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Feminist Ambivalence in Contemporary African Female Filmmaking: A Reading of Selected Films of Funke Akindele

ABSTRACT. Feminist ambivalence in contemporary African female filmmaking reflects the tension between cultural traditions and feminist ideals. Nollywood, as a dominant cinematic force, serves as a platform where these conflicting narratives unfold. Funke Akindele's *Battle on Buka Street* (2022) and *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023) exemplify how African female filmmakers navigate the complexities of gender representation. The former explores female rivalry, particularly in entrepreneurial settings, while the latter highlights the struggles of single motherhood and economic survival. Both films address gendered power dynamics, economic disparity, and familial loyalty, revealing the cultural negotiations women undertake to assert agency. The contradictions embedded in these portrayals reflect feminist ambivalence, an approach to gender discourse in African cinema that emphasizes adaptation, resilience, and collective progress rather than radical opposition to patriarchy. By analysing these films as cultural texts, this study reveals how feminist ideals are simultaneously upheld and contested within Nollywood. In the end, it is found that Funke Akindele's work encapsulates the complexities of feminist ambivalence, illustrating how gender roles are continuously negotiated within the intersections of tradition and societal expectations.

KEYWORDS: feminist ambivalence, gender equality, African female filmmaking, Nollywood, feminism

Introduction

African cinema has become a powerful medium for narrating the complexities of identity, culture, and gender. Female filmmakers, in particular, have played a significant role in reshaping portrayals of women in society. The rise of female filmmakers in Africa also significantly contributes to the discourse on gender representation in cinema. In recent years, African cinema has evolved as a critical medium for examining societal values, identity, and power dynamics across the continent. The representation of women in film, particularly in works by African female filmmakers, has sparked

ongoing debates about gender, cultural expectations, and the interplay of tradition and modernity. African cinema has long been lauded for its role in reclaiming narratives and challenging stereotypes perpetuated by Western portrayals (Dipio, 2019, p. 1). Within this context, contemporary African female filmmakers have carved out a space to express diverse perspectives on gender, often marked by a sense of feminist ambivalence.

For decades, Nollywood was controlled predominantly by male filmmakers, and women were often confined to traditional roles both on-screen and behind the scenes. As Dipio (2019) notes, African women have long been marginalized in various sectors, including the arts and entertainment industries. Women were often seen as secondary to male figures, and their stories were rarely prioritized in the narratives presented to the public. Dipio further highlights how the African presence in Western media was exoticized, often only included as “bizarre and exotic objects that challenge Western heroisms” (2019, p. 11).

Feminist ambivalence in African creative works is not new. Ezenwanebe (2008) discusses similar tensions in Nigerian drama, particularly in the works of Tess Onwueme, whose female characters navigate the conflict between cultural expectations and feminist liberation. As noted by Belsey and Moore (1989), gender roles are often culturally constructed, and this construction profoundly influences how women are represented in media. These insights align with the objectives of feminist filmmaking, which, as Keyssar (1984) argues, aim to create significant roles for women that challenge societal norms. Feminist ambivalence refers to the duality of advocating for gender equality while navigating cultural constraints and traditional gender roles (Fields, 2013, p. 494). Feminist ambivalence in African filmmaking hence refers to the complex, often contradictory approaches that African filmmakers, particularly women, take toward feminist ideals in their narratives and character representations. This ambivalence stems from the interaction of traditional African socio-cultural values and the global feminist movement, which of course, cannot be ruled out.

Gabriel aptly describes cinema as a “custodian of memory,” a medium that preserves and transmits cultural values while simultaneously opening spaces for critique and transformation (2000, p. 99). African female filmmakers, through their works, address the complexities of womanhood in a patriarchal society, highlighting the tension between embracing feminist ideals and adhering to societal norms. The concept of ambivalence resonates with the broader framework of African feminism, which emphasizes practical concerns such as economic empowerment, social justice, and col-

laboration between genders rather than adversarial politics (Mikell, 1997, p. 4). This perspective enriches the discourse on how women navigate the intersections of culture, power, and agency in contemporary African societies. Despite these strides, the representation of gender in African filmmaking has revealed complex undercurrents, particularly in the works of female filmmakers. Feminist ambivalence, a phrase that captures the tension between feminist ideals and cultural realities, has become a defining feature of contemporary African female filmmaking. This concept reflects the duality of advocating for gender equality while navigating societal expectations and cultural traditions (Gabriel, 2000, p. 99).

In the context of African cinema, feminist ambivalence is particularly pronounced. While male filmmakers like Sembène have been lauded for their feminist-leaning portrayals of women, the voices of African female filmmakers often explore more elaborate and personal dimensions of gender dynamics. African feminism, distinct in its focus on “bread, butter, and power” issues, emphasizes the interplay between collective struggles and individual agency (Mikell, 1997, p. 4). This thought-provoking viewpoint breaks away from the challenging monolithic representations of women, offering a lens through which cultural specificity and feminist ideals intersect. This study examines the films of Funke Akindele, a prominent figure in contemporary African cinema, through the lens of feminist ambivalence. Her films serve as cultural texts that reflect the complexities of gender relations in Africa, contributing to broader discourses on feminism and filmmaking.

This study employs feminist theory as a lens to explore the representation of gender in selected films by Funke Akindele. By focusing on her work, it aims to illuminate the ways in which contemporary African female filmmakers negotiate the terrain of feminist ambivalence while contributing to the broader discourse on gender and representation in African cinema.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the core principles of African Feminism, a framework that recognizes the unique socio-cultural contexts of African women while advocating for gender equity, economic empowerment, and social justice. African feminism is distinct in its focus on practical, everyday concerns such as access to resources, education, and political participa-

tion, rather than solely on ideological contestations with patriarchy (Mike-ll, 1997, p. 4). Rooted in a holistic understanding of gender dynamics, this approach emphasizes collaboration between men and women to address systemic inequalities, rather than promoting adversarial gender politics.

In line with this ethos, the concept of feminist ambivalence serves as a pivotal lens for this study. Feminist ambivalence, as reflected in African female filmmaking, captures the tension between challenging patriarchal norms and negotiating cultural expectations. Among these filmmakers is Funke Akindele, a prominent figure in Nollywood, whose works straddle the intersection of entertainment and social commentary. With a filmography that spans diverse genres and themes, Akindele has garnered critical acclaim for her ability to weave humour, drama, and cultural critique into her storytelling. However, an intriguing aspect of her films lies in their treatment of gender dynamics and the portrayal of feminist ideals, making this theoretical lens particularly apt for analysing her films.

Synopsis of *Battle on Buka Street* (2022)

Battle on Buka street (2022), The film is jointly produced as a collaboration between Funke Ayotunde Akindele Network (FAAN) and Film One Studios. Directed by Funke Akindele and Tobi Makinde, Script by Funke Akindele, Jack'enneth Opukeme, Stephen Oluboyo and Jemine Edukugho, Edited by Kayode Aransiola and Valentine Chukwuma, Music composed by Tolu Obanro. Produced by Funke Akindele and Wendy Uwadiae Imasuen (Associate producer).

Buka Street is the film's central setting, where two rival women, Asake (Sola Sobowale) and Ezinne (Tina Mba), feud over their daughters, Yejide (Funke Akindele) and Awele (Mercy Johnson). The rivalry, engrained in their past, continues through their competing food businesses on Buka Street. Asake's daughter, Yejide, thrives while Awele returns after a failed marriage, reigniting the conflict. Tensions rise as their businesses clash, with petty sabotage and family drama unfolding. Yejide's son, Ademide, and Awele's daughter, Ifunnaya, also become entangled in the feud. The feud escalates with deception, brawls, arson, and spiritual battles. Both women seek divine help to one-up each other, resulting in injuries and shocking revelations. Ademide uncovers the truth about his father, Lan-shile, a fugitive who sacrificed his freedom for Yejide's safety, prompting the children to seek reconciliation.

Feminist Ambivalence in *Battle on Buka Street* (2022)

The film is divided into several sequences, categorized into eleven distinct plot segments from the opening credits to the end credits. The plot segmentation of *Battle on Buka Street* (2022) thus:

1. Opening Scene

- a) Buka Street is unveiled as a bustling area with activity.
- b) Flashback to the rivalry between Asake and Ezinne over their daughters, Yejide and Awele.

2. Marriage Tension

- a) Yejide's suitor arrives, while Awele's suitor is introduced.
- b) Family clash over the choice of marriages.

3. Awele's Return

- a) Awele returns with her daughters and opens a food business opposite Yejide.
- b) Rising tensions between the two families.

4. Sabotage and Conflict

- a) Yejide's daughter releases rats in Awele's shop.
- b) Awele retaliates with cockroaches in Yejide's food.

5. Fire and Escalation

- a) Yejide's daughter sabotages Awele's shop, causing a fire.
- b) Awele and Yejide engage in a physical altercation.

6. Ademide's Arrest

- a) Ademide is arrested in Lagos for theft.
- b) Ifunnaya investigates and clears his name from the theft allegation.

7. Spiritual Intervention

- a) Both families resort to spiritual means for redemption.
- b) Yejide seeks spiritual help, but Awele gets injured in a fire during her own ritual.

8. Family Secrets Unveiled

- a) Yejide reveals her past crimes to her children and how her husband took the blame.
- b) Ezinne Dies

9. Otanwa Youth Carnival

- a) Chaos erupts at the carnival, injuring Ifunnaya.
- b) Awele finds Lanshile hideout.

10. Final Confrontation

- a) The families face off with the youth, but Lanshile is smuggled out by a neighbour.

b) Awele chooses not to exact revenge.

11. Resolution

a) The families reconcile.

End Credits

Battle on Buka Street (2022) epitomizes feminist ambivalence through its portrayal of female rivalry, empowerment, and reconciliation. The film presents women as independent business owners yet frames their success within a competitive and conflict-driven narrative.

As the opening credit appears, the film opens with a *mise-en-scène* that quickly establishes its primary setting (fig. 1), Buka Street in Otanwa community, a bustling market area filled with makeshift shops and a chaotic atmosphere.



Figure 1. Opening sequence reveals the Spatial location, the Buka street

In the second sequence, an extreme close-up captures Mazi Maduka through a story technique that employs flashbacks, the audience is transported to the 1980s, where the foundation of the central conflict is laid. The voiceover narrates that despite already having two pregnant wives, Mazi Maduka took a third wife. As he steps into the scene, Ezinne suddenly goes into labour. Not wanting to be outdone in their ongoing competition, Asake insists on having her baby the same day, opting for a Caesarean section to match Ezinne's delivery.

As the story transitions to the present, the camera pulls back into a wide shot, incorporating a non-diegetic outdoor insert. An alternating shot then reveals that Asake and Ezinne run competing food joints on Buka Street, despite being independent entrepreneurs, are positioned in direct rivalry rather than as mutual supporters. Their food businesses, a symbol of female economic empowerment, become battlegrounds for proving dominance rather than collective success. This tension extends to their daughters, Yejide and Awele, reinforcing how generational cycles of competition among women are perpetuated within societal structures.

In segment 2, the scene shifts to a marriage introduction ceremony where Lanshile is introduced to Mazi Maduka as a suitor seeking Yejide's hand in marriage. As the event unfolds, Ezinne walks in with Chukwuemeka (fig. 2), who has come to ask for Awele's hand in marriage at the same time. The simultaneous introductions of the suitors intensify the tension between the two families. By orchestrating these simultaneous marriage introductions, Asake and Ezinne turn what should be a joyous occasion into another competitive spectacle. The significance of this sequence is that the filmmaker uses this moment to highlight how patriarchal traditions, which emphasize marriage as a marker of success for women, are paradoxically reinforced through the very women seeking to empower themselves. The tension escalates when Awele deliberately chooses the same day as Yejide's traditional wedding for her own. How-



Figure 2. Awele and Yejiide introduce their suitor's same time

ever, the real battle ignites when Mazi Maduka blesses Awele's union first, overshadowing Yejide's moment.

In Segment 3, the camera pans in a close-up, capturing Yejide thriving in her food business, which she runs alongside her mother, Asake, who handles the cooking. However, Yejide's success is soon disrupted by Awele's unexpected return. Heartbroken from a devastating breakup, Awele arrives with her three teenage daughters Ifunnaya, her eldest, and the twins, Kaiso and Kaira. Adding fuel to the long-standing rivalry, she rents the shop directly opposite Yejide's, reigniting tensions within the already fractured family.

Awele's return shocks her frail mother, Ezinne, who insists she should have stayed in her marriage. Awele's mother, Ezinne, further amplifies this ambivalence by insisting that Awele should have endured her marriage despite her husband's betrayals, reflecting a cultural expectation for women to tolerate suffering for the sake of family stability. Awele recalls her troubled past with Chukwuemeka, who repeatedly cheated and squandered Ifunnaya's WAEC exam money, forcing her to leave. Determined to rebuild, Awele starts a food business but struggles as Yejide's shop thrives (fig. 3). As Ademide prepares for a trip, Yejide falsely boasts he's going overseas to provoke Awele. In retaliation, Awele, with Ezinne's backing, sends Ifunnaya on a trip and spreads the rumour that she has travelled to Canada, escalating the family rivalry.



Figure 3. Ifunnaya is perplexed about the lack of customers

In Segment 4, the rivalry between Yejide and Awele takes a devious turn. Determined to sabotage Awele's business, Yejide instructs her daughter, Fadekemi, to release rats in Awele's shop, hoping to drive customers away. (fig. 4). Soon after, Awele discovers the scheme and retaliates. She enlists her twin daughters, Kaiso and Kaira, along with an outside accomplice, to discreetly drop cockroaches into Yejide's customers' food. The escalating feud between the two women creates an increasingly hostile atmosphere, turning their long-standing competition into an all-out war.



Figure 4. Fadekemi in disguise while planting rats in Awele's shop

In Segment 5, frustrated by the endless back-and-forth, Yejide takes a drastic step, instructing Fadekemi to act on her behalf. Following her mother's orders, Fadekemi secretly swaps Awele's kerosene with fuel. Moments later, as Awele ignites her stove, a sudden explosion engulfs her shop in flames, reducing her business to ashes. Enraged, Awele storms into the marketplace, confronting Yejide in a heated clash. Consumed by fury, she accuses Yejide of arson, and their feud erupts into a chaotic public brawl. The women wrestle wildly, knocking over goods as stunned onlookers gather, witnessing the long-standing rivalry reach its most explosive moment yet. (fig. 5).



Figure 5. Awele fights with Yejide

The significance of this sequence lies in the escalating tension and rivalry between the two women, Yejide and Awele. What begins as a series of petty schemes quickly spirals into an all-out battle, reflecting the lengths to which each will go to assert dominance over the other. In the context of the film, this conflict speaks to a broader theme of competition and jealousy, where each woman's desire to outdo the other fuels increasingly extreme actions. In Nigerian culture, rivalries, particularly between women in close familial relationships, are not uncommon. The dynamic between Yejide and Awele mirrors this, where deep-rooted animosities and societal pressures shape their ongoing feud.

In segment 6, The scene shifts back to Lagos, where Ademide is arrested for allegedly stealing from the factory where he works. His stepsister, Ifunnaya, rushes to his aid, determined to secure his release. However, without sufficient evidence to prove his innocence, she is unable to bail him out immediately. Determined to clear his name, Ifunnaya meticulously retraces the events leading to his arrest, gathering crucial evidence from the actual perpetrators of the crime. Her efforts ultimately lead to Ademide's exoneration, highlighting her resilience and resourcefulness in the face of injustice.

In an effort to resolve the escalating feud, Asake advises her daughter, Yejide, to seek spiritual intervention in Segment 7. Following her mother's counsel, Yejide embarks on an intense spiritual quest. She is instructed to climb seven mountains in a single day and, upon completing the climbs,

bathe in a sacred river using a special sponge provided by her spiritual guide (fig. 6). Meanwhile, Awele turns to her own form of spiritual warfare, enlisting the help of prayer warriors to intercede on her behalf. She hopes their prayers will weaken Yejide's influence and bring an end to their long-standing rivalry. However, events take an unfortunate turn for Awele at the prayer house. While she is deep in prayer, a fire unexpectedly breaks out, burning her leg. The accident is caused by the negligence of a prayer assistant, who mishandles burning coal during an incense ritual. The assistant's carelessness results in the fire spreading, leaving Awele injured and in pain.



Figure 6. Yejide ascends the mountain

In Segment 8, flashback is utilised, Yejide reveals to her children, Ademide and Fadekemi, a painful truth from her past. She confesses that she was sexually assaulted by a man and, in an act of self-defence, stabbed him, and that in a bid to protect her, Lanshile took the blame and was imprisoned in her place. As Yejide clears the air, Ademide and Fadekemi gain some closure, realizing the extent of their father's sacrifice. Determined to seek justice on his behalf, they decide to visit Lanshile in his hideout and explore ways to right the wrongs of the past. However, Awele's frail and ailing mother, Ezinne, urges her to let go of the feud and avoid further escalation. In the midst of their conversation, Ezinne succumbs to her illness and passes away, leaving Awele grief-stricken.

In Segment 9, the long-standing rivalry takes a backseat as chaos unfolds at the Otanwa Youth Carnival. Ademide eagerly prepares for his performance, while Awele's three children also attend the festivities. However, the celebration turns disastrous when a sudden stampede erupts, throwing the event into panic. As the crowd scatters, the twins manage to escape unharmed, but Ifunnaya is left injured in the commotion. Despite the tensions between their families, Ademide instinctively steps in to help, taking Ifunnaya to the remote farmhouse where his father, Lanshile, has been hiding. There, he ensures her safety and provides care, momentarily setting aside the animosity between their mothers. The next day, news spreads that five people have gone missing from the carnival, sending shockwaves through the community. A desperate Awele reports her missing daughter to the youth leaders and learns from Ojo that Ifunnaya is with Ademide at the farmhouse. Following the trail, Awele arrives at the farmland, relieved to find Ifunnaya safe but furious at the discovery of Lanshile's presence. Overcome with anger, she threatens to expose him (fig. 7), reigniting old tensions and setting the stage for another confrontation.



Figure 7. Awele threaten to expose Lanshile

In Segment 10, Awele wrestles with her decision but ultimately chooses not to report Lanshile. However, in a final test of loyalty and principle, she still leads the youth on a search of the farmland, creating a tense stand-

off. Realizing that the only way to protect Lanshile is to help him escape, she devises a diversion to shift attention away from him. As the search intensifies, Akinzo and Ojo spot Lanshile, threatening to expose him. But after heartfelt pleas from Ifunnaya, Ademide, and Lanshile himself, Akinzo hesitates. Seeing the desperation in their eyes, he ultimately agrees to let him go, choosing compassion over justice.

Meanwhile, in the climax of the plot (segment 11), Awele's neighbour, Kazeem, steps in to ensure Lanshile's safe escape. Using his farm truck, he discreetly hides Lanshile in the trunk, smuggling him past the suspicious and enraged youth. Just as tensions reach a boiling point, the truck pulls away, securing Lanshile's freedom moments before the police arrive. The film's climax where reconciliation takes precedence over prolonged conflict mirrors African feminism's emphasis on collective well-being rather than radical separatism (Mikell, 1997). While *Battle on Buka Street* critiques patriarchal limitations, it simultaneously advocates for familial unity and social harmony, reinforcing feminist ambivalence as a defining characteristic of contemporary African female filmmaking.

Synopsis of *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023)

A Tribe Called Judah (2023) is a production of the Funke Ayotunde Akindele Network (FAAN), written by Funke Akindele and Tobi Makinde, with script contributions from Nkem Onyekpe and Martins Eze. The movie was directed by Funke Akindele, with cinematography by Femi Adebayo, edited by Tunde Owolabi, and music composed by Tolu Obanro. It was produced by Funke Akindele alongside associate producer Yemisi Oladimeji.

The film centres around Jedidah (played by Funke Akindele), a single mother ostracized by her family due to an unplanned pregnancy. Living in the Kodurotan community, she raises her five children (Ejiro, Emeka, Adamu, Pere, and Shina Judah). Despite financial struggles, Jedidah is resourceful, running a tricycle business and navigating the challenges of motherhood. Her children each have distinct traits and personal conflicts that lead to a mix of humor, drama, and tragedy. The family's dynamics are put to the test when Jedidah collapses and is diagnosed with chronic kidney disease. Her children band together to raise funds for her treatment, culminating in a heist that changes their lives forever.

Feminist Ambivalence in *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023)

The film is clearly divided into several sequences, categorized into eleven distinct plot segments from the opening credits to the end credits. The plot segmentation of *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023) thus:

1. Opening Sequence

- a) The Kodurotan community is introduced, showing its bustling and chaotic environment.
- b) Jedidah wakes from a nightmare of her father disowning her.

2. Jedidah's Struggles

- a) Jedidah is shown managing her tricycle business.

3. The Judah Family Intervenes

- a) Jedidah steps in to defend Linda but is insulted by Linda's husband.
- b) Jedidah's children retaliate, physically assaulting Linda's husband to protect their mother.

4. Grandma's Arrival

- a) Grandma (Ebele Okaro) visit
- b) The children resist her idea, showcasing their rebellious nature.

5. Family Dynamics and Subplots

- a) Collette (Nse Ikpe Etim) works at a furniture store owned by Chairman Chigozie
- b) Adamu plans to marry Halima, but Jedidah refuses to discuss their family background.

6. Ejiro's Deception

- a) Ejiro and his girlfriend, Testimony, disguise themselves as beggars to earn money.
- b) Jedidah discovers their scheme, reprimands Ejiro, and sends Testimony away.

7. Pere's Criminal Activities

- a) Pere is caught pickpocketing by a mob, but Jedidah rescues him.
- b) Emeka confronts Pere, frustrated with his reckless behaviour.

8. Emeka's Workplace Dilemma

- a) Emeka finds a bundle of cash at work and gives it to Collette to return
- b) Shina is arrested but bailed out by Jedidah

9. Jedidah's Health Crisis

- a) Jedidah collapses and is rushed to the hospital
- b) The family struggles to raise funds for her treatment.

10. The Heist Plan

- a) The Judah siblings devise a plan to rob Mr. Chigozie's furniture store

11. The Heist and Betrayal

- a) The siblings execute the heist but are confronted by masked men, including Collette.
- b) Chaos ensues during the heist, leading to Shina's injury and Emeka's death.

12. Resolution

- a) Jedidah mourns Emeka's death, and the family escapes to Aba.

As the opening credits roll, the *Funke Akindele Network (FAAN)* logo fades into view, accompanied by a solemn melody that sets a reflective tone. The credits conclude with a dedication to Dr. R.B. Adebajo Akindele, whose image is displayed alongside the text (fig. 8).

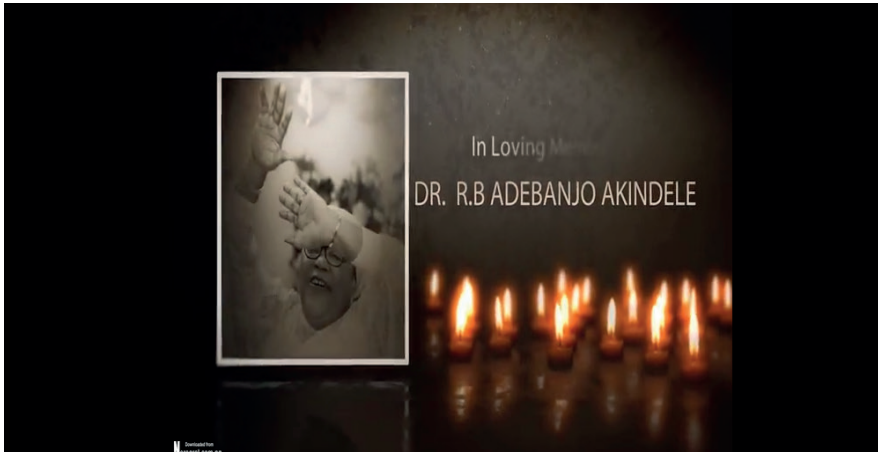


Figure 8. Dedication of the movie to Dr. R.B. Adebajo Akindele

In segment 1, the film begins with an establishing shot of the Kodurotan community, a bustling slum where most of the action unfolds. A wide shot captures rows of dilapidated houses and streets, emphasizing the harsh realities of the setting. The camera transitions to a medium close-up of Jedidah (played by Funke Akindele), who is abruptly awakened by a haunting voice in her dream (fig. 9). The voice, a flashback voiceover of her father accusing her of being a “disgrace to the family” due to her pregnancy out of wedlock reveals the patriarchal values employed in the narrative. As a church leader, her father symbolizes institutionalized patriarchy, where religious and cultural ideologies often place the burden of moral

conduct squarely on women. This creates a tension between Jedidah's choices and the societal expectations imposed upon her. Her father's sternness and disownment also reveal the rigid, unforgiving stance of a patriarchal society that prioritizes reputation over compassion, while Jedidah's remorseful expression conveys her internalized guilt and societal shame.

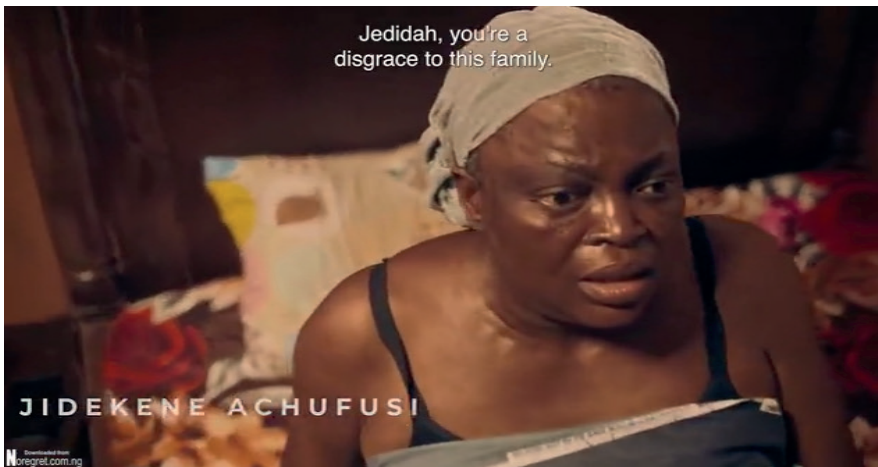


Figure 9. Jedidah wakes from her sleep with a flashback of her father telling her she is a disgrace to the family

In the second sequence, the camera utilises a wide shot as Jedidah's business is brought to light, she owns fleets of Keke Napep (tricycle) which she gives out to young men on hire purchase in trust that they bring daily returns to her. This portrayal embodies feminist ideals by showcasing Jedidah as a self-reliant and entrepreneurial woman, defying societal norms that often restrict women to domestic roles. In a system where power dynamics are often skewed in favour of men, Jedidah's reliance on this network introduces a subtle ambivalence. This duality of empowerment through agency and dependence on a system rooted in patriarchal values encapsulates the core of feminist ambivalence. She also drives one in a local transport business, a kind of job which women rarely do. The film positions her as an entrepreneurial, self-reliant woman, yet her strength is derived primarily from traditional motherhood rather than radical feminist ideals. Her business acumen and ability to sustain her family demonstrate female agency, but this agency remains framed within conventional maternal roles.

In a third segment, the film introduces Linda, a struggling market woman who sells pepper and tomatoes. Her husband, deeply suspicious of the source of her capital, becomes verbally abusive and, in a fit of rage, violently overturns her goods, leading to a heated confrontation. When Jedidah intervenes to separate them, the situation rapidly escalates. Instead of acknowledging his own insecurities and financial inadequacy, Linda's husband redirects his frustration toward Jedidah, blaming her for allegedly interfering in their marriage. He accuses her of funding Linda's business with dubious intentions, despite the fact that Jedidah had only loaned Linda ₦30,000 to help her establish financial independence.

This moment exemplifies feminist ambivalence by exposing the contradictions in how female empowerment is perceived within patriarchal structures. Rather than recognizing Linda's business as a step toward self-reliance, her husband views it as a threat to his authority, reinforcing the societal belief that a woman's financial independence must be monitored and sanctioned by male approval. The conflict reaches a climax when Linda's husband publicly humiliates Jedidah, making derogatory remarks about her having five children from different fathers, an insult meant to discredit her integrity and reinforce patriarchal notions of female respectability.

Jedidah's sons, Ejiro, Emeka, Adamu, Pere, and Oluwashina Judah, immediately rise in her defence. Their swift reaction, culminating in physically confronting Linda's husband (fig. 10), reflects the intersection of matriarchal strength and male solidarity within the household. This scene underscores how African women, while often subject to societal judgment and control, also cultivate strong familial bonds that counterbalance external oppression.

In segment 4, Following the altercation, Jedidah's mother, known as Grandma (played by Ebele Okaro), arrives for a visit. Disturbed by what she perceives as a lack of discipline among Jedidah's children, she proposes taking two of them back with her to Aba, where she believes she can instil proper values and structure. However, the children reject her offer, asserting their autonomy and loyalty to their mother. This scene subtly reflects feminist ambivalence by juxtaposing traditional and modern perspectives on family structure and child-rearing. By presenting this tension, the filmmaker reinforces the duality of African feminism, one that acknowledges the necessity of familial and communal support while also challenging the rigid expectations placed on women as sole bearers of morality and discipline.



Figure 10. Judah family attacks Linda's Husband

In segment 5, in a parallel storyline, the film introduces Collete (played by Nse Ikpe Etim), an employee at Chairman Chigozie Onouha's (Uzor Arukwe) furniture store. Coincidentally, this is also where Jedidah's eldest son, Emeka Judah, works. During a tense moment at the office, Mr. Chigozie receives a call from his wife, alerting him that the Financial Crimes Commission (FCC) is conducting a search of their home. Despite the disruption, the search yields no incriminating evidence, leaving an air of uncertainty surrounding the chairman's financial dealings. The storyline then shifts focus to Adamu Judah, who is eager to formalize his relationship with his fiancée, Halima. However, during a visit to her parents, he finds himself unprepared for their probing questions about his family background. His inability to provide clear answers exposes the tension between personal identity and societal expectations regarding lineage and respectability. In a moment of desperation, Adamu steps away to call his mother, Jedidah, seeking clarity about his roots. However, she remains evasive, refusing to disclose the details of his paternity. Frustrated and disillusioned, Adamu walks away, leaving his future with Halima uncertain.

This subplot highlights feminist ambivalence by showcasing the generational consequences of single motherhood within a patriarchal society. Jedidah's refusal to discuss Adamu's lineage reflects her desire to protect her children from societal judgment while simultaneously struggling with the cultural expectation that a child's legitimacy is intrinsically tied to paternal identity. Adamu's predicament further illustrates the lingering effects of patriarchal norms that prioritize a father's name and status over a mother's unwav-

ering commitment to her children. By weaving this tension into the narrative, the film makers in *A Tribe Called Judah* critiques the rigid social structures that continue to define identity and family legitimacy through male lineage, despite the resilience and sacrifice of single mothers like Jedidah.

In segment 6, Testimony, played by Genoveva Umeh, is exposed as the girlfriend of Ejiro, Jedidah's youngest child. The camera zooms in for a close-up, transitioning into a subplot that reveals Ejiro and Testimony disguising themselves as peasants to beg for money in distant areas where they won't be recognized (fig. 4). Upon their return, Jedidah catches the two in a secluded part of the house, kissing and celebrating their earnings from the scheme. Confronting them, she presents evidence she had gathered of their begging. Though they try to claim it was merely a skit, Jedidah sends Testimony away and confiscates the money from Ejiro.

In Segment 7, another pivotal scene, the film introduces Pere Judah, the most delinquent of Jedidah's children, who has resorted to a life of crime, engaging in pickpocketing and petty theft. His reckless choices catch up with him when he is apprehended by an enraged mob, who, in a typical display of street justice, prepare to mete out brutal punishment. Just as the situation reaches a critical point, Jedidah arrives, forcefully intervening to prevent the mob from exacting their vengeance. Her commanding presence and desperate pleas manage to disperse the crowd, allowing her to whisk Pere away to safety. However, the ordeal does not end there. Overwhelmed by frustration and the emotional toll of constantly shielding her children from the consequences of their actions, Jedidah is visibly shaken. Witnessing his mother's distress, Emeka Judah her eldest son and the family's moral compass snaps. Unable to contain his anger, he lashes out at Pere, violently confronting him despite the younger sibling already being battered from the mob attack.

The highlight of this sequence encapsulates the film's exploration of feminist ambivalence by presenting Jedidah as both a fierce protector and an enforcer of discipline. Her unwavering defence of Pere highlights the deep maternal instinct to shield her children, even when their actions are indefensible. Yet, through Emeka's reaction, the film also highlights the burden placed on single mothers who must constantly mediate between unconditional love and the need for accountability.

In segment 8; at the furniture store, Emeka diligently arranges chairs when he unexpectedly discovers a bundle of cash on the floor. Without hesitation, he hands it over to Collete, instructing her to return it to Chairman Chigozie. However, later that day, when Emeka informs the chairman

about the missing money, he is shocked to learn that Collete never returned it. This revelation deepens the growing animosity between Collete and Emeka, as her resentment toward him intensifies. His unwavering honesty stands in stark contrast to her questionable morality, setting the stage for further conflict. Meanwhile, as Emeka makes his way home, chaos erupts when the police arrive at Jedidah's house to arrest Shina Judah. He is accused of vandalizing a truck at a construction site, further adding to the family's troubles. The film then shifts its focus back to Mr. Chigozie, whose own moral ambiguity comes to light. In a dark, ominously lit basement, he is seen attempting to execute someone he suspects of trying to steal the same bundle of money that Emeka had innocently stumbled upon.

The narrative then returns to Jedidah's home, where her resilience is once again put to the test. In a desperate attempt to secure Shina's release, she makes a difficult sacrifice, selling one of her tricycles, a key source of her income. This selfless act highlights her unwavering devotion to her children, even as they continue to make choices that jeopardize their future. Upon returning home, she gathers Pere and Shina, pleading with them to abandon their reckless lifestyles. Her impassioned plea mirrors her internal conflict as a mother torn between unconditional love and the harsh reality that, despite her sacrifices, she cannot single-handedly dictate their paths. This sequence exemplifies feminist ambivalence by portraying Jedidah as both an empowered, resourceful provider and a woman trapped in an unrelenting cycle of sacrifice and disappointment, illustrating how African women must navigate not only patriarchal limitations but also the harsh socio-economic realities that shape their lives.

In segment 9; determined to reform, Pere secures a job at a supermarket in the same mall where Adamu and Emeka work. Adamu, sceptical of Pere's sudden change, questions how he got the job, reflecting lingering distrust within the family. At home, Jedidah urges her sons to stay united but suddenly collapses (fig. 11). At the hospital, the doctor diagnoses her with chronic kidney disease and hypertension, shifting the family's struggles from external conflicts to an urgent fight for survival. Desperate for funds, Emeka seeks a loan from his boss, Mr. Chigozie, but is refused, while Adamu also faces rejection from his employers. Meanwhile, Testimony borrows her brother's cab to raise money, and Shina, returning to crime, fails to extort workers at a construction site. Despite these struggles, Jedidah is discharged, prompting Grandma's visit. However, her condition worsens as she misses dialysis sessions due to high costs. Emeka, frequently leaving work to care for her, is eventually fired.



Figure 11. Jedidah Collapses

In segment 10, The story takes a dramatic turn when the brothers uncover Mr. Chigozie's money laundering operation, realizing he has been hoarding large sums of dollars in his office. With Emeka still in possession of the store keys, an unexpected opportunity emerges. Determined to act, Adamu seeks support from his fellow mall security guards, Pluto and Jerry. They identify an upcoming costume party at the mall as the perfect cover for a heist. Disguising themselves in costumes, they plan to break into Chigozie's furniture store during the event. Initially hesitant, Emeka, overwhelmed by his family's financial struggles and desperate to save Jedidah, ultimately agrees to participate.

In segment 11, on the day of the heist, the camera is made in slow motion, heightens the tension as the Judah siblings, dressed in elaborate costumes, arrive at the mall. In an unexpected twist, Ejiro confides in Testimony, who insists on joining them. The brothers, fearing she might compromise their mission, order Ejiro to send her away. Meanwhile, Pluto and Jerry, the security guards involved in the scheme, work to divert police attention, ensuring the operation remains undetected.

Inside the furniture store, the Judah brothers successfully locate the hidden stash of dollars. However, just as they believe the plan is unfolding smoothly, a masked gang ambushes them, turning the heist into a violent standoff. Chaos erupts as the masked men kill Pluto and demand the stolen money. Amid the scuffle, Collette is unmasked as one of the attackers. The situation escalates when Shina is shot, and their getaway vehicle is sabotaged. In a desperate bid to escape, Emeka is shot from behind. Despite

Shina's attempt to seek help from his former gang, Emeka succumbs to his injuries (fig. 12), leaving the family devastated.



Figure 12. Emeka dies from the gunshot wound

In the resolution (segment 12), as the canoe carrying Adamu, Jedidah, Shina, Pere, and Ejiro makes its way to safety, the hidden basement of Mr. Chigozie is uncovered, leading to his arrest by the police. Meanwhile, just in time, Testimony arrives at the abattoir and intervenes as one of Chigozie's men is about to strike. She successfully thwarts the attack, ensuring the group's safety before joining them in their escape. Together, they flee via canoe to Aba, seeking temporary refuge from the chaos that has upended their lives. Later, Grandma reunites with them, making her way to Aba by bus.

Thematic Comparisons and Implications

Both *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023) and *Battle on Buka Street* (2022) examine feminist ambivalence through women who challenge traditional roles yet remain constrained by cultural and societal structures. Funke Akindele's films advocate for female agency while acknowledging the enduring power of patriarchal norms, reinforcing a duality that defines contemporary African female filmmaking.

A significant takeaway from these films is their portrayal of gendered power dynamics. Unlike Western feminist narratives that often depict an

outright rejection of patriarchal norms, African female filmmakers, such as Akindele, adopt a more integrative approach, advocating for gender equality while recognizing cultural realities. This aligns with Belsey and Moore's (1989) assertion that feminist representation is deeply contextual and shaped by socio-cultural frameworks.

In *Battle on Buka Street* (2022), feminist ambivalence is explored through the rivalry between Asake and Ezinne, as well as their daughters, Yejide and Awele. On the surface, the film portrays female entrepreneurship as a marker of agency, showcasing women as financially independent business owners. However, this independence is framed within a structure of rivalry rather than solidarity, reinforcing the stereotype that women are competitive rather than supportive of one another. Instead of forming alliances to challenge the patriarchal structures that influence their struggles, these women engage in battles of dominance, which inadvertently perpetuate gendered conflict.

A Tribe Called Judah offers a different but equally compelling portrayal of feminist ambivalence, centring on Jedidah's struggle as a single mother raising five sons. The film positions Jedidah as a figure of strength and determination, she is a businesswoman who owns multiple tricycles and independently sustains her family despite financial hardship. In this regard, she embodies feminist ideals of self-sufficiency and perseverance. This positions her as a figure of empowerment, challenging the notion that women must rely on men for financial security.

This analysis demonstrates that Feminist Ambivalence is a prominent feature in Contemporary African Female Filmmaking, where traditional cultural norms intersect with the progressive ideals of 21st-century feminism. Funke Akindele's work exemplifies how African female filmmakers navigate these conflicting forces, striving to preserve the insurrectionary spirit of women's liberation while advocating for gender equality. The study highlights the tension between empowering depictions of women and the entrenched societal structures that continue to influence their lives. It offers a critical perspective on how African female filmmakers confront and negotiate these complex gender dynamics within their narratives.

Conclusion

In contemporary African cinema, female filmmakers like Funke Akindele navigate a complex terrain where feminist ideals intersect with deep-

ly ingrained cultural traditions. *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023) and *Battle on Buka Street* (2022) exemplify this ambivalence, portraying women as both independent figures and products of societal expectations. Through humor, conflict, and resilience, these films explore the struggles of African women, not through outright defiance of patriarchy, but through negotiation, survival, and familial solidarity.

The presence of feminist ambivalence in contemporary African female filmmaking underscores the intricate balance between empowerment and tradition. Funke Akindele's films serve as cultural texts that navigate this complexity, illustrating how African women negotiate their identities within patriarchal societies. Rather than presenting feminism as a binary opposition to tradition, these films suggest that gender equality in African contexts is often achieved through negotiation, resilience, and communal solidarity. This study thus affirms that African female filmmakers continue to reshape gender narratives, offering portrayals that are both progressive and deeply rooted in cultural authenticity.

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