frame. Joyce advises her daughter against having an affair with Tobi but cannot tell her the reason; nevertheless Franca resiliently states that she is deeply in love with Tobi.

Situation 11: Joyce’s Residence

Long shot of Tobi and Franca in discussion. Franca reveals to Tobi her mother’s objection to their relationship. He tries to know why but cannot know because her mother (Joyce) refused to reveal the real reason behind her objection.

Situation 12: L/S of Adama’s Sitting Room Overhead shot of Adama and Tobi in discussion. Tobi tells Adama point-blank that their love affair should terminate because

he is in love with Franca (Joyce's daughter). Close-up of Adama's maniacal face of anger. She says that Tobi cannot and can never terminate their love affair because she calls the shots. Tobi emphatically remains adamant and leaves her, visibly angry.

Situation 13: L/S of Adama's Parlour (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Joyce and Adama are seated in the frame. Joyce informs Adama that she wants to be out of the country for six months with the intention of selling some of her late husband's properties abroad and pay the money from the sales into a different account. Shortly after, Adama complains bitterly about being dumped by Tobi. She vows to deal with him appropriately. Joyce pleads and apologizes on behalf of Tobi. Adama promises not to take revenge against Tobi. Joyce is visibly unsatisfied with Adama's assurance that nothing will happen to Tobi.

Situation 14: L/S of Adama's Parlour (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Ezewani appears from nowhere. She instructs Adama to recruit the widows of prominent men in society, such as senators, ministers, governors and their deputies. She admonishes her to be quick about it.

Situation 15: L/S of Adama's Parlour (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Abigail and Adama are already seated. Abigail complains that she is being harassed by her brothers-in-law's wives. Adama advises her to kill the three men and render their wives as widows.

Situation 16: L/S of Abigail's bedroom (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Abigail dressed seductively is waiting for one of the brothers-in-law. While pretending to want another round of sex with him, she poisons some orange juice and gives it to him to drink. As soon as he dies, she quickly leaves the scene of the murder.

Situation 17: L/S of Adama's Parlor (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Abigail returns to Adama and informs her that the family members of her late husband are insisting that she must swear to an oath before the village shrine to exonerate herself.

Situation 18: Long Shot of the interior of a church (Inside Dichotomy)

Present in the congregation are widows. The main aspect of the pastor's sermon is that a collection point should be placed in the church every Sunday for money to be collected on behalf of the widows. The pastor also encourages other widows to join the cot. Later, Adama addresses members of the congregation and present cash gifts of fifty thousand naira only to the

widows. A woman who is not a widow also collects cash.

Situation 19: L/S of the sitting room of the woman who feigned widowhood. (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy).

The husband of the woman who collected money pretending to be a widow queries her furiously. She replies him that though he is her husband, he is a living corpse.

Situation 20: L/S of Adama's Office (Work Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

The pretender-widow who collected money meant for widows enters the frame and joins Adama who is already seated. The woman is told by Adama that she is aware that her husband is alive. She advises her to join the cot by killing her husband, the woman's response is in the affirmative.

Situation 21: Ezewanyi's Parlor (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

The *Women's Cot* metamorphoses into a full blown secret cult for widows. Ezewanyi tells Adama that more members are needed in the cult. She wants the wives of prominent individuals like senators, governors, commissioners, judges and special advisers to be recruited as members.

Situation 22: L/S of Adama's Parlor (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Members of the cult are present. A woman who was earlier advised to

kill her husband so that she can reap the financial benefits of becoming a member but was not admitted after killing her husband, brings the police to arrest the cult members. Unfortunately for the woman, Adama the leader of the cult is well connected at the top echelon of the police force. She telephones the superior of the police hired by the woman, the police officers arrive promptly. Instead of arresting the cult members, they disarm the police who came earlier, seize their uniforms and arrest the woman for the murder of her husband.

Situation 23: State Security Service Office (Work Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

The State Security Service (SSS) are already aware that the cult pretends to assist widows whereas, in reality, they encourage women to murder their husbands and reap the financial benefits of membership. They realize that the task of apprehending the members (who are widows of late senators, governors and ministers), is very tortuous because their patron and leader is the mother of the governor of the state where the crimes are being committed. The State Security Service (SSS) and the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (an anti-graft agency) are to cautiously monitor the cult's activities so that they could strike at the appropriate time.

Situation 24: L/S of Governor's Sitting Room (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

The governor thinks that he is being frustrated by his political opponents. However, Ezewanyi (his mother) promises him that as long as she is alive, nothing bad will happen to him and his regime. She establishes that there is nothing he can ever do without her.

Situation 25: L/S of Adama's Room (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Adama presides over the meeting. Adama tells the cult members saying "God provides the food and the devil provides the cook" God provides the food and the devil provides the cook" and that the Queen of Queens (Ezewanyi) is in full control. However Joyce wants the cult to return to its original status, intention and philosophy. Meanwhile, the deputy governor's wife about to be conscripted into the women's cult is promised to be made the next governor of the state if she joins. In addition she is promised some millions of naira if she can kill her husband.

Situation 26: L/S of the Deputy Governor's Sitting Room (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy).

The deputy governor's wife poisons the food for her husband who, under sedation is strangled to death by a hired killer.

Situation 27: L/S of Ezewanyi's Parlor (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy).

The deputy governor's wife is formally admitted into the women's cult, after which Adama moves a motion for a substantive leader (governor) of the cult to be elected. She is supported by Ezewanyi after a protracted debate between Adama and Joyce. Joyce wants the women's cult to return to its original intention of helping poor widows in the fight against patriarchal oppression while Adama supports the idea that the wives of prominent men should kill their husbands for affluence. She promises them that when she is elected as governor, the cult's members will be wealthier than they are presently. At the end of the debate an election is conducted. Adama defeats Joyce by thirty two (32) votes to twelve (12). After her acceptance speech, two new members are given cash gifts to mourn their late husbands.

Situation 28: L/S of Ezewanyi's Parlor (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Rita (an undercover agent) is admitted into the cult. She is given a "covenant" liquid to drink and a gift of the latest Cherokee Jeep. She notes in her diary that the cult members' brains are controlled by the Queen of Queens, who is not only diabolical but well connected; she is the mother of an influential governor. Ezewanyi suspects that

Rita is not a widow. She is ordered to kill her husband forthwith or face the consequential wrath of the cult.

Situation 29: L/S of Ezewanyi's Parlor (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Addressing the meeting, after interrogating the members to fish out the person who is betraying them, Ezewanyi tells the members to take an oath by kissing the calabash. After kissing the calabash Rita collapses.

Situation 30: L/S of Rita's Family Parlor (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Close-up (of Rita's husband) finding her corpse. He picks up her diary which says "it is getting tougher. Ezewanyi suspects that you are alive, we must discuss, it is too late". Rita's husband weeps and regrets using his wife as an undercover agent.

Situation 31: Adama's Parlour (Home Paradigm/Inside Dichotomy)

Joyce wins Adama over to her side after revealing to her that Ezewanyi murdered Adama's husband (the late Chief of Naval Staff).

Situation 32: L/S Ezewanyi's Parlor (Home Paradigm/Inside dichotomy) Adama dies trying to poison Ezewanyi..

Situation 33: L/S of the Office of the State Security Service.

The security operatives recognize that Ezewanyi and her women's cult are a grave security problem, which can only be solved through

presidential decree of a state of emergency in the governor's state in order to neutralize his power. The president is informed about the danger that Ezewanyi and her cult members are posing to the peace and security of the country.

Situation 34: L/S of Governor's Office. The governor is informed about his mother's diabolism and criminal tendencies; he orders her to stop. Ezewanyi arranges an automobile accident for him and members of his entourage in which only the governor survived. Ezewanyi says she is keeping an empty bottle which she intends to use to store the governor's blood when it becomes expedient.

Situation 35: It is revealed that Ezewanyi's power resides in the bottles of the blood of innocent persons killed and stored in the shrine. The fetish items are destroyed and security operatives move to arrest her. After the ensuing battle of resistance, security operatives succeed in capturing and arresting Ezewanyi. Consequently, the governor resigns from office whilst at the cult, Joyce regains her leadership position.

Connotative, Paradigmatic Reading, Viewing and Analysis of the Signs of Cultural Identity, Womanism and the Re-Imaging of Nigeria in *Women's Cot*

A cursory and communicative appraisal of the story and structure of

the *Women's Cot* reveals the following observations:

1. In both the diegetic and real audiential universe of the motion picture, widows are treated with indignity in its Igbo setting. They are seen as properties of inheritance by male members of the family especially when the late husband dies without leaving behind a male child or a will. Nevertheless, in Itsekiri and Urhobo ethnic nationalities of Delta State of Nigeria, female children can inherit properties even if there are male children but the eldest male child is usually given the largest share.

2. Another point that is established is that a widow is the prime suspect in the event of her husband's death. She must swear to an oath in a shrine to prove her innocence. But such is not the case when a wife dies.

3. Widows are also perceived as sexual objects. An extension of 'sharing' the wife of the deceased as a property is that the brothers of a widow separately make sexual advances to a widow who is still in a state of mourning. Carnality is taken to a ridiculous extent just as the debasement of womanhood is outrageously expressed in this film.

4. In the diegetic universe of the film, the steps taken by the widows to emancipate themselves from phallogocentrism can be trichotomized into sonority (altruistic/moderate), diabolical/occult/selfish/criminal and

politico-economic propulsion. In the first part of the triad, Joyce wants the *Widow's Cot* to be formed as a way of serving justice to the less privileged widows who are oppressed and do not have the courage or financial power to pursue their cases to logical conclusions. In the second part of the trichotomy, Adama and Ezewanyi metamorphose the sonority to a full blown cult with diabolical and pernicious motives. They want the wives of prominent individuals to kill their husbands in order to be recruited. The third part of the trichotomy is that by eliminating men, women will have absolute dominance over the male and take over political power from them. This is not the case in the real audiential universe of the film where women's organizations are very moderate - they want to help their husbands to succeed and at the same time they want widows/women to be emancipated from some of the archaic traditional practices such as forced early marriage, female genital mutilation and maltreatment of widows.

However, in real Nigerian society, female cult groups are formed for different reasons. The first is motivation for lesbian rights. The second motive is to kill and maim male or female members who are either boyfriend snatchers or womanizers on tertiary institution campuses. The third part of the triad is not the real audiential universe of

the Nigerian society. In fact, women in Nigeria support their husbands who are seeking political power and are even ready to oppose any female opposition candidates. The action of killing their husbands to gain economic and political power as a radical women's organization is outlandish.

5. How do widows satisfy their emotional needs in the absence of men in their lives? In the diegetic cosmology of the film, widows like Joyce discretely satisfy their sexual desire. In this secrecy, discretion is applied individually.

6. From one's reading of the signs in the diegetic universe of the film in which a woman whose husband is alive collects money meant only for widows, it is obvious that in the real audiential universe of Nigerian society most married women live like widows because either their husbands are burdened by penury or irresponsibility. Married men are portrayed as having the tendency to neglect their families in pursuit of "anything in skirts".

Though the diegetic and audiential universes mix in the film, it is the universe of comparative analysis that helps to situate iconic Nigerian conditions in the movie's multiple symbolisms of womanhood.

Iconicity, Symbolism and Indexicality in *Women's Cot*

This analysis is based on Peirce's (1993, pp.2, 58, 228) triadic model

of the icon/symbol/index in contrast to the Saussurean diegetic model. According to him (cited in Chandler 2004, p.47; Omatsola, 2008, p.70) a symbol is that in which the signifier does not resemble the signified but which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional, so that the relationship must be learnt (for example, language in general, plus specific languages, alphabetical letters, punctuation marks/numbers, Morse codes, traffic lights, national flags). An icon is a resemblance or split imitator of the signified, being similar in possessing some of its qualities; for example, portraits, a cartoon, a scale model, onomatopoeia, metaphor, realistic soundtrack and derivative gestures. Index is the mode in which the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some way (physically or causally to the signified). This can also be observed or inferred. Example are natural signs (smoke, thunder, foot-prints, echoes, non-synthetic odors and flavors), medical symptoms (pains, rashes, pulse rate and bleeding); measurement instruments (thermometer, speedometer, scales, and clocks); pointers (arrows, a pointing index finger and a directional signage); recording (audio recorder, a still camera, film, video or television shot); personal trademarks (hand writing, catch phrase and art illustration); and

indexical words (that, this, here and there).

In screenology and for the purpose of this analysis, these triadic modes cannot be compartmentalized; they are composite. The following are the iconic/symbolic/indexical signs read/viewed and identified from both the surface and deep structures of *Women's Cot*.

Character Paradigms

From the lead to the support and minor characters, the paradigms gleaned from the analysis of the film present themselves visibly and irrevocably.

- Joyce Ihuoma contrasts with Adanma as iconic, symbolic and index of positive image for Nigerian widows/women.
- Joyce signifies, imitates and connects with altruistic womanism or feminism.
- Adama is an icon, a symbol and an index of:
 - radical feminism, Machiavellian feminism and diabolical feminism.
 - negative image of Nigerian widows/women.
- Ezewanyi the dreaded Queen of Queens signifies, imitates and connects with
 - the extremely negative Nigerian women.
 - the dubious, radical and satanic feminist.
 - spiritual wickedness in high places.
- Abigail's character is an icon, symbol and index of
 - naïve and fickle-minded Nigerian women.
 - victims of patriarchal oppression, social suppression and phallogocentric practices in Nigeria.
- Tobi signifies, imitates and connects with
 - "sugarboyism" in Nigeria.
 - victims of sexual exploitation by radical feminists.
- Mrs. Rita Amogu is an icon, symbol and index of
 - patriotism and altruism.
 - Advocacy for gender equality/equity.
 - agape love and threnodic essence of sacrifice.
 - a virtuous wife.
 - kindness and fidelity.
 - victims of diabolical, dubious and pernicious feminism.
- Siblings of late senator (Joyce's husband) are iconic, symbolic and indices of:
 - phallogocentrism, patriarchal oppression, and suppression of widows/women in Nigeria.
 - debased/anachronistic culture, customs and pernicious tradition of the people.
- Abigail's male in-laws iconic, symbolic and point in the direction of pernicious and obnoxious traditional practices against widows.

- Abigail's in-laws generally signify, imitate and connect with murder through seductive manipulations.
- Deputy Governor's wife is an icon, symbol and index of vaulted ambition and wickedness.
- Deputy Governor signifies, imitates and connects with
 - victims of vaulted ambition and wickedness.
 - diabolical matriarchal manipulation and convoluted desire.

Ideational Paradigms

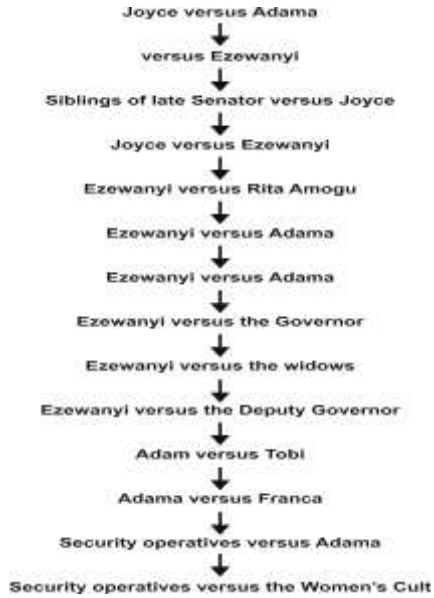
- Phallocentrism is an icon, symbol and index of the oppression and suppression of widows/women.
- Late senator's parlor signifies, imitates and connects with opulence.
- Village path represents the anachronistic, satanic and pernicious traditional practices.
- Female pudenda signify, imitate and connect with women's power, matriarchal subjugation and suppression of men.
- The church is to modern virtue what the Nigerian Police is to law and order as icons, symbols and indices.

- Police, however is inextricably linked to oppression and suppression.
- Women's cult signifies, imitates and connects with modern, pernicious, diabolic and satanic practices, as well as insecurity, fear and horror.
- *Widow's Cot* is an icon, symbol and index of the real struggle against patriarchal oppression and phallocentrism.
- Widows are tied to sufferings and bondage.
- Theme music ("someone is crying, is a widow") = icon/symbol/index of widow's sorrow and tears.
- Theme music *kill am! Kill am! Make your life better* = icon/symbol/index of perniciousness and wickedness.
- Theme music ("Ezewanyi, Queen of Queens live forever") is satanic, matriarchal eulogy.

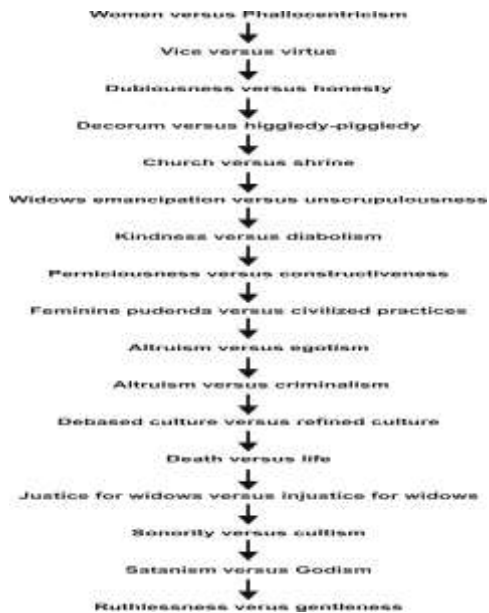
Binary Oppositions

After viewing both the surface and deep structures of the diegetic and real audiential cosmology of *Women's Cot*, the following binary oppositional signs could be constructed.

Oppositional Character Paradigms



B. Ideational Paradigms



Histrionics and Cinematographic Signs in *Women's Cot*

A remark about the histrionics and semiotics of performance of *Women's Cot* is important for a balanced analysis. It is curious that a movie, scripted and produced by men and which unenthusiastically portray the image of women, was accepted by veteran Nigerian actresses - Bukky Ajayi, Joke Sylvia and Oyeka Onwenu as fit for them to act in spite of their acknowledged feministic disposition and obvious negative depictions of their roles. Their top performance in character interpretation and delivery of conviction indicate a wholesome acceptance of the script, even if they did not contribute to its writing. Their actions, as directed in the film, combine to highlight the artistic, aesthetic and ecstatic levels of sublimity in the semiotics of performance. Costumes, make-up, scenic designs, sound tracks, themes and interludes add to the artistic derivatives and professionalism of the popular actors, especially the females. Good delivery of character is not uncomplimentary of the script, neither is it should it be used to blame the actors. What is profound is that the film's histrionics brings ponder and the directorial cinematography did not suffer to deliver. Additionally, the film does not have subtitling issues that characterize many Nollywood

movies (Daramola, Hamilton and Omojola, 2014, p.2).

The filmic signs in the *Women's Cot* are characterized mainly by long shots and close-ups. For example, the close-ups of Ezewannyi depict horror and fear that is unmistakable. The close up of Joyce's reading of Adama's face of revenge is that of convincing apprehension. Other cinematographic signs are close-ups of the smoky pot of money, the deadly oath wine, as well as the use of disappearance effects.

Conclusion and Recommendation

After a syntagmatic and paradigmatic reading and analysis of both the surface and deep structures of the filmic actions and a study of both the dyadic and triadic signs and significations of the diegetic and real audiential universe of *Women's Cot*, one can infer that the film aptly communicates the usual oppression and suppression of widows (and women by patriarchy and phallocentrism). From both the denotative and connotative readings and analyses of the film, cultism has become an albatross in the Nigerian society.

However, do Nigerian women's organizations possess the deep-seated ambition of killing prominent men in order to take over power from them? A typical answer is in the negative though the producer runs the risk of being accused of instigating women to kill their

husbands as part of the build up to taking over their spouses' properties. This accusation would have been taken seriously if the producer of the film had been a woman.

This morbid aspect of the film is not a part of Nigerian culture and mentality. Not only is it unfair, a disservice to and denting of the image of Nigerian women, it is also a denigration of Nigerian culture. Although the law of retributive justice (karma) caught up with Ezewanyi and her cohorts, the film fails to convince the viewers that there is poetic justice in the film.

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- I recommend that while struggling for their total emancipation from the shackles of phallocentrism, patriarchal oppression and suppression, Nigerian women should not allow their struggle to be hijacked by people with criminal minds. Taking the lives of their husbands or anyone at all is against the culture of any civilized society which most communities in Nigeria lay claim to. Women should continue to see themselves as mothers to the nation and the umbrella for all.

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