

Journal of African films and Diaspora Studies (JAFDIS)
(Research on African Films, Diaspora Studies, Performance
Arts and Communication Studies)

Published consistently since, 2018

ISSN: 2516-2705 (Print) ISSN: 2516-2713 (Online)

Indexed by SCOPUS, IBSS, EBSCO, ProQuest, COPENICUS,
ERIH PLUS and SABINET

Volume 9, Number 2, June, 2026

pp 267-282

Women Representation and Feminist Themes in Nigerian
Animation Films - *Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters*
and Malika: The Warrior Queen

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-2713/2026/v9n2a14>

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Abstract

This study critically analyses feminist representation in two landmark Nigerian 3D animated films: *Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters* and *Malika: The Warrior Queen*. Grounded in African feminist theory, intersectionality, and gender performativity, the research investigates how animated narratives disrupt historically entrenched gender norms prevalent in Nollywood. Employing qualitative textual and thematic analysis, the study systematically examined key scenes and dialogues through coded categories of leadership, maternal empathy, and female performative agency to trace recurring feminist motifs across both

films. The paper examines the construction of female protagonists who embody moral agency, intellectual autonomy, and political authority in these Nigerian animated films. The study draws on bell hooks' theories of liberatory education, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's STIWANISM, Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, and Ifi Amadiume's work on non-Western gender fluidity to articulate how femininity is performed through repeated actions, leadership rooted in communal responsibility and maternal empathy, and negotiation rather than biological essentialism. The findings reveal that both Bukky and Malika represent counter-hegemonic models of African womanhood that challenge patriarchal narrative structures and cultural assumptions. The analysis also shows distinct forms of African feminist agency, Bukky's imaginative self-discovery and Malika's political leadership, each expanding how animation redefines womanhood in Nigerian media. The paper contributes to the emerging discourse on African animation as a site of ideological and representational intervention, showing how it can express feminist viewpoints and offer new ways of representing women in Nigerian media.

Keyword: *Nigerian Animation, African Feminism, Gender Performativity, Intersectionality, Cultural Narratives, Feminist Representation*

Introduction

The Nigerian film industry, like other areas of entertainment, has grown to attract a global audience. Despite the popularity of documentaries and live-action films in Nigeria, animated features remained largely unrecognised until the early 2010s. Nevertheless, television commercials made with animation have been famous in the country since the 1970s. This paper examines how recent Nigerian animated films portray empowered female protagonists and advance feminist themes in contrast to traditional Nollywood portrayals. Nollywood films typically play a significant role in how viewers develop their identities and apply these ideas to their daily lives. Haynes and Onookome (1998) evaluate the link between Nollywood and its product consumers, stating, "Nigerian videos are nothing if not close to the people," and assert that it is a part of their daily lives. Adeduntan (2020), speaking about Nollywood, also argued that these filmic representations are often, and should be, critically considered not only in light of how they legitimise normative cultural behaviour but also in terms of how they constitute an infrastructure of policing it.

In many of the animated television commercials made in Nigeria, female characters are often sexualised, much like other negative stereotypes in

Nollywood films. In general, Nigerian filmmakers have been criticised for negatively representing women in Nigerian cinema. According to Onyenakeya et al. (2018: p.79), “critics of Nollywood, especially gender activists, have challenged its predominant, if not exclusive, portrayal of women for its narrowly traditional occupational and domestic roles and images”. The stereotyping of women as maids, witches, wicked mothers-in-law, and lacking the capacity for making sound judgements are some of the ways that women have been portrayed. Bryce (2012) discussed many of the contemporary concerns regarding Nollywood videos, particularly the portrayal and representation of women. She urged stakeholders to address the harmful portrayal of women in Nigerian cinema, noting that films frequently depict them as morally corrupt, manipulative, and inferior to their male counterparts. The paper presented at the forum organised by the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF) as part of the *Reclaiming Popular Culture to Promote Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment* initiative emphasised the need for Nollywood, as a dominant force in African popular culture, to promote more empowering and inspirational narratives about African women and the importance of showcasing women's talents and positioning them as positive role models within cinematic storytelling.

Abah (2008) also supports this perspective in her analysis of Nollywood’s portrayal of women’s roles. She argues that Nollywood films consistently reinforce "traditional" standards of the submissive wife and nurturing mother, failing to accurately reflect the diverse realities of women's lives in Nigeria. According to Abah, while women have made significant strides in their social and economic roles in the nation and their individual societies, these advancements are not mirrored in their personal and domestic spheres, a disparity that Nollywood films actively perpetuate. Consequently, she argues that Nollywood’s depictions have normalised these so-called "traditional" roles, making any challenge to them appear "unnatural."

However, some scholars contest this perspective, pointing to specific Nollywood filmmakers who depict female characters positively. Giwa-Isekeje’s (2013) analysis reveals a more nuanced and varied portrayal of women in Tunde Kelani’s works. Kelani established his own production company, MainFrame Films and Television Productions. This prominent studio enables him to achieve the high-quality visuals and seamlessly woven narratives characteristic of his cinematic style. Unlike many mainstream filmmakers, he has consistently produced big-budget films since his debut with *Ti Olum Ni Ile* (1993), *Saworoide* (1999), and *Arugba* (2008). Soetan (2020) has noted that Kelani can be considered a forerunner of the “New Nollywood” movement that emerged in 2010, as his filmmaking approach

aligns with the standards and aspirations of contemporary New Nollywood directors. His female characters are frequently depicted as empowered, industrious, and pioneering figures who possess significant knowledge. While some occasionally revert to traditional customs that reinforce patriarchal dominance, Kelani's narratives ensure that once these women challenge societal norms, they acquire agency that persists throughout the story. He presents women in diverse roles – including leaders, entrepreneurs, educators, pioneers, mothers, wives, and peacekeepers – using his characters and narratives to engage with the socio-political and economic realities of their time.

For example, in *The Campus Queen* (2004), Tunde Kelani employs the character of Banke to dismantle stereotypes of Nigerian female university students as promiscuous, docile, and opportunistic. Banke rejects the coercive overtures of Toks, president of the Heavyweights Club, who attempts to involve her in transactional sexual relations to fund his cult activities. Ultimately, she renounces the club and joins the rival Silverline Movement, a student group dedicated to social justice and equitable treatment of all students on campus, thereby asserting her independence and ethical stance. In *Ti Olumwa Ni Ile* (1993), the Oba (Kabiyesi) is shown consulting his queen, *Olori*, on pressing matters of state. She actively participates in discussions on complex issues, including inflation and the mysterious wave of deaths afflicting the village. Giwa-Isekeije (2013) argues that such a portrayal aligns with the precolonial Yoruba sociopolitical structure, where women held advisory and leadership roles within both domestic and public spheres. Kelani's portrayal of the *Olori* suggests a romanticised longing for an era in which female participation in leadership was integrated into the socio-political and cultural climate. In contrast, contemporary Nigerian society often requires women to constantly negotiate their presence and authority in these same spaces, underscoring a shift from traditional norms, which is discussed later in this study.

While Tunde Kelani's films are often lauded for their rich and empowering portrayals of women, the broader Nollywood industry still faces criticism for its stereotypical and negative representations of female characters. Far too many Nollywood films have historically depicted women in roles that are subservient, overly emotional, or morally compromised, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms. This trend has been identified as a significant concern by scholars and critics alike, as supported by Olayiwola (2003). The contrast between Kelani's progressive representations and Nollywood's more traditional depictions highlights the industry's complexities and contradictions regarding gender roles. It

emphasises the need for a broader change toward more diverse and accurate representations of women in Nigerian cinema.

However, women representation in Nigerian film and animation has shifted, with a modern focus on storytelling that highlights empowerment and strength. The animation industry, although still overshadowed by Nollywood's live-action productions, has aligned itself with broader cultural and social shifts in Nigeria that reflect the increasing recognition of gender equity and women's roles in shaping societal progress. Despite extensive research into gender roles within Nollywood, the nation's animated films remain an underexamined area of study.

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis approach to examine how Nigerian animated films represent women and articulate feminist themes within cultural and socio-political contexts. The analysis focuses on *Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters* (32AD x Hot Ticket Productions, 2020) and *Malika: The Warrior Queen* (Anthill x YouNeek Studios, 2019), both selected through purposive, criteria-based sampling for their central female protagonists and explicit engagement with questions of gender, leadership, power, and identity. Primary data consist of the two films, viewed multiple times for detailed scene analysis, complemented by secondary sources including press materials and scholarly literature on African women in media. The choice of these films rests on their status as pioneering Nigerian 3D features that centre on female protagonists and explore clear feminist themes. Codes were refined through iterative comparison to establish recurring motifs of female agency. This analysis ensures interpretive depth, situating both films within broader feminist discourse in Nigerian screen culture, with the aim of determining how *Lady Buckit* and *Malika* represent female empowerment and moral agency and how African feminist theories reinterpret gender performativity in these films.

Synopsis of Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters

Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters follows Bukky, an intelligent but rebellious 8-year-old girl living in 1956 Oloibiri, Nigeria, during the historic visit of Elizabeth II. Introduced as curious and independent yet resistant to discipline, Bukky neglects a simple domestic responsibility, disposing of trash, leading to the closure of her family's bakery by sanitation officers. After this consequence, Bukky encounters Mr Edwin, whose story prompts moral reflection. During a storm, she is mysteriously transported into a futuristic 2019 version of her town, where she transforms into a bucket and joins the "Motley Mopsters," a group of anthropomorphic cleaning tools dedicated to maintaining order and cleanliness.

Through her interactions, particularly with Tamuno, a bullied and struggling student, Bukky develops empathy, responsibility, and leadership. A key revelation that Tamuno is her future grandson underscores the long-term impact of her actions. Returning to her original timeline, she corrects her mistakes, helps restore the family bakery, and demonstrates personal growth. The film concludes by showing the broader ripple effects of her transformation, positioning Bukky as a symbol of resilience, responsibility, and female empowerment. Through magical realism and animation, the narrative foregrounds themes of accountability, gender expectations, and the role of young girls as agents of social change.

Bukky's subsequent transformation into a bucket within the Mopsters' fantasy world marks a decisive shift from resistance to reconfiguration. This transformation is more than incidental fantasy; it is a symbolic reclaiming of identity through the use of objects coded with the meaning of labour. The Mopsters, which are animated cleaning tools, operate through coordinated, repetitive movement patterns that visually emphasise rhythm, maintenance, and collective effort. Through stylised animation techniques such as exaggerated elasticity, synchronised motion, and saturated colour contrasts, the film constructs a visual language in which cleanliness and care become performative acts rather than static attributes.

Synopsis of Malika: Warrior Queen

Malika: Warrior Queen is set in fifteenth-century West Africa and centres on Malika, a prodigious ruler and military commander who unifies the fractured kingdom of Azzaz after a prolonged civil war, transforming it into a powerful empire. An early, decisive duel with the rebellious General Ras establishes her authority, showcasing her ability to lead using a combination of tactical strategy and sheer force. Despite unification, the kingdom faces ongoing instability. Malika's political alliance with King Bass of Attala, although contested by her male-dominated council, draws the threat of war from the Songhai Empire, led by Emperor Askia. An ultimatum forces Malika into a critical moral dilemma: assassinate Bass to preserve peace or risk another devastating war. This decision is further complicated by the revelation that Bass is not only an ally but also her secret husband. Throughout these tensions of internal dissent, external threat, and personal conflict, Malika navigates leadership as a balance of strategy, sacrifice, and responsibility. The short film portrays her authority as multifaceted, emerging from her combined roles as a sovereign, a soldier, and a diplomatic negotiator. Inspired by historical figures such as Queen Amina, the narrative

foregrounds themes of female leadership, governance, and the negotiation of power within patriarchal structures, positioning Malika as a symbol of institutional and political feminist agency.

Animation techniques play a critical role in amplifying this representation of institutional agency. Stylised visual elements like costume, spatial composition, and scale consistently place Malika at the centre of the frame to underscore her power and authority. Her physical elevation, especially her throne; the symmetry of court arrangements, and the visual contrast between her composed stillness and the agitation of others all function as repeated visual cues of command. These techniques construct authority not as an inherent trait but as a sustained performance reinforced through visual repetition and spatial control inherent with animated films.

While Bukky exercises an imaginative and internalised form of agency, Malika's power is defined by external and institutional authority. However, both converge in their rejection of passive femininity and their emphasis on action as the basis of identity. In relation to the central research question, Malika demonstrates how Nigerian animation constructs feminist agency at the level of governance, where gender is performed through leadership, negotiation, and the continual balancing of power, responsibility, and collective survival.

Analysis- Feminist Themes in Nigerian Animation

Nigerian 3D animations provide empowering counter-narratives for female children, challenging the traditional gender roles often reinforced in Nollywood and promoting media equity. Through their innovative storytelling, aesthetic creativity, and allegorical depth, Nigerian animations are, most times unknowingly, actively participating in the cultural project of gender reimagining and social justice. These animated films highlight female autonomy and strength, engaging with feminist themes such as self-realisation, communal responsibility, and dismantling gender hierarchies.

For example, *Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters* focuses on the young girl, Bukky, who is portrayed as strong and capable. The story highlights how she faces and overcomes challenges independently, demonstrating traits like independence and resilience. By doing this, the film supports feminist ideas, particularly the notion that girls and women can be self-reliant, responsible, and powerful agents of change, rather than portraying the female character as weak, passive, or dependent. By centring on a young girl in a leadership role and allowing her to drive the plot, the film challenges traditional gender norms. It contributes to a broader cultural shift toward more empowering representations of girls and women in Nigerian media.

Similarly, *Malika: Warrior Queen* draws inspiration from the historical figure of Queen Amina of Zazzau, reimagining her as a powerful and strategic leader in precolonial Africa. This depiction aims to honour African women's historical contributions to civilisation and aligns with feminist goals of reclaiming and amplifying women's stories in traditionally male-dominated areas. These works demonstrate how Nigerian animation increasingly creates space for nuanced female characters that break conventional stereotypes.

Other animated works in Nigeria also delve into societal themes that resonate with feminist advocacy, with animated characters like *Oya* in Komotion Studio's *Dawn of Thunder* and *Tola* in Kugali's *Iwaju*. By weaving stories that address social imbalances and featuring a woman at the forefront of correcting them, these animated feature films contribute to gender equality, making them powerful tools for feminist advocacy. The inclusion of strong, relatable female characters and themes of resilience, leadership, and empowerment underlines Nigerian animation's capacity to contribute meaningfully to global feminist conversations.

This study employs African and intersectional feminist theories to examine how women are portrayed in early Nigerian animated films. Unlike traditional Western feminism, African feminist thought embraces a culturally contextualised understanding of gender, one that balances action with communal values, leadership with social responsibility, and societal progress with cultural grounding and awareness. These principles provide a more pertinent perspective for investigating how female characters are positioned in African narrative spaces. Additionally, the analysis incorporates intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139), which highlights how identities such as gender, race, class, and cultural heritage intersect to shape individual experiences. *Malika*, for instance, is not simply portrayed as a woman but as a royal leader, a warrior, a lover, and a moral decision-maker, all of which intersect to inform her character. The films also draw on bell hooks' view of feminism as a liberatory movement that centres on education, self-actualisation, and empowerment for all genders, not only for women. This lens is particularly relevant to the character of Lady Buckit, whose intellectual curiosity and emotional growth reflect a form of feminist resistance grounded in learning and educated transformation.

Finally, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is used to understand how these characters perform gender not as a fixed identity, but through repeated actions and choices. The stylised and symbolic nature of animation adds weight to these performances, enabling alternative depictions of femininity that transcend the historical offerings of Nollywood

cinema. These theoretical perspectives collectively inform the interpretation of the films' narrative strategies and character development, positioning Nigerian animation as a growing industry ripe for global visual discourse.

Both Lady Buckit and Malika display traits aligned with African feminist thought; that is, balancing personal agency and autonomy with community responsibility and cultural belonging. Their actions, especially regarding leadership, are not defined by rebellion against men, but by a moral clarity and informed capacity for public good. Ifi Amadiume's argument on feminism in the African context, as cited by Lindsay (2017), where the fact that biological sex did not always correspond to ideological gender meant that women could play roles usually monopolised by men or be classified as 'males' in terms of power and authority over others, is an excellent reflection of the idea that the characters Malika and Bukky represent. The film *Malika: The Warrior Queen* also fits perfectly into the precolonial social culture, where women held powerful positions in their communities, a phenomenon that underwent rapid decline as Africa, as a continent, transitioned from colonial to postcolonial periods (Hoppe, 2016). This is due to the fact that, as Bosha (2014) aptly argued, among other things, gender stereotypes that were amplified during this period have hindered women's ability to advance in leadership roles throughout Africa.

Although women constitute the majority in most African nations, various obstacles continue to restrict their access to political leadership positions in their countries and communities. The portrayal of Malika as a warrior queen carries significant resonance because her leadership is not a break from tradition; instead, it aligns with a well-established African historical precedent. This also supports Oyeronke's (2004) assertion, using Yoruba culture in Nigeria as a window into Nigeria as a whole, that gender existed and played a significant role in Yoruba religious tradition, but in ways quite different from its conception in Western cultures. The difference stems from the fact that, in Africa, gender conceptions are not limited to sexual anatomy. They are configured in a complex and fluid manner, as many oral traditions of feminine legends and queenships tell us. Not only is gender action and representation a crucial social category in traditional Yoruba society, but it is also a flexible one. This flexibility was lost at some point.

Ogundipe-Leslie's concept of STIWANISM (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa), which focuses on how African women contribute to community advancement while retaining cultural identity, also fits into Bukky's character arc, as she grows into leadership not through rebellion but by embracing responsibility and a shared vision with the Mopsters. Initially led by Mops, a male character with deep patriarchal values, Bukky was able to unite the Mopsters against a common foe,

Tamuno's school bully, and also lead the ragtag crew through navigating their responsibilities, teaching empathy, communal service, and taking responsibility along the way, a trait that Bukky herself lacked at the beginning of the movie but picked up as a valuable lesson. By the end of the film, the Mopsters, including Mops and Tamuno, defer to her for leadership. Her transformation reflects, as articulated by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, an emphasis on social transformation that includes women without requiring them to mimic male roles. As Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) writes, "African women are not seeking to become men, but to transform society with their own capacities and perspectives". Lady Buckit's leadership is not defined by domination or ego but by creative intelligence and a sense of responsibility to the communal good, marking a feminist ethic deeply rooted in African values. It shows the audience what it means for a young girl to lead and for an even younger audience to imagine new futures for women and girls in Nigerian storytelling.

Malika's portrayal also aligns with intersectional feminist interpretations. According to Sammie (2025), intersectionality emphasises that different dimensions of identity are not isolated from one another; instead, they intertwine and overlap in intricate ways, resulting in distinct advantages or disadvantages, benefits or harms. Her (Malika's) decisions or actions in the film are informed not only by her gender but also by her sociopolitical role as queen, her cultural heritage, and the historical expectations of leadership in a precolonial empire. The arc of her character highlights a model of leadership that is strong yet feminine, focused on the well-being of the community; this is showcased through her willingness to face General Ras in a one-on-one duel to avert a civil war. This nuanced portrayal decouples power and authority from masculinity, reflecting African feminist ideals, where authority and maternal empathy coexist and complement each other. Even though she is a woman leading an empire in Africa, she embodies the tenets of governance, good governance in fact, as argued by Rotberg (2009), who posits that the provision of high-quality political goods to citizens by governments of all types is what governance is all about. These political goods include human development, the rule of law, participation, human rights, security and safety, and sustainable economic opportunities in Africa, as they are in other parts of the world. Malika does this for the citizens of Azzas, shielding them from war and further loss of life, brokering trading relationships and making allies with neighbouring kingdoms, especially Attala. Even her choice of a lover in King Bass was still made with the good of her citizens in mind, perhaps to the indignation of her male-dominated council of five.

Still on intersection, Judith Butler, as cited in Morgenroth and Ryan (2018), also argues that gender is not what we are but what we do, that is, a set of repeated actions that produce identity, not based on some inner truth but instead a by-product of repeated gender performance. In *Lady Buckit*, Bukky's transition from a misunderstood, precocious girl into a responsible community leader of Oloibiri reflects a performative construction of gender identity. She emerges as a heroine through her own conduct and choices, demonstrating that her status is earned through action and consequence rather than granted by birth or prophecy. Even as a little girl, she comes back to apologise to Mr Edwin, whom she had earlier in the film shunned and abused, not at the behest of the adults, but out of remorse and a genuine quest to make things right.

Lady Buckit's character challenges traditional gender norms in Nigerian cinema by exhibiting intellectual curiosity and emotional agency uncommon among young female leads. The opening montage of the film shows Bukky helping her father solve a mathematical problem while he is asleep and doing the same for Tamuno when he is stumped on his assignment. She is curious, intellectually assertive, and transformed by knowledge rather than the romance of being female. The character challenges passive femininity and foregrounds creative problem-solving from the outset of the film. Drawing on Hooks' (2000) vision of feminist liberation through education and critical thinking, Bukky's journey is one of personal transformation rooted in intellectual capabilities and inquiry, rather than submission. Bukky's power is rooted in her ability to pose intelligent questions, confront power, and accept responsibility, marking a significant departure from the passive or romanticised female leads typical of Nollywood. Her transformation into an eventual community leader of Oloibiri is not dictated by biological destiny or patriarchal approval but rather through self-awareness and informed decision-making. Her assertiveness reframes femininity as capable, independent, and curious.

Another key moment that establishes Bukky's initial misalignment with socially prescribed femininity occurs in the sanitation inspection sequence. Here, her refusal to complete an assigned domestic task, which was disposing of bakery waste, results in the closure of the family bakery by the sanitation inspectors. While this moment could be read simply as childhood disobedience, it more critically exposes the normative expectation of gendered domestic responsibility. Bukky's failure is not framed as moral deficiency alone but as a disruption of an expected performance of care and order typically associated with feminine roles. The consequence situates gender performance within a broader socio-economic framework,

highlighting how domestic labour remains both gender-specific and subject to regulation.

Although *Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters* and *Malika: The Warrior Queen* both centre on empowered female protagonists, they enact feminist themes through different sequential narrative settings, film tones, and modes of agency. By placing its narrative within a futuristic, child-centric setting, *Lady Buckit* utilises the themes of play, imagination, and emotional evolution to articulate feminist growth. Bukky's agency is experimental and emotional, as she learns confidence and creativity by reimagining herself and her environment, a brightly stylised environment whose aesthetic reinforces an identity that is open-ended and constantly evolving. In contrast, *Malika* grounds its narrative in a historical and mythic past, drawing from southwestern (Yoruba) and northern Nigerian traditions of female rulership. *Malika*'s feminism is political and moral rather than exploratory. Her strength lies in her capacity to lead, mediate conflict, and sustain order within deep patriarchal structures. The film's attempt at visual realism and battle sequences embodies leadership as disciplined performance, which Judith Butler might call the repetition of authority through embodied action.

The juxtaposition of Bukky's childhood with *Malika*'s adulthood, and of the future versus the past, thus expands the feminist map of Nigerian animation. Bukky's journey symbolises liberation through self-discovery and education, a form of internal decolonisation. *Malika*'s story, on the other hand, symbolises social transformation through governance and collective responsibility. Bukky disrupts domestic patriarchy in the private sphere, her immediate world, *Malika* redefines public power in the political sphere, her nation. As a child, Bukky's identity allows for a playful and imaginative form of resistance, where her natural curiosity and empathy challenge adult authority without the need for overt conflict. *Malika*'s identity as a queen places her within the structures of power, where she must balance justice, strategy, and compassion. Bukky's agency is transformative and creative, emerging from personal growth, while *Malika*'s is institutional and political, exercised through leadership and moral decision-making. Together, they suggest a range of female performative agency, from the imaginative to the institutional, reflecting both youthful defiance and mature governance, suggesting that Nigerian animation can represent feminism not as a single ideology but as a spectrum of lived and imagined possibilities across time and context.

These films illustrate the capacity of Nigerian animation to emerge as a space for performative feminist resistance, echoing Butler's (1998) concept that "gender is what is put on; the appearance of substance is precisely that,

a constructed identity.” Both fully formed protagonists in the case studies demonstrate femininity not as an innate trait but through acts of decision-making, leadership, and emotional intelligence. Their agency is self-authored rather than granted, emerging through the redefinition of womanhood via repeated performances that resist conventional classifications. This marks a significant evolution from older Nollywood stereotypes, affirming Nigerian animation films as an art form where feminist ideals are actively constructed through repeated actions and consequences with learned lessons, rather than being passively depicted.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the development of animation films in Nigeria from the different television commercials through to music videos to the recent feature-length films in the genre. Several notable studios specialising in animation films in the country are highlighted further to support the development and evolution of the industry. This study contends that female representation in Nigerian cinema has transitioned into more empowered roles over the years, a trend that is equally evident in animated films. To buttress this point, *Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters* and *Malika: Warrior Queen* - two recently made animations - are used to argue that female protagonists, female empowerment and gender equality have become popular in narrative film made in the country.

Characters like Bukky and Malika are examples of ideal empowered women. This paper has examined how the two early Nigerian animated films represent women through feminist themes that depart from traditional Nollywood portrayals. Both characters challenge narrow stereotypes by assuming roles that reflect independence, leadership, critical thinking, brilliance, and moral agency. Their stories demonstrate the potential of Nigerian animation to redefine female roles, moving away from depictions of victims or secondary characters in male-centric plots to central protagonists who control their own narratives.

Future research could explore how feminist themes in Nigerian animation evolve as the industry gains technical and narrative sophistication. As more studios embrace women-centred storytelling, these films may begin to influence Nollywood’s live-action portrayals of women, normalising complex female agency beyond domestic or romantic portrayals. Further studies might also examine audience reception, particularly how young African girls interpret and internalise such representations of strength, empathy, and leadership. Understanding these responses can reveal animation’s potential as both an educational and emancipatory tool for

shaping gender consciousness, inspiring creativity, and expanding the possibilities of African womanhood in digital media. This is because animation represents gender differently from Nollywood. After all, it is not limited by real actors or physical settings. The animated medium allows creators to show gender as flexible and symbolic, rather than fixed or tied to the body. By leveraging colour, movement, and transformation, female characters are able to manifest strength, intelligence, and spirituality more vividly than is often possible within the constraints of live-action cinema. This flexibility allows women to appear not just as caregivers or victims but as leaders and thinkers.

Animation can exaggerate or simplify features to highlight moral strength, confidence, or empathy, giving space for new ideas of womanhood. This supports African feminist ideas that view femininity as relational, dynamic, and grounded in community. By engaging with feminist ideas, especially those rooted in African and intersectional contexts, these films demonstrate that animation is not just a form of visual entertainment; it is a tool for reshaping cultural expectations and expanding how women and girls see themselves represented. This shift in consciousness or thought is still evolving, but it signals a meaningful direction for the future of Nigerian storytelling.

DECLARATION

The authors hereby wish to declare that there is no conflict of interest of any kind in the course of this study and that this research received no specific grant or funding from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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