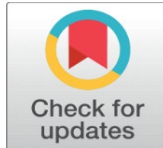


SEXISM IN KILL BILL VOL. 1 AND VOL. 2: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF QUENTIN TARANTINO'S REPRESENTATION OF GENDER

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes a feminist look at Quentin Tarantino's Kill Bill Vol. 1 and 2 to critique femininity and sexism. It considers women's representation, violence, and the power relations between male and female characters. Looking closely at how The Bride is presented as an assertive woman, the paper claims that as a byproduct, the films enforce the objectification of women, the male gaze, and the romanticism of violence against women. This research study explores the relationship between empowerment and violence as performed by the imagery, of the story in the Kill Bill films. The paper claims that through these challenges, Tarantino's portrayal of gender is complex and nuanced as he can balance between empowerment and exploitation in his characters. The paper examines these conflicts in the portrayals of gender politics in film within the scope of the current climate.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tarantino's Kill Bill Vol. 1 and Vol. 2 have been acclaimed for their stylish action, thrilling storylines, and a highly empowered female hero, The Bride. But within the increased gore-and-glory revenge is perhaps a deeper discourse that is more revealing of gender representation and sexism. This is an interesting romance and defiance of enabling or exploiting women. On the surface, however, The Bride is represented in action as resilient, agentless, and determined, against all odds, to counter the stereotypes through which women are usually portrayed in film as passive or secondary to male characters. Yet, even within those attributes of assertiveness and strength, The Bride is internal to a cinematic culture that has objectified women and caters entirely to the male gaze. Combined with Tarantino's signature hyper-violent yet richly visual storytelling, this complicates the narrative

regarding romanticizing violence, especially against women, in the corpus of his films. The paper does just that: unpack the contradictions. It investigates the representation of femininity, as constructed by Tarantino, by examining the power dynamics it sets up between male and female characters.

This study, therefore, examines the complex interrelation between violence and empowerment in Kill Bill with an eye to the implications on the wider matrices of gender politics in contemporary cinema. How does Tarantino balance empowerment with exploitation? Does the presentation of The Bride subvert or reinforce gender stereotypes? These indeed are the questions that drive this inquiry, which offers a nuanced critique of how sexism operates within what seems a progressive narrative.

In fact, this paper aims to add its miles to the already ongoing road discourse about feminism and cinema in this case of contemporary visual storytelling and its cultural footprint.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory developed in 1975 offers a fundamental paradigm for examining gendered dynamics of power in cinema. Mulvey contends that popular cinemas portray women as objects of male desire making the spectators view them through the perception of a heterosexual male. The protagonist 'The Bride' is presented as an enigmatic fighter in the movie 'Kill Bill' yet the female is depicted inside an artistic framework designed to attract a male audience. Considering the Bride's active role in the narrative, the protagonist's eroticization is fortified by the movie's intentional use of costumes, camera angles, and slow-motion sequences.

Despite the movie 'Kill Bill' has a strong female heroine who leads the narrative forward, perspectives among scholars on whether her appearance disrupts or reinforces a typical cinematic objectification. [McGowan \(2012\)](#) and [Hanson \(2010\)](#) claim that although 'The Bride' is ubiquitous, her visual appearance strictly adheres to patriarchal norms. Contrary to that, [Clover \(1992\)](#) makes its debut 'the final girl' a female protagonist in horror and action movies who transforms from victim to avenger. The protagonist 'The Bride' resembles this model of behaviour. However, her hyper-stylization enhances queries regarding whether her agency as a female is genuine or merely a reinterpreted male-oriented ideal. Kill Bill's visual appearance is shaped by Quentin Tarantino's reference to anime, martial arts films, and exploitative cinema. Some scholars say the film's stylized action scenes give 'the bride' agency [Clover \(1992\)](#). While others firmly believe that the aestheticization of deadly violence reinforces the fetishism of female suffering [Tasker \(1993\)](#). The tension between violence, spectacle, and agency becomes central to controversies concerning whether The Bride's character reflects feminist or authoritarian goals that are worthwhile.

One of the most challenging aspects of Kill Bill is its depiction of violence and especially female suffering. The film's extensive usage of close-up shots and slow-motion sequences during scenes that involve physical abuse for instance in vol. 2 where The Bride was brutally beaten. This raises concerns related to the romanticization of gendered violence. While the protagonist The Bride ultimately achieves her goal, her path to success is marked by extreme brutality, supporting cinematic tropes of women's pain and suffering as a source of narrative motivation. Characterization of the bride has been associated with more general controversies about masculinized femininity in action movies. According to [Tasker](#)

(1993) In an attempt to acquire empowerment women action heroines, tend to take on typical masculine characteristics which include physical dominance, emotional detachment, and violence. However, this poses the question of whether this type of empowerment was subversive or if it still depends on features labelled as male. In addition, Kaplan (2000) criticizes the concept that women redefine power through various structures instead of assuming violent hyper-masculine roles to be seen as strong.

The bride's character as a mother can serve as a source of both motivation and a point of vulnerability, these are the significant narrative elements in Kill Bill vol. 2. Modleski (1988) argues that representation of motherhood in films often depicts conventional gender norms by portraying women's authority within the boundaries of maternal responsibilities. The bride's thirst for vengeance is eventually connected to her maternal instincts suggesting that her agency is boosted by traditional gender stereotypes of feminine attributes rather than being innately independent. The bride's power is celebrated and restricted by her role as a mother which makes this contradiction a challenge for feminist readings of Kill Bill.

According to the feminist reading of Kill Bill, traditional gender stereotypes and empowerment intersect in a complicated manner. Post-feminist scholars argue that due to a shift in feminist discourse, contemporary female heroines serve as both agency and conventional femininity Gill (2007). This distinction is best expressed through the character of Beatrix's kiddo or The Bride who is both emotionally powerful and physically dominant by nature and her appearance, still rooted in a sexist filmmaking framework Gates (2018). Despite the film's use of retribution as a narrative trope of post-feminist ideals of individuality and self-actualization do not necessarily question existing gender disparities.

Judith Butler's gender performativity theory states that gender identity is constructed through repeated social and cultural practices. The bride or Beatrix Kiddo switches between traditionally feminine and masculine-coded behaviours of the bride simultaneously serving as a caring mother and a ruthless assassin. Hansen explains that dualism disrupts fixed gender stereotypes, but it also raises questions regarding whether women's empowerment is contingent on accepting violent male-coded behaviours.

While Tarantino frequently draws on strong female characters his stories are often about suffering, revenge, and relationships with characters Gates (2018). In the movie, 'Kill Bill', the bride's arc is driven by her relationship with Bill, which reinforces anarchy and shows how, the female agency is shaped, by male characters. This paradox further demonstrates the intricate nature of Tarantino's gender stereotypes – although having a strong female protagonist, Kill Bill somehow makes use of structures that have traditionally marginalized women in cinema.

Despite extensive studies on Kill Bill and feminist film theory, numerous research gaps require existing research to be filled with additional studies. One of the central problems that requires an in-depth analysis is the interplay between empowerment and objectification. Although fewer studies have analysed the bride's agency, there was relatively little targeted research on how the film's visual aesthetic appearance contributes to the objectification of the bride. Tarantino's stylized framing, costuming, and cinematographic choices constantly sexualized the bride even if she exemplifies power and vengeance. This complicates the discussion on women's representation in action movies, as her appearance

supports while also objectifying, making it necessary to examine how these opposing qualities influence the audience's perception.

Another important research area is how violence can be used as an instrument of patriarchy or feminism. The stylized combat scenes in Kill Bill lead one to question: whether the film challenges gender stereotypes or if it reinforces cinematic conventions that glorifies female desires. However the Bride's constant urging desire for revenge might be considered as a reclaiming of agency, the barriers between fetishization and empowerment is proclaimed ineffective by the excessive brutality used on female characters and the aestheticization of their misery. This unresolved discussion on violence in the film requires an in-depth understanding of whether the violence arise in a patriarchal society or acts as a tool for feminist struggle.

The rise of motherhood and female action heroes remains another unexplored area, particularly concerning how stories of mothers shape a narrative, focusing on female strength. Although the Bride's journey is profoundly related to her role as a mother, this part of her character simultaneously ensures and challenges conventional maternal responsibilities. Her anger arises from the death of her child which shows her character as a typical self-sacrificing mother. However, her fighting capabilities and authority oppose the feminine stereotype. This negation highlights the importance of further research into how parenting can impact the empowerment of female action heroes and whether it limits their character development.

Finally, an in-depth analysis of the film Kill Bill within the context of Quentin Tarantino's overall filmography provides a complex gender politics. Although his female characters have agency and appear powerful and ruthless, their storylines are restricted within the patriarchal frameworks. Even though, The story of the bride is about her aspiration for revenge, male characters in the film continue to have a significant role and impact. Likewise, Bill's dominating nature over The Bride's agency to the male mentors who taught her to develop her abilities. This trend posits challenging questions regarding whether Tarantino's movies provide feminist subversion or reinforce conventional gender stereotypes. A further detailed feminist analysis of his work is required to understand how the movie's gender politics fluctuates between subversion and affirmation of sexism in contemporary cinema.

3. ANALYSIS

Female empowerment with the aspects of objectification and the male gaze are the two complex gender intertwining themes in Quentin Tarantino's movies Kill Bill Vol. 1 and Vol. 2. The protagonist the bride is frequently critiqued for her strength and resilience. Even so, her narrative delves upon the conventional cinematic traditions that have marginalized women since a long time, raising questions about whether the films subvert patriarchal systems or recycle them in a conventional male revenge action film. The central plot element is the bride's desire for revenge which makes her an independent character with remarkable combat abilities and unyielding determination. This portrayal of the bride's character appears the arrangement of women in action films as passive objects. Feminist critics argues that her suffering and triumph are placed inside a hyper-violent show created for male viewers, arguing that even though the bride is in control, her image is formed within the patriarchal framework. The gender performativity theory developed by Judith Butler claims that gender roles are created through repeated behaviours. In the movies, the characterization of the

bride is reinforced by a male gaze that makes her as a powerful competitor and a beauty represented through visualization.

Tarantino's cinematic choices strengthen anticipation in the movies. The bride's attire, especially her tight-fitting yellow jumpsuit homage to martial arts cinema and a way to emphasize her body. Cinematic techniques such as slow-motion shots, extreme close-ups, and advanced choreographed combat scenes enhance the visual appearance often pausing on her body in ways that can be interpreted as creating traditional norms of female objectification. While women empowerment plays an integral role in the film, it exists within an artistic framework that does not certainly liberates her from the limitations of male visual pleasure. This difference subverts feminist analysis since the film both acknowledges and exploits its female characters. The film power structures are demonstrated as gender established hierarchies. The bride's interactions with other male characters suggests that her strength is, determined by male characters in the movie. the characters like Bill, Budd and Pai Mei, helps her to develop her skills as such they instruct, manipulates and betrays her in the end. bill's admiration and subjugation, praising her potential while causing her trouble is displayed as an element of the patriarchal structure. The constant use of the theme of violence against women raises a question about whether The Bride's will power serves as a feminist validation or suffering often found in male-directed action films.

Although Kill Bill displays other strong female characters, they are often shown as opponents instead of companions. Characters of O-Ren Ishii, Elle Driver, and Vernita Green are presented as strong, despite their roles mainly emphasizing the bride's strength rather than developing a story of female harmony. This changing dynamic reinforces the cinematic tropes of women's conflict rather than collective opposition. Other than that, O-Ren Ishii and Vernita Green are the two characters represented to show racism, coordinating with historical biases in Hollywood. O-Ren Ishii's character as a hyper-violent Asian assassin is aligned with the "dragon lady" framework, while the quick demise of the character Vernita Green reflects a pattern where black women's narrative space are limited. This racial dynamism challenges the film's feminist ideas suggesting that while Kill Bill praises female power it does so within a framework that still discriminates women by colour.

Despite the narrative, Kill Bill's production history provides more details on the gendered structures in Hollywood. Uma Thurman, who roleplayed the bride, mentions that being convinced to present a dangerous stunt that caused in serious damage raises concerns, about the exploitation of women in the industry. Her narrative highlights several dangerous stunts that have been highlighted by the #MeToo movement, which many female actors expressed their concerns about working conditions, force, and exploitation by male directors. Besides that, Tarantino's relationship with Harvey Weinstein, who was often criticised of systemic exploitation of women in the industry, requires a revaluation in the context of the film's production. Although, Kill Bill tells a story of female empowerment and revenge, though the industry that produced the movie has had a history of abusing and oppressing women.

Kill Bill's audience reception has been a contradiction, providing deeper concerns in feminist film criticism. For many audiences, The Bride is a feminist icon—a rare example of a woman who overshadows the action genre and reclaims the agency of her narrative. On one hand, feminist critics share more critical views, critiquing whether the film challenges gender stereotypes or demonstrates a

global view of female liberation moulded within the male frameworks. On the other hand, Western audiences tend to indicate The Bride's liberation and strength, while some Asian critics have raised issues regarding racial stereotyping and the exploitation of traditional martial arts within the film. This indicates the complexity of feminist readings, where female empowerment in the film industry cannot be viewed in isolation from problems regarding racism, cultural appropriation, and power dynamics. In a general sense, Kill Bill takes up an unclear area of research between feminist narrative and cinematic vision. While it critiques traditional female roles, it also disrupts certain power structures and discriminations. The film's reputation is presented by its ability to subvert discourse over gender structures, presenting a protagonist who is certainly powerful yet created within a patriarchal society. In the future, research could consider delving into the question how Kill Bill is identified in the post #MeToo era, particularly with current findings about its production and the on-going debate on gender in action films.

4. METHODOLOGY

This research analysis is a qualitative, interpretative method to examine Quentin Tarantino's Kill Bill Vol. 1 and 2, focusing on its portrayal of gender, women empowerment, and the male gaze. With the help of textual analysis, feminist film theory, and audience reception studies the research critically evaluates how the film displays its female lead and whether it subverts or reinforces patriarchal systems. The film's feminist discourse is analysed using a multifaceted approach due to its complex visual and narrative elements. A close reading of cinematic methods and character portrayal forms the core of this study. The research focuses on how the bride and other female characters O Ren Ishii, Elle Driver, and Vernita Green exchange power structures within the film's revenge plot. The most significant cinematic features including framing, slow motion sequences, costume, and fight choreography are analysed to determine whether the film challenges or follows the male gaze theory proposed by Laura [Mulvey \(1975\)](#).

The research has been organized according to basic feminist and film theories. The visual development of Kill Bill's female leads and appeals to the male gaze while having a strong female protagonist are explored through Laura [Mulvey \(1975\)](#). The application of Carol J. Clover's Final Girl theory examines if The Bride matches the final girl archetype often seen in horror and action films, transforming from victim to avenger. Judith Butler's gender performativity theory (1990) has been applied to examine whether The Bride's portrayal subverts or reinforces traditional perceptions of femininity by combining male and female traits. Bell [Hooks \(1990\)](#) intersectionality theory is applied to examine how race and gender intersect through the character depiction of O-Ren Ishii and Vernita Green especially with Hollywood's historical representation of women of colour.

This research includes an additional viewer's analysis of the film applying film reviews, academic critiques, and feminist discourse. The study compares how the general audience views the bride whether as a female icon or a male fantasy figure with the feminist scholars' interpretations which discuss whether the film truly empowers women or merely transforms their objectification. Moreover, this research takes cultural differences in reception, especially how Western and Eastern viewers grasp the film's ethnic depiction, gender politics, and martial arts influences.

Despite its expansive approach, this study acknowledges essential limitations. The nature of film analysis is biased since interpretations of feminist ideology in *Kill Bill* may differ among scholars and viewers, which makes it challenging to be decisive. The research also relies on secondary audience data from previous feedback and scholarly discussions which may restrict knowledge of contemporary viewers' perspectives. Moreover, the study is aimed at the contextual framework of the theatrical release of the movie and despite excluding continued feminist debates does not considerably analyse how one views *Kill Bill* in the period soon after the #MeToo era. This research provides an in-depth structure to critique *Kill Bill*'s gender discourse by combining textual analysis, feminist film theory, and audience reception studies. The film's place in a feminist film critically engages with discussions of intersectionality, female gaze, and cinematic objectification.

5. CONCLUSION

The movies *Kill Bill* Vol. 1 and Vol. 2 directed by Quentin Tarantino is an interplay between female empowerment and filmic objectification. The Bride represented as a tough, extremely skilled fighter who shatters the standardized passive female protagonists in action movies. Yet her journey is marked in aestheticized violence and portrayed from the male gaze, so her authorization is both rigorous and uncertain. While the movie disrupts traditional gender roles by casting a woman at the centre of a revenge narrative, it also strengthens patriarchal systems in its visual appearance and power structures. The movie also raises the question, How The Bride's power is shown leaves one wondering: is she really empowered, or is she simply another object meant for men to look at? Her occasional interaction with powerful males such as Bill, Budd, and Pai Mei complicate this further, as they lead and direct her toward revenge, often repeating that her power is defined by male power. The gender politics of the film is complex, which is shown in the movie by race discrimination. O-Ren Ishii and Vernita Green are two powerful characters in their own right, but their narratives are present mainly to make a clear way for The Bride's story and not as independent arcs. This is discusses of broader media problems in which women of color tend to be secondary characters in narratives involving white protagonists. In addition to that, rather than depending on with one another, the film sets women against each other in violent combat scenes, reinforcing typical elements that restricts female accord. Instead of working together to disrupt male power structures, these women are positioned as enemies of one another, undermining the film's ability to be an actual subversive feminist work. Finally, *Kill Bill* is both about a women's liberation and a visual representation, always fluctuating between subverting and reinforcing conventional norms. The movie serves us with a powerful female protagonist, but also relies on racism and male dominated narratives. This anticipation make it a fascinating topic for further research. It also leaves us wondering —How he has served the conception of the film among viewers transferred in the post-#MeToo period, particularly after the actress who played the role of the bride, Uma Thurman's speaks of her experience working on-set? And also mentions How does Tarantino's connection with Harvey Weinstein shapes the way we consider the film now? Other than this, A cross-cultural comparison of revenge movies directed by both men and women might serve as a greater revelation into changing visual trends and the broader results of feminist narration in action movies.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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ADDITIONAL FEMINIST CRITIQUES

Various authors. (n.d.). Feminist critiques of Kill Bill and the portrayal of gender in action films. Post-#MeToo Era Studies.

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