

Nommo: Self- Naming and Definition of Africana Woman in Haile Gerima's Child of Resistance

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Abstract:

This article examines the concept of Nommo, which has African roots, within the film *Child of Resistance*, by filmmaker Haile Gerima of African descent in 1972, emphasising its significance for the self-naming and self-definition of Africana women. It explains the rationale behind analysing Gerima's work from an African womanist perspective by investigating the insights that male filmmakers provide on African women's cinematic representation. By examining particular monologues, scenes, and narrative elements, this article underscores how Nommo connects with the film's representation of African-descent women's self-naming and self-definition. It illustrates the empowerment and resistance within the character's narrative and aims to enhance the conversation about the complexities surrounding gender and the representation of Africana women in cinema

Keywords: *Africana Womanism, Child of Resistance, Haile Gerima, Nommo, Self-naming.*

نومّو: التسمية الذاتية وتعريف المرأة الإفريقية في فيلم "طفل المقاومة" لهايلي جريما

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الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة مفهوم نومّو، بوصفه أحد المفاهيم الفكرية ذات الجذور الإفريقية، من خلال قراءة فيلم طفلة المقاومة للمخرج هايلي جريما في 1972. وتتمثل أهمية البحث في إبراز الكيفية التي يسهم بها هذا المفهوم في بلورة عمليتي التسمية الذاتية والتعريف الذاتي للمرأة الإفريقية، بما يعكس أبعاد هويتها ومقاومتها داخل الخطاب السينمائي. كما تسعى الدراسة إلى تبيان مبررات اعتماد منظور النسوية الإفريقية في تحليل العمل، من خلال استكشاف الرؤى التي يقدمها المخرجون الذكور بشأن تمثيل المرأة الإفريقية على الشاشة. ولتحقيق ذلك، يركز البحث على تحليل عدد من المونولوجات والمشاهد والعناصر السردية المختارة في الفيلم، للكشف عن علاقة مفهوم نومّو بتمثيل مسار الوعي الذاتي لدى المرأة ذات الأصول الإفريقية. وتوضح الدراسة كيف تجلت في السردية أبعاد التمكين والمقاومة، بما يساهم في إثراء النقاش الأكاديمي حول تعقيدات النوع الاجتماعي وتمثيل المرأة الإفريقية في السينما، فضلاً عن توسيع آفاق البحث في التداخل بين الفكر الإفريقي والإبداع الفني.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية الإفريقية، طفلة المقاومة، هايلي جريما، نومّو، التسمية الذاتية.

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Background

Nommo is a concept rooted in African traditions that emphasises the significant impact of spoken words and dialogue, particularly in forming the identity and experiences of individuals of African descent. As noted by Karenga (2003), this term originates from the Dogon community in Mali, signifying the ability to harness words, symbols, language, and rituals for transformative purposes, as well as to build an ethical framework within a community. He highlights that it is a crucial instrument for cultural revitalisation, self-determination, and the pursuit of social justice. He asserts that by reclaiming the strength of language, individuals of African descent and their communities validate their true identity, confront oppressive systems, and strive for a more just society. He further clarifies that accurately naming things captures their true essence and considers this act a collective endeavour essential for establishing and nurturing communities, as well as for shaping and creating reality. In his book, *The Afrocentric Ideas*, Asante (1987) also describes spoken language as possessing a creative and generative power.

Karenga (2003) identifies Nommo as the communal, generative capability of speech that fosters harmony and drives humanity's advancement. The spoken word is crucial for bringing together Black individuals, enhancing a sense of community vital to traditional African perspectives (Yancy, 2004) and represented in African orality through rhythm, vocal dynamics, repetition, and other stylistic components (Cummings and Roy, 2002). Spoken language has evolved into various genres, including rap and poetry, with forms like speeches and monologues recognised as spoken-word events (Walker and Kuykendall, 2005).

According to Imperato (1978), the Dogon community also describes Nommo as a traditional sculpture representing a combined male and female mythical figure, linked to their creation myth involving the deity Amma. This myth emphasises femininity and masculinity through the earth and termite mound, respectively, embodying the primordial pair that forms the first ancestors of humanity. Africana womenists use it to express self-naming, which pertains to the self-identification of women of African descent.

Mena and Saucier (2014) explain Africana womanism as a theoretical framework that arose from the 1960s and 1970s movements, influenced by the New Left, the Black Power Movement, and critiques from Third World feminism. Organisations like Black Women Enraged and the Combahee River Collective emerged to combat capitalism, racism, and patriarchy, prompting scholarly discussions about race, gender, and class issues. They have identified that, in this regard, scholars like Nancy Hartsock emphasise introspection for standpoint formation, Bell Hooks outlines strategies for this process, and Patricia Hill Collins stresses cultural production's role in fostering dialogue.

Hudson-Weems (1998) critiques mainstream feminist theories for overlooking the lived realities of Africana women, which led her to create Africana Womanism, a

framework that prioritises community, mutual support, and self-definition, merging both racial and gender identities to address the roles of Africana women in the fight for liberation. This framework is distinct from feminism and its various forms, as it thoughtfully explores the tensions between these different perspectives. Nitri (2001) emphasises that, in contrast to Western feminism, it focuses specifically on the unique social, cultural, and political issues faced by women of African descent. Additionally, Reeds (2001) expands the definition of "Africana Woman" to include all women of African heritage, such as Continental Africans and those in the diaspora—African Caribbean, African American, African European, and African Canadian. Al-Harbi (2017) also points out the framework's focus on the interdependence of Africana women and men in promoting shared cultural goals. In this context, Hudson-Weems (1993) introduces the concept of *nommo*—the power of naming as a means of asserting genuine identity rooted in African traditions—asserting that reclaiming the ability to define oneself is crucial for restoring agency among African-descended individuals who have historically been denied the right to self-definition. This connection between language, cultural heritage, identity, and depiction aims to amplify the voices of Africana women, which have frequently been marginalised in both societal and academic spheres.

Thus, the article analyses Haile Gerima's 1972 film, *Child of Resistance*, to illustrate the role of *Nommo* in Africana womanism and the journey toward self-identification. It explores the connections between *Nommo* and gendered cinematic portrayal while also recognising the necessity of including men within this discourse. Because the Africana womanist notion aims to challenge misrepresentations of women of African descent across various spheres (Al-Harbi, 2017) and asserts that Africana women actively resist racism and sexism, recognising their men as crucial allies in combating oppression (Ntiri, 2000).

Gerima is a filmmaker celebrated for his role as an independent storyteller, screenwriter, philosopher, director, and editor (Belachew, 2021). Alongside his scholarly contributions to the independent cinema of people of African descent, he has created over eleven feature and documentary films. His distinguished works include *Hour Glass* (1972), *Child of Resistance* (1972), *Bush Mama* (1976), *Ashes and Embers* (1982), *Mirt Sost Shi Amit*, known as *Harvest: 3,000 Years* (1976), *Wilmington 10—U.S.A. 10,000* (1978), *After Winter: Sterling Brown* (1985), *Sankofa* (1993), *Imperfect Journey* (1994), *Adwa—An African Victory* (1999), and *Teza* (2008). According to Gion et al. (2025), numerous scholars, critics, and film aficionados value him for his unique cinematic expressions that elevate African issues. Key themes within many of his films focus on Africana women with ancestral ties to Africa, prompting a critical reassessment of his work through the lens of Africana womanist theory. Gerima is a significant figure committed to portraying the lives and experiences of Africana women. Among his films, *Child of Resistance*

particularly highlights the journey of an African-descent social and political activist woman as she expresses both her identity and that of her community.

Gerima (2021) expresses concerns regarding the genuine portrayal of women of African descent in film, critiquing the prevailing presence of male directors who reinforce neocolonial stereotypes. While acknowledging the influential nature of cinema, he cautions against its tendency to represent African women as either exotic or villainous, rather than as empowered individuals. Inspired by significant women in his life, Gerima calls for stories that highlight the intricate identities of African women and confront neocolonial notions—an approach that aligns with Africana womanist tenets emphasising solidarity in the fight against oppression and the quest for racial freedom (Stewart and Mazama, 2020). This viewpoint underpins an Africana womanist analysis of *Child of Resistance*, where themes of self-identification emerge through monologues and scenes that illustrate the agency and authentic identities of Africana women.

Therefore, the foundation for this research arises from a critical gap in existing scholarship concerning Nommo, Africana womanism, and the cinematic depictions of Africana women—particularly the insufficient examination of the relationships between language, self-identification, and gender representation. While it is acknowledged for its role in cultural revival, its potential to empower Africana women through self-naming in film is still largely unexplored, especially in the works of independent filmmakers like Haile Gerima. Addressing this gap is vital for comprehending how Nommo influences Africana womanist representation in cinema.

Africana Womanism and Nommo

Africana womanism is a theoretical framework rooted in African traditions and Afro-centrism, focusing specifically on the lived experiences, challenges, needs, and aspirations of women of African descent. This framework distinguishes itself from mainstream feminism and traditional womanism by offering a perspective tailored to the unique realities those women of African heritage encounter (Dove, 1998). The concept was formally introduced by Hudson-Weems in 1987, following her extensive engagement in public discussions that highlighted the critical significance of self-identification among women of African descent, who often face distinct challenges. Hudson-Weems (1989, 2007) asserts that it is a model aimed at addressing the obstacles confronted by Africana women, drawing inspiration from the strength and resilience displayed by African women warriors throughout history, while also recognizing the extensive legacy of activism among women of African descent.

Hudson-Weems (2024) further elaborates on Africana Womanism, defining it as an inclusive framework that encompasses women of African descent from various backgrounds, including those from the Continental African region as well as the African Diaspora, which includes the Caribbean, the Americas, Europe, and Canada. The term "Africana woman" signifies this inclusivity, acknowledging the shared

heritage and connection that emerges from African ancestry, irrespective of geographical location. Asante (2020) supports the framework, emphasising its efficacy in comprehending the experiences of Africana women dispersed across the globe. Dove (1998) further elaborated that the theory is essential for the progression of Afrocentric thought, as it prioritises the female perspective and acknowledges the significant roles women play in the narratives of Africa and the African diaspora. She also highlighted that the framework is anchored in Afrocentric principles which enhance the concept of Afrocentricity by clarifying the interplay among race, gender, and class-specific factors that influence the lives of marginalised Africana women.

Hudson-Weems (1993) articulated and refined Africana womanism by outlining eighteen distinctive characteristics. These include "Self Namer", "Self Definer", "Family Centred", "Genuine in Sisterhood", "Strong", "In Concert with Male in the Liberation Struggle", "Whole", "Authentic", "Flexible Role Player", "Respected", "Recognised", "Spiritual", "Male Compatible", "Respectful of Elders", "Adaptable", "Ambitious", "Mothering", and "Nurturing". Among these characteristics, Africana womanists place significant emphasis on the principles of self-naming and self-definition. As noted by Hudson-Weems (1998), the act of naming inherently bestows meaning upon a subject. Historically, Africana individuals have faced systemic denial of their ability to define themselves, making the reclamation of this agency crucial in countering ongoing degradation, isolation, and existential threats.

Hudson-Weems (1993) further posits that she engaged actively in the processes of naming and defining by developing an African-centred paradigm specifically tailored to women of African lineage. This paradigm is shaped through careful observation of the traditional roles, attributes, and activities of this collective group sharing African ancestry. In support of this perspective, Dahy (2021) underscores that self-naming and self-definition are critical to Africana womanism and serve as fundamental elements in the pursuit of self-identity. This interconnection implies that the process of assigning a name to an entity is inherently linked to the infusion of meaning, thus illustrating the significance of these concepts within the broader discourse on identity among Africana women.

Hudson-Weems (2020) emphasises that establishing self-naming and self-definition is crucial for Africana women. Once these foundational elements are recognised, the other sixteen traits of the theory align seamlessly, reflecting both the physical and spiritual essence of Africana women and celebrating their rich traditions. Africana womanists take on the responsibility to define themselves proactively, ensuring they shape their own realities. The concept of Nommo is particularly significant in this regard, as it underscores the importance of self-naming and self-identification. Harrison (1972) highlights that it denotes language and the spoken word as a powerful tool that shapes our reality, influences social interactions, and creates shared understandings. Karenga (2003) builds on this, explaining how language unveils deeper meanings of experiences and encourages self-

representation. This concept illustrates spoken words' creative and transformative capacity, extending to collective communication and the creation of cultural narratives. It emphasises the significance of self-expression and the assertion of one's voice amidst oppression. Through it, individuals and communities engage in dialogue, storytelling, and cultural practices that shape their identities, emphasising the importance of Africana individuals in defining themselves.

In African culture, self-naming, known as Nommo, holds great significance under the belief that true existence comes from accurate naming. Ntiri (1993), referencing Lerone Bennett Jr., emphasises that naming should not be left solely to the dominant group, as Black individuals increasingly seek to define themselves. Research by Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006) highlights how Africana Womenists advocate its importance and the empowerment of women of African origin in shaping their life circumstances.

Africana womanists emphasise that societal stereotypes are rooted in historical labelling and categorisation. Hudson-Weems (2020) argues for a paradigm shift where those previously labelled take on the role of 'namers', rather than allowing the dominant group to define them. Additionally, Mbiti (1969) suggests that names serve as lasting reminders of the African community's shared knowledge. This collective aspect of naming resonates with Africana womanism's focus on the interconnectedness of individuals and their communities. In this regard, it underscores the significance of expression in cultivating social consciousness and solidarity, particularly emphasising the necessity of self-definition among individuals of African ancestry.

Nommo, a key concept in Africana womanism, impacts various artistic and cultural forms and aids in the exploration of the experiences of women of African descent. Hudson-Weems (1997) emphasises the paradigm's focus on the connection between thought and action, which has been effectively utilised to examine modern Black narratives in both fiction and nonfiction. Scholars such as Ndonibi (2023) and El-Leil Dahy (2021) have used this framework to analyse literary and dramatic plays by prominent authors Aidoo, Emecheta, Darko and Tess Onwueme. Meanwhile, Huff et al. (2018) investigate its importance in occupational science concerning gender. Additionally, Makaudze (2024) looks into the concept through Shona children's games, and Chikafa-Chipiro (2019) uses it to evaluate the film *Black Panther*. These instances demonstrate how Nommo acts as an essential tool for self-definition and empowerment, highlighting its importance across different media and its ability to enrich cinematic storytelling.

Research Method

The study of film, as noted by Mathew (2012), encompasses multiple disciplines, focusing on the production, distribution, and interpretation of texts and representations, with emphasis on their aesthetics and implications. This research undertakes a qualitative examination of the film *Child of Resistance* through the lens of Africana womanism, which offers an African-centred perspective on gender. The film prominently features a Black woman's monologue in a detention room, exploring themes of identity and community. The study's objective is to qualitatively assess self-naming and identification among women of African descent, concepts rooted in Nommo.

Viswambharan and Priya (2016) assert that qualitative research systematically interprets issues from the perspectives of the studied individuals or groups, with methodologies tailored to specific questions. This exploratory approach, as discussed by Tong et al. (2012), seeks to understand the workings of social phenomena within particular contexts, focusing on perceptions, behaviours, and lived experiences (Atkinson et al., 2001). The methodological framework is investigative, aimed at uncovering the underlying causes of the current situation (Polkinghorne, 2005), employing the film's narrative, dialogue, and visual symbolism as primary data sources. The analysis intends to highlight recurring themes related to self-naming and identification among women of African origin in relation to Nommo.

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), data analysis is an evolving process that combines the identification of themes with essential concepts from the text. In this context, Lenberg et al. (2017) point out that narrative studies can draw from a variety of sources, such as observations and interviews, which supports the meticulous examination of the film in this study. Hancock et al. (2009) also stress the importance of recognising key characters and the chronological progression within film narratives, which aids in analysing character dialogue and behaviour. This text analysis will focus on investigating monologues and visual elements, including lighting, sound, and mise-en-scène, to assess how these aspects illustrate self-naming and self-definition among Africana women. The analysis will thoroughly explore specific scenes and dialogues that highlight the identity of the Africana female character, thereby enriching the overall findings of the study. To critically investigate the experiences of women of African descent, the research applies Africana womanism, a theoretical framework that examines the intersections of gender, race, and economy, as well as the concept of self-identification.

The choice to use qualitative analysis for examining *Child of Resistance* is necessary due to its capacity to reveal the intricacies of identity and self-identification from the viewpoint of Africana women. While qualitative research can introduce elements of subjectivity, this study reduces bias by incorporating multiple data sources, including narratives, dialogues, and visual symbols, to provide a well-rounded interpretation of the film's themes. Furthermore, while the findings may be

specific to the context and not widely applicable, they offer valuable insights into the experiences depicted in the film. By applying a systematic approach to data analysis, the research efficiently tackles the time-consuming aspects of qualitative methods, ultimately delivering an in-depth exploration of the protagonist's path to self-definition.

Results and Discussion

Inspiration and context of the film

Child of Resistance is a film that draws inspiration from the televised arrest of Black intellectual and activist Angela Y. Davis. It guides viewers through a metaphorical and symbolic journey of a woman imprisoned due to her commitment to social justice. According to West (2016), Davis is a notable figure for her involvement in the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and her continued dedication to marginalised communities. Her influence has been crucial during tumultuous political periods, particularly in resisting neoliberal policies. Davis's activism and scholarship addressing issues related to women, workers, and people of African descent, as well as her critiques of the prison system, have significantly impacted contemporary justice movements. Davis gained international prominence following her arrest in 1970, during which she spent sixteen months in prison before being acquitted in 1972—a journey supported by the global "Free Angela Davis" campaign (Davis, 2000). Her experiences highlight the broader historical injustices faced by Black individuals, cementing her status as a pivotal voice in the struggle for liberation.

As noted by Thomas (2013), while *Child of Resistance* references Davis's narrative, it primarily highlights a community's persistent fight against white racist oppression, tracing the history of Black resistance from slavery to settler colonialism. It showcases a tense encounter between the prisoner, portrayed through the director's lens, and the guard, who symbolises institutional authority. Significantly, the female prisoner is shown as androgynous in her government-issued blue denim clothing, underscoring her intricate identity within this repressive context.

Howard (1985) analyses the film as a deeply emotional work driven by the anger surrounding Davis's arrest. This anger proved essential for Gerima's artistic innovation, enabling him to resist Western norms and pursue new creative avenues. The film serves as a formidable challenge to the notion of Western aesthetic superiority over Third World communities. The film is centred on an African woman, who remains unnamed, and portrays her imprisonment resulting from her dedicated pursuit of social justice. Through the use of voice-over dialogues, symbols, and a sequence of abstractly depicted daydreams and nightmares, Gerima conveys the woman's desires for self-identification and freedom as well as her concerns for her people, whom she describes as descendants of the motherland (Africa). This film

goes beyond conventional concepts of time and place, establishing a unique and transcendent narrative.

Self- Identification in Child of Resistance

Child of Resistance primarily unfolds mainly within the confines of a plain solitary jail cell, centring this unnamed woman who contemplates the perceived degradation and mental colonisation of the Blacklacklack race, particularly in a Eurocentric context. She contends that her imprisonment is a result of her rejection of this colonisation, positioning herself in contrast to other Black individuals who are metaphorically 'blindfolded' by systemic oppression. She articulates that her presence in this facility serves as a platform for voicing her dissent against a society marked by racial and sexual oppression.

Beyond the jail cell, the film explores two additional settings. The second space is idealistic settings like bars and other unrecognisable places with surreal portrayals that reflect the character's thoughts on the historical and ongoing struggles of Black people. The third space is a long corridor that leads to the unknown, where the character runs through around the end of the film, symbolising her aspirations for ultimate freedom.

The narrative structure of the film employs an anachronic approach, oscillating between the protagonist's current state of isolation in her jail cell and vivid daydreams or nightmarish visions. These sequences feature Black men and women adorned in opulent attire, accompanied by vibrant jazz, cruising in luxurious cars, and socialising with white party-goers on one side, while a group of white individuals gazes upon her from the other. In a dreamlike scene around the beginning, the prisoner enters a bar busy with both Black and white customers led by her guard. A significant moment occurs when the camera descends to reveal that every Black person depicted is physically shackled to one another, binding them by their feet and hands. Despite their captivity, they appear oblivious to their situation, focusing solely on their perceived "social status," as noted by the Black women prisoner's identification (Thomas, 2013). The initial casual interaction between Black and white individuals quickly transforms into a disturbing tableau, wherein white individuals objectify Black bodies, engaging in lewd behaviour while the white males maintain a façade of nonchalance, seemingly revelling in the intrigue.

Following this impactful introductory scene, the film gives a close-up of the protagonist's face, transitioning to a point-of-view shot as she surveys her cell, noting a discarded shoe, a toilet, a derelict sink, and the white guard passing by. The viewer will be introduced to a dark, assertive voice-over, emanating from the imprisoned African woman, whose identity remains undisclosed throughout the film. She articulates her frustration at being merely labelled a "convict", lamenting that even her own society fails to recognise her true self. Expressing fatigue with the burden of self-explanation, she conveys a sense of hopelessness regarding the

likelihood of others understanding her and her community's authentic identities. This is exemplified when she questions, '*Who will understand me? Not even my own people. Even my own skin—they call me convict. How would they know? ... How can they know? ... They are blindfolded ... It is readymade definitions created for them.*' Through this assertion, the character underscores the pressing need for self-recognition and understanding.

In alignment with Hudson-Weems' (1993) perspective, which posits that women of African origin must utilise nommo to reclaim their identities by rejecting negative labels, the protagonist ultimately empowers herself by naming herself, asserting her autonomy in defining her identity. This act stands in stark contrast to the impositions of an oppressive system. Her interpretations of Lerone Bennett further emphasise the importance of authenticity in self-identification, asserting that historical classifications and nomenclatures have significantly influenced the narratives surrounding Black identities. Thus, Bennett advocates for individuals of African descent to embrace self-definition as a means to foster empowerment and cultural authenticity.

In his film, Gerima intentionally refrains from providing a name for the character, instead allowing her to inherently define herself and narrate her own story, as well as the broader narrative of her community. Gerima (2021) articulates in a noncreative writing piece that African women possess the unique ability to articulate their own stories and those of their ancestors. This concept is reflected in his work, *Child of Resistance*, where the woman protagonist asserts her identity and self-naming through a combination of voice-over dialogue and symbolic action.

The character identifies herself as a Black woman of African lineage,,, enduring the oppressive structures imposed by a Eurocentric system. She emerges as a figure of resistance, akin to her ancestors who fought against the historical injustices of slavery. Within her community, there is a pervasive scepticism towards the narratives presented by white social scientists, which often perpetuate stereotypes that do not reflect the community's lived experiences. The protagonist emphasises this disconnect, stating, '*They believe everything you [white social scientists] say about them,*' reflecting on the community's struggle against long-standing stereotypes that have been propagated for centuries.

The character articulates a profound sense of interconnectedness with her community, revealing that "my life is intertwined with those of my brothers and sisters," who are similarly ensnared by systemic oppression. Despite acknowledging the fear that comes with such confinement, she expresses a strong defiance against this colonial mentality, stating, '*I am right here because I refused to be a colony.*' This declaration underscores her belief in the sanctity of her mind, which she determines to keep free from manipulation, thereby asserting her agency.

The film illustrates the protagonist's desire for people of African descent to reclaim their identity, rather than passively accepting the definitions imposed by

external entities. She actively advocates for the necessity of self-definition among Black individuals, challenging her community's adherence to the narratives constructed by white social scientists. Through her struggle, she highlights the historical inaccuracies and biases that have mischaracterised her community by saying:

They (her community) believe everything you (white social scientists) say them stereotyping. Theyyy don't know everything social scientists have have have written for centuries. Weee believe ... and fighting its coming. History is unravellingggg the white man's wadding veils. My life is in theseee (person) walls. Brotherssss and sisters out there are are are running with their chains too. We all are inside;;; outside it makes no difference. Malcolm is right;;; we are in the same boat. Most of the shufflinglingling bunch of colonies' minds areareare a colony. I amamam right here because I refused to be a colony ... a brain is a chain. They know it.rain ... I have at least my brain. I couldn't shut up my brain ... no... I can't do that!

Gerima's portrayal of the protagonist's monologue reveals her anguish in the pursuit of authentic self-expression and identity. Citing Eze (2018), the importance of Africana intellectual and cultural traditions in addressing systemic domination becomes evident, as the term "Africana" signifies a confluence of knowledge and experiences between Africa and the African Diaspora. In the film, Gerima seeks to cultivate this bond, illustrating the protagonist's unwavering connection to her heritage. Although she does not explicitly refer to herself as an "Africana woman", her declaration, '*We (Black men and women) are prisoners of war since I have been snatched and abducted from the motherland (Africa),*' clarifies her identity as a Black woman of African descent.

Furthermore, her reference to "my people" solidifies her connection to the collective identity of Black individuals who share a common lineage. In reflective voice-over dialogue, she seeks solidarity with Black men, expressing, '*Hi,Hi,Hi, people, I hope they defend me. I am their woman. I am them, and they are me.*' Through these sentiments, the protagonist embodies the identity of an "African-descendant Black woman", solidifying her agency and connection to her heritage.

The character in the film discards the identity labels ascribed to individuals of African descent by others, particularly white individuals. She articulates her dismay regarding the terms 'thief', 'property', and 'criminal', which are imposed upon Black individuals, stating, '*These are readymade definitions created for them (Blacks, men and women)... 'Thief,,, property, and criminal—they are born into their definitions.'*' Her frustration with these reductive labels is powerfully conveyed through a harsh voice-over monologue.

As this internal dialogue progresses, the filmmaker employs a dream sequence in which the protagonist, a Black woman of African descent, confronts a white man attempting to assault her. Concurrently, a montage reveals Black police officers sitting in a state of subjugation, their hands restrained. These visual representations

resonate with the discourse posited by Africana womanists, who advocate for the critical examination of race within the context of Black women's experiences (Nitiri, 2001). According to Houston (1993), understanding the complexities faced by women of African descent requires acknowledging the intertwined dimensions of gender, race, and class, while also recognising the intersecting forms of oppression they endure, including sexism, racism, and classism.

Throughout the film, the protagonist primarily identifies herself through the lens of her racial identity as a Black woman, emphasising the myriad challenges she faces as a result of her race. However, it is not until the film's conclusion that she addresses the issue of her gender and the complexities associated with it. In this moment of self-reflection, she recognises the significance of forming alliances with Black men who genuinely comprehend her lived experiences. Ultimately, in a poignant moment of self-dialogue, she implores all Black men to remain steadfast and acknowledge the harsh realities that confront them.

In alignment with this theme, the filmmaker presents a scene in which the protagonist daydreams about being shackled and dragged by a white man in a bar, a circumstance that elicits indifference from both Black and white patrons. Notably, the camera captures her gaze fixing on a young Black boy in the bar, who is also shackled, with the word "Black" emblazoned on his jacket. Following her departure, the audience observes the boy expressing his frustration by shaking his restrained hands, signifying his yearning for liberation. The scene gradually reveals a group of Black men and women who appear to indulge in the nightlife, yet they are metaphorically linked by a chain. Among the crowd, a Black individual in a wheelchair dons a US Army uniform, further illustrating common issues faced by individuals of African descent. The film highlights these struggles through a scene in which the protagonist navigates the jail floor, deliberately stepping only on the black-painted spaces, underscoring the prominent themes of racial identity and shared oppression among Black individuals.

The character in the film also connects her identity deeply with blues music, expressing it vividly as a part of her essence—'*Like a long steady river... Modern dungeon... Prison in between funky walls.*' Her words reflect a haunting commentary on the legacy of slavery, highlighting her plight and the collective suffering of her people in a "plantation dungeon". She questions the ignorance of others regarding their struggles and underscores her empathy by attempting to help a young Black boy trying to escape his own torment through drugs. As Diallo (2013) elucidates, American Black music—including the blues—has its origins in the work songs of enslaved individuals. The availability of drums and other instruments was restricted by slave owners, who perceived them as instruments of rebellion. Consequently, the blues emerged as a powerful symbol of freedom and resistance. He further argues that women's blues have explicitly challenged the dominant cultural narratives

propagated by the Christian church, providing a platform for the expression of Black cultural identity.

Following the aforementioned voiceover, the character also proclaims, *'More blacks are behind these bars (jail bars). No! No! The European man never examines himself, never throughout history. He never examines himself. Instead, it is always the Black man's fault ... What does he know? He doesn't question himself. He is just a man from the moon. Going in for surgery into the Black man's brain...'* This underscores the shared plight of the imprisoned Black woman and the young boy. While attempting to prevent the young Black prisoner from taking his own life, she attributes the systemic issues they face to the legacy of colonialism. This representation in the film exemplifies the struggle of women to protect subsequent generations while navigating the same racial injustices. The character's self-expressive monologues and the accompanying montage sequences compel the audience to engage with the narrative through the protagonist's perspective, ultimately highlighting the complexities of identity, resistance, and the impact of historical oppression.

The character's exploration of Black men's identity and historical context reveals the complexities of racial and gender dynamics within her narrative. She articulates her questioning of the Black male experience by stating, *'All his time is after my man's bone – tricking,,, measuring, cutting, studding, lying, mystifying, gossiping, peeping my man's...ow he is after his mind. Man's brain is what he is after now. What is wrong with the Black man?'* Accompanying this introspection is a montage scene that establishes her physical and metaphorical confinement—a prominent symbol of societal oppression. The protagonist is depicted sitting in a swaying chair adorned with a cross, surrounded by a group of white men and women who gaze upon her, while a blindfolded Black figure is situated between them. The imagery is starkly contrasted by the white man pushing her chair, whose smile conveys complicity in her subjugation. This visual juxtaposition is complemented by her voiceover, which critiques the surrounding figures as “clowns” and “performers”, suggesting a façade intended to distract from the harrowing realities of racial oppression.

Subsequent scenes unfold within the confines of her prison cell, revealing a significant moment of juxtaposition between her and a Black male character. The Black male figure, similarly isolated and pushed by a white man, is obscured by a cloud of white individuals, illustrating the intentional segregation between Black men and women. The protagonist perceives this division not as a mere coincidence but as a deliberate construct of a white-powered society, framing it as a war waged against both herself and her male counterpart—an ongoing struggle to which she resolutely refuses to succumb.

Within the prison walls, the character embraces her identity as a fighter, deriving strength from her ancestral lineage. She acknowledges the resilience

exhibited by women of African descent throughout history, who have cultivated coping mechanisms rooted in their cultural heritage. This acknowledgement leads her to recognise the indomitable spirit inherited across generations, which informs her values and virtues. She poignantly articulates her understanding of struggle by stating, *'PartingPartingParting walls – – – this is war,,, really war. The whitehitehite man is declaring war on me and on Black people... Constant historical war... I was born in wartime,,, and it is still happening ... it is ... The only choice I have is to keep carrying on a struggle. It is my responsibility to carry on and on and on.'* The accompanying montage—featuring young Black children chained to chairs—visually represents their oppression, while a white performer entertains against the American flag, underscoring racial inequalities. The protagonist, weary and confined, embodies the weight of her struggles, and a moment of distress arises as she symbolically covers her eyes, revealing her anguish. An unsettling scene follows with a white police officer's attack thwarted at the last moment, portraying her resilience. The imagery of Black men breaking free from chains alongside a sewing chair being repaired illustrates the complexity of her fight and emphasises the crucial solidarity needed between Black men and women in their struggle against oppression.

Overall, these cinematic representations and symbolic elements serve as compelling articulations of the multifaceted nature of the Black female protagonist's struggle, while underscoring the significance of unity and mutual support among individuals of African descent. Her identity, intertwined with that of Black men, is encapsulated in her declaration: *'Hi,Hi,Hi,my people, I hope they defend me. I am their woman. I am them,, and they are me.'* This interconnectedness aligns with Myers (2004), who posits that self-knowledge forms the foundation of understanding within the Africana community, emphasising that personal growth and development rest upon deeply valued human relationships.

While the protagonist views Black men as integral to her identity, she challenges them to resist the delusions perpetuated by a dominating white system by asserting, *'White men, tired of their emptiness, are now trying to make you empty too. They keep you away from the reality of these walls—historical walls he has surrounded you with. Concentration camp.'* This sentiment resonates with bell hooks (2015), who articulates that discussions on domination inherently address the dominators, illuminating the power dynamics that dictate the direction and impact of discourse. Similarly, Nitri (1998) emphasises the complexities of language as a battleground for struggle, further contextualising the protagonist's narrative.

The visual narrative presented also includes her rotating barefoot on a black-and-white floor, an image that evokes a sense of disorientation. This is followed by a blurred portrayal of women running freely through a corridor, with a sunset visible at the end, symbolising transition and hope. The scene shifts back to the protagonist, who returns through a corridor illuminated by electric light. Accompanying these visuals is a voiceover from a pivotal character, who addresses

the male audience directly with a powerful message about self-awareness and accountability by saying,

Black man, Blackkk man You hear me,,, but start getting your shit together. For instance,,, it is not right the way you treat your women;;; you know it. No,,, don't give me that shit. Ah ... just start treating her right;;; she is you men;;; she is you. No! No!... Don't give me that same story. Got revenge on on on your master. Change your master. It is your life... I know,,, I know you are the way you are. It is about to change that one. How long haveg haveg have you beennn playing a game? Stop acting like your master ... You can get it together. You and me!!h!h! Just get your shape up and clean your ... Let us move. I. I. I am your queen,,, and you are my king. We walk tall and proud without any talking.

The protagonist urges a "black man" to reflect on his treatment of women and to change harmful habits shaped by oppressive legacies, emphasising autonomy with the call to stop imitating his master. She highlights their partnership, declaring, '*I am your queen, and you are my king*,' which promotes mutual respect and dignity. And her message advocates for authenticity and the potential for positive self-image over negative stereotypes. This dialogue not only encourages the male character to overcome his racial and gender identity limitations but also stresses the importance of solidarity among Black individuals for achieving freedom and self-determination. Ultimately, the visual and vocal elements portray the intricacies of racial and gender identities while championing empowerment and positive representation, asserting that true liberation requires both individual and collective efforts.

Thus, the film *Child of Resistance* centres on a Black woman of African descent who embarks on a journey of self-identification and resistance against community injustices. This narrative resonates with the Africana womanist framework of self-naming and self-definition, as discussed by Hudson-Weems (1998), who highlights the empowering aspect of *nommo* in reclaiming identity. Asante (1987) further elaborates it as the transformative power of language that articulates deeply personal experiences. Through her poignant expressions and limited physical movements, the protagonist symbolises the systemic barriers that impede Black individuals from self-identification while asserting her strength as a Black woman of African descent. Self-identification and resistance are central themes as the protagonist confronts societal challenges while remaining connected to her heritage, exemplifying agency and resistance to externally imposed labels. Cinematically, voice-over dialogue reveals her identity, history, and emotions, alongside symbolic imagery and montages that reflect the complexities of her experiences. This representation aligns with Yancy's (2004) interpretation of *nommo*,,, which describes it as a symbolic action that defines the Black self and actualises life through "creative word magic".

The film concludes with a dramatic prison escape scene, where previously confined Black men break free, shattering their restraints. Described by Thomas

(2013),,, the film finishes with sound over the images.. Her voiceovermes overellouss use of "closing credits" directly to the "Black man", encouraging him to "get ... together" and embrace "revolutionary love", while also addressing the issue of anti-Black sexism. He has also stated that as she moves from sharp critique to a hopeful vision for the future of Black men and women, the scene changes. The credits begin to roll, listing the title, cast, music, cinematography, lighting, assistant director, props, and crew, along with general and special acknowledgements. These credits look like they are etched on the walls of a prison cell, resembling graffiti in hieroglyphic style. The portrayal of the guard underscores the film's critique of neo-slavery and the ongoing struggle for liberation, illustrating true liberation requires both individual agency and mutual support among Africana women and men.

Moreover, the film counters stereotypes by allowing Africana women to reclaim narratives and challenge societal misrepresentations, emphasising the significance of voice and perspective. Through storytelling, the protagonist asserts her identity and empowers others. The depiction of Nommo underscores the importance of words in articulating both individual and collective identities among people of African descent. By intertwining the concepts of Nommo, self-naming, and self-definition, the film provides a nuanced examination of personal and cultural identity, while highlighting the importance of resistance and self-expression in the face of oppression.

Conclusion

The idea of Nommo, especially in the context of self-naming and identity for Africana women, is examined in Haile Gerima's film *Child of Resistance*. The main character pushes back against negative labels like "convict", "thief", and "weak" and begins her path toward self-identification, which is highlighted by her lack of a name. She recognises her identity as a strong Black woman, descended from Africa, drawing upon the resilience of her ancestors who suffered during slavery. She expresses that her African roots provide her with moral fortitude, shaped by the challenges faced by her family. This choice illustrates the importance of self-naming for Africana women, emphasising their empowerment in defining who they are.

Through the perspective of this unnamed figure, the film stresses the significance of self-identification and the restoration of narratives often twisted by systemic oppression. By integrating themes of Africana womanism, it underscores the necessity for mutual support and solidarity among Africana individuals in the fight against colonial legacies. The film urges men of African descent to actively participate in supporting women's self-identification and addressing gender issues, aligning with the goals of Africana womanists, who seek meaningful engagement from men to honour the history and culture of Africana women.

Gerima's artistic methods, such as voice-over narration and symbolic visuals, effectively convey the resilience and agency of the Black community, ultimately asserting that genuine liberation requires both individual and collective actions to confront societal misrepresentations and reclaim authentic identities. The film acts as a platform that challenges stereotypes and presents the complex identities of Africana women in film.

In conclusion, this article recommends filmmakers prioritise genuine storytelling that highlights the empowerment of Africana women, allowing female characters to define their own identities. It suggests that film studies researchers employ Africana womanism as a critical framework for exploring themes of gender, race, and identity within cinema. Furthermore, it promotes collaboration between Africana men and women to craft inclusive stories that tackle gender-related issues effectively. Lastly, the article emphasises the need for additional research on the relationship between language and representation to enhance the understanding of Nommo in cultural narratives.

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