

A CLOSEUP ON GENDER ISSUES IN EDDY YOUNG'S *KASANOVA* AND KUNLE AFOLAYAN'S *CITATION*

By

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Abstract

*Modern Nigerian cinema, or "New Nollywood," has emerged as a vital arena for cultural activism and the reconfiguration of socio-political identities. Diverging from the rigid gender stereotypes of earlier video-film phases, recent productions grapple with multifaceted themes of power and institutional transformation. While substantial scholarship has chronicled the marginalization of women in "Old Nollywood" as passive figures, a gap persists in examining how contemporary aesthetics mediate the tension between burgeoning female empowerment and entrenched patriarchal frameworks. This paper redresses this shortfall through a targeted scrutiny of gender identities and power dynamics in Eddy Young's *Kasanova* and Kunle Afolayan's *Citation*. Anchored in Feminist Film Theory and the "oppositional gaze," the study applies qualitative textual and semiotic analysis to cinematography, character evolution, and scripting to trace the transition from erotic commodification to empowered depictions. The analysis reveals that both films interrogate feminist motifs with varying efficacy. *Citation* constitutes a landmark by portraying a lead character who dismantles institutional sexual predation, thereby rupturing the cycle of female "victimhood." By comparison, *Kasanova* navigates romantic autonomy more ambiguously, where proactive agency remains intermittently constrained by residual patriarchal ideals of domesticity. Ultimately, these works herald a shift in African cinema, recasting women as self-directed protagonists. This inquiry positions "New Nollywood" as a pivotal conduit for eroding hegemonic paradigms and urges creators to prioritize narratives of institutional reform. It further advocates for comparative research on the "female gaze" across films helmed by both male and female directors.*

Keywords: *Feminism, New Nollywood, Female Agency, Citation, Kasanova.*

Introduction

The global conditioning of women continues to raise fundamental questions regarding their roles in contemporary society. Traditionally, women have been relegated to subordinate positions within the family, education, and professional leadership. They face discrimination in politics and across various religions, where P.C. Daniel-Inim in tandem with Brown, reflecting the notion that "a woman's preaching is like a dog walking on its hind legs. It is not done well. You are surprised to find it done at all" (Daniel-Inim, 2014). As noted by scholars like Anyanwu, while the "contemporary image of womanhood has shifted from the traditional-patriarchal to accommodate a more liberal and wholesome view," the practical perception of women often remains static and deeply entrenched in patriarchal structures. Siwila (2017) puts it well that, regarding the concept of the 'woman' as a sex symbol, she is defined as a member of the human species capable of reproduction. 'Sex' pertains to objects of sexual pleasure, while 'symbol' represents an object that signifies deeper meanings or associations. The term 'sex symbol' originated in the early 20th century to describe glamorous film stars and has since evolved to

include various categories of public figures, including actresses and musicians. This portrayal often reduces women to their physical attributes, emphasising their bodies as objects of male gaze and desire, rather than acknowledging their multifaceted identities and capabilities (Endong, 2021; Siwila, 2017). The term 'sex symbol' encompasses various types, such as charismatic figures who exude sex appeal through personality, film and television stars known for sultry roles, music icons recognised for their sensual qualities, teen idols celebrated for their youthful charm, supermodels noted for their vast popularity, and fictional characters embodying these traits. This commercialisation is evident in advertising and entertainment, reinforcing the trend of portraying women as sex symbols, particularly in Nigerian media, where the success of home videos is partly attributed to the proliferation of female sex symbols. This objectification often denies women personhood, reducing them to mere physical objects of male desire and thereby undermining their autonomy and social standing (Endong, 2021). This underscores a pervasive cultural attitude where female bodies are often sexualized and displayed in greater degrees than male bodies, even in hyper-erotic contexts (Akpan-Obong, 2023). This disparity is further evidenced by studies indicating that Nigerian films often portray women not only as passive and subordinate but also as malevolent and unfaithful, reflecting a societal reinforcement of traditional, restrictive gender roles (Azeez, 2010). However, some feminist perspectives argue that while these portrayals are problematic, female audiences can interpret such content in ways that resist or challenge these dominant gender subjectivities, fostering a more critical engagement with media narratives (Azeez, 2010). Despite these counter-readings, the prevalence of sexually objectifying comments and aggressive sexual behaviour towards women athletes on platforms like YouTube further illustrates how online spaces can amplify these harmful portrayals, often serving a homosocial bonding function among male users (Akalonu & Ha, 2024). This perpetuates a cycle where media content, by continually reinforcing patriarchal power structures and promoting conflicts rooted in women's choices to prioritise male validation, limits women's perceived free will and autonomy, as observed in various media analyses (Maryani & Ratmita, 2023). Such reoccurring objectification and the reinforcement of limiting gender roles have prompted some Nollywood actresses to actively resist these demeaning portrayals through various forms of individual and collective action (Endong, 2021). However, despite individual efforts, the overarching trend in Nollywood continues to depict women in ways that reinforce their subjugation and objectification, with few significant changes in the 21st century (Ejem et al., 2022). This ongoing struggle is evidenced by the consistent efforts of female Nigerian actors who employ diverse strategies, from rejecting stereotypical roles to producing their own feminist-leaning films, to counter the prevailing objectification within Nollywood (Endong, 2021). In recent years, two films, Eddy Young's *Kassanova* and Kunle Afolayan's *Citation*, have garnered attention for their thoughtful and vital engagement with gender dynamics in different African contexts. *Kassanova* explores the difficulties of contemporary relationships and gender roles within Nigeria, while *Citation* confronts issues of sexual harassment and consent in academic settings.

In the Nigerian context, cinema serves as a potent mirror of these societal attitudes ("Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025; Uwah, 2011). Historically, the industry has perpetuated narrow portrayals of women as subservient domestic workers, malevolent figures, or mere "sex symbols" designed to satisfy the "male gaze" (Azeez, 2010; Endong, 2018; Ibbi, 2018). This commercialization often reduces women to their physical attributes, emphasizing reproduction and sexual pleasure over

their multifaceted identities (Alola and Alola, 2020; Ilo, 2025). However, "New Nollywood" has begun to provide a platform for "political critique" and social commentary, offering a more subtle representation of female agency (Amonyeze and Agbo, 2022; Asuman et al., 2025).

Despite the emergence of new narratives, there is a persistent "loud silence" regarding the genuine struggle for female liberation in contemporary Nollywood (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023). While individual actresses and producers have attempted to resist demeaning portrayals, the overarching trend often continues to reinforce women's subjugation through limiting gender roles (Omoera & Okwuowulu, 2021; Osakpolor, 2021). There is a critical scholarly gap in understanding how contemporary films, specifically those set in modern urban and academic environments, actively negotiate the tension between emerging female autonomy and entrenched patriarchal stereotypes (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023; Isiguzo, 2025). Without a focused analysis of these "new voices," the evolution of the female image in Nigerian cinema remains poorly understood, potentially obscuring progress made toward countering traditional gender subjectivities (Amonyeze and Agbo, 2022; Azeez, 2010). The primary aim of this study is to analyze the representation of gender issues in Eddy Young's *Kasanova* and Kunle Afolayan's *Citation* through the framework of feminist film theory. The specific objectives are to examine how *Kasanova* portrays the challenges women face in navigating romantic relationships amidst deep-rooted patriarchal stereotypes. Deconstruct the depiction of power imbalances and institutional sexual harassment in *Citation*. Evaluate the extent to which these films reinforce or subvert the "sex symbol" trope and the objectification of women in Nigerian media (Endong, 2018; Ilo, 2025). It will further determine how these cinematic representations contribute to the broader discourse on social change and gender equity in Africa (Asuman et al., 2025; "Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025). Questions yearning for answer includes; in what ways do *Kasanova* and *Citation* challenge or reinforce traditional patriarchal perceptions of women in Nigerian society? How is the "female gaze" utilized in these films to portray agency rather than mere sexual objectivity? To what extent does the portrayal of institutional harassment in *Citation* provide a counter-narrative to the "loud silence" of female subjugation (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023)? What role does contemporary Nollywood play in redefining the "contemporary image of womanhood" for a modern audience? This study advances existing scholarship by moving beyond a descriptive discussion of gender stereotypes to an analytical investigation of "New Nollywood" as a site of resistance ("Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025). By focusing on *Citation* and *Kasanova*, the research provides specific insights into how modern Nigerian cinema engages with institutional ethics and urban romantic negotiations (Isiguzo, 2025). Furthermore, it contributes a refined theoretical application of feminist film theory to the West African context, highlighting the transition from women as "sex symbols" to women as agentic, multifaceted human beings (Amonyeze and Agbo, 2022; Osakpolor, 2021). This paper serves as a resource for scholars, filmmakers, and activists interested in the potential of film to foster social transformation and dismantle hegemonic gender narratives (Asuman et al., 2025; Emwinromwankhoe, 2023). By bridging cinematic analysis with the broader sociocultural objectives of gender policy in Nigeria, this paper identifies the persistent barriers that hinder genuine empowerment (Okunade et al., 2023). Consequently, this inquiry seeks to ascertain the extent to

which these narratives either sustain or disrupt existing frameworks of gendered violence within the Nigerian filmic landscape. This examination further bridges the gap between media representation and the lived experiences of individuals by identifying whether these cinematic portrayals actively minimize human agency through established tropes of subjugation (Ekpe & Akpabio, 2021).

Literature Review

Perceptions of feminism vary across cultural contexts. In African societies, particularly in Nigeria, numerous traditions remain exclusively reserved for men. As observed by Pogson, A. I. (2012), certain cultural adherents continue to reject women's capacity for leadership, instead viewing men as suitable followers; he underscores the rigidity of these traditions, whereby men retain interpretive authority to serve their own interests. Debates on gender issues are thus poised to endure as long as human societies persist. Often, there is a clash of cultural perspectives within feminist discourse. How an African man views social class differs from the viewpoint of Americans or the British. An African woman aims to assert her place alongside her man. She knows her worth, recognises what sets her apart, protects her space, respects her partner, sets her goals, and pursues them. Conversely, in cultures unfamiliar to one's own, expectations may differ; for example, the woman might expect the man to do the laundry, clean the house, wash the dishes, and cook. All these are woven into the emotional fabric of 'for better, for worse' or in a more cunning phrase localized in Nigerian context, 'husband material'. In truth, no one likes to be marginalised. Men and women have distinct roles at home and in society. The debate surrounding feminism in Africa is characterized by a tension between indigenous realities and Eurocentric impositions. Unlike Western radical frameworks that may prioritize individual autonomy, African feminist thought often emphasizes communal well-being, complementarity, and the valorization of maternal politics (Asuman et al., 2025). This perspective recognizes that while hegemonic masculinity is currently entrenched in African social structures, this is often a result of colonial interventions that exacerbated patriarchal hierarchies and diminished the "matripotential" or significant authority women held in pre-colonial societies (Emenike, 2016). In contemporary scholarship, this historical context is vital for understanding how gender is negotiated in cultural productions. The shift from "traditional-patriarchal" views to more liberal interpretations of womanhood is not merely a social evolution but a decolonial effort to reclaim female agency (Amonyeye & Agbo, 2022). However, this negotiation remains complex as men often retain interpretive authority over traditions to serve patriarchal headship in religion, family, and politics (Uwah, 2011).

In the context of African cinema, feminist media studies apply hegemony theory to analyze how films either reinforce or challenge prevailing societal norms (Azeez, 2010). A significant debate exists regarding the "male gaze" in Nollywood, where women are frequently reduced to "sex symbols" to ensure the commercial success of home videos (Endong, 2018). This objectification is an ideological device used to sustain discourses that provide women with lower social standings (Azeez, 2010). Scholarship indicates that Nigerian films have historically perpetuated narrow portrayals of women as subservient domestic agents, malevolent figures, or objects of desire (Alola & Alola, 2020; Ibbi, 2018). These representations are not merely aesthetic but reflect a global conditioning where female bodies are sexualized to a higher degree than male bodies, even in hyper-eroticized cinematic contexts (Endong, 2018).

This study positions itself within this debate by investigating how contemporary films attempt to move beyond these restrictive "sex symbol" tropes to acknowledge multifaceted female identities.

While "Old Nollywood" was characterized by the stereotype representation of women as passive or subordinate (Ibbi, 2018), newer narratives explore female agency and value in more sophisticated urban and institutional settings (Amonyeye & Agbo, 2022; Isiguzo, 2025). However, critics point out a persistent "loud silence" in the genuine struggle for female liberation; even in contemporary films, a "new normal" of gendered violence and institutional barriers often limits the perceived free will and autonomy of female characters (Ekpe and Akpabio, 2021; Emwinromwankhoe, 2023). For instance, while some films depict powerful women, they may still frame them through a lens of "victimhood" or within traditional domestic expectations (Isiguzo, 2025; Osakpolor, 2021).

The debate regarding female agency in cinema often contrasts classical portrayals of civic competence with contemporary cinematic objectification. While literary archetypes like Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* depict women subverting patriarchal structures to influence political change, historical narratives in cinema have frequently diminished the status of the female subject (Olakunbi, O. O. 2012)). In Nigerian cinema, this tension is particularly acute; while some narratives highlight resistance, the prevailing "male gaze" continues to reduce women to passive objects or "sex symbols" to ensure commercial viability (Endong, 2018; Ilo, 2025). Scholarship indicates that Nollywood often functions as an ideological apparatus that normalizes female subordination (Azeez, 2010). Women are frequently relegated to supportive, vulnerable roles with limited voices, reinforcing the notion of the "weaker sex" even in modern urban settings (Alola & Alola, 2020; Asuman et al., 2025). This limited scope of representation not only impacts societal perceptions but also frames the discourse of gender identity within media studies as a struggle between traditional domesticity and multifaceted individual agency (Azeez, 2010; Ibbi, 2018).

A central debate in African cinema involves the "gendered disparity in accountability," particularly regarding sexual ethics and cultural nationalism. Tunde Kelani's *Narrow Path* serves as a critical case study of this imbalance, highlighting the cultural valorization of female virginity while overlooking male culpability, a phenomenon scholars describe as the "broken pot" metaphor of Yoruba culture (Azeez, 2010). This double standard sustains patriarchal norms by imposing disproportionate moral burdens on women while absolving men of equivalent responsibility (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023; Krings & Okome, 2014). These cinematic representations of sexual purity reflect a wider societal tension between preserving cultural heritage and advancing equitable gender portrayals (Azeez, 2010; Endong, 2018). Research suggests that while male audiences may endorse these patriarchal perspectives as "cultural nationalism," female spectators have continuously call for narratives that contest these outdated stereotypes (Azeez, 2010). Consequently, the persistence of these biases in contemporary film can sustain cycles of vulnerability and limited agency, as seen in narratives that equate female sexual behaviour with moral failure or disease (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023; Krings & Okome, 2014).

The transition to "New Nollywood" has introduced a "new normal" where films

are viewed as "screens of resistance" (Ekpe & Akpabio, 2021; "Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025). However, a significant scholarly debate persists regarding whether these "new voices" truly achieve liberation or merely perform a "loud silence" of continued subjugation (Amonyeze & Agbo, 2022; Emwinromwankhoe, 2023). While films like *Citation* and *Kasanova* are lauded for addressing institutional harassment and modern romantic negotiations, they often navigate complicated patriarchal constraints that limit the perceived free will of their protagonists (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023; Isiguzo, 2025). This study positions itself within this debate by investigating how *Citation* and *Kasanova* utilize the "female gaze" to reclaim personhood (Ilo, 2025). Unlike earlier works that confined women to domestic spheres or cast them as "malevolent antagonists" (Azeez, 2010; Ibbi, 2018), these contemporary films offer a platform for "political critique" and social change (Asuman et al., 2025; "Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025).

A significant debate in Nigerian gender studies centers on whether the subjugation of women is a divine mandate or a "man-made invention" codified through institutionalized theology. Scholars like Elizabeth Olayiwola and Elizabeth Cady Stanton argue that while religion may involve a gender-neutral deity, theology remains an "institutionalized activity monopolized by men" designed to enforce female subservience. This religious framework often translates into the cinematic sphere, where Nollywood films have historically functioned as "ideological apparatuses" that normalize female subordination to serve patriarchal interests (Azeez, 2010; Uwah, 2011). Rather than merely depicting faith, these films often validate the "man-made doctrines" that present men as "little short of gods," thereby mirroring a "sad socio-political reality" of gender hierarchy (Azeez, 2010; Endong, 2018).

The portrayal of marriage in African cinema frequently centers on the theme of "unconditional sacrifice," where women are depicted relinquishing their faith, careers, and even their identities (names) to achieve domestic equilibrium. Scholarship indicates that Nollywood has long reinforced these tropes, relegating women to "domestic housewife" roles or "sacrificial figures" to satisfy cultural expectations of the "African womanhood" (Alola & Alola, 2020; Ibbi, 2018). This cinematic "commercialization" often reduces women to their physical and reproductive capacities, denying them personhood and autonomy (Azeez, 2010; Endong, 2018). However, "New Nollywood" is identified as a "site of resistance" against these stereotypes ("Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025). Recent studies on "female agency and value" suggest that contemporary narratives are beginning to challenge the "loud silence" of the past, offering portrayals where women negotiate their own social and marital spaces rather than accepting inherent subordination (Amonyeze and Agbo, 2022; Emwinromwankhoe, 2023). This notion coincide with the position Alhaja Eniola Salami maintains in Kemi Adetiba's *King of Boys* objecting to hide under the pretext of marriage for her to be perceived as "settled woman" in order to score high votes at the poles.

Beyond the domestic sphere, the debate extends to institutional settings where "man-made doctrines" of male dominance manifest as sexual harassment and power imbalances. In Nigerian cinema scholarship, this is framed as a struggle between the "male gaze", which objectifies women for commercial pleasure and an emerging "female gaze" that seeks to reclaim

'agentic' identity (Endong, 2018; Ilo, 2025). Kunle Afolayan's *Citation* serves as a scholarly focal point here, as it directly confronts the "institutionalized activity" of sexual exploitation within academic spaces (Isiguzo, 2025; Osakpolor, 2021). By deconstructing the power dynamics of a system where "preaching and writing" are undertaken by men to sustain their own authority, the film provides a "political critique" that aligns with feminist efforts to dismantle patriarchal laws (Asuman et al., 2025; "Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025). This research evaluates how *Citation* and *Kasanova* contribute to this "new normal" of cinematic representation, either fostering a critical engagement with gender equity or inadvertently reinforcing the "subservient yet complementary" roles traditionally assigned to women in African media (Alola & Alola, 2020; Azeez, 2010; Ekpe & Akpabio, 2021).

Feminist Approaches to Film Analysis

Feminist film theorists utilize a variety of analytical frameworks to investigate gender dynamics, primarily by deconstructing how cinema perpetuates or subverts patriarchal conventions. This study is guided by key concepts such as the male gaze, objectification, agency, and counter-cinema, which are operationalized to move the analysis beyond general description into active critique. Emile Ogale observes that filmmakers frequently deploy prostitutes as a potent emblem for exploring womanhood. The foundational framework of this analysis is the "male gaze," as theorized by Laura Mulvey (Mulvey, 2004). This concept posits that mainstream cinema positions the audience to view women from a heterosexual male perspective, effectively objectifying and fetishizing the female form (Xue, 2024). Early theorists, including Mulvey and Claire Johnston, employed structuralist and psychoanalytic tools to examine notions like the "look," the Lacanian gaze, and suture (Chamarette, 2022; Mulvey, 2004). In the context of "New Nollywood," these dynamics often align with the "commercialization" of female bodies to satisfy a masculinist gaze that naturalizes subordination (Azeez, 2010; Ilo, 2025). This study applies these theories to Eddy Young's *Kasanova* and Kunle Afolayan's *Citation*, examining how visual semiotics, such as camera language and spectacle over subjectivity, shape audience perceptions of modern femininity (Ilo, 2025; Isiguzo, 2025). A critical counter-strategy centers on the agency and subjectivity of female characters. This lens, influenced by theorists like Tania Modleski and Mary Ann Doane, investigates how films allow women to voice desires that disrupt patriarchal narrative enclosures (Chamarette, 2022). In contemporary Nigerian cinema, this is observed in the transition from the "loud silence" of female victimhood toward agentic portrayals (Amonyaze & Agbo, 2022; Emwinromwankhoe, 2023). This analysis specifically examines the protagonist in Kunle Afolayan's *Citation*, exploring whether her resistance to institutional sexual harassment constitutes a "counter-gaze" and a challenge to the patriarchal hierarchy (Bai, 2025; Isiguzo, 2025). By deconstructing these character dynamics, the study identifies how modern narratives allow women to reclaim their personhood from historically restrictive clichés (Amonyaze & Agbo, 2022; Osakpolor, 2021). Intersectionality is vital for understanding how gendered portrayals entwine with race, class, and colonial legacies. As Ceïça Ferreira argues, overarching feminist lenses often overlook the distinct historical realities of Black women. Intersectional feminist criticism seeks to redress this by examining how racial and gendered identities intersect to form distinct marginalization patterns (Ferreira, 2017; Ibibi, 2018). This paradigm is applied to investigate how Kunle Afolayan's *Citation* and Eddy Young's *Kasanova* act as "screens of resistance," where female agency is negotiated

against the backdrop of persistent patriarchal stereotypes and societal expectations (Ekpe & Akpabio, 2021; Isiguzo, 2025; "Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025). Modleski's dissection of Alfred Hitchcock's oeuvre, for instance, revealed his female leads wielding narrative influence that upended orthodox gender expectations. This diverges from Emily Ogale's emphasis on fast-spreading of gender clichés confronting women, citing Phalane's assertion that stereotyping impairs them "economically and socially, blocking them from a range of opportunities" (Endong, 2021).

Finally, the theory of the "oppositional gaze" is used to analyze the agency of female spectators who actively resist hegemonic depictions. Research by scholars like Jackie Stacey and Azeez (Azeez, 2010) suggests that women viewers are not passive consumers but active interpreters who can derive empowerment from spectatorship despite a film's patriarchal norms (Azeez, 2010). This analysis evaluates how contemporary Nollywood provides a "new voices" platform for critical social commentary, potentially fostering social change by countering deeply rooted stereotypes and fostering a deeper understanding of political and institutional accountability (Amonyeze & Agbo, 2022; Asuman et al., 2025; "Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025).

Biography of Kunle Afolayan

Kunle Afolayan, a distinguished Nigerian actor, producer, and director, has substantially elevated production standards in the Nollywood industry through the deployment of expanded budgets, 35mm cinematography, theatrical distribution, and sophisticated reconfigurations of archetypal Nollywood narratives. His directorial oeuvre encompasses the *Aníkúlápó* franchise, alongside *The Figurine*, *Phone Swap*, *October 1*, and *Citation*. Moreover, Afolayan occupies the role of Chief Executive Officer at Golden Effects Pictures, a Nigerian production enterprise established in 2005.

Synopsis of *Citation*

The narrative of *Citation* traces the journey of Moremi-Oluwa, a postgraduate student who intrepidly reports an attempted assault by her professor, thereby illuminating institutional responses to such claims. Substantially informed by contemporaneous real-world occurrences, the storyline pivots on Moremi's interactions with her academic supervisor, Professor N'Dyare, within the ambit of her master's programme. Predominantly situated in the historic locale of Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria; with supplementary sequences in Senegal and Cape Verde. The film is directed by Kunle Afolayan and features principal performances by Temi Otedola, Jimmy Jean-Louis, Gabriel Afolayan, Adjetey Anang, Ini Edo, Bukunmi Oluwasina, Joke Silva, and Ibukun Awosika, among others.

Biography of Asurf Oluseyi

Asurf Oluseyi, a self-taught and award-winning filmmaker, honed his skills through YouTube tutorials. He rose to prominence via the Google African Connected Campaign, which exemplifies how young Africans harness digital platforms for skill acquisition and career advancement. Oluseyi has directed and produced an extensive array of video projects in the United Kingdom, United States, and Nigeria, earning recognition through awards on traditional and cable television networks, as well as acclaim for his overall body of work. His short films underscore this achievement: *Hell or High Water*, which won Best Short Film at the 2016 IFAB

International Film Awards in Berlin and secured selections at seven international festivals; and *A Day with Death*, featured in ten global screenings and awarded Best Short Film at the 2016 Africa Movie Viewers Awards. Additionally, he received a nomination for Best Screen Producer at the 2016 Future Awards Africa. Oluseyi's debut independent feature, *HAKKUNDE*, has garnered accolades from prestigious organizations, including the US TAFA, IndieFEST, and European Cinematography Awards, alongside screenings at more than eighteen international film festivals.

A Synopsis of *Kasanova*

Kasanova depicts the travails of Femi, a widower prone to romantic entanglements. The film commences with Femi jogging alongside his son, Jason, an aspiring musician, during which he stumbles upon fixating his gaze on a female runner. Subsequently, Femi converses with friends in a bar, articulating derogatory opinions about women; unbeknownst to him, Jessica, a music teacher and single mother who has recently quarreled with her daughter, Ini, overhears these remarks. Her confrontation elicits Femi's dismissal of her as "a lonely woman," met with her rejoinder that celibacy surpasses association with men of his character. Interpersonal tensions persist as Ini and Jason clash, notwithstanding Jason's scheme to feign affection for Ini before discarding her. At its core, however, the narrative traces the burgeoning relationship between Femi and Jessica. Unaware of her identity, Femi escorts Jason to Jessica's residence for musical instruction, thereby engineering their encounter. During this initial altercation, Femi endeavours to depart with Jason, who attributes blame to his father. Upon discovering Femi's mourning over his wife's death from cancer, Jessica extends an apology for her prior acrimony, culminating in a dinner invitation. Although the subplot concerning Jason and Ini imparts additional layers, the principal focus resides in the redemptive romance of the protagonists, which interrogates deep-rooted clichés of male absolution via feminine affiliation. Notwithstanding these conventions, *Kasanova* is distinguished by its sincere portrayals, particularly those of Ojo and Doyle, whose rapport instantiates archetypal romantic magnetism. Peripheral figures, such as Bisola, provide levity in key scenes, enhancing the storyline's effectiveness. Moreover, *Kasanova* challenges traditional romantic comedy conventions by exploring the difficulties of grief and mature romance, offering a balanced perspective on renewal. This deliberate subversion of genre expectations, combined with genuine performances, marks *Kasanova* as a noteworthy contribution to contemporary Nigerian cinema. The film thus transcends mere entertainment, offering a profound commentary on societal perceptions of love, loss, and second chances. It meticulously deconstructs the archetypal romantic narrative, demonstrating how emotional depth and character-driven storytelling can elevate a genre often relegated to superficial tropes.

An Analysis of Gender Issues in Asurf Oluseyi's *Kasanova*

Asurf Oluseyi's *Kasanova* features a resilient female protagonist, Jessica, who confronts the difficulties of romantic relationships and societal expectations in contemporary Nigeria. Through a feminist lens, the film critiques the objectification and sexualisation of women, tropes frequently encountered in mainstream cinema. The narrative frequently portrays Jessica as being appraised and judged primarily on her physical attributes and sexuality, rather than her intellectual qualities or personal character. This depiction corresponds with Laura Mulvey's notion of the "male gaze," wherein the camera aligns the spectator's perspective to objectify the female figure (Mulvey, 1975). Nevertheless, Jessica's character subverts these gender

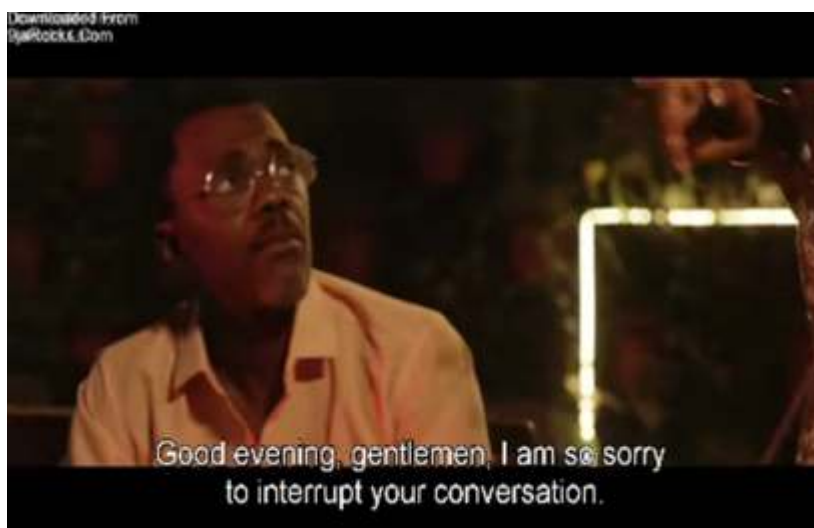
conventions by steadfastly pursuing her aspirations, thereby contesting the cultural imperative that confines women's primary roles to matrimony and motherhood. Unlike many productions that depict women as frail or defenseless, *Kasanova* offers a novel perspective on female autonomy and fortitude, despite Nollywood's tendency to perpetuate male hegemony and chauvinism in its storytelling (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023).

The portrayal of Jessica's endeavours to assert her independence and resist the constraints imposed upon her as a woman may be construed as an attempt to dismantle conventional gender depictions in cinema. This perspective aligns with Anneke Smelik's contention that feminist cinema can “counter the dominant representations of women in mainstream cinema” (Smelik, 1998). Examining the film's case study, Femi, a widower in his fifties who lost his wife to cancer prior to the story's commencement, perceives little value in his surroundings and harbours disdain for women. He regards himself as the epitome of a “sweet boy”, every woman's ideal, having failed at sports, he now excels at “chasing women” and manipulating them at will. Echoing his father, Jason discusses with friends his plan to date Ini, a schoolmate with whom he has quarreled, only to discard her afterwards. One friend objects to this scheme, prompting a third, supportive companion, to retort that “that is what pains girls most, use them and dump them.”

Directed by Asurf Oluseyi, *Kasanova* incorporates elements such as public and private disrespect toward women and their denigration, which feminist theory vehemently opposes. It is analysed here against a feminist theoretical framework. In a pivotal bar scene, a conversation unfolds among Femi, his friends, and Jessica, having endured a contentious argument with her daughter, Ini, unbeknownst to them, is eavesdropping, which starkly illustrates the ubiquity of misogynistic rhetoric and its deep effects on women in patriarchal societies. Femi's pejorative comments, emblematic of wider societal pathologies, collide with Jessica's personal realities, underscoring the friction between male privilege and female self-determination. This exchange exemplifies how quotidian misogyny, frequently trivialised as mere jest, deeply affects women's emotional and psychological states, thereby strengthening gender stereotypes in Nigerian culture. These interactions highlight the continuing challenges in gender dynamics, wherein women must traverse spaces permeated by insidious and explicit discrimination, often provoking resistance to deep-rooted norms (Azeez, 2010). Such filmic representations frequently echo real-life dispositions where women's agency is eroded, and their societal roles are diminished to subservience (Ekpe & Akpabio, 2021). Moreover, these storylines commonly reinforce the notion that women's value is contingent upon male endorsement, a motif rigorously scrutinised in feminist analyses of Nigerian cinema (Rogers, 2018).



Culled from *Kasanova*.
Dir. Asurf Oluseyi. www.netflix.com



Culled from *Kasanova*. Dir. Asurf Oluseyi. www.netflix.com

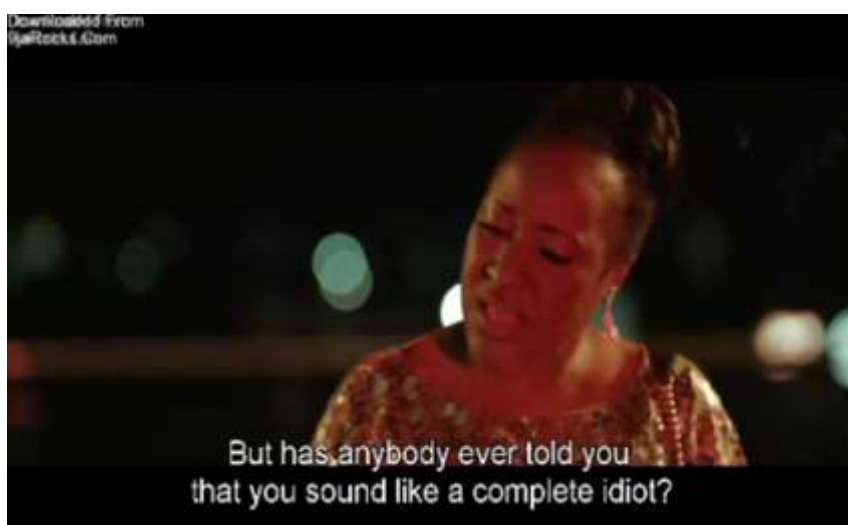


Photo culled from *Kasanova*. Dir. Asurf Oluseyi. www.netflix.com

The captions accompanying the images above illustrate Femi's overt disrespect toward women. Jessica, a stranger in this particular scene, resolutely confronts the affront. Such depictions epitomise the core concerns of feminist ideology. Paralleling the legendary Moremi, the courageous queen of Ile-Ife who imperiled her life to defend her people against Ugbo invaders, Jessica champions women's causes, repudiates subjugation, and advocates for emancipation alongside societal transformation. A comparable assertion applies to Moremi's character in Kunle Afolayan's *Citation*, who blatantly challenges Professor Idiare's advances.

Addressing Power Imbalances and Sexual Harassment in *Citation*

In contrast, Kunle Afolayan's *Citation* scrutinises gender dynamics within a university environment, illuminating sexual harassment and the asymmetrical power relations between professors and students. The narrative chronicles Moremi, a female student who levels accusations of sexual misconduct against her professor, tracing the subsequent investigation and its ramifications. This portrayal of academic exploitation mirrors the ingrained "sex for grades" phenomenon rampant in Nigerian and West African tertiary institutions (Hediger, 2023). It stresses the systemic vulnerabilities confronting female students, who frequently endure predatory overtures from authority figures, thereby emphasising the imperative for fortified institutional safeguards (Alola & Alola, 2020). Moreover, the film contests the prevailing culture of silence and victim-blaming in such cases, fostering candid discourse on sexual harassment in academia (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023). It reflects the real-world dangers encountered by Nigerian women who challenge these injustices (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023). Although fictional, these cinematic narratives echo the authentic experiences of women navigating patriarchal frameworks that erode their agency and autonomy (Azeez, 2010). Films, likewise, constitute effective instruments for social critique, heightening awareness and subverting deep-rooted norms through portrayals of women's resistance to male dominance and oppression (Edeh, Bernard 2022; Emwinromwankhoe, 2023). For instance, Nigerian filmmakers have harnessed their craft to empower women and advance their rights, crafting narratives that defy patriarchal conventions (Ekpe & Akpabio, 2021). This diverges markedly from conventional cinematic tropes critiqued by scholars, wherein female characters are consigned to frail, subordinate roles that perpetuate male hegemony (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023). Nonetheless, cinema is increasingly acknowledged as a catalyst for social transformation, poised to interrogate gender biases and cultivate egalitarian relational paradigms (Morales-Romo et al., 2023). This evolution toward progressive storytelling dovetails with continental African cinematic endeavours to harness film for gender equity advocacy (Gbambu et al., 2025). Exemplars such as *Wives on Strike* and *New Horizon* embody this trajectory, foregrounding women's narratives and achievements to cultivate cultural visibility and communal solidarity without recourse to violence (Ekpe & Akpabio, 2022).

The film's depiction of Moremi's resolve in seeking justice, bolstered by solidarity from her female peers, signifies an endeavour to empower women and dismantle patriarchal apparatuses facilitating harassment and abuse. This aligns with Annette Kuhn's notion of "counter-cinema," whereby films interrogate hegemonic ideologies and forge subversive representational strategies (Kühn, 1994). This methodology reconceptualises conventional cinematic narratives, presenting empowering depictions of women that contest and ultimately undermine patriarchal structures (Blum, 2024; Morales-Romo et al., 2023).



Image culled from Kunle Afolayan's *Citation*. www.netflix.com



Image culled from Kunle Afolayan's *Citation*. www.netflix.com

In *Citation*, Professor Indiare invites his students to a party at his residence. Moremi, afflicted by a stomach ailment, retreats to the restroom. By the time she returns, her peers have departed without registering her absence. Seizing this opportunity nurtured by his protracted predatory intentions, Indiare manhandles her and attempts to rape her. As he struggles with his belt, Moremi knees him in the groin and escapes.

Kunle Afolayan interconnects the contemporary era with historical precedents, demonstrating how ancestral figures can illuminate present-day concerns. Revered historically as the advocate

for her people, Moremi in the film personifies women's resistance against discrimination and gender inequities. Supported by the Ajike Advocacy Center and an unimpeachable plenary chaired by Professor Ibukun Awosika, she attains justice. This depiction embodies the egalitarian society feminists envision, marked by equal opportunities across genders.

Comparing and Contrasting Feminist Ideology in *Kasanova* and *Citation*

Although both films interrogate feminist themes, *Kasanova* primarily contests deep-rooted gender roles in romantic partnerships and household dynamics, while *Citation* zeroes in on institutional sexual harassment and power asymmetries in higher education, spotlighting the susceptibilities of female students to exploitative male academics (Olatunji & Tola-Adewumi, 2023). *Citation* resonates with negofeminist tenets, exemplifying how African women to a higher extent negotiate and subvert patriarchal regimes to reclaim authority over their welfare and corporeal sovereignty, thereby rejecting portrayals of inert victimhood (Udenigwe et al., 2023). This evinces a profound understanding of agency in African environments, wherein women proactively devise tactics to surmount gender oppression instead of passively submitting to it. Such a viewpoint harmonizes with Nnaemeka's conceptualization of feminism as a dynamic endeavour pursued by African women on behalf of themselves and their communities, privileging agency above altruism (Udenigwe et al., 2023). This dynamic engagement expressly confronts the interwoven social factors that completely shape women's health outcomes and their ability to flourish within their sociocultural frameworks. The African feminist paradigm, epitomized by negofeminism, furnishes a refined analytical framework for dissecting gender-based violence, transcending Eurocentric paradigms that often neglect complex cultural interplays (Olatunji & Tola-Adewumi, 2023; Udenigwe et al., 2023). These paradigms are indispensable for explaining how African women, especially in arenas like maternal healthcare, vindicate their reproductive entitlements and self-determination in care-seeking, as these choices are inextricably interwoven with communal fabrics. This modality typically entails calculated bargaining and concessions over outright antagonism, embodying a distinctive empowerment archetype attuned to collective ethos and societal cohesion (Udenigwe et al., 2023). Indeed, the negofeminist perspective criticise Western feminist discourse's depiction of African women as subservient and yielding, foregrounding instead their proactive negotiation of breaking point and insistence of agency amid indigenous cultural matrices.

Suggestions for Further Studies

An analysis of *Kasanova* and *Citation* through feminist film theory indicates that contemporary African cinema is vigorously confronting gender issues while challenging conventional female representations. These films proffer a clear portrayals of women's adversities in varied cultural milieus, lighting up persistent gender inequalities and concerted efforts to dismantle them. Subsequent research might examine other African filmmakers' treatments of gender themes and their evolution. For instance, the portrayal of Alhaja Eniola Salami in Kemi Adetiba's *King of Boys*, how she face adversity in the underworld, in the political arena, and navigate her way through the murky waters politics. Additionally, inquiries into African cinema's prospective role in catalysing social transformation and nurturing equitable, inclusive societies hold promise. Further investigation could delve into the efficacy of cinematic portrayals in shifting public perceptions and policy related to gender equality in African contexts, evaluating their tangible impact beyond artistic representation.

Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that *Citation* and *Kasanova* represent a significant departure from traditional Nollywood tropes by portraying women's agency and resistance to patriarchal norms (Adedeji-Olona, 2026; Amonyeze and Agbo, 2022). Unlike "Old Nollywood" narratives that often reinforced oppressive structures, these films function as "screens of resistance," utilizing cinematic storytelling as a conduit for social transformation and "activism" (Isiguzo, 2025; "Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025).

Pedagogical and Didactic Value: The films serve as critical pedagogical tools for illuminating gender-based violence and institutional disparities (Adedeji-Olona, 2026; Ngabeu, 2025). Specifically, *Citation* provides an empowering narrative that challenges the societal "one-sidedness" regarding sexual exploitation in academic settings (Adedeji-Olona, 2026; Isiguzo, 2025).

Disrupting the Male Gaze: The analysis reveals that while *Kasanova* initially engages with the "male gaze" through the objectification of its characters, it ultimately critiques the "sex symbol" trope by highlighting the emotional repercussions of such perceptions (Endong, 2018; Ilo, 2025). This indicates a shift toward a more distinctive "female gaze" that foregrounds the lived experiences and "matrpotency" of African women (Ilo, 2025; Osakpolor, 2021).

Intersectionality of Identity: These narratives contribute to a refined comprehension of African feminism by examining how gender intersects with factors like class and institutional status (Ferreira, 2017; Isiguzo, 2025). By diversifying gender characterizations beyond conventional romantic clichés, the films reflect the complex realities of modern urban and academic life in Nigeria (Amonyeze & Agbo, 2022; Omoera & Okwuowulu, 2021).

Conclusion

This research concludes that *Citation* and *Kasanova* provide a critical interrogation of women's marginalization and the violation of human rights. While *Citation* elicits audience agency by portraying a protagonist who successfully navigates and survives institutional abuse, *Kasanova* highlights the dehumanizing effects of patriarchal pursuit, ultimately rejecting the portrayal of women as "disposable pawns" (Amonyeze & Agbo, 2022; Isiguzo, 2025; Osakpolor, 2021).

Scholarly Contribution and Implications

The study advances Nollywood scholarship by identifying a transition from the "loud silence" of female subjugation to a "new voices" platform for political and social critique (Emwinromwankhoe, 2023; "Screens of Resistance: Nollywood, Cultural Activism, and the Politics of Social Commentary," 2025). The findings suggest that contemporary Nigerian cinema is increasingly capable of dismantling hegemonic gender narratives through the intentional use of a "counter-gaze" (Bai, 2025; Ilo, 2025).

Recommendations for Practice

To ensure a robust theoretical foundation for future productions, this study recommends the involvement of film critics and feminist scholars during the pre-production and script conference phases. Such participation is essential to ensure that female characters are not

reduced to objects of voyeuristic pleasure but are instead developed as "brand ambassadors" for a more equitable society. Ultimately, a self-reflective inquiry into cinematic signification can counteract the persistence of damaging stereotypes, fostering a cinematic culture where fame is aligned with social responsibility and intergenerational pride. This collaborative approach could cultivate narratives that genuinely reflect the intricate realities of women's experiences and contribute to broader societal discourse on gender equity, rather than simply perpetuating existing biases.

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