



Indonesian Muslim women offer prayers on the 21st night of holy month of Ramadan at a mosque in the city of Surabaya. Muslims throughout the world are marking the month of Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar, during which devotees fast from dawn until dusk. — AFP



This image released by Warner Bros. Entertainment shows, from left, Samuel L. Jackson, Margot Robbie and Alexander Skarsgard in a scene from 'The Legend of Tarzan'. — AP

Robbie plays thoroughly modern 'Jane' in new 'Tarzan' film

With her cut-glass cheekbones, porcelain skin and cascading flaxen locks, it is hard to imagine a better choice to play Tarzan's love interest than Australian actress Margot Robbie. But the 25-year-old, who appears as Jane in "The Legend of Tarzan," the latest take on one of Hollywood's most enduring colonial era adventure stories, is anything but a shrinking violet. "I've never wanted to play the damsel in distress, and Jane is anything but," said the actress, who rose to worldwide fame starring in Martin Scorsese's "The Wolf of Wall Street."

Robbie agreed early on with director David Yates that her take on Jane Porter, and later Lady Greystoke, in the 51st live-action Tarzan movie would be a feisty character, capable of fighting back. In one memorable scene, Belgian ruler Leopold II's dastardly henchman Leon Rom, played by Christoph Waltz, demands of a captured Jane that she scream to attract Tarzan's attention, and instead she spits in his face. It is a gesture of the kind of fiery insouciance common in the roles Robbie has picked, from her portrayal of the feisty Naomi Lapaglia in "The Wolf of Wall Street" to the villainous Harley Quinn in the much anticipated "Suicide Squad" from DC Comics. The Queensland native, whose first regular acting job was in Aussie soap "Neighbors," is enjoying an unusual trajectory in an industry where many female actresses complain of the shallow roles they are offered.

Positive response

Studies consistently show that men outnumber women by up to three to one among speaking parts in feature films, with the few starring female roles often largely just foils for the male star. "I think it's definitely improving. And I think people have finally recognized that half the ticket sales are coming from women," Robbie told AFP at a publicity event in Beverly Hills Sunday for "Tarzan," which hits theaters on July 1.

"And if they don't create the kind of roles that women are going to be able to relate to then they're not going to enjoy watching them as much. And if they don't enjoy watching them as much, they're not going to be able to make their money. I think they needed to recognize that and I think the industry has really responded in a positive way and people are really making an effort." Robbie says she is still offered parts that strike her as problematic, but senses that pro-

ducers and directors are keen to work with her to give the role more depth.

One notable feature of David Yates's take on Tarzan is that, for once, it is the male lead, Robbie's co-star Alexander Skarsgard, who spends much of the duration half-naked while Robbie was able to keep her clothes on. Yates, who directed the final four "Harry Potter" films and is helming JK Rowling's forthcoming Potter spin-off "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them," revealed he had turned down the studio's suggestion of "Superman" actor Henry Cavill for the role of "Tarzan," preferring Skarsgard's lower profile and physicality.

'Not completely naked'

"He was so motivated. I did ask him and I did this with Eddie Redmayne on 'Beasts' because they both had to work out - can you send me photographs of yourself? which seemed kind of not right. So every week, there would be photographs of Alex naked - not completely naked - and after about three or four weeks I just thought 'ok, that's fine, it's great.'" "The Legend of Tarzan" picks up the King of the Jungle's story several years after his adventures in Africa with Jane. Now a parliamentarian in London, Lord Greystoke is persuaded by Samuel L. Jackson's former US civil war soldier George Washington Williams to go back to the Congo Free State to investigate reports that Leopold II is engaged in mass enslavement of the locals.

Jackson told AFP he visited Washington's grave in Blackpool, northwestern England, last year while shooting Tim Burton's "Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children," which is due out in September. "George is a pretty fascinating guy," said the 67-year-old Hollywood veteran. "He fought in the civil war, underage, and had this darkness about him that

took him to the Mexican-American War where he joined the cavalry and ended up killing a whole bunch of Indians, which disturbed him greatly." Jackson describes Tarzan as "an origin story more than anything else." "You find out exactly why he is Tarzan of the Apes and what his relationship is to that ape community, how he was treated in it, who loved him, who bullied him," he said. — AFP

'Regretting motherhood' debate rages in Germany

Is it possible to regret becoming a mother? The question first posed by an Israeli researcher has stirred a debate in Germany like in no other country, shattering a long-held taboo. "In Israel, it was settled in a week. In Germany, it has lasted for months," said sociologist Orna Donath, whose study "Regretting Motherhood" was published in 2015. Tired of hearing that she "would regret" not having a child, the researcher collected testimonies from 23 women who, on the contrary, love their own kids but would, truth be told, prefer not to have had them. The book taps into a usually-unspoken maternal ambivalence that may be far more common than previously acknowledged in many places, including Germany, whose fertility rate is less than half that of Israel's.

Several German books have since been published on the subject, including "The Lie of Maternal Happiness" by Sarah Fischer, along with almost-weekly newspaper columns, television chat shows and Twitter debates with the hashtag #RegrettingMotherhood. "More than a third of women with a university education remain childless here, a situation that is unique in Europe," said scholar Barbara Vinken, who published an analysis on the "myth of the German mother" in 2001.

'Raven mothers'

Speaking to AFP, Vinken said Donath's study

touches a chord in Germany because it "radically questions the joy of having children in a society that expects everything from mothers, and where the mothers demand everything of themselves." The notion that children's well-being depends on their mothers and not on the society around them or their fathers, is deeply entrenched in Germany and creates real obstacles to women's careers. "It's not like in France, where you can have a glass of champagne during your pregnancy, limit the time you breastfeed and go back to work and adult life three months after giving birth," Vinken said, contrasting Germany with its far more fecund neighbor. A mother who returns to the office without taking maternity leave for a year or often three opens herself up to being branded a "Rabenmutter" (raven mother) — women who dump their kids in childcare so they can pursue their personal goals. The political discourse has evolved since Angela Merkel took power a decade ago, ushering in new policies targeting the low birth rate including expanding nursery spots and creating incentives for fathers to take parental leave.

But cultural change has been slower in coming, with the top-selling Bild daily railing as recently as last summer against women who "pursue careers, wear trouser suits, drink smoothies and work out." The male columnist was not finished: "They look like men. They are

not mothers. They no longer wake up at night when their child is afraid of thunder and lightning."

And the fathers?

On a slightly less strident note, the book "Doing Away With Mothers" — which was serialised by the respected weekly Die Zeit — argued that "traditional" motherhood was being "devalued" by the push for women to contribute to the economy. The media, meanwhile, swing wildly between calls to "offer other images of motherhood" that are less self-sacrificing, and taunts against "whining" young women who are obsessed with their own fulfillment. "These children are the parasites of well-being. They are disturbing mummy in her search for herself," Die Zeit wrote sarcastically.

Remarkably, the idea of doing more to bring fathers into the mix has not really caught on. A recent study by the DIW economic institute found that even women who work full time do three hours of housework per day, exponentially more than the men in their lives. Meanwhile, some women have opted to stay out of the "mummy wars" entirely, defending their right not to have children rather than waging daily battles about parental roles and career opportunities in Germany. — AFP



A woman walks with her 11-year-old daughter after picking her up from school in Berlin. — AFP photos



An empty swing is pictured at a Berlin playground.