

**WOMEN PORTRAYAL IN THE FILMS OF SELECTED NOLLYWOOD FEMALE
FILMMAKERS**

BY

**FIBERESIMA, DIKI UGOEZE
B.A. (HON) UPH
G2022/MA/THA/FT/005**

**DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND FILM STUDIES
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

JANUARY, 2026

**WOMEN PORTRAYAL IN THE FILMS OF SELECTED NOLLYWOOD FEMALE
FILMMAKERS**

BY

**FIBERESIMA, DIKI UGOEZE
B.A. (HON) UPH
G2022/MA/THA/FT/005**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND FILM
STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD
OF MASTER OF ARTS (M.A), DEGREE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND
FILM STUDIES, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT,
RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA.**

**SUPERVISORS: PROF. I. C. KRAMA
 DR. O. C. IHUNWO**

JANUARY, 2026.

DECLARATION

I, **FIBERESIMA, DIKI UGOEZE** with Registration Number **G2022/MA/THA/FT/005** declare that the work in this Dissertation on **WOMEN PORTRAYAL IN THE FILMS OF SELECTED NOLLYWOOD FEMALE FILMMAKERS** was carried out by me; that it is my original work and that it has not been submitted wholly or in part for the award of a degree in this or any other institution.

FIBERESIMA, DIKI UGOEZE

Name of Student

.....

Signature

.....

Date:

Confirmation by Supervisor(s)

PROF. I. C. KRAMA

Supervisor

.....

Signature

.....

Date:

DR. O. C. IHUNWO

Supervisor

.....

Signature

.....

Date

CERTIFICATION

**UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**WOMEN PORTRAYAL IN THE FILMS OF SELECTED NOLLYWOOD FEMALE
FILMMAKERS**

BY

**FIBERESIMA, DIKI UGOEZE
B.A. (HON) UPH
G2022/MA/THA/FT/005**

The Board of Examiners certifies that this Dissertation is accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in Film in The Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt.

DESIGNATION	NAME	SIGNATURE	DATE
Supervisor (1)	Prof. I.C. Krama	-----	-----
Supervisor (2)	Dr. O.C. Ihunwo	-----	-----
Chairman, Dept. Graduate Studies Committee	Prof. F.I. Ken-Aminikpo	-----	-----
Head of Department	Dr. O.C. Ihunwo	-----	-----
Dean of Faculty	Prof. J.E. Yeseibo	-----	-----
External Examiner	Prof. C.O. Odi	-----	-----
Dean, School of Graduate Studies/Chairman, Board Of Examiners	Prof. K.A. Anele.	-----	-----

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Almighty God.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express profound gratitude to God Almighty who is my source for His Loving-kindness and sustenance. My sincere appreciation extends to my supervisors, Prof. I.C. Krama for his invaluable mentorship and to Dr. O. C. Ihunwo who is also Head of Department for his unwavering support, they both made the journey smooth and worthwhile. I am indebted to them and I cannot thank them enough. Due gratitude goes to Prof. Faith I. Ken-Aminikpo for her push and commitment towards the post-graduate affairs which she chairs, Prof. J. E. Yeseibo - The Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Prof. E. C. Emasealu, Prof. B. A. Ejiofor, Prof. J. N. E. Umukoro, Dr. Sunday Edum, Dr Patrick Agha, Dr. S.J. Ikiroma-Owiye, Dr. E. E. Imo, Dr. Nkem Ukaegbu, Dr. Remigius Anyawu, and other staff members for their training and assistance.

My immeasurable gratitude goes to my dear mum - Adobi E.Oputa; for your depth of love and support, God bless you Ma. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to my sisters - Dd and Ibi, you guys are the best! I also acknowledge contributions of friends, colleagues, and well-wishers too numerous to mention, thank you.

ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the ways in which selected female Nollywood filmmakers, specifically Genevieve Nnaji (*Lionheart*) and Funke Akindele (*A Tribe Called Judah*, *Everybody Loves Jenifa*), utilize their creative platforms to strategically portray women and challenge prevalent cinematic stereotypes. The central issue addressed is the scarcity and persistent misrepresentation of autonomous, multi-dimensional female characters in mainstream Nollywood, a trend historically perpetuated by male-dominated narratives that rarely attribute female authority to competence or intellect. This research investigates the underexplored potential of female directorial voices to correct this imbalance by centering narratives of female autonomy and socio-economic resilience. Through rigorous qualitative textual analysis, the study dissects characterizations, narrative strategies, visual elements, thematic priorities, and directorial choices within these three films. The analysis is guided primarily by Feminist Film Theory, with support from Cultivation Theory, to examine how strategic control over cinematic representation can promote female agency and shape long-term audience perceptions. The findings indicate a consistent pattern of depicting women whose autonomy is rooted in competence and moral conviction, rather than emotional or passive qualities. These portrayals are crafted through deliberate storytelling and thematic focus to assert a female-centered subject position and provide repeated reinforcement of female capability, which is essential for cultivating progressive beliefs. The films directly address significant socio-cultural issues, including corporate sexism, economic instability, and domestic violence. The study concludes that these films actively redefine the portrayal of women by grounding their power in socio-economic realism and moral clarity. It is recommended that female filmmakers in Nollywood continue to depict multifaceted female characters, leveraging their unique perspectives to offer transformative narratives that enhance audience understanding and contribute meaningfully to social discourse.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cover	Page
Title Page	i
Declaration	ii
Certification	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Abstract	vi
Table of Content	vii
List of Figures	ix

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1	Background to the Study	1
1.2	Statement of the Problem	4
1.3	Aim and Objectives of the Study	5
1.4	Research Questions	6
1.5	Significance of the Study	6
1.6	Profile of the Authors of the works being studied	8
1.7	Scope of the Study/Delimitation	12

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Conceptual Framework	13
2.2	Theoretical Framework	19
2.3	Empirical Review	26
2.4	Periodization of Existing Literature Development	33
2.5	Gap Identification	39

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1	Research Design	41
3.2	Study Area	41
3.3	Population of the Study	42
3.4	Sample and Sampling Techniques	42
3.5	Nature/Sources of Data – Primary/Secondary	43
3.6	Methods of Data Collection	43
3.7	Methods of Data Analysis	44

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1	Introduction	45
4.2.	Critical Readings	45
4.3.	Results and Analysis	97
4.4	Discussion of Findings	107

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1	Summary of Findings	113
5.2	Limitations	116
5.3	Conclusions	117
5.4	Recommendations	119
5.5	Contributions to Knowledge	123
	References	126

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 4.1. Genevieve at the private screening of her movie <i>Lionheart</i> . (2020)	62
Fig. 4.2. Akindele’s achievements with <i>A Tribe Called Judah</i> . (2023)	79
Fig. 4.3. <i>Everybody Loves Jenifa</i> as the grossing movie of all time. (2024)	96
Fig. 4.4. <i>Lionheart</i> premieres as the first Nollywood film on Netflix. (2020)	98
Fig. 4.5. Jenifa’s achievements with her movie <i>Everybody Loves Jenifa</i> . (2024)	100
Fig. 4.6. Adaeze emphasised standing amidst the Company's stakeholders.	102
Fig. 4.7. Jeddidiah combating a threat.	104
Fig. 4.8. Adaeze's composed negotiation.	111

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Cinemas have become significant instruments for social change, shaping reality and influencing behaviors by igniting conversations, challenging societal norms, and inspiring action. Through compelling narratives and emotional resonance, films serve as catalysts for progress, illuminating pressing issues and prompting audiences to reconsider established perspectives. Films function both as mirrors and as agents of transformation, capturing and reinterpreting reality through storytelling that generates alternative possibilities. This capacity to construct new realities across genres subtly shapes public understanding by framing issues and eliciting emotional responses. The interplay between imitation, exaggeration, and creative reality in film drives cultural shifts in perception, establishing cinema as a powerful agent of social learning that influences behaviors, attitudes, and values, and even anticipates future innovations and social change.

Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, has actively utilized its platform to address a range of social, political, economic, and cultural issues relevant to Nigerian society. By engaging with these topics, Nollywood filmmakers challenge stereotypes, promote social justice, and foster empathy and understanding. In doing so, they contribute to shaping societal perspectives and inspiring audiences both within Nigeria and globally.

Filmmaking inherently reflects the perspectives of filmmakers and shapes how audiences interpret these viewpoints. The topical issues addressed in films often influence audience perceptions, encouraging viewers to engage with filmmakers' interpretations of their

environment and behaviors, thereby catalyzing social change. Such films document and reflect the differences and transformations within Nigerian society. While societal change may occur at varying rates, film serves as a valuable tool for delineating the social, political, economic, and cultural status of Nigeria, as well as highlighting human shortcomings.

Nigerian women have navigated a complex interplay of traditional cultural expectations and emerging modern aspirations in recent years. The deeply rooted cultural barriers that Nigerian women have recently navigated have created a complex interplay between traditional expectations and emerging aspirations. Deeply rooted patriarchal structures and societal norms have imposed significant limitations on their personal and professional development. Traditionally, women have been expected to prioritise domestic roles, such as marriage and motherhood, over educational and career pursuits, discouraging challenges to established hierarchies and limiting expressions of agency. Female role models in media. As more Nigerian women gain higher education and professional success, they acquire the financial autonomy and intellectual confidence to challenge these traditional constraints. This transformation is not occurring in a vacuum; the emergence of female filmmakers is a powerful catalyst, pivotal in reshaping the narrative surrounding women's roles and capabilities. For decades, Nollywood has primarily been dominated by male narratives and perspectives, often perpetuating traditional gender roles and stereotypes. However, a significant and increasingly influential force within Nollywood is the burgeoning presence of female filmmakers, directors, producers, and writers - bringing their unique perspectives and experiences to the forefront of Nigerian storytelling. These women are not merely participating in the industry but actively contributing to a shift in representation, challenging conventional narratives about women, and offering alternative visions of female agency and empowerment. This emergence of female filmmakers in Nigeria

provides a crucial opportunity to examine how women's stories are being told, the complexities of female experiences, and messages of empowerment through a distinctly female lens. Films directed, produced, or written by women have the potential to offer nuanced portrayals of female characters who defy stereotypes, navigate societal constraints with resilience, and actively pursue their goals and aspirations. These narratives provide powerful counter-narratives to traditional representations, offering young Nigerian women alternative role models and expanding their understanding of what is possible for them. Films by these female filmmakers depict women as strong, independent, and capable individuals, challenging long-held stereotypes and demonstrating that women can thrive in traditionally male-dominated spheres. These films portray women as active change agents rather than passive recipients of societal expectations. We see women in these films pursuing diverse careers, launching successful businesses, and achieving financial independence while navigating the complexities of family life. Beyond financial success, these female filmmakers are dismantling the "man's world" paradigm and proving formidable competitors to men in professional settings. The unprecedented success of personalities like Bimbo Ademoye, Ruth Kadiri, and Omoni Oboli is a testament to the growing influence of women in Nollywood. Their achievements, from breaking box office records to changing the industry's creative landscape, highlight how women are actively shaping the types of stories being told and, in turn, how female characters are portrayed.

This study is motivated by a desire to fill a critical gap in the research literature. While the Nigerian film industry's influence is well established, there has been insufficient academic attention to how the growing presence of women behind the camera is changing the on-screen representation of women. This research moves beyond general critiques of Nollywood's portrayal of women and specifically investigates if and how female filmmakers are consciously

challenging stereotypes and presenting new, more nuanced narratives. This research is driven by a belief that understanding the creative choices of these female storytellers is essential to appreciating their unique impact on Nigerian culture and society. Ultimately, it provides a clearer, more detailed picture of how female authorship in Nollywood is shaping the dialogue around women's roles and identities for a new generation of audiences.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The fundamental problem this entire study addresses is the scarcity and pervasive misrepresentation of autonomous, multi-dimensional female characters in mainstream Nollywood. This representational deficiency is compounded by the fact that the dominant cinematic narrative in Nollywood has historically been controlled by male directors. This control has resulted in a portrayal in which female authority consistently fails to originate in competence, intellect, or moral conviction, instead being inaccurately depicted as deriving from external factors such as passive relationships, emotional volatility, or circumstantial dependency. This traditional narrative not only diminishes the complexity of women but also reinforces restrictive societal blueprints for female identity. This study directly addresses this imbalance by scrutinising the unexamined potential of female directorial voices to strategically correct it, centring narratives of female autonomy and socio-economic resilience. The research thus seeks to display female portrayals crafted by women and contrast them with the flawed, traditional, male-driven representations in Nollywood.

This widespread misinterpretation of female characters often inadvertently contributes to an inferior education for women, perpetuating stereotypical portrayals that can limit aspirations, reinforce societal biases, and offer restrictive blueprints for female identity and agency. Continuous exposure to one-dimensional and disempowering portrayals can cause women to

have a distorted view of themselves and their potential. It limits their understanding of what they can achieve both personally and within society. Hence, the knowledge provided in this study through the selected films offers a distinct form of superior knowledge. This superior knowledge moves beyond mere entertainment, providing robust observational models of leadership, resilience, and agency, thereby challenging existing gender schemas and fostering empowered self-perceptions, with a view to fostering gender complementarity in professional careers in the interest of better societal development.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to critically examine the portrayal of women in the films of selected Nigerian female filmmakers.

The study will achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyse the portrayal of female characters in selected Nollywood films directed by female filmmakers.
2. To analyse the specific techniques female filmmakers use to portray women's autonomy .
3. To examine how the creative choices of female filmmakers contribute to the representation of diverse female experiences in Nollywood.
4. To investigate how the selected films by female filmmakers address social and cultural issues relevant to Nigerian women.

1.4 Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, this study will answer the following research questions:

1. How are female characters portrayed in selected Nollywood films directed by female filmmakers?
2. What specific techniques do female filmmakers employ to represent women's autonomy?
3. In what ways do the creative choices of female filmmakers contribute to the representation of diverse female experiences in Nollywood?
4. How do the selected films by female filmmakers address social and cultural issues relevant to Nigerian women?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This research is significant across theoretical, practical, and policy domains, with direct benefits for students and female filmmakers. By focusing on the role of female filmmakers in shaping narratives of women's empowerment within selected Nollywood films, this study examines the unique contributions of women behind the camera in influencing societal perceptions and fostering empowerment among female audiences, particularly those navigating complex sociocultural contexts in Nigeria. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between female creative agency in local media, cultural context, and women's empowerment. By analyzing how the perspectives and storytelling of female filmmakers influence the portrayal of women and promote messages of agency, resilience, and the challenge of limiting norms, the study provides valuable insights for filmmakers, educators, social advocates, and policymakers seeking to foster gender equality and empower future generations of women through nuanced analyses of female-authored cinematic narratives.

Theoretically, this research advances understanding of female authorship in film and its impact on gender representation and empowerment within Nollywood. It contributes to media effects

and feminist film theories by examining how the perspectives of female creators shape on-screen narratives and influence audience perceptions of women's roles and capabilities in a non-Western context. The study also explores how female filmmakers in Nigeria navigate and potentially subvert patriarchal cinematic traditions to articulate empowering visions for women. Additionally, it deepens understanding of the cultural impact of Nollywood films by analyzing how narratives crafted by female filmmakers reflect and shape Nigerian culture and influence women's aspirations and perceived possibilities, highlighting the significance of female storytelling in popular media.

Practically, this research offers valuable awareness of the potential of female-driven narratives in Nollywood as a tool for positive social influence and women's empowerment. By analysing how female filmmakers portray strong, agentic female characters and address issues relevant to women's lives, the research can inform the development of more effective strategies for using film to promote gender equality and challenge harmful stereotypes, providing insights for filmmakers, educators, and social advocates.

From a policy perspective, this research raises awareness among policymakers about the significant role of female filmmakers in shaping discourse on women's empowerment in Nollywood. It advocates for policies that support the inclusion and amplification of female voices within the Nigerian film industry and informs initiatives that leverage film to promote gender equality.

Finally, this research is expected to directly benefit students by contributing to the body of knowledge in relevant academic fields with a focused examination of female authorship and women's empowerment in Nigerian cinema, inspiring future research and offering valuable insights for aspiring filmmakers. By focusing on the empowerment of women through the lens of

female filmmakers, the research resonates with female students, fostering critical media engagement and a greater understanding of the power of women's voices in shaping cultural narratives within their context. It uniquely centres the agency of female creators in Nigeria's Nollywood film industry, offering a critical perspective on the evolution of gender representation and empowerment on screen.

1.6. Profile of Female Filmmakers of the Works Being Studied

Funke Akindele

According to Wikipedia, Funke Akindele was born on August 24, 1977, in Ikorodu, Lagos State, Nigeria. She is the second of three children (two girls and one boy). Her mother was a medical doctor, while her father was a retired school principal. She attended Grace Children's School, Gbagada, Lagos State. She obtained an Ordinary National Diploma (OND) in Mass Communication from the former Ogun State Polytechnic, now known as Moshood Abiola Polytechnic. She earned a Law degree from the University of Lagos.

Funke Akindele's entry into the Nigerian media landscape was not as a filmmaker, but as a young artist navigating the rigid structures of late-1990s television. She gained initial prominence starring in the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-sponsored sitcom, *I Need to Know*, which aired from 1998 to 2002. According to Akpan (2018), this early exposure to developmental communication provided Akindele with an understanding of how media functions as a tool for social engineering—a theme that persists in her later work. During this period, Akindele faced the typical struggles of a young female artist in a male-dominated industry, often restricted to stereotypical roles before seeking autonomy through production.

Contrary to the perception of her being just an actress, Akindele's transition to filmmaking began long before her transition to cinema. Driven by the desire for creative control, she established Scene One Productions. Her breakout as a producer came with the Yoruba-language film *Jenifa* (2008), which she wrote and produced. This marked the birth of a franchise that allowed her to experiment with character-driven narratives. By the time she transitioned to the long-running television series *Jenifa's Diary* in 2015, Akindele had already solidified her role as a showrunner, overseeing writing rooms, casting, and executive production (Ogunlade, 2012, p. 52). This period was crucial as it served as her unofficial training ground for directing and large-scale project management.

While her official cinematic directorial debut is often associated with *Your Excellency* (2019), Akindele had been exercising shadow authorship through her production company for over a decade. Her directorial style is characterised by a hands-on approach where she simultaneously manages acting, directing, and producing—a feat rarely seen in such high-budget contexts (Obari, 2017). Her filmmaking prowess reached a global benchmark with *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* (2020) and the record-breaking *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023). In these works, Akindele demonstrates a sophisticated command of the camera, utilising high production values to centre marginalised female narratives within the New Nollywood aesthetic (Olofintoye & Gorla, 2021).

In 2024, her movie *Everybody Loves Jenifa* became the highest-grossing Nigerian movie of all time, breaking the record of her movie *A Tribe Called Judah*. Akindele has won the most awards at the AMVCA and Nigeria Entertainment Awards. She is the producer and director of the four highest-grossing Nollywood movies of all time: *Everybody Loves Jenifa*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, *Battle on Buka Street*, and *Omo Ghetto: The Saga*. Akindele, as a filmmaker, is best understood

through three distinct yet overlapping professional compartments: producing, writing, and directing.

Genevieve Nnaji

According to Wikipedia, Genevieve Nnaji was born in Mbaise, Imo State, in southeast Nigeria, and grew up in Lagos, southwest Nigeria. The fourth of eight children, she was raised in a middle-class family; her father was an engineer, and her mother was a nursery school teacher. She attended Methodist Girls College (Yaba, Lagos) before proceeding to the University of Lagos, where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in creative arts.

Genevieve Nnaji's career began with a foundational stint in television, a detail often overshadowed by her later cinematic fame. At the age of eight, she debuted in the popular soap opera *Ripples* (1987), an experience that introduced her to the technical rigours of television. Despite this early start, Nnaji faced the significant challenges of a young female artist in a burgeoning, unregulated industry. Upon her re-entry into the film space in 1998 with *Most Wanted*, she was initially caught in Nollywood's star system, where female talent was often treated as a decorative element rather than a creative force (Adejunmobi, 2004). This prolific acting era—comprising over 200 films—was a gruelling period Nnaji eventually transcended by seeking creative and financial autonomy. Her early struggles were punctuated by diverse ventures, including a brief foray into the music industry with her 2004 album, 'One Logologo Line', and high-profile commercial endorsements (e.g., Face of Lux, Pronto), which she leveraged to build the personal brand necessary to fund her later production efforts.

The shift in Nnaji's career from performer to filmmaker was a deliberate move to reclaim agency. In November 2015, she transitioned into executive production with the film *Road to Yesterday*, which won Best Movie Overall (West Africa) at the 2016 AMVCAs. This project

served as her primary transition into the behind-the-scenes mechanics of filmmaking, where she exercised control over narrative pacing and character depth. By 2018, she achieved a landmark directorial debut with *Lionheart*. As noted in industry reports (Lauzen, 2019), *Lionheart* represented a departure from traditional Nollywood production values, emphasising a nuanced, "female-centric" narrative that avoided the typical tropes of domestic strife. This directorial prowess was validated when Netflix acquired the film as its first Nigerian Original, signalling Nnaji's entry into global cinema authorship (Wikipedia, 2024).

Nnaji's progression is defined by her role as a pioneer for the Nigerian film industry on the world stage. Her academic background in Creative Arts from the University of Lagos provided a theoretical foundation for her practical achievements, enabling her to challenge boundaries of National Cinema (Choi, 2011). In 2019, *Lionheart* became Nigeria's first-ever submission to the Academy Awards (Oscars) for Best International Feature Film. Beyond the screen, Nnaji utilises her platform for social activism, advocating against early child marriage and female abuse. She defines her feminism as the "right to make one's own choices," a philosophy that mirrors her professional journey from a controlled actor to an autonomous director who prioritises female agency in her storytelling (Nnaji, 2024).

1.7. Scope of the Study

This research primarily focuses on women within the specific cultural context of Nigeria. The study is limited to three selected Nollywood films: *Lionheart* (2018), *A Tribe Called Judah* (2024), and *Everybody Loves Jenifa* (2025).

This research analyses the narratives in these films and examines their influence on women's perceptions and behaviours regarding career aspirations, self-esteem, financial independence, and the challenges posed by societal norms.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 The Concept of Representation and Portrayal

Representation extends beyond merely reflecting reality; it constitutes a process of meaning-making in which media actively constructs and disseminates ideas about social groups, identities, and norms. Film, rather than serving as a neutral mirror, functions as a powerful instrument for shaping cultural consciousness. The portrayal of women in film is not a neutral act of storytelling but a contested site where ideas about gender, power, and social roles are continually negotiated and redefined, particularly within the Nigerian context.

Portrayal can be analyzed through three interconnected dimensions. The first is Stereotypical Portrayal, which involves the use of one-dimensional and oversimplified images to depict women. This includes instances where female characters are restricted to archetypes such as the "long-suffering wife," the "wicked mother-in-law," or the "ghetto girl." Such portrayals reinforce a limited and reductive understanding of women's roles and capabilities.

The second dimension is Complex Portrayal, which serves as a counterpoint to stereotyping. This approach presents characters as multi-dimensional and fully human, depicting a broad spectrum of emotions, motivations, flaws, and strengths. A complex portrayal of a woman emphasizes her role as an active agent within the narrative, driving the plot and making independent choices, rather than remaining a passive figure who merely responds to male characters. This study examines how female filmmakers construct such complex characters and

whether these portrayals authentically address themes of ambition, self-determination, and personal growth.

Last is Identity Portrayal, which focuses on how the films represent the roles women occupy in both traditional and modern Nigerian society. This goes beyond a simple list of occupations and delves into the dynamics of these roles. For example, women are portrayed not only as mothers and wives, but also as professionals, entrepreneurs, and political leaders. The concept of identity portrayal is critical, as it examines how female characters see themselves and how the films represent their aspirations, struggles, and values in relation to their cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds.

2.1.2 The Role of Female Filmmakers in Engineering Women's Portrayal

The intersection of women's empowerment and filmmaking, particularly through the lens of female filmmakers, offers a potent and strategic avenue for advancing this crucial concept. As a powerful medium for storytelling and cultural production, film uniquely shapes perceptions, challenges stereotypes, and fosters critical dialogue on social issues. When women are at the creative helm of these narratives, they bring diverse, often marginalised perspectives and experiences that authentically represent the realities of women's lives, which have historically been misrepresented or entirely absent in mainstream media. In this capacity, female filmmakers serve as vital agents of change.

According to a study by Lauzen (2019, p. 3), female filmmakers are notably more likely to create films that feature complex female characters, thoroughly exploring women's issues, and actively promoting women's empowerment. By deliberately telling women's stories and showcasing their experiences, female filmmakers significantly promote a more inclusive and equitable representation of women in media. As Kavoori and Punathambekar (2008) assert, media

representation is an exceptionally powerful tool for shaping cultural attitudes and promoting social change. Furthermore, Hooks (2000, p. 58) has underscored the profound significance of representation in media, arguing that “it plays a crucial role in shaping identities and challenging dominant ideologies”. By crafting narratives that centre women's experiences, agency, and resilience, female filmmakers can significantly shift societal attitudes and empower women to envision themselves and their potential in transformative new ways.

Moreover, female filmmakers actively engineer women's empowerment by deliberately disrupting traditional gender roles and challenging patriarchal norms through their cinematic creations. By portraying women in diverse and empowered roles that extend far beyond stereotypical representations, they provide powerful counter-narratives that can profoundly inspire and motivate female audiences. Mulvey's (1975) seminal work on the "male gaze" highlights how women have historically been objectified and passive subjects in cinema. Female filmmakers, consciously working against this objectifying gaze, offer alternative ways of seeing and representing women, focusing instead on their subjectivity, agency, and complex inner lives. This fundamental shift in representation can profoundly impact how women are perceived both on and off-screen, fostering a greater sense of self-worth and challenging restrictive societal limitations.

Finally, the very presence of women behind the camera can organically create opportunities and pathways for other women within the film industry, fostering a more inclusive and equitable professional environment. This not only empowers individual women within the profession but also ensures that a broader range of voices and perspectives are brought to the forefront of storytelling. Women taking control of the narrative, from its initial conception to final production, is in itself an act of empowerment, directly challenging the historical dominance of

men in this profoundly influential field. Ultimately, the collective impact of female filmmakers telling diverse and empowering stories contributes significantly to a broader cultural shift that increasingly recognises women's agency, actively challenges inequalities, and fosters an environment conducive to women's empowerment across all spheres of life. Women's empowerment through the strategic, conscious efforts of female filmmakers is a powerful concept that can promote profound social change and effectively challenge entrenched patriarchal norms. By creating narratives that showcase women's experiences, perspectives, and voices, female filmmakers actively help to engineer women's empowerment.

2.1.3 Female Filmmakers as Creative Agency and Representation

This concept seeks to understand how women exercise their creative power and how they are portrayed across various cultural and societal spheres. At its core, it examines women's capacity to initiate, develop, and execute creative endeavours, ranging from artistic expression and intellectual pursuits to social activism and entrepreneurial ventures. Furthermore, it scrutinises how these creative actions and women's identities are depicted, interpreted, and understood within different contexts, including media, art, literature, and everyday life. This framework recognises that female creative agency is not exercised in a vacuum but is often shaped by, and in turn shapes, existing power structures, social norms, and cultural expectations related to gender.

Extensive scholarly research has examined the multifaceted nature of female creative agency.

For instance, feminist scholars like Hooks have emphasised the importance of women having the space and autonomy to define themselves and their experiences through creative expression, challenging patriarchal narratives that often marginalise or misrepresent them. Similarly, Butler's (1990, p. 25) work on performativity highlights how gender itself is constructed and can be

subverted through creative acts, allowing women to challenge and redefine traditional gender roles.

The concept of representation within this framework goes beyond mere visibility. It encompasses the quality, complexity, and authenticity of female portrayals. Hall (1997, p. 15) has emphasised that representation is a process of meaning-making, where images and narratives construct and circulate ideas about social groups. Therefore, the framework considers not only the presence of women in creative and representational spaces but also the nature of their portrayals - whether they are nuanced and multifaceted or limited by stereotypes and patriarchal biases. Furthermore, it acknowledges the intersectional nature of identity, recognising that women's creative agency and representation are also shaped by race, class, sexuality, and disability, leading to diverse experiences and expressions.

Analysis of the interplay between agency and representation reveals a dynamic and reciprocal relationship.

When women possess greater agency in creative production, they are more likely to influence representations that reflect their perspectives and experiences. This can challenge dominant narratives and promote a more comprehensive and unbiased understanding of gender roles.

Conversely, positive and diverse representations of women can inspire and empower others to embrace their creative potential and challenge societal limitations. This framework, therefore, serves as a valuable lens for analysing cultural products, social practices, and power dynamics. It ultimately aims to foster a more inclusive and equitable landscape where female creative agency is recognised, valued, and amplified and where representations of women are diverse, authentic, and empowering.

2.1.4 Film and Social Impact

Nollywood films can change social attitudes by challenging stereotypes, promoting empathy and raising awareness. Film has demonstrated its effectiveness as a tool for social change, particularly when used alongside other forms of activism (Kellner, 2016; Lang, 2017). Nollywood films can contribute to changes in social behaviours by encouraging social activism, promoting social norms and influencing policy decisions. The extent to which films influence social consciousness is well recognised. Sutherland and Feltey (2010, p. 36) argue that "movies are a particularly important vehicle for the transmission of cultural norms and understandings". Peck (2005, p. 744) affirms this statement by noting that "fictional media sources, including film and television, may have persuasive effects on public attitudes and beliefs", primarily through their depiction of popular cultural 'embourgeoisement', a fact conceded by Appel (2008) and Appel & Richter (2007). Sloan (1988) also notes the role of film in negotiating cultural experiences.

Choi (2011, p. 174) believes that "the discussion of cinema cannot tiptoe around the questions of national consciousness in (its diverse) manifestations." This entails his view of cultural expressions as a display of national consciousness and ideology.

Film plays a significant role in rebuilding national identities and creating various ideologies among the citizenry. Choi's (2011, p. 182) view of film as a direct player in the national ideological apparatus is worth noting as it proposes an enquiry into "how National Cinema is implicated within complex social processes and institutions, which catalyzes both conformity and defiance, loyalty and infidelity, stasis and change". Choi calls it "complex social processes and institutions, which imbue cinema with its mediation role in the social context ". Similarly, they are the focus of this study, whose inquiry encompasses, among other aspects, the film's

symbolic codes and the audience's interpretations of them. It is equally important to note that film ideology is closely related to a film's significance, serving as an "important dimension" or "instance" of social practice that develops within and alongside other such instances. (Kavanagh, 1995, p. 312).

"The primary interest was however inquiry of how filmic texts intersect with social ideologies and its role in actively or passively transmitting cultural ideas which contribute to the social reproduction of society" (Sutherland & Feltey, 2010, p. 36). This social reproduction through films is essentially a reproduction of ideologies, which is made possible by the film's "role in the battle for control of the mind's eye" (Ross S. J., 2001, p. 82). The allusion to the mind's eye suggests the film's capacity to influence emotionally and intellectually. Such an enormous influence is what, for this study, has been proposed as social negotiation, or ideological influence whose end is behavioural control. These scholars are proposing recognition of the need to start seeing film's social narratives as nodes from which ideologies are being dispersed.

Other scholars who have made the study of film's socio-ideological interventions a subject of their inquiry include Kang (1997) and Surette (2007), who points out that media(film) reflects a shared social space in which collective opinions, attitudes, and beliefs are developed and negotiated in various ways, the most important of which is that between the viewer and the medium. Filmic endeavours to instantiate opportune intersections between conceptions of prevailing social conditions and artistic enterprise, which crosscut Marxist ideologies and cinema aesthetics to create an understanding of social issues. This conceptual framework offers a structured approach for understanding the role of Nollywood films in influencing behavioural change among women.n.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two theoretical frameworks: Cultivation Theory (CT) and Feminist Film Theory (FFT). The primary framework, FFT, offers a critical lens for analyzing film texts, focusing on the micro-level creative choices and narrative structures employed by female filmmakers. FFT is utilized to examine how the gender of filmmakers influences the portrayal of women, particularly through the subversion of the traditional "male gaze" and the centering of female subjectivity. The supporting framework, CT, addresses the broader, macro-level influence of media and underscores the importance of analyzing consistent patterns of portrayal across selected Nollywood films. Collectively, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for the study.

2.2.1 Feminist Film Theory

Feminist Film Theory (FFT) is a critical, interdisciplinary framework that emerged prominently in the 1970s, fundamentally concerned with how cinema, as a powerful ideological apparatus, constructs, reflects, and ultimately “perpetuates gender ideology and patriarchal power structures” (Kaplan, 1983, p. 23). Unlike media effects theories that focus on individual behavioural outcomes, FFT centres its analysis on the cinematic text and production practices to expose the historical marginalisation and visual objectification of women on screen (Lauzen, 2019, p. 2). It provides the essential critical language to assess the quality and politics of women's portrayal, moving beyond mere visibility to question the nature of representation itself.

The cornerstone of FFT is Laura Mulvey's (1975) seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey, who proposed the theory of the male gaze while drawing heavily from psychoanalysis and semiotics, argues that classical Hollywood cinema is structurally built around the "male gaze." This gaze positions the female body as an object for spectacular viewing

("to-be-looked-at-ness"), intended for the pleasure (scopophilia) of the presumed male spectator, while men remain the active, narrative-driving subjects (Mulvey, 1975, p. 7). This framework established that film is not neutral; its visual grammar reinforces patriarchal control by reducing women to passive, symbolic figures whose existence serves the masculine narrative. Mulvey's work provided the necessary critical tool to analyse the aesthetic and ideological function of women in mainstream cinema, establishing a baseline against which alternative forms of representation must be measured.

Following Mulvey's (1975, pp. 6–18) critique, subsequent scholars broadened the scope of FFT to emphasise the politics of representation and agency. This dimension asserts that representation is an active political process that shapes societal perceptions of gender roles. Teresa de Lauretis (1987, pp. 2-3) extended this conversation, arguing that film not only represents gender but actively constructs it, positioning the female subject within a system of meaning that is often inherently repressive. When women are consistently “portrayed as secondary, domestic, or one-dimensional, it reinforces limiting social norms” (Kaplan, 1983, p. 29). Therefore, the goal of feminist film analysis is to demand and identify portrayals that feature agency—the capacity of female characters to initiate actions, make independent choices, and drive the plot, demonstrating full, complex subjectivity rather than serving as props or emotional anchors for male characters.

The most crucial evolution of FFT for this study is the focus on female authorship and the proposed "female gaze." Recognising that a majority of film history was written by men, theorists argued that placing a woman behind the camera could inherently alter the cinematic product. Theorists such as E. Ann Kaplan (1983, pp. 30-31) explored how female filmmakers might intentionally subvert the male gaze. This subversion focuses on the internal, emotional,

and intellectual reality of the female character, emphasising her experience over her exterior appearance. Patrice Petro (1989, pp. 65-67) highlighted how female directors bring unique lived experiences and cultural perspectives that challenge established patriarchal narratives. Their directorial choices—in thematic focus, dialogue, and character arcs—are often intentional acts aimed at disrupting stereotypes and centring issues of power and female solidarity (Lauzen, 2019, p. 3). The presence of women in key creative roles is seen as a mechanism for reclaiming narrative voice, allowing women's stories to be told authentically and contributing to more nuanced and equitable representations (Hooks, 2000, p. 38).

FFT provides the essential critical apparatus for analysing the films of selected Nollywood female filmmakers. It allows the researcher to assess not only what is being portrayed but how the filmmaker is using their creative agency to influence that portrayal.

Nevertheless, the FFT is not without its critics. Some post-colonial and intersectional feminists argue that early FFT, being Western-centric, often focused exclusively on gender while neglecting the intersecting roles of race, class, and cultural context (Hooks, 2000). For the Nigerian context, this means the analysis must be culturally situated, recognising that the "female gaze" in Nollywood will be uniquely shaped by local narratives, societal pressures, and the specific dynamics of Nigerian filmmaking (Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008, p. 142). However, FFT remains the most robust theoretical framework for linking the intentionality of the female director to the resulting quality and complexity of women's portrayal in the cinematic text.

2.2.2 Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory (CT), developed by George Gerbner (1969, pp. 3-15), is a media theory that explains how long-term, consistent exposure to media content gradually shapes an audience's perception of social reality. For this study, CT serves as the theoretical framework to justify the

social and cultural significance of analysing patterns of women's portrayal across multiple Nollywood films. It provides a framework for moving beyond the singular film text and examining the cumulative impact of female filmmakers' representations on audience beliefs.

CT posits that the media, particularly pervasive and accessible forms like Nollywood films, present a consistent, repetitive portrayal of social issues, thereby influencing audiences' attitudes, beliefs, and understandings of the world (Gerbner, 1969). According to Gerbner et al. (1986)

“Cultivation is a process by which the mass media, particularly television, construct a common conception of reality—a world of shared assumptions and beliefs” (p. 17).

This "common conception of reality" is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the real world but rather a mediated version shaped by the narratives presented.

In the context of Nollywood, CT suggests that the recurring themes, narratives, and character portrayals within these films contribute to viewers' understanding of various social issues and, critically, their perceptions of different social groups, especially women. Heavy viewers of Nollywood may gradually internalise the norms and values portrayed in these films, adopting them as their understanding of social reality. The application of CT to gender portrayal highlights the theory's focus on long-term influence. Nollywood films, with their widespread cultural relevance, have the potential to significantly influence viewers' perception of women's roles. By repeatedly portraying specific themes—such as female professional autonomy, resilience against patriarchy, or economic independence—these films can shape viewers' understanding of these issues and their perceived prevalence. For instance, if films directed by women consistently depict female characters as financially independent decision-makers, this cultivated perception can then challenge traditional beliefs about women's dependency and influence the audience's willingness to accept or aspire to non-traditional roles.

Conversely, CT is vital for examining the impact of stereotypes. Recurring stereotypes, even if presented subtly, can cultivate negative perceptions and prejudices (Liebes & Katz, 1971, pp. 24-26). Therefore, the study uses CT to argue that the deliberate shift by female filmmakers toward nuanced portrayals—away from the typical stereotypes found in male-directed cinema—is essential. By providing consistent counter-narratives that humanise women and depict their struggles and experiences with complexity, these films work against the cultivation of prejudice and toward a more expansive understanding of women's societal contributions.

Cultivating specific attitudes and beliefs through Nollywood films is not a uniform process. Gerbner et al. (1986) explain that "Cultivation analysis... is concerned with the subtle and long-term consequences of exposure to the world of television, a world that may or may not be congruent with the world of everyday experience" (p. 18). CT acknowledges that the influence of media is mediated by various factors, including the viewers' social context, pre-existing beliefs, and demographic characteristics such as age, education, and socioeconomic status. Viewers do not passively absorb messages; they actively interpret and negotiate them through their own cultural lens. For example, viewers with strong pre-existing beliefs about a social issue may be more likely to interpret Nollywood narratives in ways that confirm their views. Furthermore, the cultivation of beliefs is often categorised into two concepts: mainstreaming and resonance. Mainstreaming refers to the blurring, blending, and bending process by which heavy viewing makes diverse groups of viewers' perspectives converge toward the stable, common outlook depicted in the media. Resonance occurs when the content of the media aligns with the viewer's real-life experience, amplifying the cultivation effect. This dynamic means that positive, nuanced portrayals of women by female filmmakers may resonate deeply with young Nigerian women

who are already facing similar challenges, thereby strengthening the impact of the mediated reality on their worldview.

This theory guides the analysis of recurring patterns in the representation of women and gender roles across the selected Nollywood films. By focusing on the consistency of the portrayals, the study explores how exposure to the creative choices of female filmmakers cultivates specific, progressive beliefs and attitudes about women's place in society among young female viewers. CT provides the essential justification for arguing that a systematic, repeated effort by women behind the camera to portray their gender in a complex, active manner holds significant potential for shaping cultural attitudes over the long term. This provides a robust argument for the relevance of the textual analysis conducted within this study.

The analysis of how women are portrayed in the films of selected Nollywood female filmmakers is guided by an integrated theoretical framework encompassing Feminist Film Theory (FFT) and Cultivation Theory (CT). FFT elucidates how the creative and directorial choices of female filmmakers, including narrative structure, thematic focus, and character development, can intentionally subvert the established "male gaze" and reclaim the narrative voice. Hence, FFT allows the study to assess the quality of representation, specifically identifying whether female filmmakers are successfully creating complex, refined female subjects who possess agency, rather than passive objects or stereotypes. While FFT analyses the portrayal's structure in a single film, CT explains why the consistency of that portrayal across the body of work matters, focusing on its potential to shape cultural perceptions over time and cultivate a new, broader understanding of women's roles and potential in the minds of the Nigerian audience. This validates the socio-cultural relevance of the patterns identified in the filmmakers' work.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of the politics of portrayal in Nollywood. By recognising the strengths of this combined approach, the study holistically analyses the complex interplay between female authorship, the aesthetic of representation, and the influence of Nollywood on the evolving dialogue around women's roles in Nigeria.

2.3 Empirical Review

The study of Nollywood's influence on social perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours is a burgeoning field. The growing body of research reveals the industry's significant potential to shape these perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. While direct empirical studies explicitly focusing on the influence of Nollywood films are still limited and emerging, the existing research on other narratives, drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as gender schema, agenda-setting, cultivation, and social cognitive theory, provides valuable insights and offers profound perspectives.

2.3.1 The Perpetuation of Stereotypes and Patriarchal Norms

This review establishes the prevailing representation of women in Nollywood, often characterised by stereotypical, restrictive roles in films directed primarily by men. This body of research defines the "normative portrayal" in the industry, against which the creative choices of female filmmakers in the present study will be critically compared. The central finding across these studies is that Nollywood frequently reproduces conservative gender ideologies, limiting the on-screen agency and complexity of female characters (Adejunmobi, 2004, p. 162; Olofintoye & Gorla, 2021, p. 55).

The majority of scholarly analyses on Nollywood content show that traditional patriarchal structures heavily influence and perpetuate gender stereotypes. Researchers have identified a

limited range of character tropes that function primarily to reinforce established societal expectations regarding marriage, motherhood, and morality (Okoli, 2018, pp. 12-14). For instance, Adejunmobi (2004, p. 165) argued that Nollywood often presents a narrative landscape where a woman's success or failure is inextricably linked to her ability to secure and maintain a marriage, often casting those who prioritise careers or independence as morally suspect or ultimately unhappy. This narrative mechanism effectively polices female ambition.

Specific stereotypes frequently cited in the literature include the "wicked mother-in-law" or "evil stepmother," characters who serve as antagonists to the virtuous protagonist (Obari, 2017, p. 89). These figures, while powerful, are generally portrayed in a negative light, with their power derived from manipulation or dark magic rather than legitimate authority or skill. This contrasts sharply with the portrayal of male power, which is often presented as legitimate and inherent (Olofintoye & Gorla, 2021, p. 58). Furthermore, the trope of the "gold-digger" or the "hyper-sexualized urban woman" is often used to demonise female ambition that steps outside the bounds of domesticity, portraying financial independence sought outside of marriage as inherently corrupt or earned through illicit means (Okoli, 2018, p. 19). A significant critique levelled against general Nollywood portrayals, films often reflecting male authorship, is the pronounced lack of agency afforded to female characters (Adejunmobi, 2004, p. 170). Agency, in this context, refers to a character's ability to initiate action, make independent choices, and drive the central plot, rather than merely serving as a reactive element in a male protagonist's storyline (Obari, 2017, p. 92).

Studies indicate that when female characters are given prominent roles, their arcs frequently revolve around struggles related to marriage, fertility, or infidelity, positioning them within private, domestic spheres rather than public, professional ones (Okoli, 2018, p. 22). This focus

restricts their subjectivity, as their inner lives are often explored only in relation to their familial failures or successes. Olofintoye and Gorla (2021, p. 60) concluded that even when female characters achieve status, their narratives often conclude with a return to or validation of patriarchal structures, suggesting that true female fulfilment lies within traditional boundaries. This pervasive pattern establishes a clear "normative portrayal" in which female identity is often defined by external relationships and traditional roles, providing the critical context for examining the contrasting choices of female filmmakers.

2.3.2 Female Filmmakers and the Impact of Authorship

Global studies focusing on media production and content have found a strong correlation between female authorship and the quality of female representation. Lauzen (2019, p. 3), in her extensive study of top-grossing films, empirically demonstrated that films with at least one female director or writer feature significantly more female protagonists and more complex, non-stereotypical female characters than male-only-authored films. This supports the argument that women in creative control are more likely to consciously push back against the industry's historical tendency to marginalise female experiences. Furthermore, Fischer (2017) highlighted that female directors frequently employ narrative techniques that shift the focus from the woman's physical appearance (challenging the "male gaze") to her "internal emotional landscape and psychological depth, thereby affording her greater subjectivity within the cinematic text" (p. 82). These global findings set an expectation that the female filmmakers in the present study will similarly break the established Nollywood stereotypes.

A key distinction identified in the literature is the thematic shift toward female solidarity and the exploration of relationships outside of the traditional heterosexual romantic context. Dixon and Smith (2014, pp. 110-112) analysed a collection of female-directed films and found a recurring

emphasis on complex mother-daughter bonds, friendships, and female professional networks. This thematic focus contrasts sharply with male-authored films that often prioritise conflict or competition among female characters. Hooks (2000, p. 62), while focusing on cultural production, underscored the importance of women creating media spaces where their own experiences and relational power, rather than competitive conflict, are centred, which directly translates to the narrative choices identified by film analysts.

“Within the African cinematic landscape, the work of female filmmakers is often explicitly political and counter-hegemonic, challenging both colonialism and indigenous patriarchal structures” (Maseko, 2013, p. 45). Scholars examining filmmakers from the African diaspora and the continent, such as Maseko (2013, p. 48) on South African cinema, noted that these female directors often utilise the camera to reclaim agency over cultural narratives. Their films tend to foreground contemporary social issues relevant to women, including land rights, sexual violence, and political participation—and portray female characters as active resisters rather than passive victims (Ogunyemi, 2018, p. 201). This demonstrates that when African women control the means of production, their narratives are typically driven by a conscious effort to empower and humanise their subjects, prioritising the woman's struggle and eventual triumph through agency and determination. This empirical evidence strongly suggests that Nollywood female filmmakers are likely to follow a similar pattern, using their authorship to challenge the restrictive portrayals identified in the preceding review section.

2.3.3 Cultivation Effects and Nollywood's Influence on Social Attitudes

Akinola (2018, p. 74), in her study of the portrayal of women in Nollywood films, found that frequent exposure to films depicting women in traditional roles reinforced traditional gender-role beliefs among viewers. This aligns with Signorielli and Bacue's (1999, p. 532) findings. Ibrahim

(2017, p. 112) found that Nollywood films play a significant role in cultivating specific attitudes and beliefs about social groups and cultural norms. These studies suggest that Nollywood films, given their widespread consumption, contribute to viewers' understanding of social issues and their perceptions of different social groups, reinforcing the cultivation effects observed in other media contexts.

These studies suggest that exposure to media narratives can cultivate specific attitudes and beliefs about social groups and cultural norms. For example, if Nollywood films consistently portray women in traditional roles, viewers who heavily consume these films might be more likely to hold traditional gender role beliefs.

While direct empirical evidence on Nollywood's cultivation effects is limited, we can extrapolate from the general cultivation research. Given the widespread consumption of Nollywood films, it is reasonable to hypothesise that these films contribute to viewers' understanding of social issues and their perceptions of different social groups. For example:

Gender Roles: If Nollywood films frequently depict women as subservient or dependent on men, viewers who heavily absorb these films might be more likely to hold traditional gender role beliefs. On the contrary, films featuring strong, independent female characters could challenge these traditional beliefs.

Social Class: If Nollywood films consistently depict a stark divide between the wealthy and the poor, viewers might develop a heightened awareness of social class disparities and potentially cultivate specific attitudes towards different social classes.

Prosocial Behaviour: Studies have shown that exposure to media portrayals of prosocial behaviours (e.g., helping, sharing, and cooperating) can increase viewers' prosocial behaviour

(Hearold, 1986, p. 115). It is plausible that Nollywood films depicting characters engaging in helpful or cooperative actions could have a similar effect on viewers.

Aggression: According to Bandura (1977), the link between media violence and aggression suggests that exposure to violent portrayals can increase aggressive behaviour, particularly in individuals with pre-existing tendencies towards aggression (p. 12). While Nollywood films are not typically known for excessive violence, it is worth considering how portrayals of conflict and aggression might influence viewers' behaviour.

Given the widespread reach and cultural relevance of Nollywood films, it is reasonable to hypothesise that viewers can learn from and model the behaviours and attitudes depicted in these films. For example;

Relationship Dynamics: Nollywood films often depict a range of relationships, including romantic, family, and friendship dynamics. Viewers might learn different ways to interact in these relationships by observing the film's characters.

Civic Participation: Films that portray characters engaging in civic activities, such as voting, volunteering, or community organising, could inspire viewers to become more involved in their communities.

Cultural Values: Nollywood films often reflect and reinforce cultural values and norms. By observing the characters in the films, viewers might learn appropriate ways to behave and interact within their culture. The existing research on media effects lays out a strong theoretical foundation for studying Nollywood's influence.

Crime and Violence: If Nollywood films frequently feature crime and violence, viewers might perceive their communities as more dangerous than they are, potentially leading to increased fear

and anxiety. Investigating the long-term cultivation effects of Nollywood requires longitudinal studies that track viewers' film consumption and their perceptions of reality over time. Content analysis of Nollywood films is also crucial for identifying recurring themes, character portrayals, and narrative patterns that may contribute to cultivation effects. Furthermore, it is important to consider the role of individual differences and cultural context in mediating these effects.

Again, research explicitly examining and assessing the direct impact of Nollywood films on behavioural modelling is minimal. However, we can draw upon the broader literature on social cognitive theory and media effects to understand the potential for Nollywood films to influence viewers' behaviours and attitudes through observational learning. As Bandura (1986) explained, "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do" (p.20). Media, including film, provides a rich source of models for viewers to observe. By portraying characters engaging in various behaviours and experiencing the consequences of those actions, Nollywood films can offer viewers vicarious experiences that influence their beliefs and behaviours.

Based on the preceding review of empirical studies, a clear research gap emerges. While ample research has effectively documented the prevalence of stereotypical and limiting portrayals of women in general Nollywood content—often reflecting a male-centric narrative—and while global and African diaspora studies provide compelling evidence that female authorship leads to nuanced representation, there remains a significant dearth of systematic, text-based empirical research within the Nigerian context. Specifically, no dedicated study explicitly analyses the portrayal of women across a selected contemporary body of work directed solely by established Nollywood female filmmakers. Consequently, the industry lacks an evidence-based understanding of whether these women are successfully creating a distinct, consistent pattern of

representation that challenges established gender norms. This study is precisely designed to close that gap by providing a critical analysis of female authorship and the portrayal of women in Nollywood.

2.4 Periodisation of Existing Literature Development

A comprehensive review of the existing literature requires an examination of Nollywood's evolution, including its stylistic development, influential genres, and the emergence of female filmmakers.

This periodization establishes a framework for analyzing the selected films and assessing their potential social impact. Nollywood's history can be broadly divided into several phases, each defined by distinct production practices, thematic concerns, and aesthetic approaches.

2.4.1 Early Nollywood (roughly late 1980s - 1990s)

This period witnessed the rise of home video production, facilitated by affordability and accessibility. Films were typically low-budget, produced rapidly, and relied on available resources. Storylines often centered on melodrama, morality tales, and supernatural themes, reflecting prevailing social anxieties and cultural values. Technically, these productions exhibited limited production values and inexperienced acting. Nevertheless, this era was instrumental in establishing Nollywood's distinctive narrative style and its emphasis on local stories and experiences, setting it apart from established cinematic traditions. The development of a video rental culture also provided a vital distribution network, accelerating the industry's growth.

Although male directors dominated the early years, the late 1990s marked the initial emergence of female voices in Nollywood filmmaking.

Despite significant challenges in a male-dominated industry, pioneering female figures began to emerge. Amaka Igwe, for example, became notable during this era. Although her directorial work gained greater prominence in subsequent years, her early contributions to production and storytelling established an important foundation.

Films from this period, particularly those addressing family drama and societal issues, occasionally featured female characters navigating challenging circumstances. These portrayals foreshadowed the perspectives that female filmmakers would later explore in greater depth.

2.4.2 The Rise of "Epic" Productions (1990s - early 2000s)

As the industry expanded, productions became more ambitious, frequently focusing on historical dramas, cultural epics, and narratives rooted in myths and legends. These films featured larger budgets, elaborate costumes and sets, and a heightened emphasis on visual spectacle. This period also saw the emergence of Nollywood's early stars and directors, who gained recognition for advancing the industry. Thematic concerns often addressed tradition versus modernity, cultural identity, and the complexities of social change. This phase marked a transition toward greater professionalism in production values and storytelling, despite ongoing resource and infrastructure limitations.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, female filmmakers became increasingly visible. Amaka Igwe directed critically acclaimed and commercially successful works such as *Rattlesnake* (1995) and the television series *Fuji House of Commotion* (early 2000s), both of which featured strong female characters and nuanced storytelling.

Lilian Amah-Aluko also emerged during this period, contributing new perspectives on established themes and introducing narratives centered on female experiences. Nevertheless, female directors remained significantly underrepresented compared to their male counterparts.

2.4.3 The "New Nollywood" (mid-2000s - present)

This era is characterized by a diversification of genres, including romantic comedies, crime thrillers, and social dramas, which reflect a broader spectrum of audience interests. There is an increased emphasis on production quality, with improvements in cinematography, sound design, and editing. "New Nollywood" films frequently address contemporary social issues such as corruption, political instability, and urban challenges. The period has also witnessed a rise in international collaborations, co-productions, and expanded access to funding and distribution channels. The proliferation of digital platforms has created new opportunities for distribution and audience engagement, enabling Nollywood films to reach global audiences. This phase demonstrates heightened awareness of international film standards and a drive to compete globally, resulting in experimentation with narrative styles and thematic approaches. Notable examples include *The Wedding Party* (2016), *King of Boys* (2018), and *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* (2019).

"New Nollywood" has experienced a notable rise in both the number and visibility of female filmmakers. Directors such as Stephanie Okereke Linus (*Dry*, 2014), who addressed Vesicovaginal fistula, Kemi Adetiba (*The Wedding Party*, 2016; *King of Boys*, 2018), and Mo Abudu (*Fifty*, 2015) have achieved critical and commercial success. Their films frequently explore themes of female empowerment, social issues from a female perspective, and complex character studies. This era represents a significant advancement in female representation and storytelling within Nollywood.

Nollywood's ongoing evolution is shaped by several key trends. A major development is the increasing professionalization of the industry. While earlier productions were often characterized by low budgets and amateur techniques, there is now a strong emphasis on high production values, including improved cinematography, sound design, editing, and special effects. This shift is motivated by the desire to compete internationally and attract broader audiences. Film schools and training programs play a vital role in cultivating the skills required to meet these elevated standards. The professionalization of the industry is also evident in the growing sophistication of storytelling, with more complex narratives, well-developed characters, and nuanced explorations of social themes.

Another significant trend is the diversification of funding and distribution mechanisms. Whereas the industry initially depended on home video sales, it now benefits from a wider array of funding sources, including government grants, private investment, and international co-productions. This expanded access to funding allows filmmakers to undertake more ambitious projects with larger budgets.

The emergence of digital platforms and streaming services has introduced new distribution channels, enabling Nollywood films to reach international audiences. This increased visibility not only promotes Nigerian culture and perspective globally, but also promotes Nigerian culture and perspective globally. Online platforms empower traditional distribution systems and engage directly with viewers; diversity is a defining feature of contemporary media. While earlier films often centred on melodrama and centrality tales, current productions address a broader array of themes, including challenges. This thematic expansion enhances the relevance of Nollywood films for contemporary audiences and cexpansion enhances the relevance of Nollywood films for. By presenting diverse perspectives and challenging dominant narratives, Nollywood can

stimulate discussions on significant social issues and potentially influence them. There is a growing trend towards experimentation and innovation in Nollywood. Filmmakers are pushing the boundaries of traditional storytelling, experimenting with new narrative techniques, visual styles, and genres. This includes the rise of experimental films, arthouse cinema, and documentaries exploring niche topics and challenging conventional filmmaking practices. This experimentation contributes to the industry's artistic growth and expands creative possibilities. The influence of global cinematic trends is also evident, with Nollywood filmmakers drawing inspiration from various film traditions and incorporating them into their work.

The role of women in Nollywood is undergoing significant transformation. While earlier films frequently depicted women in stereotypical roles, an increasing number of female directors, producers, and screenwriters are now presenting stories from a female perspective. These works often challenge traditional gender roles and examine women's experiences in contemporary Nigerian society. Greater representation of women both behind and in front of the camera fosters a more diverse and inclusive industry. Contemporary female filmmakers such as Jade Osiberu (*Isoken*, 2017; *Brotherhood*, 2022) and Bolanle Austen-Peters (*93 Days*, 2016; *The Bling Lagosians*, 2019) are instrumental in this evolution, producing films that feature diverse narratives and high production values.

Nollywood's genre landscape has evolved considerably. While early productions were dominated by melodrama and morality tales, the industry now encompasses a variety of genres. Romantic comedies have gained popularity, often addressing contemporary relationship dynamics and social issues with a lighthearted approach. Crime thrillers and action films have also become prominent, reflecting societal concerns about crime and insecurity. Social dramas provide a platform for nuanced exploration of complex social issues. This genre evolution mirrors shifting

audience preferences and the industry's increasing maturity in engaging with diverse social and cultural themes. Female filmmakers play an active role in this diversification, directing across multiple genres and contributing unique perspectives.

Nollywood's development is closely linked to Nigeria's socio-political context. The industry's formative years coincided with economic hardship and political instability, which shaped the themes and narratives of early films. The advent of democracy in the late 1990s and early 2000s provided filmmakers with new opportunities to address social and political issues, resulting in works that critique corruption, advocate for social justice, and examine nation-building. Persistent challenges such as poverty, inequality, and insecurity continue to influence Nollywood's narratives, reinforcing its role as a platform for social commentary and dialogue.

It is important to recognize that these periods and genre classifications are not rigid. Considerable overlap and fluidity exist, with styles and trends frequently blending. The industry continues to evolve, as new generations of filmmakers push boundaries and experiment with innovative storytelling forms. Appreciating this dynamic evolution is essential for understanding the richness and complexity of Nollywood cinema and its significant contributions to Nigerian culture and society.

Looking forward, Nollywood possesses the potential to become a global cinematic powerhouse. Its vibrant storytelling, cultural relevance, and increasing technical sophistication are drawing attention from international audiences and investors. Continued innovation, diversification, and engagement with pertinent social issues will enable Nollywood to shape Nigerian identity, promote cultural exchange, and contribute to social change. The industry's ongoing evolution promises to deliver increasingly compelling narratives.

2.5 Gaps Identification

The current body of research on Nollywood's representations and social influence reveals several critical gaps, underscoring the need for this study on female authorship and the portrayal of women. These gaps include:

2.5.1 Systematic Textual Analysis of Female Authorship:

Although existing literature indicates that female directors worldwide tend to create more nuanced female characters, there is a lack of systematic, text-based empirical research that specifically isolates and analyzes the portrayal of women in works exclusively directed by contemporary Nollywood female filmmakers. Most studies focus on general content analysis, often overlooking the director's distinct creative influence.

2.5.2 Focus on Portrayal Quality over Mere Visibility:

Many Nollywood studies emphasize quantitative metrics, such as the number of female characters, rather than examining the qualitative complexity and agency of these portrayals. Further research should employ frameworks like Feminist Film Theory to critically assess how female characters function within narratives and how their complexity or stereotypes are constructed textually.

2.5.3 Limited Cultivation Analysis of Nuanced Portrayals:

While Cultivation Theory is frequently applied to examine the cumulative effects of negative stereotypes, little research investigates how the consistent depiction of complex, non-stereotypical female roles—potentially crafted by female filmmakers—might foster progressive perceptions of women's potential and capabilities among audiences over time.

Under-researched Mechanisms of Influence (Narrative/Thematic): There is limited research on the specific narrative, thematic, and dialogue strategies that contribute to positive portrayals of

women. Further investigation is needed into the story structures and themes, such as female solidarity and economic autonomy, employed by female filmmakers that may distinguish their work and influence audience perceptions.

By addressing these gaps through focused textual analysis informed by Feminist Film Theory and supported by Cultivation Theory, this study seeks to provide a critical understanding of female creative agency and its impact on the portrayal of women in contemporary Nollywood.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study employs a qualitative research design centered on textual analysis of selected films. This approach enables an in-depth examination of how the portrayal of women in Nollywood films may influence female audiences. The research investigates film narratives, character portrayals, and thematic representations that contribute to shaping women's perceptions. Through detailed textual analysis of *Lionheart*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Everybody Loves Jenifa*, the study highlights the complex relationship between film content and its potential to inspire positive change among female viewers. This qualitative methodology emphasizes depth and richness of understanding, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the strategies used by female filmmakers to communicate empowerment and transformation.

3.2 Study Area

The study examines contemporary Nollywood films produced between 2018 and 2025 that feature women as central characters. This period facilitates the analysis of current trends and representations, reflecting the evolving depiction of women in Nigerian cinema. By analyzing narrative structures and characterizations, the research identifies mediated realities and gendered messages conveyed by Nollywood regarding women's roles and identities.

3.3 Population of the Study

The study population consists of all "New Nollywood" films produced and released between 2018 and 2025 that are directed by women. This period marks a significant phase in Nigerian cinema, characterized by increased production budgets, global streaming partnerships such as

Netflix and Prime Video, and the growing influence of female auteurs who challenge traditional gender narratives.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample comprises three purposively selected Nollywood films: *Lionheart* (2018), *A Tribe Called Judah* (2024), and *Everybody Loves Jenifa* (2025). These high-grossing, critically acclaimed works serve as primary texts for analyzing the development of the female gaze and agency in contemporary Nigerian cinema.

3.4.1 Sampling Technique

The selection of primary texts was based on specific inclusion criteria to ensure data depth and relevance. The study prioritized directorial authorship, requiring that films be directed or co-directed by women, specifically Genevieve Nnaji and Funke Akindele, to align with the focus on the female gaze. Additionally, temporal relevance was emphasized by restricting the selection to films produced between 2018 and 2025, thereby capturing contemporary shifts in Nollywood's thematic landscape.

The films were also selected for their thematic alignment, focusing on narratives that foreground central female characters who demonstrate agency, resilience, and subversion of patriarchal norms. Furthermore, commercial and critical impact was considered; by choosing benchmark productions such as Nigeria's first Netflix Original and record-breaking box office successes, the study ensures that the analyzed texts possess significant potential to influence social attitudes.

3.5 Nature/Source of Data

This study utilises both primary and secondary data.

3.5.1 Primary Data

The primary data consist of the films *Lionheart* (2018), *A Tribe Called Judah* (2024), and *Everybody Loves Jenifa* (2025). Detailed analysis focuses on their visual and narrative content, including character development, thematic representation of women's agency, challenges to patriarchal norms, and the overall portrayal of empowerment.

3.5.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data sources were consulted to contextualize and support the primary data analysis. Academic literature, including scholarly articles, books, and journals on Nollywood, feminist film theory, and media effects, was reviewed to establish a robust theoretical framework and situate the study's findings within existing scholarship. The integration of primary and secondary data enables a comprehensive exploration of how female filmmakers in Nollywood contribute to the representation and discourse of women through their cinematic narratives.

3.6. Methods of Data Collection

Data collection involves systematic analysis of the selected films to identify, categorize, and interpret relevant features. A multi-faceted approach is employed to gather and analyze data, with particular emphasis on the portrayal of women's empowerment by female filmmakers.

The process begins with multiple viewings of each film, with careful attention to narrative, plot, character development, dialogue, visual elements, sound design, and thematic symbolism related to female empowerment. Subsequently, a critical textual analysis is conducted, treating each film as a complex text for deconstruction. This stage examines the representation of gender roles, the

construction of female identity, and the use of cinematic techniques to convey meaning from a female perspective.

Secondary sources, including film reviews, essays, interviews with female filmmakers, and academic literature, are analyzed to contextualize primary findings and elucidate the intentions behind on-screen representations. Finally, a comparative analysis synthesizes the results from individual film analyses to identify similarities and differences in the portrayal of women, discern evolving trends in Nollywood's representation of gender roles from a female perspective, and examine each film's unique approach to social issues.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The data analysis method is a film-text analytical approach, which is qualitative and interpretive. The study primarily employs thematic analysis to critically examine the portrayal of women in films by selected female Nollywood filmmakers. The analysis focuses on how these filmmakers use narrative and dialogue to represent women and address social and cultural issues.

This method involves systematically identifying, analysing, and reporting recurring themes within the selected films. Thematic analysis is chosen for its flexibility and capacity to provide a detailed, nuanced account of the data. The ultimate goal is to offer a comprehensive understanding of how female filmmakers in Nollywood use narrative to shape discourse on women's roles and identities in Nigeria.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings derived from the critical textual analysis of the selected Nollywood films: *Lionheart*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Everybody Loves Jenifa*. Building upon the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2 and the methodological approach detailed in Chapter 3, this section systematically discusses the results gleaned from a close reading of the films' narratives, character portrayals, visual strategies, and thematic elements.

4.2. Critical Readings

4.2.1 *Lionheart*

Lionheart tells the story of Adaeze Obiagu, a driven and competent woman who serves as the Director of Logistics in her father's successful transportation company, Lionheart Transport. Despite her visible competence and deep-seated loyalty, a glass ceiling appears when her father, Chief Ernest Obiagu, suffers a heart attack. Rather than appointing his clearly qualified daughter, Ernest clings to patriarchal tradition by choosing his eccentric brother, Godswill, as interim CEO. This creates the central conflict: Adaeze must navigate her professional marginalization while simultaneously fighting to save the legacy that overlooked her. The narrative tension escalates when Adaeze discovers the company is drowning in a 330 million Naira debt, leaving them vulnerable to a hostile takeover by the predatory rival, Igwe Pascal. This act highlights Adaeze's autonomy through her tireless efforts to secure a bank loan—a journey that exposes the systemic hurdles female executives face in a male-dominated corporate and regional landscape. Her initial friction with Godswill's unorthodox, old-school methods serves as a foil to her modern, data-driven leadership. The turning point occurs when they travel to Northern Nigeria,

forcing Adaeze to adapt her professional rigidity to navigate cultural and regional nuances to find a solution. The climax centers on a high-stakes meeting with Alhaji Danladi Maikano. Here, Adaeze's intellectual labor and strategic vision are the catalysts for a groundbreaking merger. By proposing a partnership rather than a bailout, she transcends regional biases and corporate sabotage. The resolution is not merely the saving of the company, but the public validation of Adaeze's agency. Her father finally acknowledges her leadership, and she is formally installed as the head of Lionheart, effectively dismantling the patriarchal barriers that initiated the story.

Plot

The film follows a relatively linear and classic three-act structure. The film opens at the Lionheart Transport bus park in Enugu. A group of angry protesters are outside, demanding money and causing a disturbance. Onyinye, a secretary at Lionheart, rushes inside to inform Adaeze Obiagu, the Director of Logistics and Operations. Adaeze confidently goes outside and diplomatically addresses the protesters, successfully calming them down. This scene establishes Adaeze's competence and her role in the company.

Adaeze arrives slightly late for a board meeting chaired by her father, Chief Ernest Obiagu, the owner and CEO of Lionheart Transport. She presents a compelling promotional video for a lucrative BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) contract the company is vying for. The board is impressed. This scene introduces the key players and the high stakes for the company's future.

After the meeting, Chief Ernest suffers a mild heart attack. While recovering at home, he observes his competitor, Igwe Pascal of Igwe Motors, showing interest in the BRT contract and Lionheart itself. Chief Ernest addresses the board via video call, announcing his temporary incapacitation and naming his younger brother, Chief Godswill Obiagu, the Managing Director

of Lionheart's Owerri headquarters, as his replacement. Adaeze is visibly disappointed, having expected the position herself after working closely with her father for seven years.

Adaeze and Godswill visit Chief Ernest. Adaeze is unable to directly express her feelings about being passed over. Later, Adaeze and Godswill attend a meeting with the company auditors. They are shocked to discover that Lionheart is in a staggering ₦950 million in debt due to a loan Chief Ernest took to purchase new luxury buses. The auditors give them a strict 30-day ultimatum to repay the debt or face losing the company's assets.

News of Lionheart's financial woes reaches Igwe Pascal through Samuel Akah, Lionheart's Director of Engineering Services, who is secretly working with Igwe. Igwe Pascal convenes a secret meeting with Lionheart's board of directors and informs them of the company's dire financial situation. He then proposes to buy out Lionheart and merge it with Igwe Motors in a ₦3 billion deal. Adaeze and Godswill interrupt the secret board meeting. They plead with the board to reject Igwe Pascal's offer and give them time to find a solution to the debt. However, the board members are hesitant and influenced by the potential buyout. Igwe Pascal gives them a 10-day deadline to respond to his offer.

Adaeze and Godswill try to secure a loan extension from various banks, but their efforts are futile. Unbeknownst to them, Igwe Pascal has been working behind the scenes to prevent any financial institution from assisting Lionheart, further tightening the noose around the company.

Desperate, Adaeze suggests seeking help from a wealthy musician friend. However, he makes an inappropriate advance towards her in exchange for his assistance, leading to a dead end. Meanwhile, Chief Godswill Obiagu coincidentally stumbles upon two Igbo fraudsters attempting to swindle a Hausa businessman named Hamza Maikano. Godswill intervenes, exposing the scam and saving Hamza. Recognising a potential solution, Chief Godswill suggests a merger

with Maikano Motors, a successful transportation company based in Kano, which is looking to expand into the Eastern market. Adaeze is initially sceptical but eventually agrees to present the idea to her father. After some initial resistance due to historical tribal tensions, Chief Ernest reluctantly agrees to the proposal.

Adaeze and Godswill travel to Kano to meet Alhaji Danladi Maikano, the owner of Maikano Motors. At the airport, Hamza recognizes Chief Godswill and introduces himself, expressing his gratitude for the earlier intervention. During their conversation, they learn that Hamza is Alhaji Maikano's son. Hamza then introduces them to his father, who is also at the airport. They all travel to Kano together.

In Kano, Adaeze presents a well-articulated business proposal to Alhaji Danladi Maikano. She emphasises the synergy between Lionheart's technical expertise and Maikano Motors' capital, highlighting their shared family values and the potential for a mutually beneficial partnership that would enable Maikano Motors to enter the Eastern market and Lionheart to stabilise and expand its operations. Alhaji Maikano is impressed but insists on meeting Chief Ernest before finalizing any agreement.

Alhaji Danladi Maikano travels to Enugu to meet Chief Ernest. An initial period of awkward silence and mutual assessment ensues. However, the ice is broken when Alhaji Maikano speaks in Hausa, and to his surprise, Chief Ernest responds fluently in the same language. This shared linguistic ability creates an immediate connection, fostering understanding and friendship between the two business people.

As the Lionheart board of directors convenes for the final vote on Igwe Pascal's buyout offer, Chief Ernest, accompanied by Adaeze and Godswill, dramatically enters the meeting. Chief Ernest announces their new partnership agreement with Alhaji Danladi Maikano and his son,

Hamza. Adaeze presents the details of the mutually beneficial merger, explaining how it will save Lionheart from liquidation and enable the company to expand without losing control. Igwe Pascal is furious and leaves in embarrassment. Samuel Akah's betrayal is revealed, and he is promptly fired.

With the company saved and a promising future secured, Chief Ernest publicly announces his retirement and formally hands over the reins of leadership to his daughter, Adaeze, acknowledging her competence and dedication. The film concludes with Chief Ernest's retirement party, celebrating the family's resilience and Adaeze's ascension to leadership as Obinna, her brother who is not interested in the business, performs his song.

Characterization

Adaeze Obiagu: The Portrayal of Female Agency and Leadership

The portrayal of Adaeze Obiagu serves as a direct ideological challenge to the traditional, patriarchal representation of women in Nollywood. Adaeze is immediately established not as a reactive character, but as the active subject who drives the narrative forward. Her agency is demonstrated through deliberate, professional actions, subverting the stereotype of women relegated to domestic roles. This is initially proven by her professional competence: she handles angry protesters with calm diplomacy and presents a compelling case to the board, establishing her as the proven leader of Lionheart Transport. When faced with the insurmountable ₦950 million debt and the board's hesitation, she exhibits Initiative and problem-solving, consistently initiating critical solutions. She strategically seeks loan extensions, identifies the need for new financing, and, crucially, develops and presents the highly articulate business proposal for the merger with Maikano Motors. Her final triumph is not based on luck or emotional maneuvering but on her intellectual fortitude and persistence. By securing the merger, she provides the

solution that saves the family legacy, forcing the patriarch, Chief Ernest, to acknowledge her merit. This narrative arc champions the idea that meritocracy must transcend gender, a direct ideological subversion of the film's initial patriarchal conflict.

The ideological construction of Adaeze also actively works toward the Subversion of the Objectifying Gaze by centering her professional identity over her romantic or domestic identity. Adaeze's storyline is entirely devoid of a primary romantic interest (De-emphasis on Romance/Sexuality). The brief encounter where a wealthy musician demands a sexual favor functions as a critique of patriarchal transactional power, which she firmly rejects. By doing so, the film ideologically asserts that Adaeze's worth and success are internal and professional, not derived from her desirability or marital status. Furthermore, the film uses visual framing of Power where her costuming (sharp business suits) and framing (often standing at the head of a table or addressing the board) deliberately establish her in positions of professional authority. This visually counteracts the historical cinematic tendency to frame women primarily as spectacles "to-be-looked-at". The character's construction thus presents a compelling, modern role model who achieves power and recognition through competence and agency.

Chief Ernest Obiagu: The Patriarchal Gatekeeper

Ernest is the inciting force of the story. While he is a loving father, his characterization is rooted in traditional patriarchal structures. By overlooking Adaeze for the interim CEO position despite her obvious competence, he embodies the symbolic barrier women face in corporate Nigeria. His health crisis is the plot device that forces Adaeze into a position where she must prove her autonomy—not through her father's permission, but through her own strategic results.

Godswill Obiagu: The Narrative Foil

Godswill serves as a foil to Adaeze's modern, disciplined leadership. He is characterized by eccentricity and old-school Nigerian business intuition. His importance lies in the shift of his gaze: he moves from being a watchman sent to oversee a "girl," to becoming a collaborative ally who recognizes her superior business acumen. His character advances the play by facilitating the Northern alliance, but more importantly, he validates Adaeze's leadership by eventually stepping aside to let her lead.

Igwe Pascal: The Antagonist

Igwe Pascal represents the predatory nature of the male-dominated business world. He is characterized by ruthless ambition and a lack of professional ethics. Pascal is the catalyst for Adaeze's empowerment. Without his threat of a hostile takeover, Adaeze would not have the platform to demonstrate her high-level crisis management and negotiation skills. He is the test that proves her autonomy is not just theoretical but survival-based.

Themes

Women's Agency and Challenging Gender Stereotypes

This is arguably the most prominent and intentionally explored theme, and it serves as the bedrock of the film. It is not merely a surface-level observation; it forms the very spine of Adaeze's narrative and resonates deeply within the Nigerian cultural context. The film meticulously crafts Adaeze Obiagu as a direct counterpoint to traditional gender expectations within both the family structure and the professional landscape, particularly in the often-patriarchal world of Nigerian business.

In the Nigerian context, where traditional patriarchal structures often dictate professional hierarchies, Adaeze's ambition and demonstrated competence serve as a direct challenge to the long-held stereotype that leadership roles, particularly within the demanding realm of business, are the exclusive preserve of men. The film strategically utilizes Chief Ernest's initial decision to overlook his demonstrably capable daughter in favour of his brother, Godswill, to highlight these deeply ingrained societal norms subtly. This initial setback becomes a crucial narrative device, underscoring the very real barriers that women often encounter and fueling Adaeze's subsequent determination to prove her inherent leadership potential, a potential initially overshadowed by her gender.

Lionheart actively dismantles harmful stereotypes surrounding intelligence and ambition in women. Countering narratives that might portray driven women in a negative light, the film presents Adaeze's ambition as a natural and commendable extension of her sharp intellect and profound commitment to her family's business. Her desire to lead is not depicted as an aggressive power grab but rather as a logical and justified progression stemming from her proven abilities and her clear vision for *Lionheart's* future trajectory. Adaeze's intelligence is not confined to boardroom strategies; it extends to her diplomatic finesse in managing crises and her astute strategic thinking when navigating intricate business challenges.

Furthermore, the film offers a refreshing redefinition of strength and resilience, consciously moving away from traditionally masculine interpretations. Adaeze's unwavering determination in the face of being initially disregarded and the immense pressure of the company's looming financial collapse is not manifested through aggression or forceful dominance. Instead, her strength emanates from her intellectual fortitude, her persistent dedication to finding viable solutions, and her adept emotional intelligence in navigating complex interpersonal dynamics.

This nuanced portrayal of female strength, rooted in inner resolve and strategic action rather than a mere imitation of male behaviour, provides a more authentic and relatable representation for female audiences.

Crucially, *Lionheart* champions the principle that professional competence should transcend gender unequivocally. Adaeze's years of dedicated service to Lionheart, her comprehensive understanding of its intricate operations, and her insightful and well-articulated business proposals collectively demonstrate that her capabilities are not limited or defined by her gender but are instead a direct result of her acquired skills and extensive experience. The film implicitly advocates for a meritocratic system, one where professional opportunities and recognition are justly awarded based on individual talent, hard work, and demonstrable expertise rather than on pre-assigned and often limiting gender roles. Through Adaeze's compelling journey, *Lionheart* offers a powerful and resonant message of hope and possibility for women navigating professional landscapes in Nigeria and beyond, illustrating that ambition, intelligence, and unwavering dedication are potent forces in overcoming deeply entrenched gender-based obstacles and ultimately achieving the well-deserved success they deserve.

Family Legacy and Responsibility

The film deeply explores the theme of family legacy and the responsibility of preserving it. Lionheart Transport is not just a business; it is a symbol of the Obiagu family's hard work and heritage. Adaeze feels a strong sense of responsibility for her father's creation and is determined to save it from collapse. This theme is evident in her initial desire to take over from her father, her unwavering commitment to finding solutions to the financial crisis, and her ultimate success in securing the company's future. The film underscores the weight of carrying on a family's name and the sacrifices individuals make to uphold it.

Inter-Tribal Collaboration and National Unity

The central plot device of the merger between an Igbo transport company (Lionheart) and a Hausa transport company (Maikano Motors) intentionally promotes the theme of inter-tribal collaboration and the potential for national unity through economic partnerships. The film subtly addresses historical tensions and prejudices by showcasing the mutual benefits and understanding that can arise when different ethnic groups work together. The pivotal moment of Chief Ernest and Alhaji Maikano connecting through language underscores the power of communication and shared understanding in bridging cultural divides. The successful merger serves as a hopeful microcosm for broader national cohesion.

The Clash of Tradition and Modernity

The film subtly explores the tension between traditional values and modern approaches. Chief Ernest's initial inclination to appoint his brother over his capable daughter might stem from traditional patriarchal norms. In contrast, Adaeze represents a more modern, merit-based approach to leadership. Godswill's character also embodies this clash, with his seemingly traditional reliance on prayer juxtaposed with his surprisingly shrewd and practical solutions. The film does not necessarily present one as superior but instead shows how both tradition and modernity can play a role in navigating challenges. Chief Ernest's eventual acceptance of Adaeze's leadership signifies a move towards a more modern perspective.

The Value of Different Forms of Intelligence and Experience

The characters of Adaeze and Godswill highlight the value of different forms of intelligence and experience. Adaeze embodies formal education, strategic planning, and business acumen. Godswill, on the other hand, initially appears as comic relief but demonstrates a practical, street-smart intelligence and valuable life experience that ultimately leads to the solution. The

film suggests that wisdom and effective problem-solving can come from diverse backgrounds and approaches, challenging the notion that only one type of intelligence is valuable.

Family Support and Loyalty

Despite internal disagreements and external pressures, the theme of family support and loyalty remains strong throughout the film. Adaeze's unwavering dedication to her father and the family business, Godswill's eventual support and guidance, and the mother's consistent encouragement all underscore the importance of familial bonds in overcoming adversity. Even Obinna, despite his different aspirations, remains a supportive family member. The film emphasizes that a strong family unit can provide crucial emotional and practical support during challenging times.

Challenging Expectations and Subverting Stereotypes

Several characters in *Lionheart* challenge initial expectations and subvert stereotypes. Adaeze defies gender stereotypes in leadership. Godswill transcends his initial portrayal as mere comic relief to become a key problem-solver. Even the portrayal of inter-tribal relations moves beyond simplistic stereotypes to highlight the potential for collaboration and understanding. The film encourages viewers to look beyond surface appearances and preconceived notions.

By intentionally weaving these themes into the narrative, *Lionheart* transcends a simple story of saving a business, becoming a commentary on contemporary Nigerian society that addresses issues of gender equality, national unity, the interplay between tradition and modernity, and the importance of family and diverse perspectives.

Language

The language and diction in *Lionheart* are meticulously crafted to enhance the film's authenticity and cultural resonance. The strategic use of a blend of English and Igbo reflects the multilingual

reality of Nigeria, firmly anchoring the film in the Southeast. This seamless code-switching, particularly the use of Igbo in intimate family settings, reinforces cultural identity and familial bonds. Crucially, the pivotal moment where Chief Ernest and Alhaji Maikano connect through fluent Hausa demonstrates the power of language as a symbol for breaking down inter-tribal barriers and fostering national unity through shared understanding.

Directorial Concept and Approach

Genevieve Nnaji's directorial concept for *Lionheart* is rooted in a desire for authenticity, aiming to present a contemporary Nigerian narrative that resonates both locally and internationally. Her approach prioritizes character-driven storytelling, focusing on the complexities of family dynamics, professional ambition, and cultural interactions within a specific Nigerian context. The vision likely involved moving beyond some of the more stereotypical portrayals often associated with Nollywood, opting for a more grounded and relatable depiction of Nigerian life, particularly the experiences of a strong, ambitious woman navigating the business world.

The film extends to its thematic concerns, particularly the exploration of women's portrayal within a Nigerian context. Nnaji's direction ensures that Adaeze's journey is central, portraying her ambition and competence without resorting to simplistic tropes of female strength. The challenges Adaeze faces are rooted in both the patriarchal structures of the business world and the expectations placed upon women in Nigerian society. The film's resolution, with Adaeze ultimately assuming leadership, serves as an empowering statement that subtly challenges traditional norms. Nnaji's directorial choices – the way Adaeze is visually framed, her interactions with male characters, and her professional competence – all contribute to the central theme of female agency and leadership.

Genevieve Nnaji's directorial work on *Lionheart* holds significant implications for female filmmakers in Nigeria and the broader movement of women's empowerment in the film industry. Nnaji's directorial execution demonstrates a keen eye for detail and a commitment to visual storytelling that enhances the narrative. The film's pacing is deliberate, allowing for character development and the gradual unfolding of the plot without resorting to unnecessary melodrama. Her shot compositions and camera movements are often understated yet effective in conveying emotion and highlighting key interactions. The choice of locations in Enugu and Kano is deliberate, significantly contributing to the film's authenticity and visual richness and moving beyond the familiar Lagos cityscape. The cinematography captures the distinct atmospheres of these regions, further grounding the story in a tangible Nigerian reality. The seamless integration of Igbo and English languages, along with the subtle incorporation of cultural nuances, suggests a director deeply invested in presenting a genuine cultural experience. The performances she elicits from her cast are generally naturalistic, avoiding over-the-top portrayals and allowing the characters' motivations and relationships to drive the narrative. This suggests a directorial approach that values subtlety and emotional resonance over theatricality.

Her successful navigation of the director's role for a film of this scale and its subsequent international recognition on Netflix shatters existing barriers and sets a powerful precedent. In a historically male-dominated Nollywood, her achievement demonstrates the creative and leadership capabilities of women behind the camera. *Lionheart* serves as a tangible example of a commercially and critically successful film helmed by a woman, potentially opening doors for more female directors to gain opportunities and funding for their projects. Furthermore, the film's central theme of a strong, capable female protagonist achieving professional success offers an empowering narrative that resonates with female audiences both in Nigeria and globally. By

telling stories that centre on empowered female characters, female filmmakers like Nnaji contribute to a more diverse and representative cinematic landscape, challenging traditional gender roles and inspiring future generations of women both on and off-screen. Her directorial vision and execution in *Lionheart* not only deliver a compelling film but also serve as a significant step forward for female representation and empowerment within the Nigerian film industry.

Visual Language

The visual language of *Lionheart* works to subvert the patriarchal gaze and visually affirm Adaeze's professional agency. The cinematography maintains a grounded realism, using naturalistic lighting and unobtrusive camera work. This style avoids the hyper-sexualized or sensationalized visual treatment often applied to female characters in mainstream cinema, thereby contributing to the de-objectification of Adaeze.

Crucially, the film's visual rhetoric deliberately places Adaeze in positions of power. She is consistently framed in medium shots or eye-level compositions when speaking in the boardroom, confronting her uncle, or presenting her proposal. This visual choice establishes her as an active subject of the narrative, directly challenging the "male gaze" which typically uses close-ups and low-angle shots to visually fragment or fetishize the female body. Instead, Adaeze's visual framing emphasizes her competence and authority, making her actions—not her appearance—the focus of the viewer's attention. Her professional costuming further reinforces this visual framing of power, underscoring her role as a leader rather than a spectacle.

Symbols

Lionheart, while grounded in a relatively straightforward narrative, subtly employs several symbols that enrich its thematic depth and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of its core

messages. These symbols often operate within the cultural context of Nigeria, adding layers of meaning that resonate with local audiences and offer insights for international viewers.

The very title, "Lionheart", serves as a central and multifaceted symbol. On a literal level, it is the name of the family's transport company, representing their legacy, hard work, and the source of their livelihood. However, on a deeper symbolic level, "Lionheart" embodies courage, resilience, and strength – qualities that Adaeze must embody throughout the film as she fights to save her father's company. The lion, often associated with power and bravery, reflects the inner fortitude required to navigate the male-dominated business world and overcome the financial crisis. Adaeze's journey can be seen as her development and demonstration of her own 'lionheart', proving her strength and leadership capabilities.

The buses themselves, the very vehicles of Lionheart Transport, function as more than just a means of business. They symbolize connection, movement, and the lifeblood of the community. They represent the tangible legacy of Chief Ernest's hard work and the potential for progress and economic growth. The ailing state of the buses due to debt mirrors the precarious situation of the family and the company. Adaeze's determination to maintain and improve the buses symbolizes her commitment to preserving this legacy and driving the company towards a better future. The potential merger with Maikano Motors, involving a larger and more modern fleet, suggests an expansion of this connection and movement on a national scale.

Adaeze's costumes are not merely practical clothing; they subtly symbolize her evolving role and character. Her attire is often professional and assertive, reflecting her position as a director in a male-dominated industry. Her sharp, business-like outfits underscore her competence and ambition. The contrast between her professional wardrobe and more relaxed family attire also highlights the different facets of her life and identity.

Tone/Mood

The tone and mood of *Lionheart* are deliberately balanced to reflect and validate Adaeze's professional struggle, maintaining an optimistic, yet serious, tone regarding the gender narrative.

The film's initial mood quickly shifts from familial warmth to serious uncertainty and professional frustration. This intentional mood directly establishes the weight of the financial crisis and the pressure Adaeze faces, which is compounded by the subtle patriarchal slight when she is initially overlooked for the CEO role. This allows the film to seriously engage with the real-world barriers women encounter in male-dominated business spaces.

Despite the high stakes, the film maintains a core tone of resilience and competence. Adaeze's consistent professionalism and determination inject a mood of hope and possibility, preventing the struggle from descending into melodrama or helplessness. Humor, primarily via Godswill, is strategically used to lighten the overall mood, but it never trivializes Adaeze's core responsibility or competence.

Ultimately, the tone culminates in a mood of empowering resolution and validation. Adaeze's final victory and recognition are presented with a celebratory tone, reinforcing the film's core message: that merit and capability can and should overcome traditional gender biases. The entire tonal arc; from initial frustration to justified triumph, is purposefully crafted to affirm the potential for positive change and inspire hope for female leadership in Nigeria.

Plausibility

The film establishes a strong ideological plausibility by demonstrating Adaeze's professional competence as the sole determinant of her success. Her ultimate recognition is earned through repeated acts of strategic intelligence and initiative, not through luck or romantic intervention. This provides an ideologically plausible blueprint for female leadership, championing the idea

that capability and diligence can successfully overcome patriarchal structural resistance. The film successfully persuades the audience that Adaeze deserves the CEO position, which is the central ideological victory.

However, this ideological success requires the narrative to occasionally rely on contrivances and shortcuts that reduce real-world complexity, such as the overly rapid acceptance of the Maikano merger or Godswill's improbable rescue of Hamza. These moments, while lacking literal plausibility, serve a necessary narrative function: they expedite the resolution of the external threat (the debt crisis) so the film can focus its energy entirely on the resolution of the internal, ideological conflict (the recognition of Adaeze's merit). In this context, the narrative's minor improbabilities are merely scaffolding necessary to support the fundamentally plausible and empowering narrative of female professional triumph.

Impact beyond the Screen

Adaeze's character resonates deeply with the experiences of many Nigerian women who navigate similar challenges in their professional lives. Her success offers an empowering message of hope and possibility, demonstrating that ambition, intelligence, and dedication can overcome gender-based obstacles. *Lionheart*, through Adaeze's journey, contributes to a broader cultural conversation about the role of women in Nigerian society and the need to dismantle limiting gender stereotypes in the workplace and beyond. It champions a future where women are recognized and rewarded for their abilities, paving the way for greater gender equality and representation in leadership across various sectors.

Beyond the compelling narrative, Genevieve Nnaji's directorial debut with *Lionheart* marked a monumental achievement for Nigerian cinema, extending its impact far beyond the screen. The film's acquisition by Netflix in 2018—making it the first Nigerian film to be acquired by the

global streaming giant—catapulted Nollywood content onto the international stage, significantly expanding its reach and accessibility worldwide. This pioneering distribution deal provided an unprecedented platform for *Lionheart's* empowering message to reach diverse global audiences, including the vast Nigerian diaspora.

The Netflix deal itself represented a substantial financial milestone, demonstrating the growing commercial viability and international appeal of quality Nigerian productions. Critically, *Lionheart's* selection as Nigeria's entry for the 2020 Academy Awards (Oscars) for Best International Feature Film further solidified Nnaji's directorial prowess and the film's artistic merit on a global stage. Although ultimately disqualified on a technicality (predominantly English dialogue), the recognition itself was a powerful affirmation of the film's quality and its ability to compete with international cinematic masterpieces. This global recognition not only elevated Genevieve Nnaji's stature as a filmmaker but also significantly boosted the perception and global reach of Nollywood as a whole, showcasing its potential to tell universally relevant stories, particularly those centered on female empowerment, to an increasingly interconnected world.



Fig. 4.1. Genevieve at the private screening of her movie *Lionheart*. (2020)

4.2.2 *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023)

In A Tribe Called Judah, The narrative centers on Jedidiah Judah, a resilient single mother living in a low-income area of Lagos. She is the matriarchal anchor for her five sons—Emeka, Adamu, Pere, Elkanah, and Lucky—each fathered by men from different Nigerian ethnic groups. This diverse household serves as a microcosm of Nigerian society, held together solely by Jedidiah's formidable strength and moral authority. The story's inciting incident occurs when Jedidiah is diagnosed with chronic kidney failure, requiring a 'huge' sum of 18million Naira for a life-saving transplant and ongoing dialysis. As the family's financial struggles collide with this medical crisis, the narrative shifts into a high-stakes heist drama. Driven by a maternal determination to save their mother, the sons transition from petty squabbles to planning a sophisticated robbery of Jedidiah's former employer, a wealthy furniture mall owner suspected of money laundering. This act marks the character's trajectory from managing domestic chaos to endorsing extreme, unconventional measures for survival. The plot thickens when the brothers' heist coincides with a separate, violent robbery by a professional gang, turning the mall into a site of a deadly standoff. In the climax, the Judah brothers must navigate the double threat of the armed gang and the police. Jedidiah's influence remains the moral compass even in absentia; her sons' survival is portrayed not just as a criminal feat, but as a testament to the "matriarchal resilience" she instilled in them. The resolution sees the family escaping with their lives, though the ending is bittersweet. While the heist provides the means for her initial treatment, the film concludes by highlighting the systemic nature of poverty and the lengths to which a resourceful head of a family must go to preserve her lineage.

Plot

The film begins by immersing viewers in the distinct and often turbulent world of Jedidiah Judah as she engages in her morning prayer, anointing images of her five sons – Emeka, Adamu, Shina, Pere, and Ejiro – a gesture that underscores her profound maternal solicitude. Subsequent scenes present Jedidiah's persona as a diligent and supportive mainstay within her modest community. We observe her intervening in a domestic altercation involving Linda and Papa Micheal, illustrating her resolute nature and protective instincts, even enduring physical aggression. This initial sequence firmly establishes Jedidiah's pivotal role and her steadfast devotion to her community and, implicitly, her offspring.

The narrative then introduces each of Jedidiah's five sons, underscoring their disparate paternal lineages and contrasting dispositions. Emeka, the eldest and a sales associate, is depicted as seemingly the most responsible, albeit facing scrutiny at his workplace. Adamu, the composed and peace-brokering security guard, is shown working alongside Emeka. Shina is unequivocally presented as the neighbourhood delinquent. Pere is definitively characterized as a habitual pickpocket. Ejiro, the artistic and mischievous youngest, is frequently seen with his girlfriend, Testimony, participating in minor swindles. These scenes unequivocally establish the "good, bad, ugly, and worst" dynamics within the family.

The central dramatic trigger transpires when Jedidiah's health deteriorates due to the consumption of unhealthy alcoholic beverages, resulting in kidney disease. A definitive scene portrays the brothers confronting the stark reality of her ailment, and the staggering N18 million demanded for her surgery, alongside the N400,000 required weekly for dialysis. The brothers, including Emeka, who has recently become unemployed while attending to his mother, are confronted with an insurmountable financial predicament.

Driven by the undeniable desperation to preserve their mother's life, the brothers collectively resolve to engage in criminal activity. The next scene identifies their target: Emeka's employer, Mr. Chigozie, the Chairman of C and K Furniture, whom they discover is involved in money laundering. This decision is a critical juncture, signifying their descent into unlawful actions. Emeka's insider knowledge of his workplace and his employer's illicit dealings becomes the catalyst for their scheme. The brothers – Emeka, Adamu, Shina, Pere, and Ejiro, along with Ejiro's girlfriend Testimony – then commence formulating a plan to rob Mr. Chigozie's furniture store. Their personalities and limited criminal experience undeniably shape their approach to the planning, likely involving comedic disagreements and flawed strategies, highlighting their initial incompetence. Emeka's familiarity with the store's layout and security, Adamu's cautiousness, Shina's street-thug mentality, Pere's thieving skills, and Ejiro and Testimony's con-artist tendencies influence their ill-conceived scheme.

The narrative climax centres on the execution of the robbery at C and K Furniture. Each brother and Testimony attempt to fulfil their assigned roles, leading to a series of chaotic and humorous mishaps juxtaposed against the serious stakes. The brothers' lack of professional criminal expertise and their contrasting dispositions contribute to the unfolding pandemonium, potentially jeopardizing their plan and their freedom. Following the heist, the film depicts the immediate aftermath of their actions. The brothers must grapple with the success or failure of their endeavour, the potential for apprehension by law enforcement, and the moral implications of their crime. Jedidiah's reaction to their actions and the news regarding the obtained funds is a crucial part of this stage.

The film's conclusion examines the long-term consequences of the brothers' desperate actions. This encompasses the fate of Jedidiah's health and the legal repercussions for the brothers.

Despite their flaws and criminal behaviour, the film ultimately underscores the unflinching love for their mother that united them, suggesting that their familial bonds, however strained, endure through the crisis. The ending offers a sense of resolution regarding Jedidiah's situation and the future of their 'tribe' as the family sails away (with Testimony).

Characterization

Jedidiah Judah: The Embodiment of Matriarchal Agency

Jedidiah Judah stands as the indispensable pillar and primary catalyst of the film. Her characterization as a single mother of five sons from five different tribes is a deliberate directorial choice that positions her as a unifier of diversity, effectively serving as a metaphor for a multicultural Nigeria held together by maternal strength.

Her autonomy is portrayed as both resilient and burdened. Unlike the polished, corporate agency seen in *Lionheart*, Jedidiah's agency is "street-tested and visceral. She is hardworking and strong, yet, Akindele humanizes her by including her flaws—specifically her historical struggles with liquor and the emotional trauma of being disowned by her father. These scars do not weaken her; instead, they provide the moral weight for her sons' devotion.

The entire plot—the N18 million medical crisis—intrinsically positions Jedidiah's survival as the supreme familial value. Her role advances the play even when she is bedridden; it is her life-or-death situation that forces her sons to abandon their petty squabbles and transition into a tactical unit. By making the climax about saving their mother, the film affirms the ultimate authority and unifying power of the matriarch, redefining female strength not just as the ability to lead, but as the ability to inspire a collective to take extreme, unconventional risks.

Testimony: The Proactive Agent

A contrasting form of female portrayal is seen in Testimony, Ejiro's girlfriend. She serves as an active female agent in crisis, successfully defying the archetype of the passive love interest or the damsel in distress. Testimony advances the narrative by being a willing and active participant in the Judah family's criminal shift. She is fully aware of the dangerous plan to rob the money launderer and is actively involved in the pre-heist operations, by playing the blind-beggar ruse. She demonstrates female solidarity; she chooses to enter a high-stakes, life-threatening situation not out of necessity, but out of loyalty to her boyfriend Ejiro and at large, the Judah unit. Her proactive involvement asserts that women in this cinematic world are capable, decisive agents in high-stakes conflict resolution.

Collette: Dark Agency

Collette, the furniture store manager, provides a powerful and sharp ideological contrast to Jedidiah. While Jedidiah's power is maternal and rooted in community, Collette's authority is initially presented as professional, rigid, and strictly transactional. Her stern, unsympathetic dismissal of Emeka serves as a narrative catalyst, pushing the family closer to the edge of desperation. However, her character advancement takes a dramatic turn in the final act, revealing a dark layer of agency. The revelation that she is a former gang member who relapses into greed—arriving at the mall to seize the spoils for herself—elevates her from a mere corporate foil to a double-crossing antagonist. This shows a form of female agency that is ambitious, independent, and entirely separate from the moral or maternal codes of the other women. She represents the anti-matriarch, proving that female characters in Nollywood are increasingly being given the complexity to be both the hero and the sophisticated villain.

Emeka Judah: The Surrogate of Matriarchal Agency

As the eldest son, Emeka is characterized as the responsible pillar of the family. He acts as the primary executor of Jedidiah's will. When Jedidiah falls ill, Emeka's character advances the play by transitioning the family from a domestic unit into a tactical heist team. His leadership is a direct reflection of the resilience Jedidiah instilled in him; his agency is essentially an extension of hers.

The Younger Sons (Adamu, Pere, Elkanah, and Lucky)

The other four sons, as listed above, represent the chaos that Jedidiah has spent her life managing. Their diverse tribal backgrounds (representing a mini-Nigeria) advance the narrative by showing that Jedidiah's matriarchal influence transcends ethnic boundaries. During the heist, their specific skills—Adamu's brute force, Pere's street smarts, Lucky's driving—are the tools that make Jedidiah's unconventional measures for survival possible.

Themes

The Theme of Women's Experiences

While *A Tribe Called Judah's* central narrative revolves around a mother and her sons, the film subtly weaves in threads related to women's experiences. Jedidiah Judah herself, as a single mother of five, embodies a particular form of resilience and strength in the face of societal and personal challenges. She has navigated raising a large family with diverse needs and without consistent paternal support for all her children. Her hard work within her community and her role as a pillar of support demonstrates a woman taking agency and providing for her family in a context where societal structures might not always be supportive. Her ability to raise five sons

with different fathers and maintain a semblance of unity despite their flaws speaks to her strength and determination as a matriarch.

However, the film also subtly portrays the vulnerability of women within the Nigerian socio-economic landscape. Jedidiah's declining health, potentially linked to the stresses of poverty and single motherhood, underscores the physical and emotional toll that societal and economic pressures can take on women. Her reliance on her sons, even in their flawed attempts to help, highlights a potential lack of adequate social safety nets for women in her situation.

The character of Testimony, Ejiro's girlfriend, offers another perspective on women. While her initial portrayal might lean towards a supportive romantic interest, her unwavering loyalty and active participation in the brothers' desperate plan showcase a woman who is not merely a bystander but an engaged agent in the unfolding events. Her courage and commitment to Ejiro, and by extension, his family, demonstrate a form of female agency and solidarity, even in unconventional circumstances.

Conversely, the character of Collette, Emeka's manager, presents a different facet. As a woman in a position of authority within a corporate setting, she navigates a potentially male-dominated environment. However, her portrayal leans towards strict adherence to rules over empathy; she embodies a professional ambition that can sometimes transcend gendered expectations of behaviour. Jedidiah embodies resilience, maternal strength, and vulnerability. Testimony showcases loyalty and active participation, while Collette represents a woman navigating professional hierarchies with a focus on authority and influence. The film's strength lies in portraying these multifaceted experiences without reducing its female characters to simplistic tropes of empowerment or victimhood. It subtly reflects the realities and complexities faced by women within its specific Nigerian context.

Matriarchal Agency and Familial Unification

This is the film's most crucial theme, directly addressing the central female character's role. It explores the concept that Jedidiah Judah serves as the matriarchal center and the irreplaceable unifying force of the family. The narrative demonstrates that the family's survival, purpose, and even the coordination of the male characters are entirely dependent on preserving the mother's life. By making the mother's survival the ultimate narrative goal, the film implicitly critiques traditional patriarchal structures, asserting that the matriarch's health and presence are the highest value and source of authority within the 'tribe.'

Female Resilience and the Burden of Single Motherhood

This theme focuses on the lived experience of women like Jedidiah within the socio-economic context. It highlights the resilience required by a single mother to raise a large, diverse family under challenging economic conditions. Conversely, the theme also explores the vulnerability and hidden toll of this resilience. Jedidiah's severe illness, potentially stemming from years of stress and self-neglect, symbolizes the immense physical and emotional burden carried by single mothers in a system lacking adequate social safety nets. This narrative focus elevates her struggle from a mere plot device to a socio-cultural commentary on women's hidden sacrifices.

Active Female Agency in Crisis

This theme moves beyond Jedidiah's passive vulnerability to highlight the active agency of women during the crisis. It is best exemplified by the character Testimony, whose involvement is not that of a passive romantic interest. Her decision to actively participate in the highly dangerous criminal plot showcases female solidarity and initiative. This thematic thread asserts that women are not confined to supportive roles during crises but are capable, decisive, and willing agents whose actions directly influence the outcome of high-stakes conflicts.

Setting

The setting of *A Tribe Called Judah* is firmly rooted in the vibrant and challenging urban landscape of Lagos, Nigeria. This specific location is not merely a backdrop but actively shapes the characters' lives, their struggles, and the very fabric of the narrative. The primary setting is a low-to-middle-income urban neighbourhood of Lagos, which establishes the plausible context for the Judah family's financial desperation. The visual contrast between their cramped family home and the opulence of the mall/Mr. Chigozie's business directly highlights the theme of economic inequality that morally justifies the heist. Furthermore, the selection of Lagos; a vibrant, multi-ethnic city is essential for the theme of unity in diversity, as it plausibly houses sons from different Nigerian tribes. Ultimately, the demanding Lagos environment underscores the resilience and strength of the matriarch, Jedidiah, who successfully raised her "tribe" within its challenging confines.

Language

The language in *A Tribe Called Judah* is a vital socio-linguistic tool that enhances authenticity and thematic structure. The blend of Nigerian English and incorporated indigenous languages validates the core theme of unity in diversity, effectively demonstrating how the matriarch, Jedidiah, navigates a multi-ethnic family environment. Furthermore, language serves as a crucial marker for social class and character distinction. The contrast between the street slang and colloquialisms used by the wayward sons (Shina and Pere) and the standard Nigerian English spoken by the formally employed sons (Emeka and Adamu) highlights their differing socio-economic statuses. This linguistic varieties, including the use of accents like Mr.

Chigozie's, deepens the film's relatability and grounds the character development in a specific, complex Nigerian reality.

Acting Performance

A Tribe Called Judah hinges on the performances of its principal female cast members, which actively affirm and embody female agency, resilience, and authority.

The performance of Funke Akindele as Jedidiah Judah is paramount. Known for her comedic roles, Akindele delivers a portrayal that balances fierce protectiveness and resilience with profound vulnerability. Her acting captures the emotional weight of a loving, yet overwhelmed, single mother, grounding the character in relatable Nigerian reality. Akindele ensures Jedidiah's illness does not render her passive; rather, her quiet determination and fierce love for her sons are the powerful emotional levers that compel the entire male cast into action, establishing her agency as the family's undisputed emotional and moral anchor.

Nse Ikpe-Etim's performance as Collette is designed to showcase a contrasting form of female authority. Ikpe-Etim effectively embodies the stern, unsympathetic furniture store manager, highlighting a woman navigating a corporate, transactional world. Her acting is defined by a rigid adherence to authority over empathy, presenting a type of female power that is professionally ambitious and unyielding, serving as a foil to Jedidiah's maternal warmth. Crucially, the performance subtly conveys a lack of moral restriction, culminating in the reveal of her criminal agenda, confirming her character as a potent, active agent driven by personal gain rather than just professional duty.

Genoveva Umeh as Testimony delivers a performance that showcases unwavering loyalty and surprising courage. Umeh effectively characterizes Testimony's commitment to Ejiro and her seamless, active integration into the Judah family's high-stakes crisis. Her portrayal ensures the

character is not merely a supportive presence but an engaged co-conspirator whose courage and willingness to participate in the heist demonstrate a tangible form of female agency and initiative.

Directorial Concept and Approach

Funke Akindele's directorial vision for *A Tribe Called Judah* is highly intentional, driven by an acute understanding of the Nigerian audience and a commitment to validating the struggles and resilience of its female characters. Her approach successfully merges social realism with commercial entertainment.

Akindele strategically anchors the narrative in the relatable, grounded authenticity of a working-class Lagos family, ensuring an immediate connection with local viewers. This setting establishes the credibility of the family's financial hardship, which is the catalyst for the entire plot. Critically, Akindele uses this realism to challenge the negative stereotype of the single mother: Jedidiah Judah is portrayed not as a victim, but as a street-smart, self-confident matriarch and provider whose quiet determination compels the entire male cast into action. Akindele ensures the emotional focus shifts from judging her past to celebrating her present strength and resilience.

Her directional concept strategically champions female economic power. By anchoring the entire high-stakes plot (the N18 million heist) in the insurmountable cost of the mother's healthcare, she powerfully establishes the economic value and necessity of the woman's life to the family's stability. This choice mandates that the men's primary action is one of service and sacrifice for the female head-of-household, a directional choice that validates female well-being as the ultimate priority. This intentionality extends to other women, such as the actively engaged

co-conspirator Testimony and the rigid, ambitious corporate manager Collette, ensuring female agency is represented across different moral and professional spheres.

A defining characteristic of her directorial style is her masterful tonal balance, skillfully blending the humour of the brothers' chaotic attempts at crime with the profound emotional drama of the mother's illness. This calibration ensures the comedy enhances, rather than undermines, the dramatic core.

The final layer of Akindele's vision lies in the meta-narrative of holistic creative leadership. As the film's Writer, Director, Lead Actress, and Producer, her multifaceted involvement provides a real-world example of female creative and business leadership in a male-dominated industry. This hands-on, unified approach ensures cohesive artistic vision, emphasizing strong character work and dynamic visuals. By delivering the highest-grossing Nigerian film of all time, her directional concept confirms the viability and success of a strong female vision, mirroring her powerful on-screen role with her status as a box office powerhouse.

Visual Language

The visual language and cinematography in *A Tribe Called Judah* are intentionally used to reinforce female agency and contextualize the family's socio-economic reality. The film visually establishes Jedidiah's centrality through her consistent framing in the center of domestic and emotional scenes, regardless of her illness, which reinforces her status as the unifying force and moral anchor. This visual emphasis is supported by the stark contrast between the cramped, warm Judah household and the sleek, sterile environments of wealth and the hospital, arguing visually that true value lies in the matriarch and the family she leads. Furthermore, visual choices highlight the distinct female agencies: Testimony is actively framed as a full and equal participant in the dangerous sequences, moving her beyond a passive love interest, while Collette

is visually isolated in formal, corporate attire and professional settings, establishing a contrasting, transactional model of female authority. Ultimately, the use of dynamic visuals of working-class Lagos streets sharply juxtaposed against the polished visuals of corporate wealth serves as a clear visual argument for the economic desperation that drives the working-class family toward conflict with the corrupt elite, grounding the thematic exploration of class and gender in a convincing Nigerian reality.

Symbols

A Tribe Called Judah, while grounded in a realistic portrayal of family struggles, employs particular objects, settings, and recurring motifs as symbols that deepen the film's thematic resonance. The Judah family name itself carries symbolic weight. In a Nigerian context with diverse ethnicities, a unified surname for a family with different tribal origins could symbolize the potential for unity and shared identity that transcends tribal divisions. It represents the mother's unifying force, creating a 'tribe' bound by love and shared experience rather than solely by blood or origin.

The cramped Judah family home serves as a potent symbol of their economic hardship and the close quarters that force the disparate brothers to coexist. It represents both the constraints they face and the intimacy of their familial bonds, highlighting how their shared struggles and limited resources tie them together despite their differences.

Jedidiah's illness, particularly kidney disease potentially stemming from unhealthy habits due to stress, could symbolize the sacrifices and burdens carried by single mothers in challenging socio-economic environments. It represents the physical and emotional toll of her unwavering dedication to her sons, becoming the central catalyst for the brothers' desperate actions. The money itself, specifically the large sum needed for Jedidiah's surgery and the allure of the

laundered dollars, symbolizes both salvation and temptation. It depicts the desperate hope for a better outcome but also the corrupting influence that can lead individuals down a dangerous path. The brothers' pursuit of this money highlights the stark realities of healthcare costs and the desperation that can arise from economic inequality.

Ejiro's paintings could symbolise his artistic spirit and perhaps serve as a form of escapism from the harsh realities of his family life. His art also represents a different way of seeing the world, contrasting with the more pragmatic or street-smart perspectives of his brothers. The fate of his artwork or his dedication to it amidst the crisis could carry symbolic meaning about the importance of individual passions in the face of adversity.

The furniture store, the target of the brothers' heist, symbolizes the wealth and corruption that exist within their society. It represents the illicit gains made by those in power, contrasting sharply with the poverty and desperation of the Judah family. Robbing this location could symbolically represent a misguided attempt to take back what they feel they are owed or to level the playing field, however, illegally. The sachet-packed spirit drinks that contribute to Jedidiah's illness could symbolize the allure and danger of cheap coping mechanisms for those facing hardship, highlighting the cycle of poverty and health issues.

Ultimately, the symbols in *A Tribe Called Judah* likely work to enrich the narrative, adding layers of meaning beyond the literal events and deepening the audience's understanding of the characters' motivations and the film's underlying themes. They contribute to a more nuanced and thought-provoking viewing experience.

Tone/Mood

The overall mood *A Tribe Called Judah* is one of desperate urgency tempered by unbreakable familial loyalty. This mood is crucial for legitimizing the Judah family's actions under the thesis

of female empowerment and class critique. The prevailing sense of desperation is set by Jedidiah's critical illness and the impossible cost of her care. This tone ensures that the viewer focuses on the matriarch's survival as the necessary, paramount objective, effectively framing the subsequent criminal act as an act of familial duty rather than pure malice, thereby validating the extreme measures taken by her sons.

The tone deliberately employs a careful tonal balance that merges social critique with entertainment. The film uses a humorous, chaotic tone when depicting the sons' bumbling attempts at the heist, but this is constantly juxtaposed against the poignant, dramatic tone surrounding Jedidiah's deteriorating health. This directorial calibration prevents the film from becoming simply a frivolous comedy, ensuring the underlying themes of class struggle and the critique of a failing healthcare system remain potent and serious.

Despite the crises, the final tone is ultimately one of female resilience and ultimate unity. The comedic chaos dissolves into a serious, high-stakes final act where the family finds harmony through collective action. This final mood of resolution affirms the enduring power of the matriarch's spirit and the strength of the unconventional "tribe" she founded, thus validating the female lead as the triumphant, essential figure in the face of systemic hardship.

Plausibility

The film's sense of plausibility is crucial because it legitimizes the desperate actions of the family and validates the film's core arguments regarding female agency, economic inequality, and class struggle. The entire narrative is anchored by the plausibility of financial desperation. The massive cost of Jedidiah's life-saving kidney surgery (N18 million) is a realistic figure within the context of Nigeria's private healthcare system, making her dire situation instantly relatable and believable to the local audience. This realistic, overwhelming financial burden is

the sole moral justification for the family's extreme criminal act. The narrative dictates that a single working-class mother's life is worth a major heist, thus powerfully asserting Matriarchal Agency as a justifiable, urgent economic necessity.

Furthermore, the Socio-Geographic Plausibility of the setting is essential. The depiction of the Judah family residing in a cramped, low-to-middle-income Lagos neighbourhood while targeting the wealth stored in a lavish city mall is a believable representation of the stark economic inequality prevalent in contemporary Nigeria. This realistic class disparity makes the robbery plausible as a desperate, retaliatory action against a corrupt system, transforming the crime from mere law-breaking into a narrative of working-class survival driven entirely by the needs of the matriarch.

Impact beyond the Screen

While *A Tribe Called Judah* is not explicitly centred on women's empowerment in the way *Lionheart* focuses on Adaeze's professional journey, it offers glimpses into the diverse experiences of women within its narrative.

While the thematic landscape of the film primarily explores familial bonds, desperation, unity in diversity, and socio-economic inequalities, the film's significance regarding women's empowerment lies not solely in its narrative content but rather in the groundbreaking achievement of its creation and reception. Directed and produced by Funke Akindele, *A Tribe Called Judah* has demonstrably shattered box office records in Nollywood, becoming the first film to surpass the monumental N1 billion threshold. This unprecedented success, particularly in a historically male-dominated industry, serves as a powerful and practical demonstration of women's capabilities and leadership in the filmmaking field.

Akindele's multifaceted role as writer, director, and producer on such a commercially successful project underscores the potential for women to excel and lead across various aspects of film production. Her consistent track record of breaking box office records with previous films, such as *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* and *Battle on Buka Street*, has already established her as a formidable force in Nollywood. However, *A Tribe Called Judah's* unprecedented achievement solidifies her position as a trailblazer and a source of inspiration for aspiring female filmmakers in Nigeria and beyond.

Therefore, while the film's storyline may not explicitly champion female characters overcoming gender-specific obstacles in a direct thematic way, its very existence and triumph act as a powerful form of women's empowerment. Akindele's success demonstrates that women can achieve the highest levels of success in the film industry, breaking barriers and setting new standards for what is possible. This tangible achievement transcends on-screen narratives of empowerment, offering a real-world example of female leadership, creative vision, and business acumen. The film's impact extends beyond the entertainment sector, serving as an encouraging symbol of women's potential to reach unprecedented heights in various fields, proving that leadership and success are not limited by gender.



Fig. 4.2. Akindele's achievements with *A Tribe Called Judah*. (2023)

4.2.3 *Everybody Loves Jenifa* (2024)

Everybody Loves Jenifa is a story about Jenifa; an installment of the long-running franchise, Jenifa has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a socially ambitious youth into the respected head of the 'Bassey World Foundation'. As a successful community leader, her autonomy is defined by her dedication to women's empowerment and social justice. However, this established peace is disrupted by the arrival of a charismatic new neighbor whose own charitable organization begins to eclipse Jenifa's work. This rivalry is not merely professional; it serves as a catalyst for Jenifa to exercise her sharp intuition to look beneath the surface of his flashy philanthropy. The narrative shifts gears when Jenifa's proactive investigation uncovers that her neighbor's altruism is a front for a sophisticated criminal network. This discovery leads the plot to Ghana, where the stakes escalate from local rivalry to international peril. Jenifa and her loyal circle find themselves unintentionally embroiled in a high-stakes drug trafficking operation overseen by a ruthless kingpin. Throughout this dangerous journey, the film portrays Jenifa not as a passive victim, but as a strategic agent of change. The climax centers on Jenifa's ability to navigate the underworld of organized crime by relying on her moral clarity and "authentic self." Instead of conforming to conventional professional expectations, she leverages her unique communication style and grassroots influence to dismantle the syndicate. Ultimately, justice is served as Jenifa exposes the kingpin, solidifying her status as a serious philanthropic leader. The resolution affirms that her unconventional personality and linguistic identity are not barriers to her leadership, but are the very tools that allow her to protect her community and assert her social autonomy.

Plot

The film opens with a powerful display of Jenifa's heroism as she courageously rescues a child from a burning house. This act immediately garners her widespread praise and admiration within the Amen Estate community, firmly establishing her as a beloved figure. Her boyfriend, Shege, expresses his deep admiration and introduces her to his new entrepreneurial venture, "Shege-Jenifa Water," a testament to their growing bond. Jenifa, however, is consumed by her philanthropic endeavours, pouring her energy into her foundation, which focuses on equipping individuals with vocational skills. The foundation's credibility is underscored by its partnerships with prominent trainers, including the celebrated chef Hilda Baci and renowned fashion designer Veekee James. As she is publicly honoured as a humanitarian, Jenifa's remarkable evolution from her humble, often clumsy past into a successful businesswoman and influential philanthropist becomes a source of profound inspiration for many.

Jenifa's life takes an unexpected turn with the arrival of Lobster, a sophisticated and well-connected new neighbour. Lobster quickly wins over the community, his charm and apparent benevolence eclipsing Jenifa's efforts and threatening her established position as the local favourite. Initially, Jenifa welcomes him with her characteristic humour and charm, even proposing collaboration. However, tensions rise sharply when Lobster dismisses her proposal, fueling Jenifa's growing envy. Her suspicions are confirmed when she witnesses a brutal act: Lobster violently assaults his wife, Olivia, leaving her in a coma. Jenifa then uncovers Lobster's extensive fraudulent activities. Despite this horrific discovery, Olivia's mother, Mrs. Agnes, remains conspicuously silent, her silence rooted in the significant financial benefits she receives from Lobster.

Driven by an unwavering resolve to seek justice for Olivia, Jenifa enlists the formidable help of Madam Bassey, a women's rights activist who herself has a history of overcoming domestic abuse. Madam Bassey's commitment is absolute, but their pursuit of justice faces a significant obstacle when Lobster's sister-in-law, Ogechi, adamantly refuses to testify. As pressure mounts on Lobster, he resorts to extreme intimidation tactics, even sneaking into Jenifa's room to deliver a chilling threat. Undeterred by the danger, Jenifa defiantly organizes a cultural festival to rally her community. However, the threats from Lobster's associates escalate rapidly, forcing Jenifa and her close friends, including Toyosi and Adaku, to seek refuge at Cordelia's house after narrowly surviving a chilling assassination attempt.

Events take a thrilling turn during the Eko Fest, where Jenifa and her friends find themselves relentlessly pursued by Lobster's dangerous men. Seeking desperate safety, Jenifa secures a gig in Ghana, hoping that distance will provide much-needed relief from the relentless threats. However, their trip to Ghana inadvertently unravels a sinister drug cartel led by the enigmatic Bebe. Jenifa's investigation into Lobster's past, intertwined with their search, leads to a series of comedic misadventures, including instances of mistaken identity, awkward encounters, and a bold infiltration of one of Lobster's high-profile events, where they pose as reporters to gather intelligence.

Amidst this escalating chaos, Jenifa grapples with profound feelings of inadequacy and increasing tensions in her personal life. Her relationship with Shege reaches a significant breaking point when she firmly declines his marriage proposal, instead choosing to prioritise her mission for justice. The stakes rise even further when Toyosi makes a shocking confession: her involvement with a dangerous gang led by the Sheriff. This revelation inextricably draws Bebe and her dangerous associates directly into their lives. Jenifa and her friends are subsequently

kidnapped and subjected to brutal torture by this gang, but a dramatic and timely police intervention saves them, leading to Bebe's immediate arrest.

The film culminates in a climactic charity gala. Here, Jenifa confronts Lobster in a heated, emotional exchange where his deep insecurities and desperate need for validation are laid bare for all to see. Moved by his unexpected vulnerability, Jenifa makes a compassionate choice: she sets aside their differences and proposes merging their philanthropic efforts to create a single, more impactful organisation. The film concludes with Jenifa's resilience and profound compassion triumphing, underscoring the powerful themes of unity, self-acceptance, and forgiveness. The final scene depicts Jenifa and Lobster co-hosting a major charity event, a symbolic representation of their transformed relationship and their shared, renewed commitment to uplifting their community.

The film ends on a happy note, with Jenifa finally accepting Shege's proposal as well as gaining the trust and respect of her community.

Characterization

Jenifa: The Evolution of Authentic Agency

Jenifa is the undisputed heart and the engine of the film's moral trajectory. Her characterization subverts the traditional hero trope by proving that Authentic Leadership does not require linguistic or social assimilation. Her agency is defined by a unique blend of altruism (rescuing the child) and intuition (seeing through Lobster). By retaining her imperfect English while managing a global foundation, she asserts that a woman's power is rooted in her authentic self. Her capacity to transition from investigation to restorative justice (offering Lobster a partnership) elevates her from a mere protagonist to a sophisticated philanthropic leader.

Olivia & Madam Bassey: Victims to Victors

These characters represent the Victim-to-Victor trajectory. Olivia's journey from a poised but suffering wife to a whistle-blower highlights the courage required to break cycles of abuse. Madam Bassey provides the institutional support, using her history as a survivor to mentor Jenifa. Together, they represent Intergenerational Advocacy, showing that female agency is a legacy passed from one survivor to another.

Bebe: Dark Female Agency

Bebe as a ruthless kingpin proves that women in this cinematic world can occupy high-stakes positions of power, even if they are criminals. She advances the play by escalating the conflict from a domestic issue to an international thriller, forcing Jenifa into a life-or-death exercise of her agency.

Lobster: The Antagonist

Lobster represents the deception of the patriarchal veneer. He is the multi-layered villain whose outward charisma masks domestic abuse and organized crime. He provides the test for Jenifa's intuition and the cause for Olivia's empowerment. His ultimate vulnerability in the climax allows Jenifa to demonstrate a superior, compassionate form of power, turning the 'male vs. female' conflict into a victory for Jenifa's moral code.

Shege: Supportive Masculinity

His entrepreneurial "Shege-Jenifa Water" and his loyalty in Ghana show a man who is comfortable in the shadow of a powerful woman. However, Jenifa's refusal of his marriage

proposal is a pivotal moment for female autonomy; it asserts that her mission and social responsibility take precedence over traditional domestic expectations.

Mrs. Agnes: Moral Compromise.

By prioritizing financial gain over her daughter's safety, she serves as a critique of how women can sometimes sustain patriarchal violence for personal survival. She is the ethical obstacle that Jenifa and Olivia must overcome.

Adaku, Toyosi & Cordelia: Network of Support

These characters represent the vulnerability and strength of friendship. Adaku is the steadfast anchor, providing the emotional and physical support that makes Jenifa's mission possible. Toyosi, conversely, represents the vulnerable agent whose perilous entanglement with crime serves as the stakes of the story. These women prove that female autonomy is sustained by a community of safe spaces.

Themes

Theme of Authenticity, Deception, and the Power of Female Truth

The central theme of authenticity vs. deception is powerfully explored through the characters of Jenifa and Lobster, with Jenifa's female authenticity ultimately exposing Lobster's malevolent fraud. Jenifa, despite her evolved status, remains genuinely herself, her distinctive English a symbol of her integrity. This authenticity is precisely what earns her the community's genuine admiration and trust. In stark contrast, Lobster meticulously constructs a sophisticated façade as a philanthropist, charming the entire community. This elaborate deception, however, hides his true, sinister nature as a criminal mastermind and an abuser. The film meticulously peels back

these layers of deceit, and it is Jenifa's unshakeable intuition and commitment to truth – qualities often associated with her unique female perspective – that drive this exposure. This directly connects to women as agents of change, as Jenifa, through her authentic leadership, actively dismantles the deception that threatens her community. Her own women's empowerment foundation stands as a beacon of genuine philanthropy, sharply contrasting with Lobster's fraudulent NGO. This contrast highlights how female-led initiatives, grounded in genuine intent, can have a profound impact on the community, whereas male-dominated fronts may mask corruption. The film argues that true power lies not in fabricated appearances but in authentic, often female, leadership that prioritizes genuine communal well-being.

Justice, Domestic Violence, and Female Advocacy

The theme of justice and accountability is critically intertwined with the harrowing reality of domestic violence and its societal impact, a connection primarily forged through the experiences of Olivia and the relentless advocacy of Jenifa and Madam Bassey. Olivia's brutal assault by Lobster is a stark portrayal of gender-based violence, highlighting the vulnerability of victims and the insidious ways financial dependency can silence them, as seen with Mrs Agnes's complicity. Jenifa's unwavering determination to expose Lobster's abuse and seek justice for Olivia is a direct manifestation of advocating against gender-based violence. This is not just a personal quest; it becomes a broader societal fight led by women. The film powerfully introduces Madam Bassey, a women's rights activist and survivor of abuse, whose involvement amplifies the theme of female leadership and influence in the public sphere. Madam Bassey's expertise and strategic guidance empower Jenifa's efforts, emphasizing that collective female action and experienced advocacy are crucial for achieving accountability in such sensitive and complex

cases. The narrative demonstrates that women are not merely victims but powerful forces in confronting and dismantling structures of abuse and crime.

Resilience, Growth, and Female Support Systems

The overarching themes of resilience in the face of adversity and personal growth and transformation are intensely illuminated by the film's focus on its female characters and their robust support systems. Jenifa herself embodies profound resilience; she faces repeated threats, intimidation, and even assassination attempts, yet she remains undeterred in her mission for justice. Her ability to bounce back from setbacks and adapt to new dangers showcases a profound inner strength. This resilience is mirrored in Olivia's journey from victim to finding the courage to expose her abuser, a powerful act of female empowerment. The film consistently highlights the importance of female resilience and support systems in navigating such trials. Adaku provides unwavering wisdom and grounding support, while Toyosi's perilous entanglement and subsequent rescue underscore the vital role of female solidarity. Even as Jenifa experiences personal growth, making difficult choices like declining Shege's proposal to prioritize her mission, her strength is buttressed by these female bonds. This demonstrates that transformation, especially for women, often occurs within a framework of strong, empathetic networks that provide the courage and resources to overcome immense challenges. The film champions the idea that actual growth is not isolated but fortified by collective female strength and enduring friendships.

Setting

Everybody Loves Jenifa utilizes a dynamic, dual-nation landscape to critically explore female agency and the deceptive nature of socio-economic status.

The film's primary setting, Amen Estate in Lagos, is a deliberate directorial choice. Its affluent facade of grand houses and prevalence of NGOs serves as a potent socio-economic symbol and the perfect camouflage for the male corruption and fraud orchestrated by Lobster. This respectable outward appearance is central to the film's theme of deception, highlighting how illicit wealth can easily hide behind a veneer of legitimacy within the Nigerian upper-middle class. Crucially, Amen Estate is also the domain where Jenifa's women's empowerment foundation operates, making it the central battleground where her genuine female leadership and philanthropic agency are leveraged to expose the male economic exploitation masked by the estate's prosperity. This juxtaposition contrasts sincere female communal upliftment with deceptive male economic exploitation within an aspirational Nigerian setting.

The narrative undergoes a significant and strategic geographical shift to Accra and Kumasi in Ghana, dramatically broadening the film's scope and escalating the stakes. This transition from the familiar Nigerian environment to an entirely unfamiliar territory immediately heightens Jenifa's vulnerability and sense of danger. What begins as a search for respite quickly transforms the seemingly idyllic beachside resort into a deceptive front for dangerous underworld activities. This change allows the female-led investigation to expand from local community fraud to sophisticated high-stakes international crime, where Jenifa and her friends encounter the transnational drug cartel led by Bebe. This expanded geographical scope and the cultural interconnectedness between Nigeria and Ghana enables the film to explore broader criminal networks that transcend national borders, further testing and affirming the resilience and determination of its female protagonists.

Acting Performance

The film's ensemble cast showcases a range of acting styles, from the signature comedic timing of its lead to the more understated dramatic performances, all of which contribute to the movie's appeal as a "festive crowd-pleaser" while tackling deeper themes.

Funke Akindele's portrayal of Jenifa serves as the undeniable anchor of the film, continuing the character's strategic evolution while masterfully blending physical comedy, distinctive vocal delivery, and surprising emotional depth. Akindele retains Jenifa's signature, unpolished grammar and naïve confidence, which consistently provide comedic relief and ensure her working-class authenticity remains intact, even in the film's most intense scenes. However, in *Everybody Loves Jenifa*, her acting style is intentionally evolved, moving beyond pure comedy to demonstrate newfound gravitas and sincere determination. This shift is most evident in scenes where she investigates the fraud and confronts the horrific reality of domestic violence. By infusing the character with emotional sincerity and determination, Akindele strategically cements Jenifa's role not just as a comedic lead, but as a proactive agent of justice. This growth is driven by a moral imperative to fight corruption and seek justice for other women, successfully embodying Jenifa's transformation from a bumbling past into a compelling symbol of resilience and female agency.

The dramatic core of the female struggle is anchored by Nancy Isime and Patience Ozokwor. Isime's performance as Olivia skillfully tracks her transition from a silent victim of domestic abuse to a figure of quiet resolve, emphasizing her journey to find the courage to expose her abuser and reclaim her agency. Contrasting this is Patience Ozokwor's portrayal of Mrs. Agnes. Ozokwor uses her characteristic formidable screen presence to embody the moral ambiguity of complicity driven by financial benefits. Her evasive and conflicted demeanour highlights the

realistic and tragic ways that economic dependency can silence victims and their families, thus underscoring the film's critique of wealth's corrupting influence.

The theme of collective female advocacy is powerfully delivered by Bisola Aiyeola as Madam Bassey. Her acting style is authoritative and steely, successfully conveying the image of a serious, formidable women's rights advocate and abuse survivor. Aiyeola's performance provides the necessary gravitas and legal expertise, establishing her character as a crucial, experienced ally whose advocacy amplifies the power and determination of Jenifa's mission.

Jackie Appiah as Bebe delivers a performance that powerfully subverts typical female roles. Taking on the role of a drug baron, Appiah conveys a cunning, dangerous, and no-nonsense kingpin through subtle yet palpable intensity. Her controlled and menacing presence brings gravitas to the story's darker moments, cementing her as a formidable, credible antagonist. This portrayal showcases a distinct form of negative agency, where a woman wields power and authority in the criminal sphere, providing a complex figure for the female protagonist to confront. In contrast, Omotunde Adebawale as Adaku and Juliana Olayode as Toyosi embody the vital female support system that grounds the film's social realism. Adebawale's performance of Adaku balances her established comedic presence with genuine wisdom and guidance. She acts as a grounding force through a relatable delivery, symbolizing the unwavering loyalty and moral compass essential for Jenifa's resilience. Olayode's portrayal of Toyosi emphasizes her role as a loyal friend who experiences significant peril, transitioning from youthful energy to scenes of vulnerability, fear, and desperation following her entanglement with a dangerous gang. Her performance highlights the emotional impact of escalating stakes, underscoring the vital role of female solidarity in navigating dangerous criminal circles.

The male performances in the film are strategically cast to provide a sharp contrast between charming male duplicity and essential comic relief, supporting the female-driven narrative of justice and survival. Stan Nze as Lobster masterfully embodies the film's theme of deception through his portrayal of charming duplicity and understated menace. His performance convincingly presents a polished, seemingly benevolent philanthropist who uses his affluence to camouflage his true, sinister nature as a crime boss and abuser. Nze skillfully transitions from outward sophistication to a chilling, violent disposition as his façade crumbles, ultimately exposing a crucial layer of vulnerability beneath his powerful front, which highlights the antagonist's moral complexity. In contrast, Falz (Shege) and Layi Wasabi (Rex) provide consistent, necessary levity. Falz brings his signature witty and deadpan comedic timing to Shege, anchoring the romantic subplot with genuine affection while his chaotic antics in Ghana embrace the absurd. Layi Wasabi's performance as Rex is squarely focused on expressive delivery and situational humour, designed to lighten the mood and offer moments of unadulterated amusement amidst the escalating drama and danger faced by the female protagonists. This interplay of diverse male styles—from menace to comedy—contributes significantly to the film's ability to navigate its complex genre shifts.

Directorial Concept and Approach

The directorial concept for *Everybody Loves Jenifa*, guided by Funke Akindele (who co-directs, writes, and stars), is a strategic and ambitious effort to evolve a popular franchise into a vehicle that champions female agency, social commentary, and box-office success, reflecting the power of a female filmmaker's vision.

The core concept is the dynamic blend of genre expansion and character evolution. The directorial choice to transition the franchise from comedy-drama to one that explicitly integrates

action and thriller elements (assassination attempts, drug cartels) is a strategic move to place the female lead in high-stakes, agency-driven scenarios. This broadening of scope is essential to portray Jenifa's growth from a bumbling past to a successful businesswoman and philanthropist and a modern-day advocate, requiring Akindele's performance to balance her signature humour and working-class authenticity with newfound gravitas and determination when tackling serious issues like domestic violence and crime.

A vital aspect of the approach is the deliberate integration of social commentary directly into the entertainment. The directorial concept actively uses the popular platform of the Jenifa franchise to address critical issues. The focus on Jenifa's foundation for vocational skills and the explicit tackling of domestic violence (via Olivia and Madam Bassey) are clear choices to spark conversations and advocate for social change, positioning the female protagonist as a catalyst for positive social impact. Furthermore, the directorial concept employs a deliberate geographical shift as a narrative device to escalate the plot and amplify the female characters' challenges. The move from the familiar, affluent Amen Estate to the unfamiliar territory of Ghana is a calculated choice to heighten the danger and vulnerability, forcing Jenifa to confront criminal elements with a global reach. This reinforces the increasing stakes and the necessity of her evolved, empowered status.

Finally, Akindele's multifaceted involvement as Writer, Co-Director, and Star is central to the concept's success. This holistic creative leadership ensures a cohesive and powerful artistic vision, emphasizing technical quality, strong visual appeal, and a commitment to entertainment that also resonates with significant societal themes, successfully balancing star power with a deep message.

Language

The language of *Everybody Loves Jenifa* is a critical tool that reinforces Jenifa's working-class authenticity and the film's socio-economic realism. The dialogue is predominantly Nigerian English, a distinct, colloquial variety infused with local idioms that grounds the film in its cultural setting and ensures broad domestic relatability. This realism is further enhanced by code-switching between English and indigenous languages, notably Yoruba, which accurately mirrors the multilingual reality of Lagos. The most defining linguistic characteristic is the strategic use of non-standard English, which is central to Jenifa's character. Jenifa's signature, charmingly imperfect grammar is more than comedic relief; it is a powerful symbol of working-class authenticity and identity. Her unique linguistic style, deliberately retained despite her evolved social status, asserts that success and empowerment do not require shedding one's true identity or class background. This choice provides a deep connection to her roots and is a profound thematic statement against the assimilation often demanded by affluence.

Visual Language

The visual language of *Everybody Loves Jenifa* is intentionally crafted by Funke Akindele's (co-)directorial vision to powerfully portray female agency, socio-economic realities, and cultural identity.

The film employs vibrant, energetic cinematography characterized by bright shots and a lively aesthetic. This deliberate visual choice, typical of Akindele's style, not only reflects the effervescent personality of Jenifa but also serves to present the modern Nigerian and Ghanaian landscapes as dynamic backdrops for female-driven narratives of resilience and action. The polished visual quality underpins the film's entertainment value while allowing for the seamless integration of serious social commentary.

Crucially, costume design, especially for Jenifa, is an expressive visual marker of female empowerment and cultural identity. Jenifa's evolving fashion, blending traditional African fabrics with modern cuts, is a direct visual representation of her personal growth and agency as a successful woman who remains rooted in her heritage. This conscious styling, reflecting Akindele's own background, celebrates Nigerian female identity as sophisticated and empowered.

Moreover, the visual language highlights class disparity and moral contrast. The visually polished affluence of Amen Estate, with its grand houses, is established as a deceptive façade for male economic fraud. This visual strategy emphasizes the socio-economic context where female leadership (Jenifa's foundation) confronts and exposes corruption. The later visual shift to the different aesthetics of the Ghanaian locations is used to heighten the spectacle of the female-led investigation into international crime, showcasing women navigating and dominating complex, dangerous environments. This intentional visual storytelling, under Akindele's direction, reinforces the film's core themes by foregrounding female perspectives and actions.

Symbols

Symbolism in *Everybody Loves Jenifa* is precisely engineered to underscore the film's core messages concerning female authenticity, leadership, and the critical socio-economic conflict between integrity and corruption.

The primary symbolic complex revolves around Jenifa's identity. Her distinctive English and evolving fashion are potent symbols of working-class authenticity and self-acceptance. The deliberate retention of her non-standard English, even as she achieves success, asserts that female empowerment does not require abandoning one's cultural or class background. Similarly, her fashion, blending Nigerian fabrics with modern cuts, symbolizes personal growth rooted in

cultural pride. This is countered by the central conflict symbol: Lobster's NGO and Grand Houses. These serve as symbols of deception and socio-economic corruption, representing how illicit wealth and malevolent intentions can be hidden behind the veneer of affluence and respectability in a highly class-conscious society.

Female Agency and Justice are symbolized through two key narrative elements. Jenifa's Women's Empowerment Foundation is the central symbol of genuine female leadership and social upliftment, standing in stark contrast to Lobster's fraudulent male-led front. Its focus on vocational skills symbolizes economic independence for women. Furthermore, Olivia's coma and eventual public exposure is a visceral symbol of the devastating impact of domestic violence and the ultimate empowerment of the survivor to break the silence and seek justice, affirming the film's advocacy against gender-based violence.

Finally, the expansion of the plot to Ghana and the introduction of Bebe's Drug Cartel symbolize the escalating danger and globalized economic corruption that female integrity must confront. Ghana represents unfamiliar, high-stakes territory where Jenifa asserts her moral authority against transnational criminal networks. The climactic merging of Jenifa's and Lobster's organizations acts as a final symbol of female compassion and leadership triumphing over male-driven conflict and corruption, suggesting unity and redemption as a path forward for societal good.

Tone/Mood

The film's tone and mood are intentionally calibrated to affirm female resilience, moral authority, and the power of collective support under the guiding vision of a female filmmaker.

The overall mood is one of desperate urgency tempered by an empowering optimism. The pervasive desperation, rooted in the urgent need to address domestic violence and fraud, is

immediately validated by the narrative, setting a serious, high-stakes tone. This ensures that the primary focus remains on the female protagonists' fight for justice and survival, positioning their actions as necessary and morally justifiable.

The tone deliberately navigates between humor and social commentary. It employs a humorous, chaotic tone in depicting the protagonists' misadventures, but this is always juxtaposed against the poignant, dramatic weight surrounding Olivia's abuse and Jenifa's mission. This careful tonal balance, managed by a female writer/director, prevents the film from trivializing the serious social issues, ensuring that the critique of gender-based violence and systemic fraud remains potent and empathetic.

Ultimately, the film cultivates an affirming and hopeful mood of resolution. Despite repeated threats and vulnerabilities, the final tone celebrates female resilience and the triumph of unity. The chaos dissolves into a committed final stance where Jenifa chooses compassion and partnership over retribution. This final mood validates the enduring strength of the female protagonist and the moral clarity of her vision against corruption and injustice.

Plausibility and Improbability

The film's sense of plausibility is carefully established to legitimize the extreme actions of the female protagonist and validate the film's critique of social and economic issues, reflecting the focus of a female filmmaker. The narrative is anchored by the high Plausibility of Social Ills, particularly the realism of domestic violence (Olivia's abuse) and the existence of fraudulent NGOs (Lobster's organization). This grounding in recognizable social issues provides the sole moral justification for Jenifa's escalating, often improbable, actions. The plot dictates that a beloved female community leader must turn detective and activist to fight a corrupt system, thus asserting Proactive Female Agency as an urgent, plausible response to a verifiable social crisis.

Furthermore, the Socio-Economic Plausibility is crucial. The realistic depiction of financial dependency and complicity (Mrs. Agnes's silence) and the need for organized female advocacy (Madam Bassey's expertise) solidify the film's social critique. These plausible real-world pressures transform the narrative from a simple comedy into a believable journey of working-class survival and justice, where the female characters' courage is rooted in the believable realities of contemporary Nigerian life. The improbability of Jenifa's repeated survival and successful infiltration, while cinematic, is acceptable because the film has already established the plausible necessity of her mission.

Impact beyond the Screen

Beyond the story told on screen, *Everybody Loves Jenifa* powerfully embodies women's empowerment through its very creation and success, with Funke Akindele at the helm.

Funke Akindele's role as the writer, director, and producer of *Everybody Loves Jenifa* is a profound statement of female empowerment within the highly competitive Nigerian film industry. She is not just an actor; she is a creative and business force. The film's record-breaking box office success, grossing ₦1 billion at the Nigerian box office within 19 days of its release, making it the fastest Nollywood title to reach this milestone, is a direct testament to her vision, leadership, and commercial acumen. This achievement shatters glass ceilings and sets new benchmarks for what female filmmakers can achieve.

As writer and director, Akindele has direct control over the story, its themes, and the portrayal of female characters. She actively crafts narratives where women are central, active, and influential, moving beyond stereotypical roles. Her comprehensive involvement in the production process, from writing to directing to producing, demonstrates a complete mastery and agency over the creative and business aspects of filmmaking. Akindele's colossal success with *Everybody Loves*

Jenifa serves as a powerful inspiration for aspiring female filmmakers, directors, writers, and producers not just in Nigeria but across Africa and beyond. It proves that a female-led creative vision can achieve immense commercial success and critical impact, encouraging more women to pursue leadership roles behind the camera and even in other spheres of life.

In essence, *Everybody Loves Jenifa* champions women's empowerment not only through its compelling portrayal of female leadership, advocacy, and resilience within the story but also, even more powerfully, through the undeniable achievement and groundbreaking success of its female creator, Funke Akindele, in the real world of filmmaking.



Fig. 4.3. *Everybody Loves Jenifa* as the grossing movie of all time. (2024)

4.3. Results and Analysis

Before systematically presenting the findings from these films, it is crucial to first acknowledge the female filmmakers who are the very embodiment of empowerment. Genevieve Nnaji and Funke Akindele. Their professional journeys and personal successes resonate profoundly with the themes of female agency and resilience explored in their cinematic works.

Genevieve Nnaji, as the director of *Lionheart*, has not only broken barriers as a prominent actress but has also achieved groundbreaking success as a filmmaker, taking her work to global platforms. Her own career trajectory, marked by ambition, creative control, and strategic navigation of the industry, mirrors the very qualities she imbues in her film's protagonist, Adaeze Obiagu. Adaeze's fight to save her family's company, demonstrating intellect, composure, and unwavering resolve in a male-dominated corporate landscape, reflects Nnaji's own empowered stance in a challenging industry.



Fig. 4.4. *Lionheart* premieres as the first Nollywood film on Netflix. (2020)

Similarly, Funke Akindele, a multifaceted force as a writer, producer, and director behind *A Tribe Called Judah* and *Everybody Loves Jenifa* - the only two Nollywood films to cross the N1 billion benchmark, embodies a powerful narrative of self-made success and relentless innovation. Her journey from a popular actress to a leading media entrepreneur, consistently building her brand and expanding her creative empire, speaks volumes about her drive and strategic acumen. This personal empowerment finds a direct echo in her characters: Jenifa's evolution from a naive young woman to a philanthropic and justice-seeking community leader, and Jedidah Judah's fierce determination and resourcefulness as a matriarch protecting her family against overwhelming odds. Akindele's characters often reflect a practical, relatable, yet profoundly powerful female agency that mirrors her own approach to her career and impact.



Fig. 4.5. Jenifa's achievements with her movie *Everybody Loves Jenifa*. (2024)

These filmmakers, through their personal and professional narratives, serve as compelling real-world examples in and beyond the screen. Their ability to transcend traditional roles and command influence in a competitive industry provides a vital context for understanding the empowered portrayals found in their films.

The analysis of *Lionheart*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Everybody Loves Jenifa*, reveals a consistent and strategic approach to women's portrayal that directly addresses the research objectives of this study. These creative choices showcase female characters with significant autonomy, contribute to diverse female experiences, and confront critical social and cultural issues relevant to Nigerian women.

4.3.1 Portrayal of Female Characters and Autonomy

Across the three films, the portrayal of women is characterized by an uncompromising assertion of authority and self-definition that transcends conventional stereotypes. The female protagonists' authority is consistently derived from demonstrable competence and intellect, rather than familial status or emotional manipulation. In *Lionheart*, Adaeze Obiagu is portrayed as a highly competent corporate strategist whose autonomy is established through her sharp intellect in boardroom negotiations. The directorial technique positions her competence explicitly against patriarchal expectations within a male-dominated industry, ensuring her authority is seen as earned and professional.



Fig. 4.6. Adaeze emphasised standing amidst the Company's stakeholders.

Conversely, *A Tribe Called Judah* asserts a different, yet equally formidable, autonomy through Jedidiah Judah's matriarchal resilience. She is portrayed as the undisputed, resourceful head of a large family whose autonomy is demonstrated through her ability to manage chaos and her profound maternal determination to take extreme, unconventional measures for her family's survival, effectively redefining female strength in the context of extreme adversity and poverty.



Fig. 4.7. Jeddiah combating a threat.

Everybody Loves Jenifa portrays a trajectory of autonomy through transformation and moral conviction, as Jenifa evolves into a serious philanthropic leader. Her autonomy is asserted through the proactive investigation and confrontation of grave social issues—domestic violence and organized crime—cementing her image as a self-defined public figure rooted in moral imperative. Furthermore, the filmmakers employ the technique of linking autonomy to the character's authentic self and moral clarity, regardless of social status, as Jenifa's autonomy is visually and linguistically affirmed by her ability to retain her authentic, non-standard English while simultaneously achieving success and taking on profound social responsibilities.

4.3.2 Directorial Choices and Diverse Female Experiences

The creative choices of Nnaji and Akindele deliberately expand the representation of female leadership beyond a single archetype, enriching the portrayal of women's experiences. Nnaji's directorial choice in *Lionheart* emphasizes a refined, intellectual form of female empowerment in the corporate sphere, depicting Adaeze's power through strategic thinking and quiet perseverance, thus challenging the notion that female power must be aggressive. Conversely, Akindele's dual roles allow for the authentic portrayal of a multifaceted female experience in *Everybody Loves Jenifa*, demonstrating that a woman can embody humor, maternal instinct, and fierce advocacy simultaneously. Her meticulous portrayal of Jedidiah in *A Tribe Called Judah* further diversifies representation by celebrating the resourcefulness and resilience of the single mother navigating extreme socio-economic adversity. These female filmmakers consistently employ specific techniques to visually and narratively validate these diverse female experiences. For instance, the use of character-driven plots ensures that women are consistently positioned as decision-makers and catalysts for significant plot developments, as seen with Adaeze leading the company save and Jenifa leading the investigation. Moreover, visual framing strategically frames

female characters in positions of authority—Adaeze at the head of the boardroom table, Jenifa addressing her foundation—to visually assert their leadership. Finally, the Strategic Genre-Blending, particularly in *Everybody Loves Jenifa*, allows for a dynamic exploration of female agency across diverse contexts.

4.3.3 Addressing Relevant Social and Cultural Issues

The selected films acutely address several pressing social and cultural issues pertinent to women's empowerment within the specific Nigerian sociocultural context. The films directly and overtly challenge Patriarchy and Traditional Norms. *Lionheart* overtly confronts corporate sexism and the traditional expectation of male inheritance, forcing a direct re-evaluation of gendered succession. *A Tribe Called Judah* subverts traditional notions of female vulnerability by presenting Jedidiah as a powerful, unmarried matriarch, defying societal expectations regarding female family structures. Most explicitly, *Everybody Loves Jenifa* directly addresses the pervasive issue of domestic violence and male authoritarianism through Olivia's storyline and Jenifa's proactive intervention, providing a crucial platform to openly condemn abuse and underscore the vital importance of advocacy and support for survivors. Furthermore, the narratives consistently use female characters to highlight and critique Systemic Socio-Economic Failures. *Lionheart* addresses the vital role of female leadership in protecting economic wealth, *A Tribe Called Judah* highlights how desperate circumstances driven by inadequate healthcare can push families to extreme measures, and *Everybody Loves Jenifa* explicitly champions economic independence through Jenifa's foundation while critiquing the prevalence of fraud and organized crime. Consequently, the female characters are consistently portrayed as central figures who are not just surviving, but actively confronting and seeking to remedy these complex challenges within the Nigerian societal landscape.

4.4. Discussion of Findings

The empirical analysis of *Lionheart*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Everybody Loves Jenifa* confirms a profound paradigm shift in Nollywood filmmaking led by women, moving the portrayal of female characters from simple reaction and passivity to proactive autonomy and critical socio-economic engagement. The consistency of findings across the films of both Genevieve Nnaji and Funke Akindele underscores a unified, shared creative agenda that fundamentally challenges patriarchal norms both on-screen and within the film industry itself. The results are highly significant in that they validate the strategic use of narrative elements to establish female authority derived from competence, intellect, and moral clarity, rather than traditional emotional vulnerability or familial dependency. This strategic approach provides a new critical lens through which to view Nigerian cinema. The most compelling finding of the study confirms that all three protagonists—Adaeze, Jedidiah, and Jenifa—asserted autonomy derived from demonstrable competence, not emotional or passive qualities. This finding directly challenges traditional representations of women in Nollywood. The consistent portrayal of autonomy across diverse contexts—Adaeze's corporate intellect, Jedidiah's matriarchal resilience, and Jenifa's moral advocacy—suggests a conscious creative choice among female filmmakers to normalize multifaceted female authority. This collectively demonstrates that Nigerian women's autonomy is recognized as being earned through action and intellect, rather than granted by patriarchal structures. Furthermore, the analysis of linguistic and visual authenticity is crucial: the technique of retaining Jenifa's non-standard English acts as a powerful cinematic tool to link autonomy to working-class authenticity, arguing that self-definition is not contingent upon assimilation into the elite class. This directorial choice powerfully reinforces the

finding that the portrayal of female authority is grounded in relatable socio-economic realism and self-acceptance.

The analysis of the diversification of female experiences further confirms that the directorial choices of Nnaji and Akindele actively enrich the scope of representation, moving beyond a singular, reductive archetype. The systematic use of character-driven plots and the purposeful positioning of women as catalysts for plot development confirms a robust commitment to showcasing the full versatility of female capability across varied pressures. By demonstrating the spectrum from Adaeze's corporate intellect to Jedidiah's single-mother resilience and Jenifa's philanthropic activism, the filmmakers ensure that female experience is portrayed as complex and capable of navigating diverse threats. The technique of genre-blending, most evident in *Everybody Loves Jenifa*'s transition from comedy to action-thriller, serves to amplify the female character's ability to dominate high-stakes environments, consistently positioning women as the primary decision-makers who drive the narrative forward.

Critically, the findings demonstrate that these films function as highly effective platforms for social commentary, explicitly addressing issues relevant to Nigerian women that are often marginalized in general commercial filmmaking. The consistent use of female protagonists to confront systemic issues is not incidental; it is a foundational creative choice. The explicit confrontation of corporate sexism and male inheritance norms in *Lionheart*, the focus on domestic violence and fraud in *Everybody Loves Jenifa*, and the highlight of systemic healthcare failures in *A Tribe Called Judah* assert the critical and indispensable role of women in seeking social justice and national development. The films achieve this by making the threat to the female protagonist (e.g., Adaeze's inheritance, Jedidiah's health, Olivia's safety) a plausible reflection of real-world Nigerian crises, which lends profound gravity to their subsequent

actions. This narrative strategy empowers the female character by making her the central moral agent of accountability and change, a powerful counter-narrative to traditional portrayals of female victimhood.

In conclusion, the analysis confirms that female filmmakers (through the selected filmmakers) are systematically employing narrative, visual, and thematic strategies that result in the portrayal of women defined by competent authority, moral conviction, and socio-economic resilience. Their creative choices contribute to a richer, more authentic representation of diverse Nigerian female experiences, while simultaneously confronting core cultural issues like patriarchy and corruption. This strategic control over the narrative fundamentally shifts the discourse of women's portrayal in Nollywood toward one of proactive, grounded, and multi-layered autonomy, providing compelling evidence that Nollywood films directed by women are about reframing female agency as a necessary response to socio-economic failure.

Overall Thematic Treatment, Impact, and Mechanisms of Influence

Beyond the individual analysis, the films *Lionheart*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Everybody Loves Jenifa* reveal a unified, deliberate approach to thematic handling that leverages core theories of media influence—Feminist Film Theory and Cultivation Theory—to redefine women's roles and critique socio-cultural norms in Nigeria. The films effectively integrate content and form to amplify the portrayal of female autonomy and address pressing social issues.

The films' thematic treatment is deeply rooted in Feminist Film Theory (FFT), primarily by disrupting the male gaze and establishing a female-centered subject position. The mechanisms of Narrative Immersion and Identification are foundational to this feminist project. Audiences are deeply immersed in the journeys of Adaeze, Jedidiah, and Jenifa, identifying with their competence, fierce maternal devotion, and quest for justice. This vicarious experience allows

viewers to emotionally connect with the consequences of these strong female characters' actions, thereby reinforcing and internalizing themes of female autonomy and resilience. Crucially, this identification allows viewers to experience and normalize non-traditional roles for women—such as corporate leadership or matriarchal command—directly challenging cinematic conventions that often marginalize female ambition.

Furthermore, the films utilize Cognitive Processing and Framing to promote a feminist agenda. They consciously frame issues like corporate sexism (*Lionheart*) and domestic violence (*Everybody Loves Jenifa*) not as private failures, but as public issues requiring female intervention and justice. By focusing the narrative lens on the resilience of the female protagonists and their capacity for complex problem-solving, the films actively shape viewers' understanding of gender power dynamics. This framing directly influences what audiences deem important about women's roles and contributes to a critical consciousness regarding societal limitations.

The powerful and sustained thematic impact of these films is explained through Cultivation Theory, which posits that the repetitive exposure to media content gradually shapes viewers' perceptions of reality. The key mechanism here is Repetition and Reinforcement. Across these selected films, the consistent portrayal of female resilience, competence, and agency is repeatedly reinforced. For characters like Jenifa, who has evolved across an entire franchise, the repetitive thematic emphasis strengthens the films' influence on viewers' long-term beliefs about women's capabilities. This mechanism works by continually presenting new images and sounds associated with powerful, assertive women (e.g., Adaeze's composed negotiation).



Fig. 4.8. Adaeze's composed negotiation.

This gradual, cumulative exposure contributes to the cultivation of a more progressive and accepting societal outlook towards female autonomy and leadership in Nigeria. Memorable scenes and quotes, where female characters demonstrate resolve, become mental anchors in popular culture, solidifying the empowerment messages.

Moreover, Visual and Auditory Persuasion play a critical role in this cultivation process. Empowering visual compositions, purposeful costume design (e.g., Adaeze's professional attire, Jenifa's evolving ensembles), and dynamic action sequences underscore themes of power and leadership. This continuous visual language, associated with success and virtue, contributes to the normalizing of new female schemas. By consistently seeing women in roles of authority who overcome adversity through intellect, audiences—especially heavy viewers of Nollywood—may gradually shift their perceptions of the "real world" toward one where female leadership and self-reliance are the accepted norm.

Finally, the films exert a profound Cultural and Ideological Influence by simultaneously reflecting and challenging Nigerian cultural values and ideologies. They serve as powerful conduits for social discourse by explicitly addressing sensitive issues like corporate patriarchy, economic survival (*A Tribe Called Judah*), and abuse. By showing empowered female responses and solutions to these societal ills, the filmmakers not only raise awareness about women's rights but also prompt essential public discussion within Nigerian communities, serving as a catalyst for potential social change and the acceptance of expanded roles for women. This intentional ideological framing solidifies the films' significance beyond mere entertainment.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary of Findings

This study undertook a unique and comprehensive exploration into how women are portrayed in Nollywood films directed by female filmmakers, specifically examining *Lionheart*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Everybody Loves Jenifa*. The central focus was to understand how female directors in the Nigerian film industry leverage their creative platforms to challenge traditional gender narratives and promote forms of female agency within Nigeria's diverse socio-cultural landscape.

The primary objective was to critically dissect the representation of empowered female characters, the narrative, visual, and thematic strategies employed by these female filmmakers, and the impact of their directorial choices on diverse female experiences. Equally important was the exploration of how these films could potentially empower female audiences in Nigeria, thereby contributing to the practical application of the study's findings beyond the specific films.

To achieve these goals, a qualitative research approach, primarily utilizing film analysis, was employed. The three selected films were meticulously analyzed for their content related to female characterization, plot structures, visual elements, underlying themes, directorial decisions, and engagement with specific socio-cultural issues pertinent to Nigerian women.

The analysis revealed several key findings with broader implications. The study found a consistent trend where female characters are central to the narratives, exhibiting strong leadership, remarkable resilience, and proactive agency. This moves beyond traditional portrayals often seen in other contexts, where female characters might be relegated to supporting roles or limited to specific archetypes. For instance, Adaeze in *Lionheart* demonstrates corporate

and intellectual prowess, challenging the notion that leadership is solely a male domain. Jedidah in *A Tribe Called Judah* embodies fierce maternal strength and resourcefulness, highlighting a different facet of female empowerment rooted in family and survival. Jenifa in *Everybody Loves Jenifa* showcases philanthropic leadership and courageous social advocacy, demonstrating that women can be drivers of social change. These portrayals collectively expand the definition of various forms of agency and influence.

Female filmmakers employ sophisticated storytelling techniques to convey messages of agency and empowerment effectively. They utilize character-driven plots with clear problem-solution arcs initiated by female protagonists, ensuring that women are not just victims of circumstance but active agents in their own stories. The effective use of genre blending keeps audiences engaged while reinforcing themes of female resilience and leadership. Visually, filmmakers employ robust framing, purposeful costume design, and compelling imagery to reinforce female strength and leadership. The consistent foregrounding of empowerment, resilience, and female leadership addresses societal issues through the experiences of these women, making the messages resonate deeply with audiences. This demonstrates a deliberate effort by female directors to shape narratives in a way that actively promotes female agency.

The directorial choices of female filmmakers like Funke Akindele and Genevieve Nnaji significantly contribute to depicting diverse and empowered female experiences. Their decisions enable the portrayal of multi-dimensional female roles that challenge traditional comedic molds, highlight maternal resilience, and showcase sophisticated intellectual leadership. This offers a wider spectrum of representations of womanhood, moving beyond monolithic or stereotypical depictions. This finding suggests that when women are at the helm, there is a greater likelihood

of nuanced and varied portrayals of female characters, reflecting the complexities of real-life women.

The films directly engage with crucial issues relevant to women's experiences within the Nigerian context. This includes challenging existing norms around economic independence, actively subverting patriarchal and traditional norms, and explicitly condemning domestic violence and abuse. Furthermore, the films engage with themes of corruption and crime from a uniquely female perspective, highlighting the impact of these issues on women and their active roles in confronting them. This shows a commitment by female filmmakers to use their platform to tackle real-world challenges faced by women in society, offering both critique and potential pathways for change.

The study consistently found that these films offer strong and diverse female role models who actively demonstrate agency and problem-solving abilities. They convey powerful messages of resilience and perseverance, and actively challenge traditional stereotypes. This translates into a significant potential for audience empowerment, leaving viewers feeling hopeful and inspired. The positive impact of these films on female audiences in Nigeria suggests that cinematic representation, when handled thoughtfully by female filmmakers, can serve as a powerful tool for social change and personal inspiration.

In summary, the study unequivocally found that female filmmakers in Nollywood are deliberately utilizing their creative platforms to depict multifaceted and empowered female characters. They employ specific cinematic strategies to convey messages of agency and address critical socio-cultural issues, thereby offering powerful new narratives. In doing so, these films are actively contributing to the empowerment of female audiences in Nigeria and beyond.

5.2 Limitations

While this research offers valuable insights into the portrayal of women by selected female Nollywood filmmakers, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that delineate its scope, inform the interpretation of findings, and suggest avenues for future research framed by Feminist Film Theory and Cultivation Theory.

Firstly, the study's sample size was intentionally narrow, focusing on only three films. While these texts (*Lionheart*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, *Everybody Loves Jenifa*) were selected for their prominence and relevance to the research questions on female autonomy and socio-economic critique, they do not represent the entirety of Nollywood's output by women. The qualitative nature of the analysis means the findings are text-specific interpretations. Therefore, their direct statistical generalizability to all films directed by women in the industry, or to the vast diversity of narratives within the broader Nigerian film landscape, is limited. The conclusions reached are indicative of the strategic approaches of the two selected filmmakers, not a definitive statement on the whole industry.

Secondly, and most significantly, this study relies primarily on textual analysis and theoretical application. A major limitation is the absence of empirical audience reception data. While the discussion utilized Cultivation Theory to explore the potential long-term influence of repetitive exposure on viewers' perceptions and Feminist Film Theory to analyze the films' capacity to challenge patriarchal schemas, the study does not directly measure or confirm the actual perceptions, attitudes, or behavioral changes of Nigerian viewers. The research analyzes how these films may influence the cultivation of beliefs about female autonomy, rather than empirically demonstrating their impact on real audiences across different Nigerian demographic groups.

Furthermore, the scope was intentionally narrowed to the films' content, narrative strategies, and directorial choices regarding women's portrayal and autonomy. This restriction excludes other important dimensions necessary for a holistic understanding of the female filmmaker's position. Specifically, the analysis does not examine the economic challenges and power dynamics faced by these female filmmakers during production and distribution, nor does it delve into the intricate relationship between film themes and specific consumption patterns or business models in Nigeria. These factors, which heavily influence the ultimate reach and ideological impact of the films, were outside the purview of this textual research.

Lastly, while the analysis meticulously grounds its findings within the Nigerian socio-cultural context, it acknowledges the inherent complexity of the nation. Nigeria is a country of immense diversity in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, and socio-economic realities. The films' portrayals of female autonomy and their subsequent reception may vary significantly across different Nigerian demographic groups, a nuance that a focused textual analysis cannot fully capture. The study offers a critical snapshot of elite female directorial choices, but it acknowledges the complexity of a nationally diverse audience whose specific cultivation of beliefs may differ based on local context.

5.3 Conclusions

This study critically examines how selected Nollywood films directed by female filmmakers portray women's roles, the cinematic strategies employed, and the ways these choices engage with the Nigerian socio-cultural context. The comprehensive textual analysis of *Lionheart*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Everybody Loves Jenifa*, interpreted through the powerful frameworks of Feminist Film Theory (FFT) and Cultivation Theory (CT), unequivocally demonstrates the

deliberate and significant role of female filmmakers in strategically shaping narratives of female autonomy in contemporary Nigerian cinema.

The study concludes that female filmmakers are actively crafting protagonists who embody proactive autonomy derived from competence and moral conviction. Characters like Adaeze Obiagu, Jedidiah Judah, and Jenifa consistently display leadership, resilience, and agency across diverse domains—corporate, familial, and civic. This sustained portrayal is critical from an FFT perspective as it deliberately disrupts the traditional male gaze and establishes a female-centered subject position, normalizing multifaceted female authority that is earned through intellect and action, rather than granted by patriarchal structures.

Furthermore, these filmmakers employ sophisticated narrative, visual, and thematic strategies that are instrumental in conveying messages of women's agency. Through compelling character-driven plots and the strategic framing of female strength, these films leverage CT's mechanism of Repetition and Reinforcement. The consistent exposure to women solving complex problems—from corporate takeovers to fighting international crime—works to cultivate a deeper societal understanding and acceptance of women's expanded roles and capabilities, thereby gradually shifting long-term beliefs about Nigerian womanhood. The directorial technique of linking Jenifa's autonomy to her working-class authenticity further serves this cause, challenging classist assimilation.

The creative choices of Funke Akindele and Genevieve Nnaji are pivotal, directly contributing to the intricate representation of diverse and autonomous female experiences. Their artistic decisions ensure that female characters are portrayed with depth and realism. Crucially, the selected films robustly address issues relevant to Nigerian women by directly confronting patriarchal norms, corporate sexism, and the pervasive reality of domestic violence and

corruption. By foregrounding these issues through an empowered female lens, the films engage in powerful social commentary that FFT identifies as central to cinematic activism. This strategic engagement sets a potent agenda for social discourse and contributes to cultivating greater societal awareness and a desire for change.

In conclusion, *Lionheart*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Everybody Loves Jenifa* exemplify how female filmmakers in Nollywood are leveraging their creative platforms to intentionally establish a new narrative landscape of female autonomy. By strategically portraying women defined by competence and confronting critical societal issues, these films make a significant contribution to shaping perceptions, challenging traditional norms, and broadening the mental frameworks through which womanhood is understood, thereby paving the way for a more autonomous and equitable future for Nigerian women.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several avenues for future research exist. These recommendations are a direct outgrowth of this study's findings and are specifically designed to address its core objectives regarding the portrayal of women in Nollywood films by female filmmakers. They are presented for various stakeholders, including future students and researchers, the Nollywood industry, and the Nigerian government, all with the goal of deepening our understanding and actively promoting female empowerment through cinema in Nigeria.

Firstly, a critical recommendation is to conduct empirical studies on audience reception. While this research inferred potential implications for audience empowerment based on textual analysis and theoretical frameworks, direct engagement with viewers would provide invaluable data for further understanding. Future studies could employ surveys, focus groups, or in-depth interviews

with diverse Nigerian female audiences to ascertain their actual perceptions, interpretations, and the tangible impacts of watching these films on their self-efficacy, aspirations, and understanding of gender roles. This could also include comparative studies across different demographic groups within Nigeria (e.g., urban vs. rural, different age groups, educational backgrounds) to explore varied reception contexts.

Secondly, expanding the scope and sample size of film analysis is recommended. Future research could include a larger number of Nollywood films directed by female filmmakers, spanning various genres and production scales, to identify broader trends or variations in portrayals of women. A comparative analysis between films directed by female filmmakers and those directed by male filmmakers could also yield insightful results, highlighting distinct narrative approaches or thematic priorities. Furthermore, comparative studies with female-directed films from other African cinemas or the global South could provide a broader contextual understanding of similar trends and challenges.

Thirdly, research could delve deeper into the long-term cultivation effects of Nollywood's portrayal of empowered women. A longitudinal study tracking audience perceptions and beliefs over an extended period of consistent exposure to such narratives could provide more substantial evidence for the transformative potential of these films, as suggested by Cultivation Theory. This would help to understand the cumulative impact of media messages on societal norms and individual attitudes regarding female empowerment.

Given Nollywood's significant cultural influence, the industry has a powerful role to play in shaping societal narratives around female empowerment. The industry should first prioritize and continuously support the creation of diverse and empowered female characters. This means actively investing in and promoting multi-dimensional female characters that move beyond

stereotypes. Showcasing women in diverse roles; as leaders, innovators, caregivers, or agents of change, will truly reflect the complexity and strength of Nigerian women. Filmmakers should be encouraged to utilize strategic storytelling techniques, including character-driven plots and purposeful visual elements, to consistently reinforce female agency.

Moreover, it is crucial to support and amplify female directorial voices. Nollywood stakeholders should recognize the unique perspectives female filmmakers bring to stories of empowerment. Providing more funding, production opportunities, and mentorship for female directors will ensure their impactful directorial choices continue to shape narratives that challenge norms and offer varied representations of womanhood.

The industry should also continue to integrate socially relevant themes into their narratives. By addressing critical socio-cultural issues affecting women in Nigeria, such as economic independence, patriarchal challenges, domestic violence, and corruption—films can serve as powerful platforms for public discourse. Addressing these themes through empowered female characters can contribute meaningfully to real-world change.

Again, Nollywood stakeholders should embrace research for content development. Collaborating with researchers to understand audience reception and the impact of their films can be invaluable. Utilizing findings on what resonates with audiences regarding female autonomy can directly inform future script development, character design, and overall narrative strategies.

Furthermore, recognizing film's capacity for social impact, the Nigerian government and policymakers have a vital role in fostering an environment conducive to female agency through media.

Government bodies responsible for film development and cultural policy should incentivize gender-inclusive content production. This could involve offering grants, tax breaks, or national

recognition for films that effectively portray empowered female characters and employ strategies that challenge harmful gender stereotypes. Such incentives would encourage more productions aligned with national goals for gender equality.

In addition, to sustain this positive trend, the government should invest in film education and training programs. These programs should actively encourage female participation in all aspects of filmmaking; directing, screenwriting, and production. Curriculum development should also emphasize responsible and empowering gender representation.

Also, policymakers should utilize empowering Nollywood films as tools for public enlightenment campaigns on gender equality, women's rights, and other social issues. Collaborating with filmmakers to facilitate community screenings, educational initiatives, and national media campaigns could significantly amplify the practical impact of these narratives on female audiences across the nation.

Finally, while films can effectively raise awareness, government policies must provide the structural support needed for women's empowerment. This includes strengthening laws against domestic violence, promoting economic opportunities for women, and enforcing policies that challenge patriarchal norms in all sectors of society.

By pursuing these recommendations, future research can build upon the foundational insights of this study, students can deepen academic understanding, the Nollywood industry can enhance its impactful storytelling, and the government can facilitate a supportive environment, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between film, gender, and social change in Nigeria and most importantly, imparting to a more overarching promotion of women portrayal through film in Nigeria.

5.5 Contributions to Knowledge

This study has contributed to knowledge in both theory and practice, offering several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge within media studies, gender studies, and film, particularly in the context of Nollywood.

5.5.1 Theoretical Contributions

The research provides a vital, context-specific case study that significantly expands the theoretical reach of established frameworks. Firstly, the study enriches the application and nuance of media effects theories, specifically Feminist Film Theory (FFT) and Cultivation Theory (CT), by rigorously applying them within the distinct Nigerian cultural context. The findings illustrate how FFT's core mechanism of establishing a female-centered subject position actively challenges patriarchal schemas by consistently portraying women (like Adaeze, Jedidiah, and Jenifa) as autonomous agents whose authority is derived from competence and moral conviction. Furthermore, the research demonstrates how CT operates within this context, revealing that the consistent, repeated portrayal of female resilience and competence, particularly by highly successful figures like Funke Akindele, works to cultivate long-term societal acceptance of expanded female capabilities and leadership roles. By demonstrating the robust applicability and cultural variations of these theories in a major African film industry, this study significantly expands their theoretical reach, encouraging a more varied and less Eurocentric approach to media effects and feminist film research.

Secondly, the research provides a culturally relevant understanding of women's portrayal and autonomy by offering a culturally specific model of female agency. It moves beyond generalized notions to illustrate female agency through specific Nigerian socio-cultural realities, such as challenging traditional business succession (*Lionheart*), navigating economic precarity (*A Tribe*

Called Judah), and confronting affluent corruption and domestic violence (*Everybody Loves Jenifa*). This contextualized understanding significantly contributes to theoretical frameworks of gender and development by effectively challenging universalist, often Western-centric, notions of empowerment. This analysis validates a distinctly African feminist perspective on media representation, offering critical insights into how cultural specificity mediates the reception and impact of media messages.

5.5.2 Practical Contributions

The findings offer practical blueprints for content creators, industry stakeholders, and development organizations seeking to promote positive social change. Firstly, this research provides empirical evidence and detailed textual analysis of female filmmakers explicitly portraying female agency. By meticulously analyzing the narrative, visual, and thematic strategies of *Lionheart*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Everybody Loves Jenifa*, the study offers concrete examples of successful storytelling for depicting female autonomy in a culturally resonant manner. This blueprint is invaluable for filmmakers, producers, and screenwriters, as it provides a model for creating compelling and impactful stories that challenge patriarchal norms and resonate with local audiences, potentially influencing future production decisions within Nollywood and other emerging film industries.

Secondly, the study highlights the deliberate agency and unique contributions of female filmmakers themselves. By focusing on films directed by women, the research affirms the critical role of female voices behind the camera as agents of social and cultural dialogue, offering a strong argument for supporting and promoting female filmmakers within Nollywood and beyond. This practical support ensures that the transformative potential that women directors bring to the industry is fully realized.

Finally, the selected films offer superior knowledge for women's motivation by presenting female protagonists who are strategic problem-solvers, contrasting sharply with narratives that may perpetuate negative values or dependency. The empowerment depicted is not about aggressive defiance, but about strategic negotiation, innovative thinking, and asserting one's worth. This provides a more relatable and achievable model for real-life autonomy within the Nigerian context. For development organizations, NGOs, and community leaders, this study offers a grounded understanding of how female leadership is perceived and enacted within Nigerian society, providing crucial knowledge to inform the design of more effective and culturally appropriate interventions aimed at fostering women's empowerment, moving beyond one-size-fits-all approaches.

In summary, by establishing a foundational qualitative analysis, this study serves as a catalyst for future research in several areas. It lays the groundwork for subsequent empirical audience reception studies, comparative analysis between male- and female-directed films, and longitudinal investigations into the long-term impact of media on gender perceptions in Nigeria, thereby contributing to the development of a more robust and diverse body of knowledge in African media scholarship. This study, therefore, not only contributes to academic understanding but also highlights the critical role of these specific films in fostering positive social change and empowering women in Nigeria and beyond.

REFERENCES

- Adebanwi, W. (2017). Nollywood and the democratic imperative. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 9(1), 5-20.
- Adejunmobi, M. (2004). Jollywood: The history of a filmic practice. Carolina Academic Press.
- Adeleke, T. O. (2020). Television dramas and youth behavior in Nigeria. *Journal of Nigerian Communication Studies*, 8(1), 45-62.
- Akinola, F. A. (2018). Portrayal of women in Nollywood films: Implications for gender role beliefs. *Nigerian Journal of Gender Studies*, 12(2), 78-95.
- Akpan, E. (2018). The evolution of Nigerian television: From I Need to Know to the digital era. University Press.
- Appel, M. (2008). Fictional narratives cultivate just-world beliefs. *Journal of Communication*, 58, 62-83.
- Appel, M., & Richter, T. (2007). Persuasive effects of fictional narratives increase overtime. *Media Psychology*, 10, 113-134.
- Barker, M. (2012). The power of movies: How cinema influences our lives. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Baudry, J. L. (1986). Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus. In P. Rosen (Ed.), *Narrative, apparatus, ideology: A film theory reader* (pp. 286-298). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Calhoun, C. (2006). Nationalism matters. In D. Doly & M. A. Pamplona (Eds.), *Nationalism in the New World*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Choi, J. F. (2011). National cinema: An anachronistic delirium? *Journal of Korean Studies*, 16(2), 173-191.
- Cohen, B. C. (1963). *The press and foreign policy*. Princeton University Press.
- Comolli, J. L. (1985). Technique and ideology: Camera, perspective, depth of field. In B. Nichols (Ed.), *Movies and methods*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Craig, E. G. (1911). *On the art of the theatre*. Browne's Bookstore.
- De Lauretis, T. (1987). *Technologies of gender: Essays on theory, film, and fiction*. Indiana University Press.
- Dixon, W. W., & Smith, G. A. (2014). *Twenty-first-century American cinema*. Wiley-Blackwell.

- Ekwueme, C. O. (2019). The impact of Nigerian television dramas on public discourse. *Journal of Mass Communication and Journalism*, 9(4), 1-10.
- Emelobe, D. E. (2008). Reinventing the canon: The role of African films in postcolonial discourse. In I. N. et al. (Eds.), Professor Femi Osofisan international conference on performance: Proceedings (pp. 426-433). Joytal Press.
- Fischer, A. (2017). *The female gaze: Women directors talk about their films - New approaches to the narrative cinema*. Columbia University Press.
- Funke, A. (2024). Funke Akindele. Wikipedia. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Funke_Akindele
- Gerbner, G. (1969). Toward "cultural indicators": The analysis of mass mediated public message systems. *AV Communication Review*, 17(2), 137-148.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1977). TV violence: An updated systematic review of findings. *Journal of Communication*, 27(3), 171-177.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1986). Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Perspectives on media effects* (pp. 17-41). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Gillespie, M. (2015). Film and social change. *Journal of Film and Video*, 67(1), 3-14.
- Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 13-74). Sage Publications.
- Haynes, J. (2016). *Nollywood: The creation of Nigerian film genres*. Indiana University Press.
- Hearold, S. L. (1986). A synthesis of 1043 effects of television on social behavior. In G. Comstock (Ed.), *Public communication and behavior* (Vol. 1, pp. 65-133). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Hess, F. (2011). Domesticating modernity: Kinimatografikos Astir, the work of the imagination, and the emergence of a national cinema culture, 1924-1927. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 29(1), 51-71.
- Hooks, B. (2000a). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. South End Press.
- Hooks, B. (2000b). *Feminist theory: From margin to center* (2nd ed.). South End Press.
- Ibrahim, A. M. (2017). Cultivation of cultural values through Nollywood films. *Nigerian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(1), 32-48.
- Jost, J. T., Day, M. C., & Pollak, A. (2017). Measuring political ideology in the age of Obama: An integrative perspective. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 20, 289-315.

- Jost, J. T., Ledgerwood, A., & Hardin, C. D. (2017). Shared reality: How social movements create it, how authoritarianism undermines it. *Psychological Inquiry*, 28(1), 30-47.
- Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435-464.
- Kang, M. E. (1997). The portrayal of women's images in magazine advertisements: Goffman's gender analysis revisited. *Sex Roles*, 37, 979-996.
- Kaplan, E. A. (1983). *Women and film: Both sides of the camera*. Methuen.
- Kavoori, A. P., & Punathambekar, A. (Eds.). (2008). *Global Bollywood*. New York University Press.
- Lauzen, M. M. (2019). The celluloid ceiling: Behind-the-scenes and on-screen employment of women on the top 100, 250, and 500 films of 2018. *Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film*, San Diego State University.
- Liebes, T., & Katz, E. (1971). *The television family in America*. Sage Publications.
- Maseko, Z. (2013). Filming the margins: The challenges of being a female director in South Africa. In V. S. Rajadhyaksha & J. P. E. G. Willemsen (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of African film* (pp. 561-570). Routledge.
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6-18.
- Nnaji, G. (2024). Genevieve Nnaji. Wikipedia. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genevieve_Nnaji
- Nwosu, K. C. (2019). Prosocial behavior in Nollywood films: Influencing audience actions. *African Journal of Film Studies*, 5(2), 112-128.
- Obari, E. (2017). *Nollywood women: Representation and power*. University Press.
- Odugbemi, D. O. (2016). Nollywood and the portrayal of political corruption. *Journal of African Politics*, 22(3), 345-360.
- Ogunlade, O. A. (2012). Cultural norms and gender schema development in Nigerian women. *Nigerian Journal of Gender and Development*, 6(1), 45-60.
- Ogunyemi, C. (2018). *African cinema and the challenges of representation*. University of Ibadan Press.
- Ogunyemi, C. (2018). Nollywood and the cultivation of empathy. *Journal of Social Issues in African Cinema*, 4(1), 56-72.
- Ogunyemi, O. (2018). *Nollywood: The making of a film culture*. Indiana University Press.

- Okoli, C. (2018). Beyond the hero: Female characterization in contemporary Nigerian cinema. *Journal of Film and Media Studies*, 5(2), 45-61.
- Okome, O. (2017). Nollywood and the politics of representation. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 29(1), 34-47.
- Olofintoye, S., & Gorla, C. (2021). Gender representations and the reinforcement of patriarchy in selected Nollywood films. *African Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 8(1), 102-120.
- Petro, P. (1989). Feminist film theory: An introduction. In *The cinematic text: Methods and approaches*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Ross, S. J. (2001). American workers, American movies: Historiography and methodology. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, (59), 81-105.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Shaka, F. O. (2007). Introduction to film/television studies. In H. L. Bell-Gam (Ed.), *Theater in theory and practice for beginners* (pp. 124-145). Port Harcourt, Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt Press.
- Shanahan, J., & Morgan, M. (1999). *Television and its viewers: Cultivation theory and research*. Cambridge University Press.
- Signorielli, N., & Bacue, A. (1999). Recognition of gender roles on television: Children's perceptions in transition. *Sex Roles*, 40(7-8), 541-554.
- Singhal, A., & Rogers, E. M. (2004). *Entertainment-education: A communication strategy for social change*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Sutherland, J. A., & Feltey, K. (2010). *Cinematic sociology: Social life in film*. Pine Forge Press.
- Tomaselli, K., & Eke, M. (1995). Perspectives on morality in African cinema. *Oral Tradition*, 10(1), 111-128.
- Wayne, M. (2001). *Political film: The dialectics of third cinema*. Pluto Press.
- Zhu, J. H. (1992). *Media, audience, and social structure*. Ablex Publishing Corporation.