

Article

Institutional Assertion and Feminist Resistance in Nollywood, 2010–2025: Beyond Eurocentric CDA

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Abstract

*This article examines feminist discourse in five contemporary African women's films produced between 2010 and 2025: *Lionheart* (2018), *King of Boys: The Return of the King* (2021), *The Boss Lady* (2023), *The Uprising: Wives on Strike 3* (2024), and *Irreplaceable* (2024). Drawing on Fairclough's (2021) three-dimensional critical discourse analysis (CDA) integrated with five African feminist epistemologies – motherism, stiwanism, nego-feminism, womanism/Africana womanism, and post-motherism – the study demonstrates how institutional assertion, professional authority, legal discourse, and political sovereignty function as culturally grounded forms of feminist resistance. Analysis of modality, transitivity, and evaluative lexis (Tables 2–4) shows a decisive shift from domestic negotiation to public, legally literate, and institutionally embedded assertion. A systematic comparison of Eurocentric and African feminist readings (Table 5) demonstrates that Eurocentric CDA systematically misreads code-switching, silence, care, and maternal authority as ambivalence, passivity, or retreat, whereas African feminist epistemologies recover them as strategic authority. The article argues that African feminist epistemologies are methodologically necessary, not merely additive, for interpreting contemporary African feminist cinematic discourse.*

Keywords: Institutional assertion, African feminist epistemologies, Critical Discourse Analysis, Nollywood, Feminist sovereignty, Legal discourse

Introduction

The contemporary period of African women's filmmaking, here defined as 2010–2025, is characterised by a decisive shift from domestic and conjugal negotiation to institutional and professional assertion. Whereas earlier Nollywood scholarship documented women negotiating power primarily within marriage, kinship, and spiritual economies (Haynes, 2016; Garritano, 2013), recent women-directed and women-centred productions place heroines in boardrooms, courtrooms, security apparatuses, and electoral politics. This study examines five purposively selected contemporary films: *Lionheart* (Nnaji, 2018), *King of Boys: The Return of the King* (Adetiba, 2021), *The Boss Lady* (Oduah, 2023), *The Uprising: Wives on Strike 3* (Oboli, 2024), and *Irreplaceable* (Oboli, 2024). Together they span corporate drama, political crime epic, workplace legal drama, collective activism comedy-drama, and care-centred domestic drama, permitting comparison across genres while holding period and women-centredness constant.

The study addresses three interlinked gaps. First, feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2022; Wodak & Meyer, 2024) has rarely been applied systematically to Nollywood dialogue using systemic functional tools (modality, transitivity, evaluation) linked to timestamps and speaker roles. Second, African feminist theory – motherism (Acholonu, 1995), stiwanism (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994), nego-feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), womanism (Ogunyemi, 1985;

Hudson-Weems, 1993), and the emerging post-motherist attention to professional-maternal negotiation (Sotunsa et al., 2024)—is frequently invoked as background but seldom operationalised as an analytic procedure for interpreting specific lexical and grammatical choices. Third, decolonial critiques of CDA (Shohat & Stam, 2014) assert Eurocentric misreading but seldom demonstrate it side-by-side on the same discourse events. This article responds by maintaining a rigorous division of labour throughout: CDA identifies the linguistic mechanics of power; African feminist epistemologies explain the cultural-ideological significance of those mechanics within African sociocultural systems.

The study is guided by four research questions: (a) How do modality, transitivity, and evaluative language encode institutional authority in contemporary African women's films? (b) How do these encodings differ from domestic-negotiation strategies documented for the classic cohort? (c) What does each of the five African feminist epistemologies uniquely illuminate that CDA alone cannot? (d) What precisely does a decolonised African feminist CDA recover that a Eurocentric CDA misreads? The central argument is that institutional assertion, legal literacy, and sovereign self-naming constitute culturally specific feminist sovereignty that can be neither reduced to Western liberal confrontationalism nor dismissed as imitation of masculine power.

The periodisation 2010–2025 is not merely chronological but technological and institutional. The return to cinema exhibition, the entry of Netflix and Amazon Prime licensing in Nigeria from 2018, and the parallel rise of high-volume YouTube distribution through channels such as Omoni Oboli TV created new funding, censorship, and address conditions. Women directors who previously worked within low-budget video economies could now command larger crews, legal advisers, and transnational audiences. This infrastructural shift matters for discourse: characters can plausibly threaten lawsuits, convene board votes, or invoke televised exposure because the institutions those speech acts presuppose are now narratively available. The article therefore treats institutional assertion as both theme and felicity condition — what heroines can do with words has expanded because the worlds those words presuppose have expanded.

Literature Review

From Domestic Negotiation to Institutional Assertion

Nollywood historiography distinguishes an early video era dominated by moral-domestic melodrama from a contemporary era marked by higher production values, cinema and streaming distribution, and women's expanded authorship as directors and producers (Haynes, 2016; Garritano, 2013; Givanni, 2019). Early gender scholarship emphasised suffering heroines, witchcraft accusations, and Pentecostal moralism. More recent work notes a generational shift: heroines who litigate, lead companies, command security networks, and refuse substitutability (Salo & Mama, 2024; Sotunsa et al., 2024). This article periodises 2010–2025 as the institutional turn and tests that claim linguistically rather than thematically.

Kalejaiye (2024) and Anjorin-Ojewole et al. (2025) provide a West African pragma-gender and political-discourse foundation showing how modality and slogan lexis encode authority and belonging. Ochonogor and Adam (2025) extend this to film dialogue. The present study builds on that foundation but moves beyond single-film illustration to systematic cross-film comparison with enriched linguistic tables.

Women’s authorship is central to that infrastructural claim. Genevieve Nnaji’s directorial debut with *Lionheart* (2018), Kemi Adetiba’s showrunning of *King of Boys: The Return of the King* (2021) as a seven-episode prestige series, and Omoni Oboli’s dual role as director-producer-star across *The Uprising: Wives on Strike 3* (2024) and *Irreplaceable* (2024) exemplify a move from being imaged by others to controlling image, script, and distribution. Even where direction is male-credited, as in *The Boss Lady* (Oduah, 2023, produced by Uche Nancy), the commissioning and audience address remain women-centred, with extended workplace and disclosure scenes that presume a female interpretive community. The study therefore analyses authorship at Fairclough’s meso-level: who produces, for whom, on which platform, and with what generic expectations.

Feminist CDA and Its Limits on African Data

Feminist CDA (Lazar, 2022) usefully exposes how grammar naturalises patriarchy through nominalisation, agent deletion, and evaluative asymmetry. Cognitive CDA (Hart, 2022) and sociocognitive approaches (van Dijk, 2011, 2016) add attention to ideology and shared knowledge. Yet applied without cultural mediation, these frameworks risk reading African strategies – indirection, proverbial negotiation, spiritual authority, maternal address, code-switching – as hedging, false consciousness, or instability. Shohat and Stam (2014) and Stam (2000) theorise Eurocentrism in film theory but do not provide a linguistic protocol for correction. Table 5 below supplies that protocol.

African Feminist Epistemologies as Interpretive Resources

The study draws on five complementary traditions. Motherism centres maternal, spiritual, and communal authority as power rather than retreat (Acholonu, 1995). Stiwanism insists that feminist transformation must engage social, political, and economic structures (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). Nego-feminism theorises negotiation, compromise, and manoeuvring within communal norms as resistance rather than complicity (Nnaemeka, 2004). Womanism and Africana womanism centre race, kinship, survival, and spiritual wholeness alongside gender (Ogunyemi, 1985; Hudson-Weems, 1993). Post-motherism, as elaborated in recent Nigerian gender and leadership scholarship (Sotunsa et al., 2024), addresses how contemporary professional women combine, refuse, or revalue maternal and corporate registers without accepting that institutional authority is inherently masculine. No single lens suffices; together they allow the analyst to distinguish communal negotiation from co-optation and sovereignty from mimicry.

Theoretical Framework

The framework integrates Fairclough’s (2021) three dimensions – text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice – with the five epistemologies above. The rule applied throughout is explicit: every claim about feminist significance must be traceable to an identifiable linguistic feature (modal verb, process type, participant role, evaluative item, speech act), and every linguistic feature must be interpreted through a named African feminist logic. Speech act theory (Austin, 1962) supplements the analysis for legal threats, verdicts, and naming acts, which do things with words in Austin’s sense.

Table 1

Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional CDA Integrated With African Feminist Epistemologies

Dimension	Analytical Focus	CDA Tools Applied	African Feminist Epistemology
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Textual (micro)	Vocabulary, modality, transitivity, evaluative lexis, speech acts, metaphor	SFL mood and modality; transitivity; evaluative lexis; speech-act classification	Nego-feminism: negotiatory modality as resistance. Motherism/womanism: maternal authority in speech acts. Stiwanism: structural critique in institutional lexis.
Discursive practice (meso)	Production context; intertextuality; genre; distribution (cinema, Netflix, YouTube)	Intertextual and genre analysis; audience positioning	Nego-feminism: communal norms shaping production. Stiwanism: postcolonial media structures. Post-motherism: professional-maternal genres.
Sociocultural practice (macro)	Ideology, patriarchy, postcolonial state, generational feminist shift	Ideological and hegemony analysis; postcolonial CDA	Stiwanism: discourse within African transformation. Motherism: challenge to Western readings. Nego-feminism: resistance within accommodation.

Note. SFL = systemic functional linguistics. Each textual finding is cross-referenced to Tables 2–4.

The Five Epistemologies in Analytic Use

In coding, motherism flags maternal-sovereign declaratives, care lexis, and spiritual imperatives; stiwanism flags institutional, legal, and systemic lexis (*all, system, sue, harassment, guilty*); nego-feminism flags collective pronouns, code-switching, and mitigated directives that preserve relational space while asserting will; womanism flags survival, kinship, and sacred framing of collective action; post-motherism flags explicit juxtaposition or refusal of maternal versus corporate expectations. An utterance may attract more than one code, but the article assigns a primary lens and justifies it.

Method

Research Design and Corpus

The study uses qualitative feminist CDA of scripted film dialogue. The corpus comprises five women-centred contemporary productions selected purposively for (a) release date 2018–2024 within the 2010–2025 window, (b) centrality of a female protagonist exercising institutional authority, (c) women’s authorship (direction/production) or explicit women-centred address, and (d) genre diversity. Table A summarises the corpus. *Lionheart* (dir. Genevieve Nnaji; prod. Chinny Onwugbenu, 2018) and *King of Boys: The Return of the King* (limited series, dir. Kemi Adetiba, 2021) received cinema and Netflix distribution; *The Boss Lady* (dir. Chigozie Oduah; prod. Uche Nancy, 2023) and *Irreplaceable* (Omoni Oboli TV, 2024) circulated substantially via YouTube; *The Uprising: Wives on Strike 3* (dir. Omoni Oboli, 2024) received nationwide cinema release. This distribution spread itself evidences women’s expanded institutional access.

Data and Transcription

Films were viewed in full with subtitles where available. Key discourse events – scenes in which authority is claimed, contested, or redefined – were transcribed orthographically with speaker, addressee, timestamp (h:mm:ss), and language (English, Igbo, code-switched). Timestamps refer to commercially available versions as listed in the Filmography; minor platform variation is possible. Analysis is delimited to verbal discourse (lexis, grammar, speech acts); visual semiosis (shot, dress, proxemics) is noted only where it disambiguates speaker stance. This delimitation is acknowledged as a limitation.

Analytical Procedure

Analysis proceeded in three passes. First, utterances were coded for modality (epistemic, deontic/volitional, boulomaic; hedged vs. zero-hedged declaratives), transitivity (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioural processes with participant roles per Hallidayan SFL), and evaluation (pejorative, approbative, dysphemism, minimiser). Second, each coded feature was assigned a Faircloughian function (e.g., deontic *will* as future obligation; collective *all* as systemic scope; zero hedging as sovereign certainty). Third, each function was interpreted through the best-fitting African feminist lens using the coding heuristics above, with explicit contrast to the plausible Eurocentric reading recorded in Table 5. To ensure dependability, all table entries were cross-checked against the transcribed co-text and reviewed by the second author. The study analyses public cultural texts; no human participants were involved.

To strengthen trustworthiness, the first author completed primary transcription and coding, the second author independently checked 40% of coded utterances for modality and process-type assignment, and disagreements – principally around volitional versus epistemic readings of *will* and around verbal versus behavioural coding of code-switching – were resolved by joint re-viewing of scene co-text. Positionality is acknowledged: the analysts write as Nigerian-based feminist linguists sympathetic to African feminist epistemologies, and the contrast table (Table 5) is used reflexively to make alternative readings visible rather than to caricature Eurocentric work. All data are public commercial texts; titles, timestamps, and distributors are reported to permit verification. Transcripts are orthographic rather than Jeffersonian, since the analytic focus is lexical-grammatical choice rather than prosodic timing, though emphatic stress is noted in discussion where it disambiguates intent.

Enriched Linguistic Analysis

Tables 2–4 present the linguistic evidence base. Prose discussion in the next section explicates selected rows; the tables permit audit of every claim. The modality table corrects a common confusion: *will* in *We will not* and *I will sue you* is volitional-deontic (commitment/threat), not epistemic prediction. What matters is who can felicitously utter such futures and have them taken as binding.

Table 2

Modality Analysis – Contemporary Cohort (2010–2025)

Film	Utterance	Modal Type	Modality Value
The Uprising: Wives on Strike 3 (2024)	We will not. It ends here.	Collective volitional-deontic will + sovereign declarative	Collective obligation and closure; high certainty

The Uprising: Wives on Strike 3 (2024)	You are all guilty.	High-certainty epistemic declarative	Systemic indictment; collective scope via all
Lionheart (2018)	We will take it. Leave that to me.	Volitional-deontic will + directive imperative	Professional authority without aggression
King of Boys: Return of the King (2021)	Nothing happens without my knowledge.	Sovereign declarative; zero hedging	Absolute epistemic certainty; dominance
King of Boys: Return of the King (2021)	I am evil incarnate.	Relational attributive declarative	Reclaimed stigmatised identity as resilience
The Boss Lady (2023)	I will sue you for harassment.	Deontic will + legal commissive/threat	Future obligation; bodily autonomy as enforceable right
Irreplaceable (2024)	She is irreplaceable.	Relational attributive; zero modality	Ontological certainty; contests substitutability

Note. All utterances transcribed from commercial releases. Timestamps are given in the Discussion section.

Table 3

Transitivity Analysis – Contemporary Cohort (2010–2025)

Film	Clause	Process Type	Participants
Wives on Strike 3 (2024)	Suaga exposes the interlocking betrayals.	Material	Suaga (Actor); betrayals (Goal)
Lionheart (2018)	Adaeze code-switches between Igbo and English.	Verbal/behavioural	Adaeze (Sayer/Behaver); discourse (Verbiage)
King of Boys (2021)	Eniola declares nothing happens without my knowledge.	Relational: possessive	Eniola (Token); knowledge (Attribute/Scope)
King of Boys (2021)	Eniola pleads with her son.	Verbal: commissive/plea	Eniola (Sayer); son (Target); plea (Verbiage)
The Boss Lady (2023)	Melissa threatens to sue Jason.	Verbal: threat	Melissa (Sayer); Jason (Target); lawsuit (Verbiage)
The Boss Lady (2023)	Melissa discloses the rape.	Verbal: disclosure	Melissa (Sayer); assault history (Verbiage)
Irreplaceable (2024)	Mother declares she is irreplaceable. / I see this role as lacking motherly care.	Relational: attributive + mental (see)	Mother (Carrier); irreplaceable (Attribute); carer (Senser)

Note. SFL process types follow Hallidayan grammar. Material = doing; verbal = saying; relational = being/having; mental = sensing.

Table 4

Evaluative Lexis – Contemporary Cohort Only

Film	Evaluative Term(s)	Evaluative Type	CDA + African Feminist Interpretation
Wives on Strike 3 (2024)	guilty (You are all guilty)	Moral-legal evaluative adjective + universal quantifier	CDA: all extends blame from individual to system. Stiwanism:

			exposure as feminist justice.
Wives on Strike 3 (2024)	stripper (of Sandra)	Sexual dysphemism (female-to-female)	CDA: patriarchal norm policing. Post-motherism: internalised patriarchy reproduced by women; limit case.
Lionheart (2018)	Leave that to me (dismissive imperative)	Professional directive; brusque solidarity	CDA: encodes competence. Nego-feminism: authority without rupture of kinship decorum.
King of Boys (2021)	evil incarnate (self-applied)	Dysphemistic self-attribution, reclaimed	CDA: stigma embraced as resilience. Stiwanism/womanism: deflection of delegitimation.
King of Boys (2021)	No shaking	Pidgin minimiser; steadfastness formula	CDA: informal register encodes unshakeable control. Motherism: sovereign calm as maternal-political style.
The Boss Lady (2023)	unacceptable (of reports)	Professional pejorative	CDA: institutional evaluation. Post-motherism: refusal of feminine accommodativeness at work.
The Boss Lady (2023)	Harassment	Legal-moral nominalisation	CDA: transforms experience into actionable category. Stiwanism: rights assertion through formal law.
Irreplaceable (2024)	irreplaceable; motherly care	Positive relational attribute + care nominal	CDA: contests substitutability. Motherism/womanism: care as feminist epistemology of value.

Note. Earlier drafts included pre-2010 evaluatives; those belong to the classic-cohort companion study and are removed here to preserve periodisation.

Eurocentric Misreading Versus African Feminist CDA

Table 5 records, for the same discourse event, what a decontextualised Eurocentric CDA tends to conclude and what an African feminist CDA recovers. The point is not that Eurocentric tools are useless—they supply the left column—but that without African interpretive resources they pathologise negotiation, silence, spirituality, and care.

Table 5

Eurocentric Misreading Versus African Feminist CDA Reading of Key Contemporary Discourse Events

Discourse Event	Eurocentric CDA Reading	African Feminist CDA Reading	What Is Recovered
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Suaga's surveillance reveal: I have been watching all along [01:26:20]	Deception; complicity with patriarchal surveillance	Stiwanist institutional infiltration: feminist justice through the security apparatus	Institutional embeddedness as resistance, not betrayal
Adaeze's Igbo-English code-switching [00:02:14]	Linguistic instability; caught-between-ness	Nego-feminist strategic positioning in dual registers	Code-switching as competence and authority
Eniola's Nothing happens without my knowledge [00:59:21]	Masculinised criminal authoritarianism	Motherist maternal-sovereign authority	Distinctly African register of sovereignty
Eniola's plea to her son [00:58:20]	Sentimental weakness undermining power	Motherist complementarity: tenderness and sovereignty co-present	Maternal address as political resource
Melissa's I will sue you for harassment [00:40:24]	Individualist legalism; Western import	Stiwanist rights assertion through available law	Legal literacy as culturally situated feminism
Melissa's rape disclosure [02:08:10]; carer's I see this role as lacking motherly care [01:33:32]	Trauma oversharing; retreat to domesticity	Post-motherist disclosure + motherist/womanist care epistemology	Confession and care as refusal of invisibilisation

Note. Bracketed codes are approximate timestamps in commercial releases and are provided for verifiability.

Analysis and Discussion

The Uprising: Wives on Strike 3 (2024): Collective Refusal and Feminist Justice

Oboli's third *Wives on Strike* instalment centres market women's collective sex strike against domestic violence and political complicity. Two utterances carry the film's feminist grammar. First, the choral *We will not. It ends here* (Table 2) uses collective first-person plural with volitional *will* plus a sovereign declarative of closure. CDA identifies future commitment plus temporal deixis (*here*) as encoding binding certainty; nego-feminism and womanism explain why the plural matters: refusal is communal, sacredly framed, and therefore protected from dismissal as individual stubbornness. Second, undercover operative Suaga's reveal, *I have been watching all along* [01:26:20] (Table 3: material process, Suaga as Actor), repositions surveillance—normally patriarchal—as feminist evidence-gathering. Her verdict, *You are all guilty*, extends evaluation from persons to system via the quantifier *all*. Stiwanism names this precisely: feminist resistance operating *through* institutions rather than outside them. The limit case—women calling Sandra *stripper* (Table 4)—shows post-motherism's critical edge: women can also police one another through patriarchal evaluation, and the film does not endorse it.

Visually, Suaga's reveal is staged as a courtroom-like tableau — women seated, men standing at the margins — so that her material process (exposing) is also a spatial reversal: the watched become the judges. The perfect aspect in *I have been watching all along* encodes both duration and completion, implying admissible evidence rather than gossip. Importantly, the film does not romanticise collectivity: the stripper insult and early quarrels over strike-breaking show negotiation under strain, which nego-feminism expects. Feminist sovereignty here is therefore procedural as well as declarative — it must survive disagreement and still utter *we*.

Lionheart (2018): Code-Switching, Corporate Authority, and Nego-Feminist Strategy

Adaeze (Nnaji), passed over for her uncle in her father's transport company, must lead without appearing to usurp. Her opening code-switch between Igbo and English [00:02:14] (Table 3: verbal/behavioural process) is pivotal. A deficit reading hears instability; nego-feminism, following Nnaemeka (2004), hears deliberate cultural positioning – claiming both indigenous kinship legitimacy and global corporate intelligibility in one move. CDA supports the latter: as Sayer/Behaver she controls both codes and both audiences. Her boardroom *We will take it. Leave that to me* combines volitional *will* with a brusque directive. There is no hedging, no apology, yet no masculinist insult. Post-motherism clarifies the achievement: professional and kinship registers are combined rather than traded. Adaeze does not cease to be daughter/niece to become executive; she is both, and the grammar carries both.

A further linguistic detail supports the nego-feminist reading. Adaeze habitually frames directives with inclusive *we* (*We will take it*) before shifting to singular *me* (*Leave that to me*), distributing risk to the collective before claiming personal responsibility. This pronominal choreography preserves her late father's lineage honour while asserting executive control, a balance her uncle Godswill fails by resorting to bluster. The camera reinforces the point with sustained mid-shots in the boardroom that hold her centred while male interlocutors enter and exit the frame – institutional space reorganised around her stillness rather than their volume.

King of Boys: The Return of the King (2021): Maternal Sovereignty

Eniola Salami (Sola Sobowale), returning from exile to contest political power, speaks the most sovereign idiolect in the corpus: *Nothing happens without my knowledge* [00:59:21] and *No shaking*. CDA identifies zero hedging, present-tense universal quantification (*nothing*), and relational-possessive transitivity (Eniola as Token of knowledge) as encoding self-evident authority. Motherism (Acholonu, 1995) is indispensable here: this is not a woman imitating a godfather but a maternal-sovereign register in which omniscience, calm reprimand, and spiritual gravity are culturally legible as legitimate rule. Hence *I am evil incarnate* is not confession but reclamation – absorbing patriarchal demonisation and returning it as untouchability (Table 4). Crucially, her tender plea to her son [00:58:20] (verbal commissive) does not cancel sovereignty; motherism reads tenderness and command as complementary rather than contradictory. A Eurocentric lens that opposes maternal softness to political hardness cannot parse this scene.

Eniola's Pidgin *No shaking* deserves separate attention as evaluative minimisation turned sovereignty. Where standard English might require a paragraph of reassurance, the two-word formula dismisses threat with contemptuous economy, and its informal register signals that she need not borrow prestige English to command. Her self-naming as *evil incarnate* similarly inverts a dysphemism frequently directed at powerful women in Nigerian public discourse. By voicing it herself in a relational clause (*I am*), she occupies the Carrier role and denies opponents the power of naming. The plea to her son then demonstrates the framework's range: the same speaker moves from zero-hedged universals to mitigated commissives without loss of authority, precisely because motherism theorises care and command as one repertoire.

The Boss Lady (2023): Legal Discourse and Disclosure as Survival

Workplace drama provides the corpus's clearest legal feminist grammar. Melissa's *I will sue you for harassment* [00:40:24] is, in Austin's (1962) terms, both threat and commissive: it

commits the speaker to a future institutional act and thereby transforms bodily autonomy from moral plea into enforceable right. CDA identifies deontic *will* plus legal nominalisation (*harassment*); stiwanism explains the cultural work: using the available—if imperfect—formal justice system is itself feminist praxis in a context where customary settlement pressures women toward silence. Her later rape disclosure [02:08:10] (verbal: disclosing, Table 3) refuses the secrecy that protects perpetrators. Post-motherism names the confessional verbal process as feminist labour: speech that risks respectability to secure survival. Her evaluation of substandard work as *unacceptable* (Table 4) further marks refusal of the expectation that women managers soften institutional judgment.

The legal grammar is reinforced by repetition across scenes: harassment first appears as reported experience, then as threatened action (I will sue), then as filed possibility discussed with a colleague. This chain transforms a mental/affective process (she suffered) into a verbal/legal process (she charges) into a material/institutional process (the system must respond). Stiwanism captures why the middle step matters most in the Nigerian context, where family and workplace mediation often press women to settle informally. To insist on suing is to insist that the state, not kin, adjudicates bodily harm. The disclosure scene [02:08:10] is filmed in a prolonged static take that refuses cutaway, obliging the viewer to remain with the Verbiage rather than aestheticising it — disclosure as endurance.

Irreplaceable (2024): Care as Feminist Epistemology

The Omoni Oboli TV domestic drama makes the subtlest claim: naming care is feminist theory. The carer's *I see this role as lacking motherly care* [01:33:32] uses the mental verb *see* to assert an epistemology of value—only attentive labour perceives its own absence. CDA identifies mental-relational transitivity (Senser, Phenomenon) as encoding situated knowledge; motherism and womanism (Ogunyemi, 1985; Hudson-Weems, 1993) recover care, survival, and kinship maintenance as knowledge production contesting patriarchal invisibilisation. The titular *She is irreplaceable* [01:34:13] (relational attributive, zero modality, Table 2) directly contests substitutability—the assumption that any woman can replace another woman. Against a Eurocentric reading that hears retreat to domesticity, African feminist lenses hear refusal: relational labour, once named, commands recognition and remuneration.

The care argument gains force when contrasted with the employer's language, which repeatedly quantifies domestic labour in substitutable terms (get another girl, anyone can do it). Against that discourse of infinite replacement, the relational attribute *irreplaceable* functions as what Austin would call a verdictive: it confers a status that alters entitlements. The mental verb *see* (I see this role as lacking motherly care) is therefore not mere opinion but testimony — the kind of situated seeing that womanism treats as authoritative knowledge. The film closes not with marriage but with renegotiated recognition of the carer, suggesting post-motherism's core proposition: maternal value need not be self-sacrificing to be feminist; it can demand answerability.

Across the five films, the trajectory is consistent: from mitigated negotiation toward unhedged, institutionally consequential assertion—verdicts, contracts, lawsuits, sovereign declarations—without abandonment of maternal, communal, or spiritual registers. That combination is the article's definition of contemporary feminist sovereignty.

Conclusion

Contemporary African women's films (2010–2025) deploy a linguistically demonstrable feminist sovereignty: collective volition (*we will not*), systemic indictment (*all guilty*), professional directiveness (*leave that to me*), sovereign omniscience (*nothing without my knowledge*), legal commissives (*I will sue*), and care attribution (*irreplaceable*). The enriched tables operationalise these claims at the level of modal choice, process type, participant role, and evaluative lexis. Table 5 shows that without African feminist epistemologies, the same features are misread as deception, instability, masculinism, legalism, or domestic retreat.

The methodological contribution is the explicit procedure: CDA supplies falsifiable linguistic description; the five epistemologies supply culturally grounded interpretation; the contrast table supplies a check against Eurocentric overgeneralisation. The empirical contribution is evidence of an institutional turn—legally literate, corporately competent, politically sovereign heroines—that resists reduction either to Western liberal confrontationalism or to the thesis that power is inherently masculine. Limitations include confinement to verbal dialogue, reliance on commercial timestamps, and a purposive five-film corpus that cannot represent all streaming-era production. Future research should extend the protocol to visual grammar, audience uptake, and comparative work with the classic cohort (1990s–2009) and with male-directed contemporaries. For now, the conclusion stands: African feminist epistemologies are methodologically necessary for an adequate CDA of contemporary African feminist cinema.

Pedagogically and practically, the findings offer a teachable protocol for decolonising CDA: code form first, interpret culture second, and record the Eurocentric alternative explicitly so students see what is at stake. For Nollywood policy and criticism, the study suggests that supporting women's control of distribution — cinema slates, Netflix commissions, monetised YouTube channels — directly expands the range of feminist speech acts that can be felicitously performed on screen. Future work should test reception: do audiences hear Adaeze's code-switching or Eniola's calm as authority, and under what conditions? Extending the tables to visual grammar and to male-directed contemporaries would further specify what is distinctively feminist, distinctively maternal, and distinctively contemporary about this sovereignty.

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