

Gendering Money Rituals: A Disquisition on the Portraiture of (Fe)Male in Contemporary Nollywood Movies

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores gender representation in Nollywood movies, with a particular focus on the subject of money rituals. Quest for materialism, wealth, power, politics and socioeconomic control are some of the recurrent themes in Nollywood movies. A close examination of these themes, particularly in relation to the subject of money ritual, reveals that they have often been conveyed in the light of gender stereotype whereby certain gender/sex is portrayed as performing the ritual while the other is at the receiving end. While this paper reprobates the act of ritual killing, it examines the disparity in the representations or misrepresentations of gender along line money-ritualism in two purposively selected Nollywood movies: *The Yahoo Plus* (2021) and *Ògùn Owó* (2017). The paper draws theoretical insights from Simone de Beauvoir's notions on gender and Obioma Nnaemeka's 'Nego-feminism' that offers Afrocentric perspective for understanding gender relations, women's agency and resistance. It finds that Nollywood films as a reflection of the societal practices and beliefs align with socio-cultural perception of female as Other—they are represented in the movies both as 'ingredient' or 'material' for money rituals and as resistant mechanism that foregrounds the consequence of money-ritualism. It concludes that this representation is symmetrical to patriarchal nature of African society as well as provides ontological worldview and morality of the practice.

Keywords: Money rituals, Gendering money rituals, Gender theory, Nollywood movies

INTRODUCTION

Gender discourses have often had their focus on human society. In other words, discussing sex and gender is discussing the society and the people therein, and how they live their daily lives. One popular means through which social issues and human confrontations in the society are re-presented and conveyed is the mass media. The mass media especially television and films, as mirrors of the society, often project the inter-relationships and social interactions between sexes in the society. Television, video and films have evolved overtime as highly influential mode of popular culture; they have along with them emerging features that allow them to represent society's belief systems, perspectives and dispositions toward certain social phenomena, including gender issues. Not only do they possess the capacity to sustain the interest of their audience on these issues, but they also have the ability to influence and compel them to rethink and reconstruct them. Their capacity to influence their audience apparently stems from their unique features—their combination of both picture and sound. With the advancement in technology, it is now possible to stream films online and even download them through the use of cell phones, IPAD, laptops, Personal Computers and other information technological devices.

Nollywood is the Nigerian film industry which has gained so much impetus that it produces more films a year, making it rated third most prolific industry after Hollywood and Bollywood (Alawode & Fatonji, 2013; Olanrewaju et al., 2021). In its efforts to portray social realities, Nollywood produces films that reflect contemporary confrontations such as unconscionable quest for materialism, wealth, power, politics, socioeconomic control, prostitution, human trafficking, drug dealing, cultism, and ritual killings, among others.

On the upsurge in the early twenty-first century Nigeria is the prevalence of money ritual that has emerged from society's celebration of materialism above virtues and moral values of patience, hardworking, endurance, optimism, faithfulness, and honesty, among others. The society no longer questions the source of people's

wealth. Once one has money, one becomes a celebrity. This has also corrupted the psyche of the youth. Hence, they do everything possible to become rich. The crazy quest for wealth among the young people started with armed robbery, cocaine dealing, human trafficking, banditry and kidnapping, and with the advancement in technology came 'yahoo yahoo'—cybercrime or fraud, which has evolved through 'yahoo plus' to complete money ritual—'yahoo plus plus'. There is now the spate of boyfriends killing their girlfriends for money ritual purposes, children murdering their parents for money, spouses using their partners for wealth, among others.

As a reflector of social occurrences, Nollywood has beamed its light on these issues, particularly ritual killings for the purpose of acquiring wealth. It re-enacts how people struggle to become rich quickly by engaging in cultism and money rituals. Observably, however, in Nollywood projection of these phenomena, there appears to be some form of 'stereotypism' in its portrayals of certain gender as 'Object' for money rituals. This raises some socio-cultural/traditional questions as to: Why are human beings often represented as the choice for rituals in Nollywood movies? What gender is often represented as being used for money ritual in Nollywood films? Why is the choice of the gender and not another? Is the representation of money ritual phenomenon in Nollywood movies a fair reflection of social realities?

This paper ventures into investigating Nollywood representations of gender in the subject of money ritual. It seeks to find out how the society has gendered money ritual to certain sex. By gendering money ritual, therefore, we imply a socio-cultural or traditional conception of money ritual in conformity with a particular gender as either the performer or the component of the ritual. By extension, the paper aims to provoke responses on the primordial traditions and practices of using human beings for ritual purposes, which are still prevalent in the contemporary times, especially in the society's race for wealth. It aims to pique a rethink on the senseless killing of humans, mostly female gender, for ritual purposes and to expose the futility thereof.

Prevalence of ritual killings in contemporary Nigeria

The spate of ritual killings in the early 21st century Nigeria calls for serious concerns by various stakeholders, scholars and institutions. Media reports are fraught with cases of ritual murders, mostly for the purpose of money making, hence money ritual. Money ritual is a magical means of acquiring supernatural wealth. Salihu et al. (2019, p. 34) describe 'money rituals as a sequence of spiritual rites and activities that are believed to induce fortunes or draw riches to people when performed'. They categorise money ritual practices in Nigeria into three types:

The first category involves the use of human body parts (head, tongue, eyes, heart, and genitals) as sacred symbols and objects for ritual sacrifices. The second category includes using wild animals (combined with roots and herbs) for ritual sacrifices, while the third category involves using amulets and charms, and incantation of phrases that are supposed to bring fortune to the person who uses them (Salihu et al., 2019, p. 34).

It is believed that the first category is more potent because it involves human body parts and fluids. Ontologically, human beings are spiritual and sacred, and can evolve or operate in different supernatural dimensions. This perhaps informs the potentiality of human for ritual. Hence, it is believed that body parts of people with special genetic formations such as albinism, dwarfism, and hunchbacks are more potent for ritual sacrifices. Dead bodies and people with physical disabilities and mental health disorders are also conceived to be surrounded by spirits that could be controlled to bring fortune (Salihu et al., 2019).

This belief in the potency of human body parts to induce or produce money accounts for the increase in the cases of ritual killings reported by the media almost on a daily basis. Usman (2017) reports a number of cases of ritual killings across the nation in *Vanguard Newspaper*. These include a four-year-old girl whose body was found close to a shrine at 28 Ogbe Close in Iwaya area of Lagos, with her throat slit. This took place on August 17, 2017. Another case is that of an eight-year-old girl, Chikamso Victory whose lifeless body was found in the apartment of one 23 years old Ifeanyi Chukwu Dike at Messiah Street, Elioza area of Port Harcourt on August 20, 2017. The girl was raped before she was killed and some parts of her body removed, including her vagina, eyes, tongue and breasts which the suspect kept in a polythene bag. Yet another case is that of Akintoye Oyeyemi, who was abducted and killed by one Tunde Jimoh along with other members of his gang who took his body to a Muslim cleric to prepare concoction for money rituals for him; the case took place in Oyo State, on March 30,

2017. Another is an unidentified lady whose dismembered body was recovered at the Lower Usuma Dam junction, along Dutse-Bwari Road. One of her breasts was cut off, while the rest of the body was cut into two from the abdomen, an indication that the killing was for ritual (Usman, 2017).

Similarly, Salihu et al. (2019) collate some more cases of ritual killings in Nigeria. These include the case of a third-year university student, Olozino Ogege, from Delta State University, Abraka, whose body was found with her breast and tongue severed in November 2018. Another case is that of a woman who was killed for money rituals in Edo State by her 18-year-old son, Samuel Akpobome, on October 29, 2018. Samuel strangled his mother while she was asleep and had sexual intercourse with her corpse as the herbalist instructed him (Salihu et al. 2019: 36). These are a few cases among several other reported and unreported cases of money ritual-related killings in Nigeria.

A survey of these cases reveals that females (girls and women) appear to be victims of the killings, perhaps because of their biological compositions. Usman, in her investigation and reportage of various cases of ritual murders in Nigeria, observes that ‘female parts are more in demand than their male counterparts. This is because of what was described as the potency of some parts like the breasts and lower private parts in money rituals and other purposes by herbalists and occult groups’ (Usman 2017, n. p.). Again, Usman observes that ‘virgins’ are mostly used by the perpetrators ‘for ritual purposes as their blood is said to be used to elongate the user’s life span as well as fortify them against spiritual attacks’ (Usman 2017, n. p.).

The belief in the potency of female for rituals of any sort seems to align with the conception that females are more spiritual than males. For instance, Ahmed Yerima, in a conversation with Oloruntoba (2021), observes that:

When you look at our cultures here in Nigeria most especially, history and tales tell us that when the clan or a community needs to make a sacrifice, when it is not an animal, it is the young girl, a woman who has not known men, that is often used for sacrifice. So, they have this nature of spirituality in them more than men do. I also believe that the older a woman gets, the more entrenched she is spiritually (Oloruntoba, 2021, p. 9).

This perceived spirituality of the female gender and erroneous traditional belief system of human sacrifice may also account for the reason why they are vulnerable to ritual killing. Hence, according to data by Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND), a Nigerian non-profit organization, over 150 incidents of ritual-related killings, many of whom were females, were reported in the Niger Delta between January 2018 and December 2021. This statistics only covers for Cross River, Delta and Imo states in Nigeria out of other reports of ritual killings from across the 36 states of the federation. According to PIND’s report:

Recent incidents also indicate an upsurge in targeted killings of women and girls for ritual purposes in the region, particularly in Cross River, Delta and Imo state. In January 2022, for example, more than 10 girls were reportedly killed for rituals in Ogoja town, Cross River state. Some vital organs were allegedly harvested. Separately, in January, suspected ritualists reportedly killed a young girl and removed her eyes in Ogwashi-Uku town in Aniocha North LGA, Delta State.... More recently, on February 07, 2022, an 80-year old woman was reportedly killed and her body parts harvested for ritual purposes in Olomoro town in Isoko South LGA, Delta State (PIND, 2022, n. p.).

PIND’s data do not only show the prevalence of ritual killings, but also present female gender as the endangered species of the heinous act and practice. Apart from the aforementioned cases of females who were victims of ritual killings across Nigeria, Bamise Ayanwale, the slain passenger of a BRT bus in Lagos, is another victim that presents females as a venerable breed of ritual killings in the nation. Omogbolagun (2022) observes that:

Ritual killing has become a commonplace, and from reports, women seem to have been the usual victims. The social media has indeed witnessed several hashtags for women who have been so gruesomely murdered. From *#JusticeforUmuoren* to *#JusticeforOchanya*, *#JusticeforUwa*, *#JusticeforSofiat* and most recently *#JusticeforBamise*. As the world celebrated International Women’s Day on March 8, 2022, women in Nigeria converged on different locations to demand justice for Bamise. It wasn’t the first of its kind; the number of

women killed and mutilated has become a national concern, prompting the House of Representatives to also call for an end to the menace (Omogbolagun, 2022, n. p.).

Apart from Bamise's case, Omogbolagun's reportage includes some more cases of females that were killed for rituals in Nigeria like that of Kehinde, a 20-year-old lady, who was killed and beheaded by four teenagers, including her 18-year-old boyfriend, Soliu Majekodunmi who conspired to kill her and severed her head in his room and burnt it severely on January 29, 2022. Another case is that of a 29-year old teacher, Elohor Oniorosa, who was murdered by her boyfriend, David Osaretin, a truck driver in his room, in Edo State, on December 24, 2021.

The list of women and girls killed for rituals seems to be endless, but a cursory list includes a 'female teenager was found dismembered in Unuebu Aragba, Obiaruku community, Ukwuani Local Government Area of Delta State' in September 2021, a 22-year-old virgin and student of the University of Benin, Uwa Omozuwa, who was raped and killed on May 27, 2020 while reading inside a Redeemed Christian Church of God at Osa Amadasun Ikpoba Hill, Benin City, and Toyin Adewale who was killed for ritual purposes by her boyfriend, Kabiru Oyeduntan together with his herbalist, in June 2021 in Osun State, among others (Omogbolagun, 2022, n. p.). All these are suspected and reported cases of killing for money ritual. These cases portray females/women as objects or 'Other' to be subjugated, manipulated and subjected to various (ab)uses—victims of violence.

Gender theory, Simone de Beauvoir's concept of 'Otherness' and Obioma Nnaemeka's 'Nego-feminism'

Gender discourse and feminism are two interdependent critical theories. Feminist analysis focuses a great deal on gender, which is the society's definitions of femininity and masculinity. Basically, gender criticism is a way of examining issues pertaining to gender, including:

(1) patriarchal assumptions about gender and gender roles that continue to oppress women, (2) alternatives to the current way we conceptualize gender as either feminine or masculine, (3) the relationship between sex and gender (between the ways our bodies are biologically constructed and the genders to which we are assigned), and (4) the relationship between sexuality and gender (between our sexual orientation and the ways in which we are viewed in terms of gender) (Tyson, 2006, p. 108).

Simone de Beauvoir is one of the prominent among gender theorists and proponents. Beauvoir's most profound notion on gender is male's subjugation of female gender by classifying them, on every level, as the *Other*, defining exclusively in opposition to men. Beauvoir states that man occupies the role of the Self, or Subject, while woman is the Object, the *Other*. Man is considered essential, absolute, and transcendent, while woman is inessential, incomplete, and mutilated; he extends out into the world to impose his will on it, whereas woman is doomed to immanence, or inwardness; he creates, acts, invents while she waits for him to save her. To this effect, Beauvoir (2010) states that:

Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being... She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other (Beauvoir, 2010, p. 26).

These distinctions form the basis of Beauvoir's conceptions on gender. Applied to Nollywood's money-ritual narratives, Beauvoir's theory offers a precise analytic for reading recurring visual and narrative patterns: the woman offered as a ritual sacrifice for a man's wealth, the wife or lover whose body, womb, or life is bartered without her full agency, the seductress whose sexuality is instrumentalised as bait in the ritual economy, or the silent, objectified female corpse that signifies male "success." In each of these portraiture, the woman is rarely constituted as a Subject with interiority, motive, and autonomous desire; she functions instead as the Other through whom the male protagonist's transcendence—his wealth, his power, his narrative arc—is secured. Beauvoir's framework thus equips this study to name and critique the visual grammar by which Nollywood cinema often stages female subjugation as spectacle, even where the film's ostensible moral is cautionary.

Obioma Nnaemeka's 'Nego-feminism' constitutes a principal African feminist framework that offers a binary yet complementary analytical construct for the study. Nnaemeka (2004) conceptualises Nego-feminism as both "the feminism of negotiation" and "no ego" feminism (pp. 377–378). The concept foregrounds negotiation, give-and-take, compromise, balance, relationality and strategic engagement with patriarchal structures. Rather than assuming that feminist agency must necessarily take the form of open confrontation, Nego-feminism recognises the capacity of African women to negotiate with, circumvent, modify and, where necessary, confront structures that constrain their social and economic agency (Nnaemeka, 2004, p. 378). Nnaemeka is explicit that this negotiation is neither passive nor a simple capitulation to patriarchy; rather, it reflects an informed, strategic competence, an ability to "detonate patriarchal land mines" when confrontation is necessary, and to "go around" them when negotiation is more strategically productive (Nnaemeka, 2004, pp. 377–378).

Nnaemeka's idea of Nego-Feminism is particularly relevant to examine how money-ritual narratives in contemporary Nollywood frequently situate male and female characters within conflicting structures of economic aspiration, poverty, family obligation, patriarchal expectation, morality and supernatural power. The theory therefore makes it possible to examine not only whether characters resist or reproduce patriarchy, but also how they negotiate economic and gendered power within the social structures available to them. It allows the study to move beyond a simplistic male-oppressor/female-victim binary and to recognise forms of agency expressed through negotiation, accommodation, strategic compliance, manipulation, resistance and relational action.

Deploying nego-feminism alongside Beauvoir's Otherness allows this study to move beyond a purely victim-centred reading of the (fe)male in Nollywood money-ritual films. While many of these films visually construct women as Othered objects of exchange, a nego-feminist lens draws attention to the moments where female characters negotiate, manipulate, or strategically and/or spiritually resist patriarchal and occult structures to secure their own advantage, protect kin, or exact a measure of power within a system that does not grant them full subjecthood. In this sense, the two frameworks operate dialectically: Beauvoir supplies the critique of the patriarchal structure that Others the female body, and Nnaemeka supplies the interpretive nuance needed to read African women's on-screen manoeuvring within, and sometimes against, that same structure.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a qualitative research approach through close observation and analysis of two selected Nollywood movies: *The yahoo plus* (2021) and *Ògùn owó* (2017). The two movies were purposively selected because they exemplify gender representation in Nollywood movies within the context of money rituals—they portray both male and female characters ('anatomic fe/males') as the Subject-Object of money rituals which are gender-structured. Simone de Beauvoir's theory on gender, especially the concept of Otherness and Obioma Nnaemeka's 'Nego-feminism' that offers Afrocentric perspective for understanding gender relations, women's agency and resistance served as theoretical framework. As a major analytical concept, the study introduces 'gendered materialism'. It observes that money ritual narratives are gendered by assigning culturally specific meanings to men's and women's desires for wealth, their methods of acquiring wealth, their bodies, their moral choices and their consequences. The analysis paid attention to how the themes of quest for materialism, wealth, power, and socioeconomic control are presented through the subject of money rituals, especially in the light of gender stereotype. It focused on the portrayal of a certain gender/sex as the performer of the rituals and the other as the object of the rituals. Hence, it examined the disparity in the representations or misrepresentations of gender along line money ritualism.

Synopses of *The yahoo plus* and *Ògùn owó*

Don's *The yahoo plus* (2021) thematises the danger of unconscionable quest for materialism and wealth which results in ritual killings and betrayals. It presents binary oppositions between male and female, poverty and riches, patience and impatience, and betrayal and loyalty among cult members, between brothers and family members, and between the forces of the darkness and light. The movie focuses on two poor brothers, Obinze and Nzube, who have made several efforts to liberate themselves from the circuit of poverty by traveling to the city in search of greener pastures. They are introduced to cult by their rich friends. Nzube is asked to get two virgin

girls for sacrifice and marry a lady whom he must be meeting only during her menstrual period. He becomes rich but he is warned never to allow any member of his family to benefit from his money. Obinze is asked to kill his mother and bury her within seven days or he dies. Obinze is able to kill his mother but his brother, Nzube intercepts the corpse. Obinze dies as a result, while the two virgins that Nzube uses for rituals often appear to him and eventually kill him.

Odunola's *Ògùn owó* (2017)—the Yoruba phrase which is literally interpreted in English as 'money ritual'—on the other hand, equally focuses on the danger of get-rich-quick syndrome. It focuses on a young man of thirty years old, Bisade, who because of poverty and pressure from his fiancée, Tinuke (who had encountered 'oppression' from some rich fellow) embarks on the journey of money ritual. He visits a herbalist who tells him that he will use someone he loves so much and who loves him as much. He volunteers to use his fiancée, Tinuke. The herbalist gives him a spelled small gourd to give his fiancée to swallow. Tinuke dies as a result while the young man becomes rich. However, Tinuke's spirit haunts the young man and the herbalist.

From the foregoing synopses, it is evident that both sexes—males and females—are depicted in the movies as major characters. In *The yahoo plus*, these major characters include Obinze, Nzube, two virgin girls, Amanda, Esther, Obinze and Nzube's mother and eldest sister, while in *Ògùn owó*, on the other hand, the major characters are Bisade and Tinuke. These characters are used to project the thematic focus of the films—dangers of devilish quest for materialism, betrayal, impatience, and power contestation that are conveyed through the phenomenon of money rituals in contemporary Nigerian society. These characters are portrayed as both Subjects and Objects of money rituals in the movies. By Subjects and Objects, we engage the syntactic onomatologies of grammar, which denote performers and receivers of an 'action'—and by 'action' here, we refer to the act of money rituals as enacted in the movies. Again, by Subject and Object, we also mean the duality between Self and Other in the hierarchical connotations of alterity between anatomic males and females. In the movies, male characters are represented as the 'Subjects of money rituals', while the females are depicted as the 'Objects'. Hence, there are binary power struggles for subjugation and resistance between the two 'genders'.

The subjective representations of male in *The yahoo plus* and *Ògùn owó*

The subjectivisation of male in the movies conforms to Beauvoir's (2010) notion of male being considered as 'the Subject' (p. 26). For instance, in the two movies, men are the ones performing the rituals. Men in the films want to establish their absoluteness and domination. They consider their present status as limited and it will not allow them to exercise power and control which they consider natural for them. That is why Obinze and Nzube in *The yahoo plus* consider themselves adults and can no longer live under their parents, even after they have done everything possible to occupy their positions as men:

OBINZE: Nzube, you and I are adults, old enough to have our own families. And we are still living with our parents, depending on them for everything. It is not right.

NZUBE: Obinze, we have tried; we have done virtually everything. But all prove abortive; it is not our faults (*The yahoo plus*).

Obinze considers their status 'not right' because of the patriarchal nature of his society. They believe that they are due to have their own families and also take responsibilities over their young siblings and their old parents. This 'Subject' position that they occupy, perhaps spurs them to struggle so hard to break this circuit of poverty by traveling to the city for opportunities.

The idea of engaging in money rituals emerges from poverty and frustration, materialistic mentality of people, and a degree of impatience as presented in both films. For instance, in *The yahoo plus*, Obinze and Nzube's household is evicted because the family is unable to pay house rent and even find it hard to eat, while Bisade in *Ògùn owó* is too in a hurry to acquire wealth; he feels oppressed by the rich in the society. He is envious of them and wants to be rich by all means. Peer pressure, however, pushes Nzube into money ritual. Obinze and Nzube's struggle for liberation brings them in contact with Nzube's friend, Ikonso in the city; Ikonso is a money ritualist and he feels the only way to help Nzube is to introduce him to the cult.

Ikonso is the first Subject of money rituals in *The yahoo plus*. He engages in money rituals consequent upon his denial of his ambition to become a football star because of nepotism and favoritism in the football club he plays, even though he was adjudged the best player. He tells Nzube: ‘Our team won the tournament in Ghana. I was awarded the best player, the best player in that tournament. But as usual the country we are in, business as usual; man-know-man; who do you know? You know how it is’ (*The yahoo plus*). In order to attain the ‘essential’ position in the society, he engages in money rituals and he is now controlling wealth although the Object of his rituals is not apparently revealed in the film.

Nzube is another Subject of money ritual in *The yahoo plus*. Ikonso exposes him to ‘big men’ and influences him to join them so that he can attain the position where he can control his world. Nzube’s requests at the temple are that: ‘I want to make money. I want to own houses, cars. I want to be super rich like Ikonso.’ His requests are granted but he must sleep with dead woman in the casket, use two virgin girls for sacrifice, and marry a lady whom he must be sleeping with during her menses.

Obinze’s case is similar to that of Nzube. Obinze is another Subject of money ritual portrayed in *The yahoo plus*. He is also influenced into money rituals by his colleague in the business wheelbarrow operation. They seek assistance from another cult—the Sacred Dog where they are also asked to make request of the kind of assistance they want. They request power, wealth, money and fame, which are granted but with conditions. The conditions are that they have to turn to dogs and eat feces for seven days. Although the friend dies in the process as he is killed by a hunter, Obinze scales through. In order to complete the process of the rituals, he has to kill his mother within seven days and bury her or he dies.

Bisade is another male portrayed as the Subject of money rituals in *Ògùn owó*. Bisade is an overambitious young man who wants to get rich quickly. Like Ikonzo, Nzube, and Obinze in *The yahoo plus*, Bisade visits a herbalist to also make request; he tells the herbalist: ‘I want to be rich. I want to be rich by all means.... I want to be wealthy in the society. I want to buy a Bentley. I want to ride exotic vehicles. Please help me.’ Also, like Nzube and Obinze, the herbalist gives him the condition of using the person he loves most, necessarily a woman. He must give the person a spelled gourd to swallow after which she will die.

From the foregoing, it is evident that only males are portrayed as the Subjects of money rituals in the two movies. A survey of some other Nollywood movies, such as *My evil husband*, *Ikú ni (It is death)*, and *Owó ànábò (Mysterious money)*, among others, that treat the phenomenon of money also reveals that men are mostly depicted as the Subjects of money rituals. Whereas, women/females have often been portrayed as engaging in prostitution, drug pushing, and hire killing instead as the variant of get-rich-quick acts.

Objectification/alterity of female in *The yahoo plus* and *Ògùn owó*

In the two movies, women are presented as the Object the rituals. They are used to establish the absoluteness and domination of men in the movies. For instance, in *The yahoo plus*, the first ‘materials’ recommended to Nzube for his money rituals process are ‘two virgin girls’, Chinenye and Nmasi. These are two of the female characters used for money rituals in the film. One can imagine why the grandmaster of the Black Cat prescribes ‘virgin girls’ and not ‘virgin boys’. It is perhaps because the females are often seen as ‘objects’ or materials. The situation and location of the two teenage virgin girls are of some significance in the movie. They are poor sisters struggling hard on the street to make ends meet for themselves and their parents; they sell sachet water on the street; hence, the girls are kidnapped on the street. This establishes the vulnerability of female gender. Observably, many African parents usually engage female children in street hawking. Poverty, illiteracy and wrong social perception of female child are found responsible for this. This has led to the damage and death of many female children. The two girls are killed and used for money rituals by Nzube in the movie.

Another female portrayed as Objective Other in *The yahoo plus* is Nzube’s wife, Amanda. Amanda is a wealth-freak lady whom Nzube meets in a supermarket and proposes to. The arrogant manner that he proposes to her and the manner that she accepts the proposal even when she notes that they have just met and that he does not know her character depict Amanda as a helpless inessential Other. He says: ‘I’ve got money to mold your character. I will mold your character to the way I want it’. Amanda cannot object to his proposal because of his money, and that depicts her as a mere ‘article’ that can be purchased with money.

Meanwhile, Nzube purposely marries Amanda for rituals to maintain his wealth. She is part of the ‘materials’ that he needs for the rituals. He is to be sleeping with her during her menstruation and be dipping his hand into her to sustain his money. Nzube says: ‘...He instructed that I must marry immediately, and I must make love to her only when she is in her monthly flow. Why doing that, I should dip my hand in her private part with the ring that he gave me.’ One might ask again, why the choice of female menstruation and not male sperm for rituals?

This idea also projects the frailty of female as an Object in the movie. Even when Amanda discovers that something is wrong, she finds it hard to do anything about it because she is married to her—‘because she lacks the concrete means, because she senses the necessary link connecting her to man without positing its reciprocity’ as Beauvoir conceives (2010, p. 30). She is subjugated and forced to be sleeping with him at the mercy of his every whim and caprice:

AMANDA: Babe, it’s wrong. You are hurting me. You are supposed to be making love with me when I’m not menstruating and not the other way round.

NZUBE: I married you. I provided you with everything life can offer. Your duty is to open these legs whenever I want it and I will have it however I want it, whether in menstruation or not (*The yahoo plus*).

The above dialogue evinces the subjugation and domination of women as Objective Others by men. The dialogue also aligns with Irigaray’s observation: ‘For woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity’ (Irigaray, 1985, p. 31). The dialogue equally manifests the aggressive nature of male gender towards the female.

Esther is another female that can be categorised as Objective Other in *The yahoo plus*. Esther is Amanda’s longtime friend, who is now engaged to Obinze. Amanda later discovers that Esther’s fiancé, Obinze is her brutal husband’s brother. The subversion of her gender as an Object is depicted in the manner that Obinze makes her to propose to him. In many African cultures, man proposes to woman; however, Obinze subverts this order to display his Subjectivity—his arrogance, wealth and control over the woman. He forces Esther to go down on her knees and propose to him instead:

OBINZE: Propose to me.

ESTHER: (*Surprises on her knees*) Babe, I should propose to you?

OBINZE: Ask me to marry you!

ESTHER: Ah... Are you not the one that is supposed to be doing it, instead of the other way round?

OBINZE: (*With an air of arrogance*) Are you drunk? I ... should kneel and propose to you, did you smoke something? There are thousand women out there who are begging me to marry them; if I tell them to kneel down, they would even lie down... A woman should kneel and propose to a man. So I’m giving you the opportunity to be my wife, ok. Kneel very well and propose to me or I will change my mind o, smile... do it happily and propose to me.... (*The yahoo plus*)

Consequently, Esther does the proposing and hugging reluctantly, evidently because of his wealth and status. Through that incident, Obinze’s subjugation of the woman in some ways are portrayed: first, he compels her to kneel down and ask him to marry her; second, he verbally abuses her for initially objecting to his position; third, he debases womanhood by saying thousands of them are begging him to marry them; fourth, he makes it a position that it should be woman who does the kneeling and proposing and not the contrary. Obinze’s position perhaps stems from the Igbo culture where women are the ones that do the kneeling, establishing the deep-seated notion that the man does not kneel for the woman. This also illustrates the servitude perspective from which women are viewed, especially in relation to men. All this depicts male arrogance and subjectivity in the movie. In the end, Esther dies mysteriously when she bumps into Obinze in his secret room. In essence, she is used for remission.

Another female that is portrayed as Objective Other in *The yahoo plus* is Oge. Oge is Obinze and Nzube's mother. Obinze is mandated by Oracle, the grandmaster of the Sacred Dogs cult, to kill Oge, his mother within seven days and bury her or he dies. In essence, she is recommended as a 'material' to be used to complete Obinze's money ritual process. One queries why is his father not recommended, even though he is not too favorably disposed to his children, particularly Obinze and Nzube? His choice, one may argue, is predicated on the patriarchal idea that the female gender is an inessential Other. Again, the grandmaster is a Self and he would not recommend another Self for such purpose.

Just like Oge, Obinze and Nzube's unnamed eldest sister is also treated as Objective Other that is used for rituals. She is sacrificed as atonement for Nzube's failure to bury Oge within seven days. Nzube's grandmaster had warned him that his mother must not be buried by Obinze. However, Obinze succeeds in burying her. Hence, the grandmaster says that Nzube will pay dearly for his 'stupidity'; he requests that Nzube must offer his eldest sister as atonement for his failure. It is observed in the film that only women are on the demand.

Again, we see the manner that Ozumba's pregnant wife is treated in *The yahoo plus*. Ozumba is the grandmaster of the Black Cat cult. His wife only appears at the beginning of the film. Although she can be described as a very minor character in the movie, she is very important to development of the plot of the film. She is inadvertently abducted at the opening of the film by members of another cult, the Sacred Dogs, and used for sacrifice. Her death apparently creates tension throughout the film between the members of the two cults. Some factors can be adduced as the reasons for her choice for rituals. One, she is a female who, as we have established earlier, is considered a mere material for use by male. This is regardless of her elitism of a sort—she is an aristocratic woman, kidnapped on her way from the supermarket. And two, she is pregnant; her pregnancy condition predisposes her to being used for rituals—the cult is in a look out for a pregnant woman for sacrifice to their lord.

Ozumba's pregnant wife is not the only female character that possesses this kind of physiological or biological feature that makes her susceptible to being used for rituals in the movie. Some other females that we have earlier identified and examined also bear certain peculiar anatomic conditions that make them liable for being used for rituals. These include Chinenye and Nmasi, the two virgin sisters—'their virginity is the condition', and Amanda whose choice is 'her menstrual flows'. The choice of these females with these peculiar biological conditions aligns with the old ritual practices in the pristine traditional African societies where individual with certain genetic conditions, such as albino, hunchback, dwarf, cripple, deaf, dump, bald, blind persons and others, are specifically required, recommended and used for sacrifices. The movie appears to leverage the traditional belief systems in its creation and representations, including the patriarchal worldview of many African societies.

Similar representations of female are evident in *Ògùn owó*. Tinuke is also treated as an Objective Other in the film. Tinuke is Bisade's fiancée, whom he uses for money rituals. There is an irony at play in her choice as a material for rituals. The herbalist requires that Bisade uses someone that he loves so much and also loves him. Hence, the only person that he can choose for the rituals is his fiancée. However, one can posit that his choice of Tinuke is not merely because she loves him; he has other people such as his male friends, brothers, and even father who equally love him. His choice of Tinuke is because of her gender. To Bisade, Tinuke is merely an instrument he believes he can exploit to attain his devil-conceived quest for money.

Nego-resisting male hegemony in *The yahoo plus* and *Ògùn owó*

There are subtle resistances by females against males' domination and violation in the movies. Female are thus significantly deployed in the films to convey the theme of dangers or consequences of engaging in money rituals. They are used as major antagonists against the males' inordinate struggle to get-rich-quick through the avenue of rituals. Hence, they are used to achieve some binary opposition against the male counterparts in the films.

One point of resistance is identified in the portrayals of the two virgin sisters in *The yahoo plus*. After their death, they transform into ghosts that constantly haunt Nzube who use them for money rituals and his grandmaster, Ozumba. Although Ozumba claims that he is not the one who used them for sacrifices and commands them to leave him and go after their killer, they repeatedly appear to Nzube and demand a habitation in his house because their spirits are trapped on earth. Although he refuses to assent to this demand, the ghosts lurk around his house;

they embarrass him in the presence of his new wife by disturbing their love making sessions. After much pressure, they kill him. Obinze also ends up in the same manner. Indeed, the girls are used to establish few ideas in the movies. First, they represent female power and contestation against male subjectivity, and their resultant triumph or heroism; this foregrounds Beauvoir's notion that no one is born with a 'gender' as it is always acquired. Second, they are used to convey the thematic focus of the film which is the disastrous end of those who use another human being for money rituals.

Yet in *The yahoo plus*, another point of resistance is located in the action of Amanda, Nzube's wife. Amanda wittingly resists Nzube's domination and abuse by escaping from his house. The very act invalidates his power, as it is through sleeping with her during her flows that he maintains his power and riches. Her escape arguably is a diplomatic form of resistance against man's subjectivity. This very act brings about Nzube's death.

Like the two virgin sisters in *The yahoo plus*, Tinuke equally represents another point of resistance against male hegemony in *Ògùn owó*. After her death, she also becomes a ghost that constantly haunts Bisade who uses her for money rituals and his herbalist. Tinuke's spirit possesses the herbalist's son who behaves madly; he beats his girlfriend and tears off his own cloth. However, the herbalist manipulates and takes power over Tinuke's spirit and displaces her, claiming that he is not the one who used her for money; he also commands the ghost to go after her killer. Tinuke's ghost repeatedly appears to Bisade; it influences him to kill an old woman with his vehicle which lands him and her family into serious trouble with the police. Oftentimes, the ghost appears to him and commands him to beat his new wife to the point of hospitalization. He is tormented by the spirit to the extent that he does not even enjoy his riches. The ghost forces him to the point of confession to Old One and consequent repentance. He eventually loses everything that he has gathered with the money and goes back to zero point. Like the girls in *The yahoo plus*, Tinuke represents female power and contestation against male oppression, and consequent victory over evil. She is also used to project the main ideas of the film which are: the futility of impatience, danger of unconscionable thirst for wealth, and consequences of treachery. All these foreground the significance of the female gender in the movies particularly in providing an opposition against male hegemony.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the portrayals of (fe)male gender in the two selected Nollywood movies: *The yahoo plus* and *Ògùn owó*, in the light of money rituals phenomenon which is the main subject of the selected films, and which is now prevalent in the contemporary Nigerian societies. It has shown the subjective and objective representations of male and female genders in the movies, drawing critical insights from Simone de Beauvoir's notions on gender and Obioma Nnaemeka's 'Nego-feminism' that offers Afrocentric perspective for understanding gender relations, women's agency and resistance. It was found in the two movies that females are portrayed as 'Objective Others', treated as 'inessential material' by males who were represented as 'Subjective Self'—'the essential being' in the movies. The males in the films are represented as the performers of the rituals, while the females are portrayed as the Objects, used for rituals by men. These representations reveal how Nollywood films, in their reflection of societal practices and beliefs, align with traditional perception of female as *Other*, by representing them as 'materials' for money rituals in the two films. These portraiture are analogous to traditional patriarchal nature of African society. It was found that although females are treated as inessential Other, they are very significant in the movies. First, they stand as major forces of opposition against male subjectivity; hence, they are eventual 'heroes' in the battle of supremacy in the movies. Second, they are used to convey the thematic concerns of the films; they communicate the danger of inundated thirst for wealth, betrayal and consequences, the futility of impatience, and catastrophic eventuality of those who use another human being or their parts for money rituals. Consequence upon this, one can posit that there is a level of balance in the representations of both male and female in the selected movies, establishing Nnaemeka's (2004) notion of 'Nego-feminism' which foregrounds strategic engagement—and in the films, spiritual modes—for navigating, circumventing and resisting structures of gender inequality.

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