

Globalizing African Narratives: Women, Power, and Cultural Identity in Netflix's African Folktales Reimagined

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Abstract: This study examines the representation of women in the Netflix-UNESCO anthology *African Folktales Reimagined*, exploring how female characters challenge or reinforce traditional gender norms across diverse African cultures. Anchored in the theoretical framework of African Feminism, the paper situates women's portrayals within indigenous cultural contexts rather than Western feminist paradigms. Through qualitative content analysis of six short films from Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda, the research reveals that women in the series transcend stereotypes of passivity and dependence. Characters such as Katera, Halima, and Katope embody agency, resilience, and moral strength, while narratives like *Anyango and the Ogre* and *MaMlambo* foreground the intersection of gender, class, and trauma. The study identifies recurring themes of women as fighters, non-conformists, protectors, heroes, and sources of refuge. These roles emphasize that empowerment in African storytelling derives from communal responsibility and emotional endurance rooted in African traditions. Ultimately, the analysis demonstrates that *African Folktales Reimagined* redefines African womanhood by reclaiming indigenous feminist values, confronting patriarchal narratives, and illuminating women's vital roles in shaping cultural identity and social transformation across the continent.

Keywords: African Feminism, Gender Representation, Folklore Reinterpretation, Women Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

During the pre-colonial era, women in West Africa held high positions in the government and played various important roles in leading armies and politics (Elnaiem, 2021). However, as time progressed and colonial influences reshaped African societies, gender roles were still increasingly influenced by culture and religion. In many African communities, these traditions shaped a mutual understanding of men's and women's roles, with the latter often being confined to domestic and reproductive spheres (Okolo & Nwachukwu, 2022). Consequently, there is an enduring archetype of an "imaginary traditional African woman" who is always associated with having a family, accepting marriage, and having children, traits that constitute a good African woman (Ebila, 2017).

Despite increased awareness of women's liberation and efforts to change practices, desired results have not been fully realized due to deep-rooted resistance to change embedded in patriarchal ideologies ingrained through socialization (Williams, 2019). This stagnation is also reflected in literary and cultural narratives, where women's roles are often depicted through restrictive lenses. In many traditional African stories, female characters are typically portrayed as passive figures, overshadowed by their male counterparts. Yet, some African scholars argue that these portrayals, when critically examined, reveal

women as figures of resilience and power, challenging the surface-level readings of passivity (Ingg, 2020).

The discussion of women's roles in African storytelling inevitably intersects with debates on feminism in African literature. Many African female authors express ambivalence toward the feminist label, wary of its association with the notion of feminism as anti-male, anti-culture, and anti-religion (Nkealah, 2007). Nonetheless, the feminist movement has undeniably influenced African literary production, deconstructing many literary works to reflect the changing times (Fonchingong, 2006).

The telling of stories (narratives), often known as folktales, is one of Africa's most popular traditions, serving both as a means of entertainment and a vessel for transmitting social values (Ebwo, 2006). In academic discourse, however, the assessment of African folktales has been primarily from the theoretical viewpoints of evolutionism, diffusionism, structural-functionalism, and psychoanalysis (Ukala, 1992), which often overlook their gendered dimensions. Given that these narratives reflect different facets of Africa's society and culture (Kabaji, 2005), they also reveal embedded power dynamics and preconceptions expressed via gender. Women are typically portrayed as docile and submissive, relegated to assisting the male protagonist or caricatured as the

gloomy and wicked witch stereotype (Sheik, 2018).

In the modern era, the media serves as a crucial site for challenging these longstanding gender narratives. While it holds potential as an important tool for social change (Aryal, 2023), it often perpetuates unequal gender portrayals, casting men as dominant and independent while marginalizing women, particularly those from marginalized cultures (Wood, 1994). Nonetheless, film has increasingly emerged as a platform for challenging different social issues to inspire or arouse people's understanding of pressing issues that are present in today's world (Kaul, 2014; McDowall, 2016).

A recent and noteworthy development in this regard is the Netflix-UNESCO collaboration entitled *African Folktales Reimagined*, a six-part anthology series released in March 2023. Created by emerging filmmakers from Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda, the series promotes and revitalizes traditional African folktales for global audiences. This initiative not only celebrates Africa's rich culture but also provides a platform for reinterpreting women's roles within these narratives. As UNESCO and Netflix emphasized, this project aims to empower African creators and promote inclusive storytelling that reflects the continent's evolving realities. Further, this project is a good avenue for raising awareness about the struggles of African women, which would promote a more understanding and inclusive society.

Given these contexts, this study seeks to examine how women are represented in *African Folktales Reimagined* and how these portrayals either reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms. It also explores the complexity of women's identities in the series, focusing on their strength, agency, and intersectional dimensions, such as age, social class, and gender identity, that influenced their realities. Ultimately, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on African feminism, representation, and the reconfiguration of women's narratives within the evolving landscape of American storytelling.

Research Questions

- How were the female characters depicted in the series in terms of challenging traditional gender stereotypes and conventions?
- How do other identities, such as gender and class, impact the experiences of the female

characters and their representation in the series?

- In what ways do the predominant themes of women's empowerment and representation in each folktale align with the diverse culture of Africa?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

African Feminism

The core objective of feminism lies in advocating for equal rights and freedoms for women in various aspects of society, including social, political, and economic spheres (Soken-Hubert, 2022; Caparino, 2023).

The discussion of feminism in African philosophy challenges the traditional paradigms that are frequently dominated by feminist theories from the West, offering a vast and complex environment. African feminism aims to address the distinct experiences and difficulties experienced by African women, with its roots in the sociocultural and historical circumstances of the continent. Due to a complicated interaction between pre-colonial customs, colonial legacies, and post-colonial advancements, these issues are deeply ingrained in African society. (Onwuliri, 2024)

The social and humanistic focus of African feminism, which acknowledges that uneven power relations can be founded on race, class, country origin, and other social divisions in addition to gender, is what makes it unique. It is influenced by past processes of external dominance and exploitation and is motivated by struggles that cut over gender boundaries. (Chioma Steady, 2005)

African feminism aims to provide arguments that seek to validate the experiences of African women, including women of African descent (Goredema, 1897). She claims that many African women have held positions of power throughout history, but there is little historical evidence to support this claim. These stories depict a "strong, black, selfless African woman." She also stated that this depiction of women has been isolated in myths and stories. As a result, it sparks a debate about reviving Africa's lost culture and tradition as a result of modernization, with the belief that prior to colonization, African societies were feminists.

In this study, African Feminism will be used as the theoretical lens to examine how women in *African Folktales Reimagined* are portrayed in relation to power, identity, and cultural traditions. This framework allows the researcher to analyze how female characters navigate systems of patriarchy

and reclaim agency within African socio-cultural contexts. By grounding the analysis in African Feminism, the study highlights women's resilience, strength, and autonomy as rooted in African values rather than imposed Western feminist ideals.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study conducted a content analysis with the Feminist Theory as the baseline of discussion. The feminist movement aims to bridge the gender gap in terms of unequal treatment and opportunities women receive in the society. The movement's advancement became more diverse over time with the inclusion of more specific agenda, such as the role of women, sexuality, gender, and self-expression.

The materials that were used in this study for analysis came from the series *African Folktales Reimagined* uploaded in Netflix. A six-part anthology series released in March 2023. Created by emerging filmmakers from Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda, the series promotes and revitalizes traditional African folktales for global audiences. This initiative not only celebrates Africa's rich culture but also provides a platform for reinterpreting women's roles within these narratives. As UNESCO and Netflix emphasized, this project aims to empower African creators and promote inclusive storytelling that reflects the continent's evolving realities.

Title and Synopsis of the Series

- *Katera of the Punishment Island* – story of a woman named Katera who sought vengeance after the death of her father and unborn child.
- *Halima's Choice* – story of a woman who is being forced to marry someone she does not love as part of an arranged marriage.
- *Anyango and the Ogre* – a story of a domestically-abused mother who stays with her husband for the sake of her children.
- *Enmity Djinn* – a story of a family's matriarch who confronted a Djinn who wanted to harm her family.
- *Katope* – a story of a young girl named Katope who sacrificed her life to save their village from a devastating drought.
- *MaMlambo* – a story of a troubled woman named Amandla who found refuge and healing in the MaMlambo river with the help of its "caretaker", Mkhulu.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women Challenging Traditional Gender Stereotypes

Katera stood firm despite the traumatic abuse she endured at the hands of Gregory, the soldier who leads the army in their village. She learned how to shoot and how to target with a knife. Women are regarded as the weaker sex in their village, and they are all too afraid to stand up for themselves, content to accept what fate has in store for them. However, when Katera went to confront Gregory in a fight while disguised as a boy, Gregory mocked her, saying, "Just because you are dressed like a boy doesn't mean you have what it takes." This part of the story highlights how gender roles can influence how people perceive and treat women in society. Moreso, it demonstrates Gregory's view of women as incapable of doing what men can.

Further, *Halima* demonstrates that women are not as weak and submissive as society perceives them to be.

Mother: Do you want to let the soup burn before you put the vegetables in?

Halima: Are you afraid I'll be burning soup in my husband's house?

Mother: Don't talk to me like that!

Her portrayal disproved the notion that women are incapable of making independent decisions. The title of the folktale, *Halima's Choice*, represents that women are free to choose the path that they want, even if their parents disagree. Also, she had proven that no one can dictate to a woman who knows what she wants and deserves.

Anyango's portrayal in the third folktale differs from the previous female protagonists. She was portrayed as a submissive wife whose sole responsibility is to care for the family and satisfy the needs of her husband. She likewise embodies the stereotypical gender roles that society assigns to women: weak and submissive. Even though she promised her eldest son that they would leave their father for hurting them, she is unable to do so due to fear and worry about the difficulties they might encounter, especially in the financial aspect. Her character demonstrates that a woman's endurance is greater, especially after becoming a mother.

Otis (Eldest son): Mom, we need to leave. Now.

Anyango: Otis.

Otis: Please

Anyango: Where are we supposed to go at this hour? Tomorrow, okay? Okay? We... we'll leave tomorrow. I promise. Okay?

Otis: Okay.

In the fourth story, the family's matriarch challenged the traditional gender stereotype in a new light. She appeared to be strong and determined to protect her family from the Djinn's evil intentions. Her portrayal also demonstrates that women are not weak because they are emotional; rather, they can use their emotions as a foundation to have the willpower to defy anything that would put her family in danger. This proves that protecting loved ones requires not only physical abilities, but also emotional strength, which is said to be a woman's trait that is often perceived as a weakness rather than a strength by society.

Similar to how the family's matriarch was portrayed in the story Enmity Djinn, Katope demonstrated that women, even at a young age, are not like how the media usually portrays women, as a stereotypical damsel in distress waiting to be saved by a knight in shining armor. Instead, Katope was the one who saved not just one person, but the entire village from a devastating drought by sacrificing her own life in a ritual. Her determination to express that she is not afraid of what might happen to her during the ritual suggests that a woman's role in films and media should extend beyond being a wife and a mother.

Finally, Amandla of the MaMlambo River represents women who have been sexually abused and have not received justice for what has happened to them. Her portrayal depicts the difficulties that abused women have faced and continue to face as a result of a tragic incident in their past. While it may appear that the most difficult part of being abused is the actual moment of abuse, it is the day after that moment when she has no choice but to accept that abuse did indeed occur to her. Because, similar to what happened to Amandla, her past haunted her, prompting her to commit suicide.

Amandla: Why are you doing all of this? Why did you save me?

Mkhulu: It is my responsibility, my child.

Amandla: Is it your responsibility to interrupt people's wish for peace?

Mkhulu: Are you not at peace?

Amandla: I am not dead.

But, with the help of Mkhulu, she established that women are not weak, but can be strong and serve a greater purpose. Her encounter with the Mkhulu taught her that the abuse did not define her; instead, she could use her experience to save other troubled women like her and encourage them to live. Mkhulu told Amandla, "*Wherever the water is, there is healing. Don't tire, my child,*" signifying that healing is always possible since water is everywhere.

Synthesis

Through the lens of African Feminism, the female characters' defiance of patriarchal norms in *African Folktales Reimagined* reflects a reclamation of agency deeply rooted in African cultural contexts rather than Western ideals. Their portrayals—ranging from Katera's vengeance to Halima's assertion of choice—embody the African feminist call for redefining womanhood as strong, autonomous, and integral to community life. This aligns with the framework's emphasis on recentering African women's lived experiences, showing that emotional strength, resilience, and leadership are inherently African feminist values.

Impact of Gender and Class to The Representation of Women in the Series

Katera is from the lowest social class, as are the other women in the story who were sent to the punishment island. It is worth noting that only Katera was punished for being pregnant out of wedlock, not her partner, Biraro. But Katera's goal involves getting revenge on Gregory for what he did to her and to save Biraro from hanging because he was caught after injuring a soldier. Gregory was able to harm Katera because he knew she had no power in their society. Gregory even obtained Katera's father's land illegally through his power and position in their society. Gregory has been described as "*most cruel to girls. His job is to mistreat fellow citizens and please foreigners,*" emphasizing how Katera's gender and status became the root causes for her oppression. This exemplifies how tragic it can be to be a woman in a society led by an abusive man who views women as objects rather than equals.

Moreover, Halima proved that that, despite being a daughter with the lowest rank in the family, she retains the right to choose whether to marry or not. "*I would rather die than marry that old man,*" said Halima when she tried to flee. The setting exudes patriarchy, as Halima's father was the one making decisions for their family despite her voicing her opinion on a matter concerning her future. Even

the man who wishes to marry her demonstrates that he has power over the situation because Halima's father supports their marriage. Halima's situation exemplifies the difficulties of a daughter in a society that views men as the ultimate head of the household, whereas women are voiceless.

Anyango's difficulty as a woman, on the other hand, involves her three children, who are also physically abused by their father. Her status as a woman and wife, whose job is to cook and care for the family, made her reliant on her husband. Furthermore, her husband abuses and manipulates Anyango by claiming that she must endure all her suffering because she depends on him. Her husband successfully instilled in her mind that she is nothing without him and that if she truly cares about her children's welfare, she will keep her family together despite the suffering.

(Anyango prepared breakfast for the family the day after she was beaten by her husband and promised Otis that they would leave)

Husband: Good. (hands flowers to Anyango)

Husband: Otis, come eat.

Otis: (shaking his head)

Husband: What's wrong with you? Sit down.

Anyango: Otis, sit. You don't want to make your dad angry.

Otis: You promised. You promised we'd leave!

Anyango: Otis, please. Just... just sit.

The portrayal of the family matriarch in the folktale *Enmity Djinn* demonstrated that a woman can be a house authority. She also showed that her mental and physical status had evolved from that of a child who had been visited by the Djinn to that of a matriarch who had established that she could not be shaken by the Djinn's evil deeds. The folktale likewise showed how the family members respected her by following her order to leave the house so she could focus more on praying to make the Djinn disappear. The protagonist's status as the mother/matriarch demonstrates that a woman can also be the family's protector. Her perseverance and strength were able to save the entire family from the Djinn's evil intentions.

Daughter: Is everything okay?

Matriarch: Everyone is fine.

Furthermore, *Katope's* portrayal in the fifth folktale parallels Halima's difficulties as a member of a community ruled by male elders. The elder's visit to Katope's home and discussion with her mother about the importance of Katope

participating in the ritual demonstrates how patriarchal their community is.

Elder: We will hold another ceremony tonight.

Mother: Sometimes these things are too much, Chief.

Elder: The drought was born with her – the drought ends with her. Katope, you must be there. The village needs you.

Even though her mother is opposed to the idea of losing her daughter, Katope chose to sacrifice herself out of free will. This reveals that even at a young age, Katope displayed a sense of responsibility to her community, and that having a choice is still important regardless of gender, age, or social status.

Lastly, *Amandla*, who was saved by Mkhulu, the mysterious woman in the river MaMlambo portrays the difficulties of being a woman who was sexually abused and was afraid to speak up and cry for help. In the folktale, she chose to jump off the cliff because she was being haunted by her horrible past. She kept on dreaming about the voice of her abuser, saying, *"Amandla, baby come on! Please! You know you want it."* Her choice to take her life signifies the terror and horror that she experienced in the hands of her abuser. This goes to show that a woman who was a victim of sexual abuse suffers from embarrassment and existential questions that increases the feeling of helplessness that may lead to self-destruction just like what Amandla did (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013).

Synthesis

Applying African Feminism to the intersection of gender and class reveals how oppression in the series is shaped not only by patriarchy but also by social hierarchies and economic inequality. The characters' struggles, such as Katera's punishment for defying gender norms or Anyango's dependence on her abusive husband, expose the layered nature of African women's marginalization. African Feminism provides the interpretive tool to highlight how these women, despite their constrained positions, find strength within their cultural realities and challenge systemic subordination through subtle acts of resistance and self-definition.

Predominant Themes of Women Empowerment and Representation That are Aligned with the Culture of Africa

The act of punishing women who got pregnant out of wedlock is still present in some parts of Africa, specifically in the remote areas of Rwanda and

Uganda, up until the 20th century. The traditional Bakiga society in those areas believes that a woman can only be allowed to get pregnant after marriage because it is considered a disgrace to the family. The island is surrounded by deep waters, and women who are sentenced have only two options: starve or swim into the lake and drown. Their culture values virgin wives more than those who are not, which is why some women on the punishment island were rescued by a poor boy desperate for a wife because he cannot afford a "high value" wife (Gong, 2017).

Katera's portrayal in the series *Katera of the Punishment Island* represents how women in some parts of Africa are mistreated by their society. The inequitable treatment of being punished for being pregnant out of wedlock demonstrates how anti-women their culture is. Furthermore, Katera's decision to seek vengeance follows the old adage "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," because she killed Gregory in front of the other women survivors, in the most brutal and agonizing way possible: by drowning. "*Mr: Gregory, I really hope you can swim*" This statement by Katera represents a poetic justice in which Gregory experienced what it is like to be tortured, as he did to the women in their village. Katera demonstrated that being a woman does not prevent her from obtaining the justice that their society failed to provide her, including other women who were brutally punished by Gregory. Her fighting spirit put an end to Gregory's cruelty, and she serves as an embodiment of African women fighters who were once the leaders of empires and armies, portraying strength and power while deviating from gender roles and stereotypes.

Women as Non-conformists (Halima's Choice)
 Arranged marriage is one of the pre-colonial African traditions. Men were allowed to have as many wives as they wanted during that time period, as long as they could support all of them. Marriages were previously thought to be an agreement between two families, rather than just the couple getting married. In Africa, the stages of wanting to marry a woman begin with a background check to ensure that the woman their son wants to marry comes from a reputable family with no record of wrongdoing in society. This ensures that the union will not have a negative impact on their family's reputation (Ainamon, *et al.*, 2022).

In relation to Halima's situation in the folktale *Halima's Choice*, it appeared at first that she had

no choice but to conform to their tradition, especially since her father appears to be adamant about the union. Her mother, too, is a voiceless member of the family and initially supports her father's decision. As a result, Halima planned to flee to show her opposition, but she was caught. The circumstance that Halima is in is linked to the idea put forward by Ainamon, *et al.*, (2022) that arrange marriages are simply an agreement between families and are synonymous with forced marriage, because women are forced to do something they do not want to do. As the story ended, Halima appeared to accept her fate, but her mother gave her the chip that would transform her into an AI, implying that she could leave.

Mother: You've never really been good at hiding things.

Halima: You might as well just show it to Baaba or Danladi or whoever reserves the right to punish me.

Mother: That's not what I want for you. I don't know why I didn't just break it (the chip). I think I was afraid I would be causing you more pain if I destroyed it.

Both Halima and her mother proved that they are willing to break the tradition if it means keeping Halima happy.

Women as Resilient Mothers (Anyango and the Ogre)

In the folktale *Anyango and the Ogre*, Anyango proved that women's resilience is not always a weakness, especially when done for a greater good, such as the welfare of her children. Anyango's strength extends to her ability to endure emotional and physical pain in order to provide her children with the life she believes they deserve: a comfortable life free of hunger and poverty. Anyango's portrayal alluded to Ebila's, (2017) argument that Africa has an "imaginary traditional African woman" whose primary function is to look after her children and provide for her husband's needs at home. In Anyango's case, she was taken aback by her husband's manipulation into believing that being with him in the "blue zone" is far superior to being free but in the "gray zone."

Otis: He's going to kill us!

Anyango: We need to take him to the hospital! We need him!

Otis: Tell me how do we need him? (shows his bruises) Do you see what he's done to me, and also you.

Furthermore, her financial dependence on her husband had prevented her from fully realizing her potential and freewill as a woman. As Mary Wollstonecraft pointed out in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1972, women should have equal rights and opportunities as men. She argued that women should be educated, free to enter business and pursue professional careers, and be granted the right to vote (Powell, 1996). Moreso, Anyango will have a better judgment of the situation if she only has financial freedom and was not manipulated by her husband.

Women as Protectors of the Family (Enmity Djinn)

In a recent survey published by Galal (2023), an estimated 50% of Africa's population identifies as Muslim, with Nigeria having the largest Muslim population by 99 million. This demonstrates that Islamic beliefs are dispersed across the continent and are part of how they see and regulate what to believe and what not to believe in.

The existence of Djinns, commonly known as ghosts or spirits that cannot be seen with the naked eye, is one common belief in Islam. According to the holy Quran, God created Djinns, angels, and humans. Muslims believe that praying to God is superior to wearing talismans or charms to keep them safe because only God can save them from danger (Liu, 2012). This belief is parallel to what has been exemplified in the folktale *Enmity Djinn*, which features a matriarch protagonist who confronts the Djinn who wishes to harm her family through prayers and ultimate devotion to God. Her portrayal as the head of the family and a devout Muslim emphasizes the importance of Islamic teachings in protecting people from harm and evil creatures.

Women as Heroes (Katope)

The ritual for sacrifice is commonly found in African mythology and fairytales, but it cannot be denied that it also occurs in real life. It is believed that in a sacrificial ritual, the blood of those being sacrificed is returned to God, who gave them life in the first place. These rituals have specific goals depending on the needs of the community, such as "prayer may ask for rain, peace, the cessation of epidemics and dangers to the nation, success in war or raids, the acceptance of sacrifices and offerings, and fertility for people, animals, and crops" (Mpyangu, & Bukuluki, 2014).

Similar to what happened in the folktale, Katope was asked by their Elder to participate in the ritual

to pray for rain in their village. She was not only sacrificed by the villagers, but she also chose to sacrifice herself. She has proven that her decision was not solely influenced by community pressure but was her own choice in light of their village's devastation. Katope's portrayal debunks the previously mentioned notion of how women are typically portrayed in the media, such as passive and dependent; instead, she was portrayed as a young female hero who saved their village from drought. Furthermore, despite her age, she took charge and made her own decision to participate in the ritual, even if it meant being separated from her mother.

Katope: Mama!

Mother: I told you not to come here! Why didn't you stay at home? Look at what is happening now. Please go home.

Katope: It's okay, Mama. I will always be with you. Further, Mpyangu and Bukuluki (2014) suggest putting a stop to such rituals because the traditional African worldview regards the preservation of life, particularly that of children, as critical to the continuity and well-being of society. However, the current social and economic difficulties that many Africans are facing have pushed some people to desperate measures. These desperate measures may include human sacrifice or child sacrifice. As a result, these extreme actions can be seen as a reflection of the deterioration of social support systems and individuals' growing desperation to alleviate their current circumstances.

Women as Refuge (MaMlambo)

Africa has consistently been reported to have higher rates of sexual abuse than the rest of the world's countries. The continent's ongoing sexual violence epidemic ranges from teenagers in school to wives at home who are forced to have sex by their husbands. This has been used to assert men's dominance over women in South Africa (Lowry, 2011; Abrahams, 2004).

The struggles of women who have been sexually abused in Africa are the same as the struggles of Amandla and all other women who have been cared for by the MaMlambo River. Amandla attempted suicide as a result of her anxiety and fear following the abuse. Addition to this is that the victims of sexual abuse are frequently stigmatized, marginalized, and condemned by society. Being traumatized, becoming more vulnerable, and finding it difficult to live a normal

life are just a few of the negative effects of sexual abuse (Schmitt, 2021).

Furthermore, Amandla's portrayal of courage at the end of the story represents her strength and willingness to help other women who have faced similar challenges as her even though she was struggling, too. *Where do I have the strength to help with anything when I can't even help myself?* she asked Mkhulu. Her character represents the fact that only women truly understand what it is like to be a woman and their struggles. It was also emphasized in the folktale that the community that fosters understanding among its kind is very important since it can serve as a refuge to those who are troubled, just like the river MaMlambo.

Amandla: Why did you stay here?

Mkhulu: I stayed for them (troubled women). We are never alone, my child.

Synthesis

Viewed through African Feminism, the folktales' themes of empowerment—women as fighters, non-conformists, protectors, and heroes—affirm that African womanhood is historically tied to strength, spirituality, and community responsibility. The framework underscores that these portrayals are not imitations of Western feminist ideals but expressions of indigenous feminist consciousness rooted in Africa's precolonial traditions of female leadership and resilience. Thus, *African Folktales Reimagined* becomes a modern cultural space where African women's voices reclaim their rightful place in storytelling, celebrating their power and collective identity.

CONCLUSION

African folktales mirror the historically and culturally perpetuated certain gender roles and stereotypes in Africa. The portrayal of the female protagonists highlights the importance of diverse and progressive representations by challenging these traditional gender norms and breaking free from conventional roles that can inspire and empower women in real life. Also, the series presents the notion of promoting intricate female characters by offering insights into the development of strong, complex, and multifaceted characters. This exploration is not only important for literature but also for encouraging more authentic and relatable portrayals of women in media since it has been proven that media is a powerful tool to challenge gender roles and

stereotypes through its reach and possible influence on its audience.

Further, the series also highlighted how the intersection of gender with other identities such as age, class, and sexuality impact the experiences of the female characters. In doing so, it shed light on the lived experiences of women from diverse backgrounds and how these intersections shape their narratives. This aspect contributes to a broader understanding of the complexities of women's lives. This work also initiates a new line of inquiry that could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in African folklore and literature.

The series has contemporary relevance since it was produced in the 21st century by new breed of filmmakers. In a rapidly changing world where discussions around gender equality, representation, and empowerment are gaining momentum, it offers a contemporary lens through which to examine these issues. Hence, it provides a platform to assess how African literature is evolving to reflect and influence societal shifts.

Lastly, this topic is a crucial study that not only contributes to the academic understanding of literature but also has broader societal implications since it delves into how literature, particularly films, might empower women in African nations and beyond by challenging stereotypes and misrepresentations of women.

Overall, the African feminist analysis of *African Folktales Reimagined* reveals that the series redefines the image of African women from passive subjects to empowered agents of change. By situating women's struggles and triumphs within Africa's own cultural and historical contexts, the narratives affirm that strength, leadership, and resilience are intrinsic aspects of African womanhood. Ultimately, the application of African Feminism exposes how these reimagined folktales not only challenge patriarchal traditions but also revive indigenous feminist values that honor women's agency and voice in shaping their societies.

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