

Metaphoric Representation of Barrenness as Witchcraft in Kunle Afolayan's "Anikulapo" and "The Rise Of The Spectre"

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Abstract

This study interrogates the gender ideological underpinnings of the traditional African belief which constructs barrenness as a metaphor for witchcraft. Leveraging insights from a curated selection of works in the field of gender studies on witchcraft in Africa, the paper illuminates the complex social behaviour of women and response-trigger curated by the patriarchal society by exploring the Yoruba ideology on barrenness. Taking a drive from Òsòròngà (a negative and destructive women evaluation) against ajeism (a positive labelling of motherhood), the work delves into responsibilitisation as a concept of *performativity*. Shaping informed feministic identity construction on barrenness as a metaphor for witchcraft, the work sees witchcraft as a mere patriarchal historical fantasy and as such, renegotiates witchcraft as motherhood. Drawing upon the seminal theory of Barley's (1988) "Cultural Pragmatics", this paper scrutinizes two poignant literary narratives of Kunle Afolayan *Anikulapo* and *The Rise of the Specter* - offering a dive into the social discourse on witchcraft. The findings show that barren women over the years have become symbols of self-actualisation, self-empowerment and self-love. It compellingly argues that the negative witchcraft undertones discernible in these texts are anchored in entrenched social and historical contexts, rather than prescriptive mandates of social responsibilitisation.

Keywords: Barrenness, witchcraft, responsibilitisation, womanhood, performativity

Introduction

An average infertile African woman suffers the shame, reproach and negative labelling of society because of their seeming inability to meet up with their natural womanhood demands of motherhood. They are also considered wicked, vindictive and inhuman without considering other biological, social and external factors that may be hindering such. To address this lacuna, it is important to consider the literature that has examined the metaphor of witchcraft within and without the borders of Africa. Such works as Geschiere (1997);

witchcraft and justice (Ashforth 2015); witchcraft, power, and the distribution of resources (Leistner 2014; Smith 2017); witchcraft, intimacy, gender, and sexuality (Mavhungu 2012; Geschiere 2013; Richter et al. 2017; and Eboiyehi 2017). The paper explains that the negative labelling of barren women as witches in contemporary Nollywood tradition is merely representational and orchestrated by the institutionalized hegemony of patriarchal masculinity. The paper explores the perspectival stance embedded in the traditional Yoruba belief on infertility and tries to study the history of the blame ideology on women as a conscious distortion of historical facts to subjugate women as the object of male authority and caricature.

Borrowing from Yoruba oral literature, cosmology, religion, and mythology, Ogunde made films that contextualised African metaphysics, religion, modernity, and epistemology. He produced movies about the witchcraft phenomenon and constructed women, especially barren women, as evil. He depicted them as shapeshifters and presented the cosmic power that women possess as evil. In surreal images, Ogunde visualizes how witches decapitate their victims to drink their blood and feed on their entrails (Aiye; 1980) and *Àyànmó* (1988). In the rituals he shows, he gives life to the legend of witches as bloodsucking mothers and cannibalistic sisters. Ajileye, like Ogunde, made movies that represented the metaphysical world of witches and their doppelgangers. He created narratives that paralleled Ogunde's stories and exposed his audiences to grotesque images of witches disturbing idyllic communities. Ajileye continually reimagined witchcraft in existential dimensions in Yoruba communities. Some of his films engaged with the intersections of gender, class, and group affinity in the lives and times of men and women across ethnic boundaries in Nigeria and Africa. The films sometimes portray witchcraft as a tool for social and retributive justice. However, many of these films show witches as naturally wicked, causing chaos and calamities without provocation. This reading of the films of both Ogunde and Ajileye shows how witchcraft is coded as an evil power that threatens the collective good of human societies. However, the current study, through the lens of Cultural pragmatics debunks the claim as a mere metaphor and cultural representation.

In contemporary times, there have been renewed multidisciplinary perspectives on the study of witchcraft. More recent research have explored the multilayered connections

between witchcraft and modernity (Geschiere 1997); witchcraft and justice (Ashforth 2015); witchcraft, power, and the distribution of resources;(Leistner 2014; Smith 2017); witchcraft, intimacy, gender, and sexuality (Mavhungu 2012; Geschiere 2013; Richter et al. 2017; Eboiyehi 2017), witchcraft and responsabilization (Soetan 2021). Close to the current study is Baloyi (2009), who examines the critical reflections on infertility in black Africans and focuses on how barrenness becomes a weapon for the oppression and abuse of women.

Existing scholarship on African witchcraft provides not just the theoretical base, they also provide renewed interest to challenging the archaic law of women as witches. In an attempt to challenge this law, this work examined the metaphor of witchcraft to reveal the complex phenomenal and conceptualizing of witchcraft; graduating from mere critical representation to practice through cultural pragmatics. To achieve this, we traced the development of a round character, Arolake, who developed from a marginalized woman to a nature-endowed and powerful woman in Kunle Afolayan's two-part movie-sequence *Anikulapo* and its concluding sequel, *The Rise of the Spectre* -offering a deep dive into the cultural discourse on witchcraft it showcases.

Methodology: Cultural Pragmatics

The social study of culture has been polarized between theorizing meaning as a text and investigating the pattern that provides autonomy, treating meaning as emerging from contingencies of individual and collective social behaviours as reflections of power. It demonstrates how social performances constrain the pattern of thoughts of individuals. The focus of cultural pragmatics is to look at how language acquires meaning through context and sociocultural embeddings. It examines how individuals perform social roles and communicate meaning within specific cultural contexts, focusing on the interaction between actors, the audience, and the settings. This helps to encode and decode cultural symbols and practices. By exploring the dynamic relationships between social structures and individual agency, cultural pragmatics provides insights into how culture shapes and is shaped by human behaviour. The metaphor of a woman as a witch has long been in existence all over the world and it seems to be a label of relegation for any woman who dares to break patriarchal rules that are laid down. Gerely (2021) asserts that witches are

those who transcend the binaries and the oppressive forces that hold them down' (p.3) such women are labelled as highhanded and rebellious. Zwissler (2018) identified various waves of feminism thus:

During the first wave of feminism, 'Women were not witches, men just thought they were and were horrifically wrong' (Zwissler, 2018, p. 12). The Second wave brought out the female differences that men so feared, and this was then articulated as Satanic and evil. It did not matter if these women practised magic or claimed supernatural powers: as women, they still threatened men in power and so their status as witches became irrelevant. Witches are women: sexual beings, hags, offering untamed power against patriarchy and thus binarized against fertility, submissiveness and social conformity. They are 'an untamed force of female solidarity and represent a threat to the . . . social structure' (Carroll, 2019, p. 7). The third wave of feminism aided the witch in transcending boundaries to become a transgressive woman of power and liberation. 'Throughout feminist waves, the witch has transcended her vilified position and restraints of socially constructed femininity to embrace her powerful position and combat patriarchy's attempt to subdue her' (2019, p.2).

The witch has thus become a metaphor for female resistance. In the modern alternative view, Zwissler sees witchcraft as a noble rebel against patriarchy. For him, this new wave of witches has undergone a cultural rebirth that repositions witches as beautiful, powerful and astute. They are no longer the hag, the crone, or the banished.

Synopsis of *Anikulapo* and *The Rise Of The Spectre*

Anikulapo describes the evolution of a beautiful young woman, Arolake, the youngest wife of the Alaafin of Oyo; loved, pampered and adored, but was infertile. Her infertility earned her a ridiculous position in the palace. Her life was made miserable when the co-queens found out that the king enjoyed her company more. She was constantly referred to as a witch and a mere tool of enjoyment for the king. She met Saro and decided to elope with him to begin a new life. Before her plan was actualized, the king's daughter who was also infatuated with Saro found out about her elopement plan and reported it to her mother. As it was an abomination for any other man to see the nudity of any of the Alaafin's wives while still alive, Saro was found guilty and ordered to be killed. Arolake, being the king's favourite, was given a lesser judgment of banishment. On the mountain where Saro was

left to die, a mythical Akala bird that possesses a supernatural power to raise the dead appeared to him to interrogate him about the cause of his death. A fear-stricken Arolake who was a few miles away approached and hit the bird. In fear, the bird left its mysterious gourd. Arolake realized the power of the gourd, and picked and carefully kept it. Saro came back to life and both of them journeyed to Ojumo where they settled as man and wife. It was in Ojumo that Arolake revealed the power and functions of the gourd to Saro who became its custodian.

Saro earned his livelihood and became famous by raising the dead. After a while, Saro became pompous and took to women, neglecting Arolake. At first, he blamed it on Arolake's barrenness and his desire to have a large family but later, his nature as an untamed woman-lover was revealed. The denouement of his fame came when the prince of Ojumo died and Saro was summoned. He demanded the hand of the only princess of Ojumo in marriage against the culture of the land. Arolake saw his act as boisterous and disregarding. To tame him, she poured out the magical substance in the gourd of Akala and left the community. Without the substance, Saro was incapacitated and so, shot dead by the guards. The akala bird that appeared to him at first reappeared to inquire of its gourd.

The concluding sequel, *The Rise of the Spectre* opened on the mountain where Saro was left dead. His soul journeyed to heaven amongst some other dead persons. At the entrance, he was denied entry on the allegation that he raised twenty people who deserved to die. To enter, he would have to bring the twenty persons along with himself. Saro thus became a ghost and was on a hunt to kill the twenty he had earlier raised. Unfortunately, one of the persons had acquired supernatural powers and refused to be killed. In order to protect her life, she proffered a solution to Saro to become a living-dead (*akudaya*). Fortunately, three of those he had killed allowed him three years to live.

In Oyo, the people were in chaos due to the gourd of the Akala bird. The Ifa priest divined that Arolake be brought back to make atonements to the Akala bird. In a malicious twist, the power drunken Bashorun, a shrewd warlord who desired the power of Anikulapo decided to wield the situation to his advantage. He plotted the arrest of Saro and Arolake and collected the chain that was given to Saro at the entrance of Heaven, as a sign of bond to those raised. Bashorun thus inherited Saro's debt and became the lead to Heaven. The

movies have many intriguing twists that border mostly on patriarchy, pride, disappointment, power tussle and greed.

The Portrayal of Barren Women in Nollywood Films

The term *Nollywood* has been used widely in the existing literature on the gigantic Nigerian film industry to refer to all films produced in Nigeria (Adesokan 2011; Harrow 2013; Haynes 2016; Krings and Okome 2013; Ogunleye 2008). The tradition of women's interaction in society as portrayed in Nollywood shows women as subordinate. According to stereotypical beliefs about sexes, women are more commonly domesticated (Eagly & Steffen, 2000) and portrayed as homemakers, child bearers, cooks and caregivers. Jekayinfa (1999) asserts that these roles are culturally vested. Swift (2013) indicates that women are valued based on their fertility. Women are considered essential childbearing machines and a failure in this area calls for abusive and contemptuous treatment from the society. Nollywood films have not favoured women, especially in the early days. In most early films, women were portrayed as derivatives of men and as a species that lacked full autonomy or capacity to carry functional power. The films represented women as witches, wives, prostitutes and maids. A few of the films that portrayed barrenness were: *Asiri Nla* (1993) by Jide Kosoko featuring Iya Rainbow as a barren woman who lost her rich husband to a ghastly road accident. Her in-laws immediately confiscated all the property because she was barren. Before the news of his death was announced, the woman found out that her sister was having an affair with her husband and pregnant with him. She took it in good faith and announced to the family that she was already pregnant and this afforded her unborn son his father's property; *Malaika* (2023) tells the story of a barren woman, Adetutu, who had anger issues. She was stigmatized as infertile. This was made more evident because her husband was once married and had a daughter -Chichi. The kindness of Adetutu was revealed when Chichi was kidnapped. She went out of her way to make sure that she was freed. Her kindness as against the belief that she was unkind and cruel was made evident. Other movies with the same theme include: *The Childless* (2020) and *Childless King* (2021). Also, movies that reveal that women are evil and witches include such as *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* (1994) which underscores the demonization of women and the glorification of Pentecostal power that men control. *Nneka, the Pretty Serpent*,

vilifies and reads the supernatural power that some women possess as evil. It reinforces the general belief that women are often responsible for ruining successful men; *Koto Orun* (1989); *Karishika* (1996); *Witches* (1998); *Married to a Witch* (2001); *Sharon Stone* (2002); *Omata Women* (2003). Emerging and contemporary producers such as Kunle Afolayan tell stories that promote the empowerment of women and show how women contribute to their communities and the nation at large.

Data Analysis

To explain the complex milieu of cultural *ajeism* through the lens of Cultural pragmatics, Afolayan creates a developing character, Arolake, who evolves from a timid young girl married to the Alaafin to a woman possessing the power of akala to controlling life and death, transversing every hurdle to becoming an affluent woman and controlling an endless wealth. Arolake becomes a symbol of feminine power as she becomes a female accoutrement of power that has the potential to subvert hegemonic/patriarchal authority that lords over women and frequently renders them weak. She became a symbol of protection, security and power for every woman and all the societies she visited. When eventually she re-emerged, Afolayan portrayed her as a captivating and queenly character, proclaimed as a progenitor of livelihood by both the living and the dead.

Witchcraft as Social Performance-Constraint in *Anikulapo* and *The Rise Of The Spectre*

Tapping into the spiritual manifestation of female power as a protection against hegemonic hostility and pretentious masking of male domination, Afolayan's *The Rise of the Spectre* creates the image of a gullible woman thrown about by her society. In the first part, "Anikulapo", the *Ifa* divination proclaimed that Arolake be brought back to the society for atonement. The patriarchy and chauvinistic male representations of Bashorun as a social clout clouded her. He made his counternarrative that flattened her images as a whore, witch and community distress. Thus, dispensing justice against conventional power arbitration logic, as Bashorun became the male gaze, manipulated justice against the womenfolk of Arolake who she referred to as a whore. The argument of Bashogbon (the *Ifa* priest) that the community needs cleansing was used by Bashorun who had nursed a lifelong enmity with the king as bait to ridicule him.

While the first sequel, *Anikulapo*, portrays barren women as witches, “The Rise of the Spectre” explicates the rise of womanhood and negotiates witchcraft in a positive light. The renegotiation of barren women as humane, kind mothers, protectors and road-mappers is portrayed in the character of Arolake who became the god-mother of Saro’s newborn. Wise Awarun(the newborn’s grandmother), understanding the affluence and power of Arolake, addressed her as queen and respectfully placed the child into her hands. Afolayan’s portrayal of Arolake as not only a godmother but also a succour and guardian to the baby reveals that the negative representation of barren women as bloodsuckers, and wicked is mere ideological labelling and not at par with reality. In that regard, the re-emergence of Arolake as an *aje* (a witch), who deploys the vital force in her to vanquish Bashorun and other male antagonists shows her power to control the cosmos.

The power transfer scene in *The Rise of the Spectre* where Bashorun takes the chain from Saro, misrepresenting it as the gourd of Akala and also collects the pouch of wealth from Arolake is an enchanting invocation of spiritual power. While the debt transfer of leading the *akudaya* went to Bashorun, Arolake was freed from all guilts and even retrieved her pouch of wealth. Saro died the death of shame all the same because of all his atrocities. In the sequels, Arolake and Saro’s self-awareness and uncompromising attitude offend Bashorun, and he subsequently plans to ‘discipline’ them. To justify the discipline, Bashorun justifies his excuses with the anger of Akala. He accuses the king of abetting a prostitute. These accusations are pretentious because they hide other sinister motives and intentions. To him, Arolake lacks credible moral standing and a graceful demeanour to carry the sacrifice to abate evil. Instead, he regards her as a debased personality suitable for clearing the mess with her head. The sudden appearance of the Ede people as led by Awolaran, Bashorun’s son against his father’s force seemed to be controlled by some forces in the cosmos and revealed that powers do not belong to the male gaze who are power-drunken and wicked. The pouch of wealth was not only regained by Arolake but she was also exonerated from every wrong and became the picture of an ideal woman in Oyo: sacrificial, kind, humane and powerful.

The freedom and power negotiated by Arolake negate her character in the first sequel where a senior queen, Olori Wojuola accused her of bewitching the king. She at first rebuffed the

negative evaluation of being a witch but quickly gave an increment that affirms that she agrees to be a witch, ...*Even if I were a witch, don't I have better things to do with my power?*

The plot twist introduced by *The Rise of the Spectre* and the desire of the Akala to have Arolake carry a sacrifice for atonement is not uncommon in the African tradition of female scapegoatism that Bashorun represents. The Alaafin, a spiritual connotation of the godhead has a strong love for Arolake just as Olodumare loves and places every woman in a position of honour and would want to protect them at all cost. Afolayan repositions women as the mother of the earth (*Iya aye*), and imbues Arolake with spiritual power, wealth and wit that fits that stature. The film represents an achievement in the history of Nollywood films for its overt feminist perspectives, especially regarding barren women's social empowerment.

Contextualised-Meaning Framing and Sociocultural Embeddings in *Anikulapo* and *The Rise Of The Spectre*

Two major framings of womanhood were portrayed in the movies: the positive and the negative labelling. Under the negative framing, women were portrayed as whores, witches, victims of infertility, and subordinate to men and baby-makers. The movies positively frame women as solution-givers, planners, protectors, kind and humane mothers.

Positive Framing in *Anikulapo* and *The Rise Of The Spectre*

Women as Planners

The theme that frames women as planners is predominant in “Anikulapo” and “The Rise of the Spectre”. The characters of Awarun, Arolake and Faderera helped the symbol of patriarchy, Saro, to surmount his major challenges. In the introductory part, when Saro is just a sojourner and sleeping under shades, Awarun is her first major helper who shelters him and offers him a job. Other men that he met on his arrival scorned his dirty look and warned him sternly not to go against the law. The man's gaze was negative, stern and judgmental. Awarun became his channel to establish his weaving outlet and paved the way for him to reach the palace. On one of his visits to the palace to advertise his wares, he was infatuated with Arolake, the youngest queen of Alaafin. Arolake thus became his *atona* (road mapper). Arolake snatched the power of Akala and channelled their escape. In Ilu

Ojumo, Arolake gave Saro the power of Akala and explained to him the intricacies, opening their channel to affluence. Even Saro agreed that Arolake was the source of his wealth and a meticulous planner in:

Excerpt 2

Saro: They have turned me into an idol in this town. Soon, I will even have my chief priest and shrine. They will bring sacrifices. We will both be chubby like a boa constrictor.

Arolake: I thought you were scared we would die of starvation.

Saro: I didn't understand, I didn't know. I should have known that you had it all planned out. People think it is I, Saro that is performing wonders. They don't know that I am not the one. I have a strong support named Rolake. Arolake who conquered Akala and took his pouch.

Arolake: Don't call out his name like that. Do you want him to haunt me in my dreams.

Saro: Don't be afraid. I will protect you. don't I have his power at my fingertips. Nothing can shake you. let him try killing you, maybe I won't bring you back.

The conversation above showed Arolake as living up to her words in all ways as a kind, humane and supportive woman and wife while Saro could only boast and fail in every promise. Saro was negligent, pompous, promiscuous and loose.

Women as Solution-Givers

Afolayan framed women as solutions to every knotty issue. This frame was evinced by the dictate of the gods to make Arolake carry a sacrifice for atonement to cleanse the community. Arolake in herself was the solution the Oyo community needed for peace to reign. Another example is the solution Iya agba rendered to Saro to make him an *akudaya* (a living-dead). The old woman taught him to become an *akudaya* which allowed him some leverage of living normally for three years.

Excerpt 3:

Iya agba: I will not die. Listen. If you spare my life and I live, I will also give you a way out

Saro: That is a big lie. It is impossible

Iya agba: There is no impossibilities...haven't you heard about the living wraiths? I will pave a way for you to become a living wraith

Woman as Humane and Motherly

While the first sequel, “Anikulapo”, portrays barren women as witches, “*The Rise of the Spectre*” explicates the rise of womanhood and negotiates witchcraft in a positive light. The renegotiation of barren women as humane and kind mothers is portrayed in the character of Arolake who was begged by Saro to take care of Faderera and their son. The wise Awarun, Faderera’s mother, understanding the affluence and power of Arolake, addressed her as a queen and placed the child into her hands. Afolayan’s portrayal of Arolake as not only a godmother but also a succour and guardian to the baby reveals that the negative representation of barren women as bloodsuckers, and wicked is mere ideological labelling and not at par with reality. In that regard, the re-emergence of Arolake as an *aje* (a witch), who deploys the vital force in her to vanquish Bashorun and other male antagonists shows her power to control the cosmos.

Woman as Protector

Tapping into the spiritual manifestation of female power as a protection against hegemonic hostility and pretentious masking of male domination, Afolayan’s “*The Rise of the Spectre*” creates the image of a gullible woman thrown about by her society. In “Anikulapo”, the *Ifa* divination proclaimed that Arolake be brought back to the society for atonement. The patriarchy and chauvinistic male representation of Bashorun made a counternarrative that flattened her images as whore, witch and community distress. Thus, dispensing justice against conventional power arbitration logic, as Bashorun became the male gaze, manipulated justice against the womenfolk of Arolake who she referred to as a whore. The argument of Bashogbon that the community needs cleansing was used by Bashorun as bait to get at the Alaafin whom he had a long-time hatred for.

Negative Labelling

Woman as Victim of Infertility

The Nollywood tradition of Kunle Afolayan aligns with the belief in the patriarchal system of women as the cause of infertility as manifested in the polygamous system of Alaafin with each queen birthing their children apart from Arolake accused of witchcraft. This manifestation is buttressed in her marriage to Saro when he impregnated Omowon. In her third marriage to Akin, she was already entrenched in the belief that she had a problem of infertility and was self-embittered.

Excerpt 4

Saro: Don't take this matter to heart. It is not a big deal. We ought to have discussed it. It is true, I impregnated Omowon. Arolake, it is our child. Come to think of it. I still love you but for how long will we remain like this without children in our house. You also know that to build a strong household, we need to have children to establish this family.

Saro appealed to the shared belief of the Yoruba cultural milieu that a child is the foundation of every marriage. Instead of conceding to being wrong, he shifted the blame on Arolake who could not be a mother. And they appeal to her sense of emotion by alluding to inclusiveness ‘...the child belongs to all of us...’ and his repetitive assertion of ‘...you know! ...You know!’ A way of self-asserting his position positively. Arolake became a social victim as incapable of her responsibility. Bimpe, Saro’s youngest wife also made this succinct during an exchange with a guard:

Bimpe: What did the poor man do to you, pretentious queen?

Saro: Why would you reveal a secret unperturbed?

Bimpe: And so, what? Please, how is that a secret? That she is barren? Or was once a queen...

Arolake: I have now become an object of mockery to you, you highly ungrateful beast of a man.

Not only was Saro unable to vindicate her of the claim of being an object of ridicule, he also physically abused her for daring to accuse him. These show that women who are unable to reproduce are blamed for it. Substantial grounds were also foregrounded as all the other women were seen carrying their children.

Excerpt 5:

Queen A: *Princess kikelomo, please go and call Queen Arolake*

Queen B: *Please sit down! Which kikelomo should go and call Queen Arolake? Does my child look a slave?... if the hairdresser cannot go to her, then Queen Arolake should come out and if she can't come out, she should conceive a child and send them on errands. Failing that, you can send your own children on errands.*

Queen A: *Look queen Arolake you came to this palace. They have their children. I have mine. And you will also have yours...you won't be barren in this palace*

The shared knowledge that an elder can send the children to the same household errands is flouted by the metaphor of barrenness. A barren woman is disrespected and stripped of the cultural honour.

Woman as Subordinate to Men

The general belief that women are subordinate and can only live off men's wealth is predominant in the data. The wealth of Arolake was questioned because she was single and even when she sent gifts to the Alaafin, the queens wanted to know who her husband was to be able to afford such gifts. For them, it was culturally wrong that any woman would be able to control such wealth without the input of a man. Rowland and Klein's (1996) assumption that "men as a group enjoy the privilege of power and that it is in the best interest of men to maintain the existing patriarchal system" (17). The privilege of power that dominate male political figures enjoy expects one form of submission or the other from women and men without power.

Excerpt 6:

Olori Wojuola- *Who is her husband that left her so much wealth?*

Arolake refused to be called a queen and would rather prefer the label of a wealthy woman. The derision of a wealthy woman was voiced by Queen Wojuola who asked who are husband was is germane to evincing the Yoruba cultural belief that a woman can never be wealthy unless a man leaves her inheritance.

Excerpt 7:

Slave: You look like a queen.

Arolake: Not a queen but a wealthy woman

The prejudice of single women not being able to accrue wealth or be regarded by the society was countered by Arolake who denied her position as queen but a wealthy woman.

Woman as Baby-Maker

The belief that women are supposed baby-making machines is entrenched in the movie. Society has conditioned the female gender to see themselves as failures if they are unable to perform their societal responsibility of birthing a child. The woman's mind is tamed through the mind-controlling cultural rhetoric directed at cultivating them into a subjugated machine. Even Arolake did not mince words to say that she is barren and not good for any man after he has gone through a series of emotional torture and misrepresentations by co-queens:

Excerpt 8:

Queen 1: Princess Kikelomo, please go and call Queen Arolake.

Queen Sunkanmi: Please sit down! Which Kikelomo should go and call Queen Arolake? Does my child look a slave?... if the hairdresser cannot go to her, then Queen Arolake should come out and if she can't come out, she should conceive a child and send them on errands. Failing that, you can send your own children on errands.

These societal filters and framing make her believe that she is not good for any man and so she voices her bitterness thus:

Excerpt: You know I cannot bear children and children are germane to every marriage. Do not try to deceive me.

Woman as Witch and Whore

The framing of women as witches and whores is predominant in Anikulapo. The likes of Arolake and Awaarun are labelled as high-handed witches and whores. Arolake, the main character is portrayed as a witch because she has the heart of her husband. Alaafin went as far as depriving other wives of ‘sleep’ to satisfy her and would buy her all the choicest gifts. After Arolake was caught having an affair with Saro and banished from Oyo, Alaafin still imagined that she was close to him. Little wonder he disregarded the harsh confrontation of Bashorun who publicly called her a whore. Instead of Alaafin being ashamed, he defended her. Other queens saw this as an act of manipulation and witchcraft. Awaarun’s character in the data is labelled as witchcraft. She is rich, independent and affluent. The men assert that she manipulates young, handsome men, sleeps with them and enslaves them. She could not be married because she claimed she would not allow any man to dictate boundaries to her. As powerful as Bashorun is, she rejects his proposal because she desires independence. This is depicted in the following excerpts below:

Excerpt 9:

Queen Wojuola: You miserable woman. Witch! Full of hate.

Arolake; I am not a witch. And even if I were, I would use my power for better things than luring some old man who...

Queen Wojuola: We all have our uses here in this palace. For some of us...are you listening? We are to bear royal sons and daughters. But you...you have a different use. You are just for the king’s pleasure. Oh yes! You are useful for nothing else...

Excerpt 10:

Man: She is a married woman, you know? Awarun has the form of a woman but she is really a man. The woman you are involved with is a man-eater. She loves young, good-looking men like you. She sleeps with them and turns them into slaves.

Excerpt 11:

Queen Sunkanmi: Why should my children help her pick her beads? Denike, Anike, haven’t I warned you not to go close to her anymore. Why should my children help her pick

her beads? Are they her slaves. She what if her beads scatter? Clearly her hands hurt. I didn't cause her not to have a child to send on errands please. Hypocrite!

Excerpt 12:

Princess Omowunmi: where are you coming from. Your lover, the moon is a gentle lover? I said where are you coming from?

Arolake: I already told you. I said I went to get some air.

Princess Omowunmi: Liar! My mother was right. You are a whore. Husband snatcher...

These sum up the notion of identity location and construction of high-handed and independent women as witches and whores. Awarun and Arolake are misrepresented because of their independence, affluence and beauty. Arolake is contextualised as a witch for being loved most by the Alaafin. To the other queens, only a woman who possesses a cosmic power can so reduce such a great king as Alaafin to a love bird. Awarun is rich, powerful and independent. She takes pleasure in seducing young men and then, enslaving them. Society sees her power as supernatural. These and many more themes point to the framing of women in the Nollywood tradition.

Albeit, the films represent an achievement in the history of Nollywood films for their overt feminist perspectives, especially regarding women's spiritual empowerment. In the quest to find happiness, Arolake brought a twist to the plot that placed her in the pedestrian of power. As such, she succeeded against all her patriarchal assailants and remained the rallying point for the gods and society. The message seems evident; that every barren woman has been endowed with supernatural intelligence and power to control the cosmic.

Conclusion

Delving into the ideological underpinnings embedded in the traditional social belief that barren women in Africa are malicious, wicked, ruthless, and unhappy, the data reveal that the social norms governing such beliefs are erroneous and detached from reality. With such a theoretical framework as cultural pragmatics, the document evaluates the context of representation. The study has therefore established that the assessment of witchcraft as an evaluation for infertile women is established through ideological nuance and unfounded.

A proper contextualization would reveal that women, especially the infertile ones, are warm, comely, motherly and kind. The findings illuminate the overarching universal ethos of women as controllers of the cosmos and possessing special power present in the reversed belief of barrenness as negative(witchcraft), evincing a grand design that accommodates the multifaceted cosmic behaviours of gender orientations. It compellingly argues that the negative undertone of barrenness as a marker of witchcraft is emblematic, misconstrued, subjective anchored in shroud fallacies constructed by the chauvinistic society rather than the African historical belief that sees barren women without children as empathetic, kind and hopeful. The paper concludes that barren women over the years have become symbols of self-actualisation, self-empowerment and self-love.

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