

Gender Perspectives and Women Political Roles in Kemi Adetiba's Return of the *King of Boys*,

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Abstract

Women and politics seem not to mix in underdeveloped and developing economies. A good example is the recent rejection of the constitutional amendment meant to empower women in Nigeria politics. It is not only in Nigeria that women are marginalized politically and economically. The glass ceiling restricted women all over the world. Although, there is a growing recognition that women are marginalized from political, economical, religious and public life. However, women are putting themselves forward for elections more and more, yet their numbers are still far behind those of men. Even though it is agreed that development, peace and prosperity in societies cannot be achieved without half of the world's population, women, they are however continuously sidelined in decision-making. They continue to face structural, socioeconomic, institutional and cultural barriers. This paper explores the challenges facing women in politics and the strategies and tactics women are using to tackle these challenges. The use of Kemi Adetiba's *The return of the King of Boys* as a tool in examining this issue. Feminism theory serves as the plank of analyzing the film in order to examine role of women and the ceiling placed on them in Nigerian politics. Recommendations are then made on ways of improving women political participation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Feminism, Politics, King of Boys, Political Participation, Film.

Introduction

The world over, participation of women in politics and administration has been of no significant value. For instance, UN Women facts and figure (2019) states that only 36% of American females in elective positions, Europe 28%, and

Africa 23% among others. The above statistics show that women's low participation and involvement in politics is not just an African issue but a global phenomenon. This has been due to the men folk's attitude towards women based on religious placement of women as men's companion and not as figureheads. Women are therefore regarded as 'weaker vessels'. In Nigeria and indeed the world-over, the society feels reluctant to assign duties of superior positions to women, but recent development has shown that women can perform as much as their male counterparts if not better; A good example is Angela Merkel of Germany . Records have shown that some women are more effective than most men especially in administrative duties, politics and political roles inclusive. Salami (2006) explains that, Nigerian politics is predominantly politics of men by men and for men as it is men dominate the political space, men formulate the rules of the political game and they define the standards for evaluation. Political life is based on male norms and values and in some cases even male way of life. Think of a political meeting in the middle of the night or 1.00am either married or single how many women can attend such meetings?, Women are marginal to national politics, and more generally, to the public life of our nation. As a result, one of the greatest challenges of Nigeria woman today, as with all African women, is her exclusion from the political arena and her invisibility in political affairs .Considering this invisibility, it is not surprising that very few women have gained access into the political offices .It is worth noting at this point that in pre-colonial times some women exerted political influence and power ;leading armies to battle, and engaging in statecraft .In situations of wars, conflict and extreme oppression, many women have risen to deliver their territories such as *Efunsetan Aniwura*, *Moremi* of Ife and *Amina* of Zaria in the Northern Nigeria to mention a few.

These women were exceptional in their times as they tried to challenge male hegemony which was dominant in their era. In recent times, have challenged the low many critics concerned with marginalized political participation have challenged the low participation of women and advised that women or gender friendly political strategies are adopted in order to boost female or gender equity in and equality in political participation. In traditional societies, for example in Yoruba land, women play important roles in the governance of traditional societies. The Iyalode, and the Erelu perform political and religious roles in Yoruba traditional settings. This means that history in Africa did not support the suppression of women. The question then is why is this so in modern and postmodern times? An attempt to answer this question is in using the feminist theory to interrogate this poser. This is what the next section of this paper is about unravel.

Theoretical Framework

This paper will be using feminist literary theories such as feminism, womanism, and stiwanism among other relevant ones to engage this reality of women in the Political affair where women are being marginalized and discriminated upon. The Feminist theory is a major branch within sociology that shifts its assumptions, analytic lens, and topical focus away from the male viewpoint and experience toward that of women. In doing so feminist theory shines a light on social problems, trends, and issues that are otherwise of overlooked or misidentified by the historically dominant male perspectives of social theory.

This paper is written within a feminist social constructionist paradigm. Social constructionist provides the opportunity and the conceptual tools for making sense of women's place in literature to date and for constructing a women-inclusive

literature for the future. Feminism is about all genders having equal rights and opportunities. It's about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realize their full rights. It is about leveling the playing field between genders, and ensuring that diverse women and girls have the same opportunities in life available to boys and men. The Feminist movement is an ongoing reaction against the male definition of woman. In most western civilizations men have dominated politics, society and the economy of their worlds. They have suppressed the voices of the women so that they could mold it the way they wanted it. Thus they defined what was feminine as insubstantial, subservient and devoid of will. Femininity was further thought to be emotion driven, illogical, naive and ought not be taught to be anything else. Feminism has been changing the world for more than a century and the new viewpoints it has brought give a new insight into literature. Feminist critics siphon the male perspective from a piece and look carefully at what the feminine aspects of the work are saying to the world. It is a way of showing the interweaving male and female influences in writing to make it function.

The conservative or liberal feminism is prevalent in the Nigeria critical studies. To the conservative feminist scholar, feminism is all about equality between men and women in terms of economic, political and socio-cultural opportunities. Feminism in Africa is viewed by many as too "Western and too radical" (Utoh-Ezeajugh, 140). It is therefore, obvious that Western feminism is considered "inappropriate and ineffective in solving problems of gender discrimination in the African social sphere. Concepts which are more culture-specific and address women's concerns from a supposed African perspective are womanism, black feminism and motherism" (Utoh-Ezeajugh, 140). Hence,

motherism, Stiwanism and so on, provide strong and incontrovertible indicators that these groups of feminists have achieved a paradigm shift that tilts Nigerian feminist agenda towards the conservative feminist agenda of gender equality rather than the radical feminist agenda of female domination.

Therefore, **Nigerian feminist agenda** is mainly about restructuring patriarchal institutions to favour gender equality. Thus, the desired Nigerian feminist agenda is conditioned by genderism hence major feminist movements like Stiwanism are committed to this agenda. Their goal is to put in place mores and cultural institutions that favour gender equality. Nigerian feminist agenda is committed to emergent economic and political hierarchy that can redistribute power and redefine one dimensional value sharing theories that subjugate the female folk. Nigerian feminist agenda therefore differs from the Western radical feminist agenda which champions a female-dominated matriarchal society. Nigerian feminist agenda is a product of revolutionary dynamism occasioned by cultural, economic and political changes in the African continent. Though scholars argue that women in traditional Nigerian societies were not subjugated and therefore, enjoyed equal rights and freedom with men, there are some incontrovertible evidences of male domination and oppressive practices against women from the primordial era till today. This paper, while examining "gender perspectives and political roles in Kemi Adetiba's *The return of the King*, will try to look at how feminism played out in the film.

Kemi Adetiba's *Return of the King of Boys*

The film exemplifies the power play of Nigeria politics, godfatherism, political violence, character assassination among others as coordinated and led by Alhaja Eniola. King of Boys *the Return of the King* is a 2021 7-part limited series directed

by Kemi Adetiba. It was released on 27 August 2021 Exclusively on Netflix as a sequel to the 2018 Nigerian crime political thriller film, *King of Boys*. Sola Sobowale and Toni Tones reprise their roles as Eniola Salami with Reminisce, Illbliss, Akin Lewis, Osas Ighodaro and Keppy Ekpenyong also reprising their roles. Additional cast members include Nse Ikpe-Etim, Richard Mofe Damijo, Efa Iwara, Deyemi Okanlawon and Charly Boy. The series follows Eniola Salami following her return after 5 years in exile. Not contented with the prospect of a fresh start, she immediately resumes her quest to launder her underworld persona into legitimate political power this time aiming even higher than before. In this sequel, Alhaja Salami, disgraced underworld kingpin and "king of boys", has returned to the country after a governmental pardon. Upon returning, she promptly declares her political ambition to become the Lagos State governor, but old and new enemies, personal demons, and a new player combined to stand in her way. These are what these seven episodes in Netflix original series. In the seven-part series, Adetiba relieves in continuation, the return of Salami, her lead character in the feature-length film, 'King of Boys'. 'Salami returns to the country bitter about the defeats she had endured. This time around, she is seeking a higher good by contesting for a leadership position in Lagos. Hooliganism earned Laburu (the evil incarnate) an empire of fame around political heavyweights in the country. To reclaim her position after a long exile, Salami contends with old adversaries (Aare Akinwande and Makanaki) and newer rivals (Odudubariba, Jumoke Randle, Dapo Banjo, Rev. Ifeanyi, and Governor Tunde Randle) and must fight for the power she feels most deserving of. Popularly known as the King of Boys, Salami will later embrace corruption, violence, and blackmail to actualise her vengeful desires. Jumoke, the first lady, is one

feisty character portrayed by Nse Ikpe-Etim who makes complex decisions for her husband, Tunde Randle, the governor of Lagos State. Bent on ensuring that he returns for a second term, she leads the contest on his behalf against Eniola. But a young courageous journalist of 'Conscience Newspaper', Dapo Banjo, is committed to the ethics of his profession as an investigative reporter. He will dig deep and try to unravel the cult of politics and thuggery which have enabled Madam Salami and other political honchos to unlawfully thrive in Lagos. Makanaki, Reminisce's character, surprisingly returns to life after Odogwu Malay, portrayed by rapper, Bliss assassinated him on Salami's orders as a punishment for his impunity. Odudubariba also wants the throne for himself and Odogwu Malay must await the vengeance of a betrayed friendship. Aare Akinwande, the vicious humorous character of Akin Lewis, plots Eniola's demise for the second time. In the end, the nefarious culture of Lagos street ruffians and corrupt political elites collapse as Salami's quest to own both terrains for herself materialised.

Feminist and Political Roles in the *Return of the King of Boys*

Kemi Adetiba's sophomore project *King of Boys* is many things, from political quasi-thriller to a work that is tart, macabre, maximalist and acutely self-aware. Critically, *King of Boys* cannot be analysed away from its feminist backdrop and Adetiba makes it look accidental but it's not. In her piece since filming 2016's *The Wedding Party*, you would find her work *King Women*, an interview-based series that received great reception for probing into the lives of powerful, successful women in entertainment, the media and beyond.

The title, "Women as King" showed Adetiba's creative impulse for designating her female subjects with masculine identifiers.

In the era of social media-obsessed millennials calling themselves kings and queens, *Adetiba* is turning gendered language on its head. In *King of Boys*, this signature sharpens into a blunt force. Our protagonist Eniola Salami (Sola Sobowale) leads the pack in a bold, feminist fantasia where women are fully evolved beings and do what they want; the patriarchy be damned. Some of the movie's brightest moments are loaded with subversion - the scene in which Amaka (Sharon Ooja) walks into a restaurant/bar while Kitan (Ademola Adedoyin) and his friends are drinking still stand outstanding. After Kitan tells the waiter that he intends to pay for whatever she orders, Amaka sends the waiter back to let Kitan and his friends know that she is going to pay for their drinks, a good Comment on putting patriarchy in its place. Women have arrived, the action shouts, men take note and take cover.

The scene makes a mockery of male entitlement and the gender roles that deem men as financial providers. Helping to run the Salami Empire is Kemi (Adesua Etomi), Eniola's non-biological daughter who makes countering decisions as Eniola's supremacy faces political-motivated threats. Toni Tones, whose Nollywood footprint screams rich, spoilt drama queen, twists herself with surprising versatility. She plays a younger Eniola with dizzying diligence, operating in the same tonal register and character complexity. But the feminist scope of *King of Boys* does not just flatten women into a matriarchy: they are allowed to be vulnerable, insufferable, terrible, imperfect, and even angry. That anger is experienced within our current cultural landscape. On the Internet and beyond, female anger is a direct response to the overbearing framework of patriarchy and this has translated into tangible outcomes: women marching in markets to protest against harassment, initiatives to combat rape culture through awareness and

consent education, and the movement minimizing period poverty. In *King of Boys*, none of the principal female casts are subservient to patriarchal male authority and Adetiba ensures they take up space, however flawed, shaking the whole system and leaving the margins behind – because women no longer belong there.

Why a female king/Oba? Thinking of the selective nature of feminism will not make a person give up this question the mind flirts around a deviant pose "Queen of Boys: the Return of the Queen" in favour of its heroine Alhaja Eniola Salami. However, having Eniola as the only feminine figure among an underworld syndicate of men, including ego-driven Makanaki (Reminisce), Odogwu Malay (Ill Bliss) and, later, Odudubariba (Charley Boy), lends credence to the choice of a rather kingship affair. It also makes sense to treat "king" with a generic ambience immune to gender partisanship. Another rationale is that prior to the usurpation by Eniola, her husband has been in reality, leader of the group, and even that very scene of Eniola's youthful seizure of power is greeted by begrudging countenance which drive us to believe that having a female leader infiltrate the ranks of the crime-peddling men was, for them, a displeasing novel idea even though they could not resist without sure-fire boomerang of aggression. Throughout this franchise, the message of women empowerment is undisguisedly the handwriting on the wall.

A person will think of Alhaja Eniola Salami (Sola Sobowale) in the same way he will perceive the Sugar sisters (Adesua Etomi, Bisola Aiyeola and Bimbo Ademoye) in *Sugar Rush* (2019) and the Wakandan duo of Shuri (Letitia Wright) and Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o) in Marvel's *Black Panther* (2018): all Black females empowered through varying but daring, adventurous routes which one would have ordinarily thought of in pre-Westernized Africa as the exclusive undertaking of

men. These feminine personas put their lives on the line to highlight their images while at the same time unsettling or competing with the place of masculine dominion. In *Sugar Rush*, Chief Douglass and Anikulapo are outsmarted and emasculated by scheming females; *Black Panther* projects technologically gifted and transmorphic Shuri as the brains behind her brother King T'Challa's sustained strength. Eniola Salami poses a threat to Aare Akinwande's (Akin Lewis) godfatherly rigmarole.

The prequel to *King of Boys* series ends on a curious note: self-exiled, Brooklyn-based Eniola Salami, looking recuperated and blistering with life once again, oversees a meeting of the elders through a call. While she is no longer physically in charge at this time, her last-gasp indulgent smile in this scenic postscript gambles on our intelligence: we can expect a sequel where we suspect that treacherous Odogwu Malay, having gunned down his associate Makanaki, will vie for the throne, relishing his chance against remote antagonism from the kingpin herself. Hardly anyone foresees Ade Tiger's active involvement in a subsequent plot. Contrariwise, when we are tuned in to the series, Ade Tiger is a more developed version, not only playing votary to Eniola's machinations but also elevated to a pseudo-Kemi status, as Eniola herself would like his feet fitted in her deceased daughter's shoes. Odogwu, unfortunately, evolves as a toothless louse and hedonist, while Odudubariba commandeers the revered seat among the elders, all the time threatening fire and brimstone on Eniola in absentia.

The Return of the King opens with merrymaking from Odogwu Malay's camp, interspersed with the rousing homecoming of Eniola Salami elsewhere, both celebratory events simulating the birthday party of Eniola Salami in the exposition of the movie prequel. Rather than filmic coincidence, this appears to

be a deliberately orchestrated stylistic approach, of the director Kemi Adetiba's resourcefulness, perhaps a good-natured means of advancing through the innocuousness of music (juju and highlife in both *King of Boys* and *The Return of the King*), Drumming and dance, a culture of positivity, a slope of beauty, in the ugly web of conspiracies, betrayals, political turmoil and erosion of integrity that the story is fraught with. Eniola's political ambition is more assertive than it were in *King of Boys*. She no longer has to beg before any arrogant godfather and her resolve to have her "gele" (instead of the often-used term "cap") thrown in the Lagos gubernatorial race passes a strong feminist test. Adetiba's portrait of an unconquerable feminine impression in mainstream Lagos-Nigerian politics is, at best, a spiritualist longing, as reality dictates otherwise—never has there been a potential female governor in the history of Lagos State.

When female reporter Sade Bello desires to know Eniola's motivation to re-acquaint with the country despite the unexpected loss of her children, her response is a proverbial reflection on the needfulness to restore her devoured image. How indeed a resurrection! Then we learn from Eniola's speech that she has been vindicated, her criminal antecedents obliterated, but the bigger picture later unfolds as we understand that her release has been dubiously procured, underlining some super-political mischief. Perhaps this is a cue fetched from the Orwellian society in 1984 where the Ministry of Truth's (Minitrue) penchant for propaganda and adulteration of factual information are strategies for desensitizing the populace towards insurrection. And, needless to say, Dapo Banjo (Efa Iwara) of "The Conscience" newspaper flaunts a recalcitrantly self-destructive intellectual curiosity, comparing on like terms with the iconic character of Winston Smith in Orwell's 1984.

Eniola's youthful self, played by Toni Tones, suggests of wanton malevolence, and this is in stark contrast with her older self that has become more contemplative and slippery, though still dangerous. This internal struggle comes alive in psychodramatised scenarios, as Eniola alternates between the desire for redemption and egotistic drive for power. Her killing of Boxer, on account of Ade Tiger's accusation of treachery, is just an "unguarded moment" for the reinstatement of her pre-traumatic period of youthful rashness. But as much as appreciate) Eniola's daunting exploits, fear that her reaction, for a woman in modern Nigerian politics, are sometimes unconventionally woven over-the-bar spells. The most disturbing act for me being her unbridled assertiveness and defiance before President Mumusa (Keppy Ekpeyoung)-going as far as threatening to have him requisition, his place taken by an opponent Retired Admiral Peterside; it appears to me that, contrary to Kemi Adetiba's idealistic vision in this boasting experiment, the image of the woman in actual Nigerian politics has not been lifted to an intractable "godmotherly" zenith. If we excuse the film of this overestimation, then we can accept it in good faith as a cloying feminist attraction, as religious compensation for a predominantly patriarchal society. Away from Eniola, Lagos state First Lady Jumoke Randle's (Nse Ikpe-Etim) high-flown conduct also drives the plot into sporadic frenzies, positioning the storyline on the podium of a palatable political rivalry between the incumbent governor's clique and Eniola. Unlike in *King of Boys* where Eniola is largely antagonised by Makanaki, *The Return of the King* sets the ground running for a faceoff between two powerful women, Jumoke and Eniola. While we do not see anything wrong with a woman, in this case Jumoke, offering allegiance, the out-shadowing of her husband Governor Tunde Randle's (Lord Frank) persona is an enigmatic stride. In a conversation

with Aare, following a visit to his house, Jumoke boasts of her authority in the home: "It's true that my husband wears the crown, but I give the orders". What better way can one overturn the clichéd narrative of women playing second fiddle to men?

Another powerful feminine figure that surfaces is Tunde Randle's mother, whom Jumoke refers to simply as "Chief". We are first acquainted with her undisguised matriarchal authority when her aide informs her about incoming phone calls from the Minister of Works and Housing, to which the old lady responds that "And I'm sure he won't die if he has to make it six". You can trust, from inference, that she wields covert political influence up to the highest level, this knowledge treatable as a token of feminine positivity. First Lady Jumoke, we discover, is no more than a stooge to this old lady who will not hesitate to have her son's wife returned to the streets should he lose the gubernatorial race. From their conversation, the old lady hints at "reservations" to Jumoke's personality, a secret which is later played on to Eniola's vantage. A dig into Jumoke's dirty past by Eniola, showing Jumoke as an erstwhile low lifer and prostitute, becomes the required blackmail tool through which Eniola reaches a deuce and catches the First Lady unawares. If it were not that Nigeria was still addicted to conservative beliefs, Jumoke's personal antecedents, which, has no real untoward cut of her political bearing, should matter less to viewers. But this use of slut-shaming, as a viral strategy which females use to put one another in check, emphasizes the fact that feminine sexuality remains paddled by common place male-centric moral standards. Imagine how this messes with our feminist appreciation of the story. Adetiba's lead female characters are not weak, docile spectators. Eniola and Jumoke play and get muddled in the game of politics, having different ends to show for it. Eniola clinches victory at the governorship

polls and renews her remote influence over the table, subduing Odudubariba's coup and announcing Makanaki as her anointed successor. Jumoke gets trapped in a scandal and sees her influence in the Randles' home wane. We cannot underestimate how their feminine energies render the series a hit. And Eniola's victory is an against-all-odds motivation for Nigerian women, just as Kemi Adetiba's film becomes the vehicle for upward mobility of feminism in Nollywood. Using women as tools, Kemi Adetiba succinctly portray women as being important in the Nigerian society. A reminiscence of the position of women in traditional society either as mother, Queen or as Iyaloja or Erelu among the Osogbos .The two women who classified with Eniola brings to the capabilities of Nigeria women if and when the environment favours them.

Recommendations

Paving the way for more women in the political, business and civic arena is an investment in more just, equitable, and peaceful societies Girls and women have a right to engage in civil society, vote in elections, be elected to government offices serve on boards and make their voices heard in any process that will ultimately affect them, their families and their communities.

Political parties should be motivated to deliberately recruit women candidate to run for public office and commit meaningful financial support to women candidates by providing specialized campaign skills training targeted at women's needs including policy development, debating. techniques, networking, advocating, public speaking, leadership, media, grassroots mobilizing. strategic planning, and confidence building and fund raising. Journalists should be educated on the importance of women in politics and governance.

There should be synergy or partnership between women party members and party leaders to increase women's political credibility, intensify voters outreach to women by using the party platform to develop messages for and about women, advocate for the appointment of more women to cabinet-level positions and other high government positions should be encouraged while women portfolio should be diversified.

Women too like Eniola Salami should not fold their arms and watch men to relinquish power to them rather; they should go for what they wanted. This with unity of purpose, numerical strength, and boldness to challenge the status quo, women place in Nigerian Politics would be enhanced. The message of the *Return of the king of boys*, though seems unrealizable at present in Nigerian politics may not be too far from being actualized. There may be the coming of a strong character like Eniola Salami who will not only shatter the glass ceiling but will also poke patriarchy in the eye and change the narrative concerning masculinity and the domination of the Nigerian space by patriarchy and unbridled male dominance.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the film *The return of the king of the boys*, it is obvious that the maltreatment of women by the same society that they are its "custodians" and in whose "laps lies its destiny", will continue to throw up campaigns, protests, demonstrations and revolutions by women in their hunt for the realisation of Nigerian feminist agenda. The movie symbolizes feminist struggles and desire to bring about the liberation of women from acts of inhuman treatment and gender oppression that the society metes out to them in the name of culture and tradition. It is instructive to note that these cultures and traditions do not have the input of women in the first place as they are patriarchally determined. The justification behind the

liberation enterprise therefore, is to give women a new lease of life; to give them a sense of belonging as equal partners to men in the development of the society. More importantly, women should come together as common force to seek their rightful place in politics not as rivals but as part of stakeholders in the political economy.

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