



International Journal of African Studies

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Discussion Article

Open Access

Herstory: The Prejudicial Agenda (A Gender) That Faces a Black “Actress”

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Article Info

Volume 3, Issue 1, June 2023

Received : 14 January 2023

Accepted : 19 May 2023

Published : 05 June 2023

doi: [10.51483/IJAFRS.3.1.2023.57-64](https://doi.org/10.51483/IJAFRS.3.1.2023.57-64)

Abstract

A herstory piece that details two components that prejudice an actress, patriarchy and inequality. The first discussion is the word “Actress” and “Diva”. The discussion around “Diva” is how the word has been vilified and dirtied to portray female performers in a bad light. Furthermore, it will discuss how the word ‘actress’ possesses prejudicial and patriarchal misogyny as well as the diminutive of the male. The second discussion is linking the abovementioned argument to how inequality amongst actresses has emerged. The first divide is gender and the next, equality. The debates in the paper will be drawn from Hollywood, which is often the benchmark of excellence in the film sector, and how the South African Film and Television (SAFT) has ascribed to Hollywood’s approach. The issues of patriarchy and misogyny persist in the television and film industry throughout the world. This is despite all the revelations of previous studies that have surfaced. This study is also informed by a Masters study I conducted in which I interviewed eleven female SAFT female practitioners on the impact of #MeToo in the SAFT sector. In line with this, I studied online commentary and interactions of the movement, studied findings of various inquests on harassment in the SAFT industry as well as existing literature, and fillings its gaps thereof. My own findings in the Masters research is that #MeToo was not impactful in the SAFT industry and that harassment still takes places, though subtly. This paper has used various online academic literature and social science literature but has identified a dire need to fill the gaps of existing literature, this paper fills the gap by offering groundbreaking and never discussed concepts in herstory and history in general. The discussions in this paper center on shedding light in the inequalities that befall women in the television sector, and suggests a new way of thinking as a way of transforming minds in how women are viewed in the sector globally.

Keywords: *Patriarchy, Sexism, Misogyny, History, Inequality*

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1. Introduction

Gradually the acting fraternity across the globe is changing, being more inclusive of females, their ranks and stories, it cannot be denied that the prejudice that faces females in the acting fraternity possesses a deep historic legacy of patriarchy and misogyny. With movements such as #MeToo being able to shed light on these prejudices, conversations have begun and slowly things are changing, but most importantly the awareness of the problems embedded in historic misogyny are being realized. #MeToo was an online movement formed by Hollywood female in 2017, who utilized Tarana

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Burke's hashtag dating back to 2006 using her *MySpace* online profile. Burke detailed her sexual violation experience and 11 years later it became widely successful through Hollywood female actors who too spoke about sexual violations in Hollywood. The first portion of this chapter sets a historic account of where this patriarchy stems from, dating back as early as 1500, and how the societal perceptions of women have shaped how women are treated in acting. It critiques the use of the word 'Actress' and 'Diva' and how both words have been used as a way to marginalize women in the sector. It draws debates from the Academy Awards in Hollywood on issues of inclusion and diversity of it thereof, comparing it to the African continent, and SAFT. This paper aims to make the argument that diminutive phrases of professionals are misogynistic and patriarchal projections on women. Just as a female doctor is not a 'doctoress', a female accountant, an 'accountantess' and female engineer an 'engineeress', an actor should not be an 'actress'.

2. The Term 'Actress' and its Prejudicial and Patriachal Nuances

This paper is about the females in the film and television industry, who are often referred to as actresses. However, I choose not to refer to them as actresses, as the term bears its own prejudices. I henceforth offer this brief historicization of the prejudices associated with this term, and hence I posit it as problematic even in today's contexts.

According to Garcia (2022), tradition was that men portray women in theatre. "[...] dates back to the theatre age of the Ancient Greeks, and is present in several other theatre traditions from around the world"¹. According to his discussion, this concept was derived due to the status quo of women in society, as well as the woman's position at the time. "The reasons for the development of these traditions, which were to endure to various degrees for thousands of years, are intricately connected to how concepts of gender and sex were understood, and specifically the role of women in society. Ancient Greek women, like many women of Shakespeare's England, did not have the right to vote or own property, and were expected to remain at home and rear children"². These ideologies were largely attributed to the influence of Elizabeth I and King James I. "In addition to other legal restrictions on the rights of women, there was no considerable social pressure on women to behave according to specific social roles. Women were expected to be subservient, quiet and homebound, with their primary ambitions entirely confined"³. This in turn shaped the idea of performance being strictly suited for males, and is believed to be the reason behind the word, 'Actor'.

The word in itself was solely for male use and thus restricted women from entering the world of theatre, only males possessed such a privilege. "Acting was, in some ways, the exact opposite of those expectations, and female actors were associated with sexual incontinence, prostitution, lasciviousness and indecency. Though there is evidence that women acted in street performances, and in other notorious venues, all commercial acting companies of the time were made up entirely of men and it was illegal for women to act on stage professionally until 1661"⁴. Garcia argues that the acting companies that were in existence at the time, comprising of male talent (actors) was deemed acceptable as it did not threaten or oppose the status quo of gender hierarchy, "Despite the profession of acting having a less than virtuous reputation, as well as a growing Orthodox Christian objection to the theatre, these all-male companies were deemed as socially legitimate because they did not threaten gender hierarchy"⁵.

Though the introduction of television and film medians of art arrived when women were able to be "recognized" as performers, it too still possessed patriarchal views in the way it depicted women, "Motion pictures largely reflect prevailing cultural attitudes about gender roles, norms, attitudes and expectations"⁶. This further contributes to the addition of stereotypes about women, "[...] this dual cause-and-effect often results in a vicious cycle as societal stereotypes influence primarily male film makers who in turn create art that adds to said stereotypes"⁷. This comes as no surprise at the diminutive formation word for actor as 'actress', a result of a classist and patriarchal informed approach to separate male performers to females. The perpetuated perception of females in society, as well as the historic legacy of female actors created an impression that they did not belong to the art, and thus a separate title to distinguish the welcome and unwelcomed was established, actress. "The term 'actress' itself is laden with subtle sexism, as the suffix '-ess' implies that the role of an actor and actress differ as performed by men and women"⁸.

¹ L. Garcia, <https://www.writers theatre.org/blog/gender-shakespeares-stage-history/>, accessed:25/06/2022

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ I. Kunsey. (2018). *Representations of Women in Popular Film: A Study of Gender Inequality in 2018*, 28, Elon University.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

The field of acting was established with males in mind and considered not the female. “Some occupational titles have been traditionally marked for gender depending on the type of occupation involved and the dominating gender of those who work in the field”. A study conducted by Maria Bovin (2016) titled, *Occupational titles and supposed gender-neutrality* looks at the dichotomy of three titles, policeman, fireman and businessman. It looks at how these titles have considered only males, hence their suffixes ending with ‘man’ due to the patriarchal view that only men can fulfill roles in policing, firefighting and business. The study looks at how the use of the titles have differed over the years. For example, the study found that in the 1920’s, 62.2% of Americans used the title ‘policeman’ and only 1.31% used policewoman. By the 1990’s, more people were using the word ‘police officer’ and not singling it to a particular gender, displaying the gender neutrality was due to the acceptance that the world was changing⁹. Though this may be case, the study reflects that society is still fixated on patriarchal thinking as any title deemed unknown is referenced as ‘he’. “When discussing pronominal referencing, something that is important to have in mind is the generic *he*. The generic *he* can, in theory refer to both men and women. As well as used when gender is either unknown or irrelevant”¹⁰. The obvious assumption of ‘he’ reflects societal norms that patriarchal projects.

Though Boyin’s study suggests that gender neutrality is realized by the world’s awareness of change, the knowing has not resulted in confession. This is evident in word uses that suggests that only males belong to a particular occupation. “The results further show that the gender- biased policeman/policemen has decreased in usage since the 1970s. However, it is only in the 2000s that police officers is more frequently used, the gender biased term has not diminished”¹¹. Boyin draws on Cameron’s analysis to explain why the gender biased titles refuse to decay, “A possible explanation for this continued usage is perhaps that these terms have other connotations than their gender-neutral alternatives. Terms marked for males tend, according to Cameron, connote meanings of power, status and freedom”¹². This gives an impression that the world is steadfast in clinging onto patriarchy. Patriarchy has existed for decades and has become the status quo, and thus becomes a comfortable ethos for people to ascribe to. The common use of patriarchal terminologies such as ‘actress’ validates patriarchy, further rubber stamping it, and deems it acceptable. When this happens, the fight and resistance against the normativity of misogyny and patriarchy becomes a battle.

3. The Term ‘Diva’ and How It’s Been Used to Vilify Female Performers

Just as the word ‘Actress’ carries immense misogyny and patriarchy, any word that aims to celebrate a female performer with laudable work ethic seems to get the negative misogynistic and patriarchal rejection. Such an example is the word ‘Diva’. The origin of the word itself is a word that aims to applaud a female opera singer, and gradually became a term or word used to celebrate female performers, not just opera singers. However, the word has been dirtied and vilified, creating a negative impression of what it actually means. “The Diva label challenges accepted gendered social constructions aligned to masculinity. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon us to highlight that Diva identity is socially constructed in the tabloid press and media and therefore carries with it a judgmental stigma”¹³. The word ‘Diva’ is and should be taken as a compliment as its original formation had intentions of praising an outstanding female performer, “The term which derives from the Italian word ‘Goddess’ or ‘Fine lady’ was originally used to describe a woman of rare, outstanding talent”¹⁴. However, it has become socially constructed that if the word ‘Diva’ is uttered, it suggests that a female performer is difficult, uncouth, pompous or a headache to work with.

The same can be said about the word ‘Thespian’ which is derived from the Greek poet, Thespis who changed the narrative of theatre in 534 BC. It is believed that theatre productions were performed in a group, referred to as ‘Chorus’ and all the lines were recited in unison, and no individual performance was allowed. Thespis broke this tradition by abruptly neglecting the chorus group of men and decided to recite the lines individually, “The Greek rhetorician Themistius (4th century AD), Aristotle said the tragedy was entirely choral until Thespis introduced the prologue and the internal speeches”¹⁵. Often the term is solely used on a male actor/performer, and the prefix ‘Female’ is used to for a woman actor (Female thespian). Often, the word is not used as a standalone. It is no surprise that Thespis was a male, as previously mentioned, only males were allowed to perform in formal theatre until mid-1600. Through this legacy of patriarchy, it continues in present day, excluding the female actor. Likewise ‘Diva’ can never be entirely accepted for what its origin

⁹ M. Bovin. (2016). *Occupational Titles and Supposed Gender-Neutrality: A Corpus-based Diachronic Study on Gender-neutral Occupational Titles in American English*, Spring, p. 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.

¹³ R. Smith. (2009). *The Diva Storyline: An Alternative Social Construction of Female Entrepreneurship*. June.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thespis>, accessed: 25/06/2022

intends, but must rather be vilified and dirtied to take away the spotlight on a female that society may want to have solely on a male.

4. Colonial/Racial Bias Agenda Towards Black Women in Performance

While the above historiography displays patriarchy emanating from Western countries, the same can be experienced in South Africa, and can be attested to African perception of women.

Patriarchy in African society is embedded in its customs and practices, yet the influence of colonial rule cannot be exempt as one of the reasons behind how women are viewed in South Africa, and the performance sector as a whole. According to findings in a research study I conducted, white owned production houses had better resources, funds and treatment towards female actors than a non-white owned production houses¹⁶. Furthermore, it was established in findings that black female film and television practitioners found that white female actors were treated better than black female actors¹⁷. Gouws (2006) argues that the racial equality fight in South Africa had overshadowed the gender inequality fight. “Political agenda- gender has been made subordinate to the struggle for racial equality for many decades”¹⁸. While racial inequality remains one of society’s biggest struggles, the struggle of a black female performer remains unmatched. A black female performer has to first fight the battle of being black, and then fight the battle of being a female and then fight historical bias battles of being an actor.

History has proven how there is little to no legal recourse for South African women. South Africa can boast of one of the most women-friendly constitutions, yet it still is described as the world’s rape capital, in which women continue to be the most unemployed, illiterate and unequal in society. The South African constitution contains of 17 grounds on which discrimination cannot take place, “This clause includes 17 grounds on which discrimination may not take place, five of which are related to gender equality (sex, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and pregnancy)”¹⁹. Though the Commission on Gender Equality was established in South Africa in 1996, to ascertain gender parity and equality- it too carries challenges. “In contrast, when issues are referred to the head office it often takes a long time to get responses (in some cases more than a year)”²⁰. A female artist interviewed in my research abovementioned was disappointed when she, and other female artists were made to re-send their testimonies countless times to the Gender commission. The testimonies were against a male broadcast and film executive, for violating their rights. The case did not progress and no justice was served. The same research proves that there is little to no legal recourse for female practitioners in South Africa. Inequality in the South African Film and Television industry remains high.

The same inequality can be said about Hollywood, which is the benchmark of television and film excellence across the globe. “Although representation of women in film have improved in recent years, this growth has been mitigated by the fact there has only been a 3% increase in female employment in the 250 top-grossing films since 1998”²¹. The fact that there has only been a 3% increase since 1998 in the inclusion of women in Hollywood, the blanket approach of gender inequality in the arts across the globe comes as no surprise. “By employing tendencies, the film industry discourages women from entering the field and thus influences decisions to hire male workers instead of female workers”²².

Women are already discouraged from even attempting to enter the film and television sector as the normativity of males being mostly employed has been evoked. Furthermore, women who leave film school have lingering at the back of their minds the possibility of never working in the sector. This is largely due to the unequal opportunities that are eminent in the acting industry. At the height of #MeToo, a time change was at its highest across the world in the acting industry, no female director was nominated in the best director category as well as the best picture. “In 2019, in the midst of social change and the #MeToo movement, zero female directors were nominated for ‘Best Director’ and zero female directors were nominated for ‘Best Picture’, additionally, each of the top 30 grossing movies in the US in 2018 were directed by men”²³. The female participants interviewed in research unanimously agreed that they did not have equal opportunities as males in the SAFT industry, “All 11 participants believed they did not have equal opportunities with men in the SAFT industry”²⁴. Hollywood finds itself in a paradoxical predicament when it expects producers to have vast

¹⁶ N. Majiba. (2022). *The Impact of #MeToo in the South African Film and Television Industry, within a Historical Framework*. University of South Africa.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ A. Gouws. (2006). *The State of the National Gender Machinery: Structural Problems and Personalised Politics*, 148.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ I. Kunsey. (2018). *Representations of Women in Popular Film: A Study of Gender Inequality in 2018*, 28, Elon University.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ N. Majiba, *op. cit.*

experience, before given large budgets and funding, women are unfortunately prejudiced in this regard because they are not employed by the industry, thus resulting in them lacking experience and this leads to the forfeiting/missing out on large budgets of funding.

One of the most prominent is the idea that female filmmakers present more of a financial risk than male filmmakers. When faced with large budgets, studio executives tend to fall back on directors who have had box-office hits in the past. These directors are often male. This presents a bit of a paradox in which women are not hired for positions that require them to have previous jobs to prove their worth²⁵.

Kunsey (2018) uses Critical Mass Theory in his research and the theory suggests that representation in film is dependent on numeric designations²⁶. In essence the argument he makes is that minority are likely to make a change with regards to equity in the acting industry, and not those that hold power. In other words, black female performers are more likely to make a change in the acting industry, than white male actors. "Once critical mass has been achieved, women will theoretically be able to push for substantial changes and legislation"²⁷. Kunsey suggests that though the minority may make change, the willingness thereof is important. He cites Kathryn Bigelow as an example, the first woman to win an Oscar for "Best Director" who according to him has shied away from addressing gender inequality in Hollywood. "Bigelow's position and refusal to address inequality and gender politics in Hollywood show the inadequacies of critical mass, as not every individual in a group is willing to advocate for change"²⁸. The same sentiments were echoed in the SAFT industry, with my abovementioned research, all women cited a lack of unity as the draw back in the fight for equality in the industry. Instead women colluded with alleged perpetrators and became enablers of the abusers in the SAFT industry²⁹.

Perceptions and behaviors of society are often reflected in the narratives that are enacted by the performers, and often than not directly resemble the inequities of society, including the very acting industry that project the stories of society. Bazzini *et al.* (1997) echoes these sentiments by suggesting that film is responsible for shaping ideas, norms and beliefs. "Popular media images are reflections of a culture's attitude, beliefs and standards, as well as projections of desired realities. Whether accurate descriptions of daily living, or wishful-thinking on the part of film-makers, media tells a story that is eagerly received by consumers"³⁰. This places a huge responsibility on an already patriarchal acting industry to dismantle patriarchy, by writing narratives that expose and address it. Patriarchy is not comfortable when exposed, it thrives when it becomes the 'elephant in the room'.

While male actors are often cast due to their technique and approach to mastering a character, female actors are usually cast based on their looks and body built. In 1986, Perdue, Peterson and Kelly revealed in their study that 40 of the most popular television shows in America, women were portrayed for visual pleasure. "Women characters were portrayed as thinner and younger than their male counterparts. Such portrayals may imply that women's primary value lies in the possession of physical beauty, while men's does not"³¹. The 11 participants interviewed in my research mentioned how colorism was rife in the SAFT industry, making the struggle of the black female actor extra difficult. A light skinned black female actor is far less prejudiced than the darker skin female actor. Kunsey's research finds that in 100 American movies, 253 central characters emerged, and of that number, 162 were male actors and 91 were female actors³². The revelation is that actors (male) are the actual performers in film, and an 'actress', is a sub-ordinate, a supporter and an "other" hence the sector is more serving to the male actor. History has shown that acting emerged with a man in mind, and the inclusion of women is seemingly a sheer inconvenience.

Syed and Ozbligrin's relational framework is used in Hennekam and Syed (2017) study on *Institutional racism in the film industries: A multilevel perspective*. "Issues of diversity and discrimination need to be understood and addressed at the macro-societal level in terms of legislative and socio-cultural contexts, meso-organizational level in terms of organizational structures and routines and micro-individual level in terms of identity, intersectionality and agency"³³. The study cites Pagan's view of how bias the selection of plays in the fine arts degree program, as it only serves a certain

²⁵ I. Kunsey, *op. cit.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ N. Majiba, *op. cit.*

³⁰ D.G. Bazzini., D. McIntosh., W.D. Smith., S. Cook. and S. Harris. (1997). *The Aging Woman in Popular Film: Underrepresented, Unattractive, Unfriendly, and Unintelligent*, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² I. Kunsey, *op. cit.*

³³ *Ibid.*

gender (male) and often carries racist nuances. “Amongst other things, Pagan noted ‘the way in which these plays are selected, structured and presented reveals the systematic racism, showing that progress is slow or inexistent’³⁴.”

Not only are black female actors experiencing prejudice and inequality in the sector itself, but as early as university training for the discipline, they’re already being made to feel that they do not belong in the acting industry. Hennekam and Syd argue that there are two phases a new comer in the acting industry goes through. The first is the clique based cycle, Hennekam and Syd argue that usually these cliques are run by those who possess power in the industry and are often racist and sexist, “Such networks or cliques are known for the potential to be both discriminatory and exclusionary in terms of race and gender”³⁵. The second is the ‘formal and informal learning’, “constitutes a means through which newcomers learn the norms and rules of the industry. [...] the process of observational learning and socialization, individuals learn the rules of the game in the industry”³⁶. This often plays part to the never ending patriarchy in the acting industry, the two abovementioned phases are motioned by powerful men in the industry who endorse, enforce and validate patriarchy. This in turn continues the vicious toxic, and historical cycle of misogyny and patriarchy in the acting discipline. Furthermore, it is also the phase(s) where racism is normalized and endorsed, further continuing the history and legacy of racism in the acting industry, particularly black female actors.

The issue is not necessarily an acting sector problem, but a societal problem and is reflected in the acting sector. Society on its own, possesses patriarchal issues. Hennekam and Syd agree with this view in their conducted research in the Netherlands with 16 participants, 9 women and 7 non-white individuals in the year 2015³⁷. The findings of the research were that society on its own is patriarchal, the industry receives the infiltration of it thereof from society and its inequality. “On macro level, the interviewees stressed that the inequalities they experienced were strongly embedded in the power structures they observed in society as a whole”³⁸. A nonwhite female actor explained how she was stereotypically cast for certain roles that further validate society’s perceptions. “Often they were depicted in a submissive, sexual or caring role and black people as sportive for men and inferior for women”³⁹. One female nonwhite actor details how getting a ‘foot at the door’ means you have to be one of ‘them’ (referring to white men).

Roles are fulfilled based on a network of friends who have known each other for a long time. It’s impossible to get a foot in the door if you’re not “one of them”. I don’t know if this is because I’m a woman and the main power holders are men or because I’m not white. Maybe a combination of both.⁴⁰

In my research, the findings have shown that more and more black producers have emerged in the SAFT industry, but it is mostly men. These men have taken it upon themselves to sexually prey on their fellow black sisters for work. The black female actor is prejudiced and compromised because she knows she does not stand a chance to work with a white male producer, unless she belongs to his “clique”. So in frustration and desperation to work, she engages in sexual acts with her said black male producer ‘brother’ in exchange for work. Hennekam and Syd reveal another black female actor’s sentiments of exclusion and inequality,

I want to speak about the fact that I am black and I’m a woman. While this seems unimportant to some, it does make a difference. Let me explain. We all want an identity that is valued and recognized by other. However, as a woman I’m in a disadvantaged position compared to men. Being black gives me a second disadvantage. In other words, while white women can stress their whiteness to bond with other white people and black men can stress their male-identity, I have no positive identity I can draw on⁴¹

The above female actor’s sentiments are equally echoed by the 11 participants interviewed in my previous research. The findings reflect that black female actors feel prejudice and in comparison to white female actors, they feel isolated and in isolation make uncomfortable decisions to get by. These decisions more often than not find them having sexual relations with prominent producers for work. Male actors may experience harassment, but their experiences have reflected to be incomparable to a black female actor. This is due to the gender hierarchies that society has bestowed. Heise *et al.* (2019) argues that what is found to be feminine or masculine reflects a profound hierarchy. “What is considered feminine or masculine reflects a profound hierarchy, in which masculine is superior to feminine and neither can be understood separately from the gender system that shapes them”⁴². Furthermore they argue that gender norms usually favor males,

³⁴ S. Hennekam. and J. Syed. (2017). *Institutional Racism in the Film Industries: A Multilevel Perspective*, 552.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 553.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 556-557.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 557.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 558.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 560

⁴² L. Heise *et al.* (2019). *Gender Equality, Norms and Health*, 1, 2440.

“Gender norms sustain a hierarchy of power and privilege that typically favors that which is considered male or masculine over that which is female and feminine, reinforcing a systemic inequality that undermines the rights of women and girls”⁴³. Gender norms are not absent in the acting industry, male performers and actors are the preferred candidates before any enforcement of policy, rates and working conditions. Such an example is the sheer disregard of maternity leave being granted to a female actor. Such does not exist in the SAFT industry as the industry is unregulated, making it difficult to enforce labor laws. The industry considers male actors first, disregarding female actors and the uniqueness of their needs. “Gender norms, the often unspoken rules that govern the attributes and behaviors that are valued and considered acceptable for men, women and gender minorities”⁴⁴.

The level of inequality between male and female actors can be seen in the wording of “Actor” (suggesting legitimacy and sovereignty of a male) and “Actress” (Not good enough to be an actor, so a subordinate term is given instead). Gaucher *et al.* (2011) argue that there is evidence in gendered wording that sustains gender inequality, “We propose that gendered wording (i.e., masculine- and feminine-themed words, such as those associated with gender stereotypes) may be a heretofore unacknowledged, institutional-level mechanism of inequality maintenance”⁴⁵.

Gaucher and Friesen have found that gendered wording can either make one feel included or excluded and adds to their belongingness. “There is ample evidence that suggests that belongingness- feeling that one fits in with others within a particular domain affects people’s achievement motivation specifically and engagement within a domain more generally, and that it can be signaled by cues in the environment”⁴⁶. In other words, when female actors are excluded from the title ‘Actor’ and are rather given ‘Actress’, their sense of belongingness is compromised. Hollywood and SAFT are not the only film sectors that struggle with gender inequality in the sector, Nigeria’s Nollywood also faces immense issues of inequality and misogyny among actors.

The major inequality detailed by Patrick in Nollywood, is that of sexual objectifying of female actors. He argues that the female actors are said to be enablers of this, by accepting such sexually objectifying roles. “According to a number of critics and scholars, female actors’ passively and complicity are to blame for the continuous negative portrayals of women in films. This line of argument follows from arguable belief that female actors most often accept offers to play demeaning roles in films, while it is axiomatic that if they reject such roles, androcentric/sexist screen writers will be compelled to develop better female characters for their films”⁴⁷. I disagree with this notion, the issue is not the female actor. The issue is the writers/informers of the mistruths the female actors are to portray. Furthermore, the onus cannot be on the victims of these prejudices (female actors). For example, a child born with a deformity cannot be given blame for what s/he was born with. The same can be said about female actors who are prejudiced and made to portray misogynistic and sexist roles, they were born in an unequal society.

Moreover, the female actors entered the acting sector with these already existing toxic traits, they merely entered into a problem they did not create. Beyond that, the acting industry across the globe has artists idling on the sidelines eagerly waiting to work, if actors reject a role to make a statement, another will be found to fulfill it.

5. Conclusion

Societal projections have had immense patriarchal influence in the acting fraternity across the world. The sector itself was built on exclusion of women and their contribution towards performance, even their exclusion from the title ‘actor’ and when they are excelling at it, the only name that solely belongs to them- ‘diva’ is dirtied and vilified. This excludes them from being lauded for excellence. This causes immense frustration among many who opt to appease the ‘runners’ of the sector, men. Their appeasement ranges from colluding with men, backstabbing other women or having sexual relations with men to have a comfortable survival mode. This also proves that patriarchy not only comes from men, but women too. Men can be feminists and women patriarchal. Female actors have had to find a survival mechanism to get them by.

Moreover, their issues are far complex than having to adapt and surviving, they find themselves being sexualized and being cast based on their features, looks and body frame- something male actors barely have to experience. Poet,

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 2440.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2441.

⁴⁵ D. Gaucher., J. Friesen. and A.C. Kay. (2011). *Evidence That Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exist and Sustains and Sustains Gender Inequality*, 109.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112

⁴⁷ FPC Endong. (2021). *Cast Me Not as a Succubus or a Jezebel: Nollywood Actresses and the Struggle Against Women Stereotyping*. *Inkanyiso Journal*, p. 225.

⁴⁸ L. Mashile. (2020). *These Hips have Carried Boulders*, 1.

Mashile puts it, “TV and magazines do not understand the symmetry between design and purpose”⁴⁸. This paper has argued that there are major prejudices that befall a woman, gender as a construct and inequality. But there is inequality within inequality as far as a black female actor is concerned. The struggles of a white female actor and a black female actor are hugely different, this the paper has shown that it is the case in Hollywood, SAFT, and the Netherlands. Though all female actors are prejudiced, their prejudice is not the same. Just as the title of this paper suggests, there is an agenda on gender, and the agenda is clear, men must and should always be considered first. This is what patriarchy and misogyny thrive and exist on. It is no different in the acting industry. Moreover, the agenda is clear that the black female actor must always come last, and that the white man must come first. This research has argued that the word ‘actress’ should be seen as a sheer insult to female acting professionals and an embrace of ‘actor’ for females should be ascribed to, not only by the acting sector but also by the female actors themselves.

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Cite this article as: Ntsika Majiba (2023). *Herstory: The Prejudicial Agenda (A Gender) That Faces a Black “Actress”*. *International Journal of African Studies*, 3(1), 57-64. doi: 10.51483/IJAFRS.3.1.2023.57-64.