

“Woman, I have told you not to speak”: Portrayals of Women in Popular Ghanaian Movies

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Abstract

The study examines the portrayal of women in popular Ghanaian movies and how such portrayals mirror social reality. The study is premised on the grounds that movies like any conventional film are key sites where identities of women are constructed and contested on a regular basis; in addition, many of these movies are situated in patriarchal cultures and tend to reproduce the dominant ideology reinforcing female stereotypes. Through textual qualitative content analysis of six popular Ghanaian movies, and anchored on stereotype theory, the study showed that; first, quantitatively, women were well represented in the movies contrary to assertions in earlier studies; second, that the dominant patriarchal qualification of women as vituperative, dependent, domestic, diabolic, sex objects, accommodating, enduring, and gullible were employed in their portrayals. The paper contends that the portrayals reinforce the subjugation of women because they potentially increase men's disdain for women, sow distrust amongst women and strengthen the forces which push them to the fringes of social life. The study concludes that the images of women presented in these movies reinforce the stereotyping of women and mirror the traditional settings in which their role, performances and subjectivities in real society are situated.

Keywords: African film, Popular Ghanaian movies, Stereotype, Patriarchy, Images of women

1.0 Introduction

The role of the media in the construction of women has increasingly come under spotlight. A UNESCO report describes the litany of common images of women in the media: “the glamorous sex kitten, the sainted mother, the devious witch, the hard faced corporate and political climber” p.13. The UNESCO report indicates that with the current rate of progress on stereotyping women, it will take another seventy-five years to achieve gender equality in the media. With this alarming revelation, many people who have women issues at heart in a bid to curb the situation have synthesized and continue to orient media particularly the movie industry on the proper representation of women.

Many scholars argue that the portrayals of women in television and film have changed over the last few decades because of feminist movement (Global Status for Women, 2009). For instance, the African Women in Film Forum was formed to employ film to accelerate efforts towards gender equity and social justice. However, despite these strides, stereotypes of women continue to endure in the movies (Media Awareness Network, 2008). Lafky (1993) also asserts that the situation is improving albeit quite slowly.

Evwierhoma (2008) indicates that most images found in films and videos are still masculinist and patriarchal in form. Fram-Kulik (1999) affirms that “Films and videos could be considered a language of their own, but the language they use still symbolizes the same binary order that has dominated our society with its phallogocentric perspective” (p. 2). The film and video industry has presented audiences with objectified and stereotypic images of femininity. Films and videos have the obvious advantage in that they transcend language barriers and their audio visual nature give them an upper hand over print in terms of shaping opinion (Chari, 2007). Movies are therefore powerful media with a vast potential to shaping people's minds and actions.

The media have come under many criticism when it comes to the issue of the portrayal of women. Okunna (1996) observes that because of the critical role the media play in shaping people ideas and perception, it is very worrying that they are dominated by stereotyped portrayal of gender relations and negative images of women. Several works done (Azanu, 2012; Azeez, 2010; Garitano, 2008) in this area indicate that both the print and electronic media are guilty of this assertion, even though there have been calls for all forms of media to exercise circumspection in the portrayal of women, much attention must be given to communication couched in artistic and entertainment forms, due to their effect and subtle influence on a wider audience. Chari (2008) indicates that film as a powerful media tool can be used to send messages meant to “enlighten, convince, entertain or stimulate” (p. 11) audiences. The role of the media in the construction of gender relations has increasingly come under spotlight since the release of the UNESCO report because the latter indicated and reinforced the conviction that media keeps exalting patriarchy to the detriment of women.

Since the inception of the Ghanaian movie industry, movies produced have followed the patriarchal pattern of society with Meyer (1999) stating that “movies made in Ghana are made with a masculine eye” (p. 23). Contemporary local movies have gained a lot of popularity among Ghanaians living home and abroad (Meyer, 1999). The explosion of popular local movies on the Ghanaian market is astounding. These popular movies are

produced on a very large scale in Ghana because of their wide audience. Research indicates that at least six these movies are released every week (Garritano, 2008: p. 3).

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Studies by Owusu & Kwansah-Aidoo (2012) reveal that despite efforts made by feminist and other female producers to rewrite the story of women in the Ghanaian society, they are still cast in stereotypic roles in films. Despite the admonition in 2004 by the Ghana National Media Commission that discretion should be used in the portrayal of women in films and drama to avoid presenting a consistently negative and stereotyped image as well as the continuous calls by feminist on the need to give women proper representation in these movies, research conducted by Meyer (1999), Garitano (2008), and Owusu & Kwansah-Aidoo (2012) show that women are constantly portrayed in domestic roles that reinforce an entrenched, the limiting and negative societal perceptions about their roles in society. ,

Most critics such as Ellerson (2000) and Akashoro (2010) are of the view that if films were to foreground the full range of contributions women are making and capable of making to self and society, then societal perceptions of them would be enhanced. Many support the assertion that mass media is incredibly influential as a teacher of social norms specifically to young people (Wynns & Rosenfeld, 2003). It is therefore important that whatever is served on any media should reinforce the positive changes that society envisages including issues on gender equality. People who are sympathetic towards the struggle for women's empowerment assert that the proliferation and the popularity of movies laced with reinforcements of women's negative images and limited role in society have heightened fears to the extent that the little gain that might have been made in the struggle for the emancipation women is being eroded by the internalization by women and society at large of the negative images portrayed by these local movies (Chyinere 2009).

This study is premised on the grounds that most reviewed studies on local movies in Ghana focused on movies that use English language as a medium of interaction. Such movies even though popular do not render themselves easily accessible to the ordinary Ghanaian who conduct their daily routine performances in the vernacular. Therefore, when it comes to research movies produced in Ghana, minimal attention has been given to popular Ghanaian local movies that use local language as the medium of interaction.

3.0 Research Questions

This study explores this gap in the literature by interrogating the contributions of vernacular-mediated popular Ghanaian local movies to the portrayal of women. The research investigates the type of images accorded women in these popular Ghanaian movies and the extent to which such representations mirror what happens in the larger society. In undertaking this interrogation, the paper asked these questions,

1(a): What is the degree of representation of women popular Ghanaian movies?

(b): How are women portrayed in these popular Ghanaian movies?

2: How do the portrayals reinforce or contradict existing notions about the role of women in society?

4.0 Literature Review

4.1 Ghana Movie Industry

Ghana's film industry dates as far back as 1948 when the Gold Coast Film Unit was set up in the Information Services Department. African Pictures Ltd. started operations about the same time (Meyer, 1999). Ghanaian film industry just like many other African film industry was borne out of a historical struggle of "decolonization and a commitment to represent Africa from an African perspective" (Garritano, 2008: p. 3). According to Cham (2002), film making in Africa was a product of historical experiences of Africa. Meyer (1999) confirms that the film industry in Ghana did not circumvent this route the African film industry had taken and produced films that were in line with this ideology. According to Garritano (2008) and Ames (2006), this kind of movie making could not generate a mass audience and could not penetrate the global market. However, in the late 1980's most African filmmakers moved from strict film ideology to producing movies that encapsulated the social world. These movies according to Meyer (1999) became very popular with the Nigerian film industry also known as Nollywood taking the lead in producing over one million copies a year.

Until the late 90's and early part of the new millennium, the Ghana film industry had been struggling to keep in business especially when its counterpart Nigeria had been successful in the area and came to be regarded as the third best movie producers in the world (Utaka, 2010). Like their Nigerian counterparts, the Ghanaian movie industry turned to new video technology to produce their films and started chalking new success and grounds in movie production and sales. Some scholars have attributed the success of Ghanaian films to the introduction of video technology. To them, cinematic films had not been very good for African Film industry and the new video technology seem to have opened the floodgates of innovation and success in movie production. Akpo (2008) states that one reason for the success of the industry was because film producers using new technology began to produce movies to meet popular taste. As a result, audiences are provided images of local content and interest in the 'new' Ghanaian movies began to sour (Meyer, 2001).

Ghanaian video film industry which emerged in the course of the late 1980s grew steadily and was producing over two hundred movies per annum in the 1990s (Garitano, 2008). The industry continues to boom especially

with movies produced in Akan language-the latter being a widely spoken local language intelligible to about 74% of the population in Ghana. The emergence of this innovative feature of producing vernacular-mediated movies in the industry, popularly dubbed *Kumawood*, is branded upon the Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood versions. Stemming from the fact that most of these movies are produced in Akan, Garritano (2008) confirms that, six movies were produced weekly in Ghana of which five were in Akan and one in English. Following from Garritano's assertion, it can be concluded that on the average three hundred and twelve movies in Akan are produced annually. With the current proliferation of movies production in Ghana, one can assume that several hundreds of movies are produced in Ghana with a chunk of the production taken by the Akan-mediated movies. This shows that the number of popular local movies produced in Ghana is becoming astounding and it is therefore important to interrogate its socio-cultural significance to development.

Currently, technological evolution has made these movies even more accessible. Garitano (2008) affirms that these movies are produced transnationally and broadcasted on television, streamed over the Internet, distributed and pirated globally in multiple formats. Haynes (2010) affirms this trend and indicates that the movies are not just put on compact discs (CD) but are also uploaded on internet-based video sharing sites such as YouTube, Daily Motion, Video Share and other social networking sites. The above assertion support the fact that these movies have acquired newer characteristics of accessibility, affordability, and ubiquity.

Another popularizing trend of the new movies is their thematic focus. Just like other African movies, the settings, themes and characterizations of these popular Ghanaian movies have a lot in common with many communal settings and cultural practices. This therefore makes it easy for people to identify with the movies as they reflect the attitudes and everyday experiences of many of their audiences. Meleiro (2008) adds that this new movie producing trend is a response to the desire for images that popular audiences can relate with. Ekwuazi (1987) as cited in Adeyemi (2008) states that every movie is derived from specific cultural or traditional realities which informs its meaning as well as its structural methodology. Scenes and stories are sometimes in line with audiences' experiences and these have contributed to the popularity of the movies. As people watch and see their natural material identities replicated in the movie, the desire to watch more and more becomes intense. Aside the easy accessibility to content, structure and settings of the movies, scholars like Sama (1994) contends that the movies are made on larger scale because unlike the cinematic films, they are inexpensive to produce. Garritano (2008) indicates that the inexpensive, widely available and easy to use technology for the production and duplication of the movies have transformed movies production on the African cultural landscape.

Many scholars such as Haynes (2010) and Larkin (2008) have argued that the producers of popular movies in Africa have never been concerned about authenticity, cultural revival or cultural authenticity, which are the founding motivations of African cinema. They are concerned with the monetary aspect rather than using it as a platform to effect positive change. Gugler (2003) argues that these "market-driven" products promote the "political processes that engender extreme inequalities" (p.16). The movies endanger efforts to bridge inequality gaps such as gender and ethnicity. Akashoro (2010) contends that these movies have been used to entertain, instruct, subjugate, persuade and propagate the overall social, political, economic and educational needs of the audience. Addressing mass audiences, these moviemakers are not obliged to speak on behalf of a minority group and remain unencumbered by the burden of representation which has been the core of film critics (Desai 2004; Garritano, 2008).

Over the years, the movies have not been able to preach against inequalities, especially, those that impact women. In this regard, many scholars such as Garitano (2008) and Owusu & Kwansah-Aidoo (2012) contend that they rather contribute to the subjugation of women. Therefore, the commercial success of these movies has also increased the continuous misogynistic representation of women in the movies and its consequential reflection in real life. In effect, Ghanaian popular movies rooted in traditional cultural tropes can be described as a system that produces and naturalizes gender ideologies (Garitano, 2008; Newell, 2000). The popular Ghanaian movies just like any other African popular culture tend to recycle gender stereotypes rooted in patriarchy.

4.2 Stereotype Theory

The media is full of representation. O'Sullivan, Dutton and Rayner (1998) observe that the continuous flow of images and information from the media is the most important source of peoples understanding of the world around them and the people who live in it. One of the theories commonly used to describe media representation is the stereotype theory. Even though this theory had existed, Pickring (2001) acknowledges that Walter Lipmann is credited with the introduction of the term in social science. Lipmann (1965) used the concept to refer to images individuals have in their minds about certain things or categories. In effect he used the word to refer to the typical picture that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group. In his book *Public Opinion*, Lippmann argues that the way things are in the real world are often not the same as images that exist in the minds of people living in a society yet the dominant group perpetuates the inaccurate images of marginalized ones. Lippmann (1965) as cited in Kanahara (2006) observes that "in the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world, we pick out what our culture has already defined for us and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture" (p. 306).

Many other scholars (Brewer 2010; Kanahara 2006; Pickering 2001) have given variety of explanations for the concept. However, these scholars seem to focus around the same idea of cultural and superficial beliefs and the generalization about certain social groups. For instance, Kanahara (2006) defines stereotype as negative thoughts or ideas thought to be true of every member of a specific group. Wella, Burnett & Moriarty (1992) also define stereotyping as “presenting a group of people in an unvarying pattern that lacks individuality and often reflects popular misconceptions” (Nwagbara, 2006: p. 21). Hilton and Von Hippel (1996) used the term to refer to cognitive schemas used by social perceivers to process information about others. These schemas according to Brewer (2010) are provided by the media and perpetuated by the dominant group. In general, stereotypes function to keep minorities in positions of low power and prestige (DeFleur & Denis, 1998). A group of people can be marginalized by their portrayal as an unrepresentative minority. Lipmann himself acknowledges stereotyping as inadequate and biased, as endorsing the interest of those who use them, as obstacles to rational assessment and as resistant to social change. In so doing, Blum (2004) adds that stereotypes powerfully shape the stereotyper’s perception of stereotyped groups, seeing the stereotypic characteristics when they are not present, failing to see the contrary of those characteristics when they are, and generally homogenizing the group. In describing stereotypes, Ford & Tonander (1998) adds that “... traits which differentiate a social group from people in general are more likely to be judged as stereotypical than traits which are less differentiating” (p. 373). This goes to support the fact that the dominant group tends to label traits that stand out as unique as stereotypic of a particular group.

Brewer (2010) adds that stereotypes tend to separate individuals into certain subgroups within the society based on membership of a particular group of people. Society therefore is responsible for stereotyping. According to McKillip, DiMiceli & Luebke (1997), there are two different categories of intergroup interactions. They call the first category the universal stereotype which means people have the tendency to see those within their group more positively than they do of members of other groups. For instance, men tend to view themselves favorably than they do of women and therefore are likely to stereotype women negatively. In this instance the patriarchal ideology of film is seen in the depiction of women and the production style of the film. Film is undoubtedly produced and directed from men’s perspective hence the negative representation of women.

McKillip et al (1997) refer to the other category as the reciprocal stereotype. Here members of the majority often keep those in the minority in positions of limited or subordinate power particularly through messages to their members of the majority group facilitated by the mass media outlets such as films. Even though women are technically the majority of the world’s population, society has revered males as the dominant or majority group. The reciprocal stereotype makes the claim that men are competent and assertive while women are submissive; and that women are warm and gentle while men are cold and rough (McKillip, DiMiceli, & Luebke, 1997). Several studies (Brewer 2010; Ford & Tonanader, 1998; Khanhara, 2006; Williams, 2003) have found stereotypes to exist in media. The study identifies stereotyping in the media as occurring in distinct ways.

First, the media distorts the real prevalence of a group in society. This is done through under representation, over representation and misrepresentation. An example is the limited representation of women in the media as described by Tuchman (1978) in her symbolic annihilation theory. The second kind of media stereotyping as described by Williams (2003) is the narrow and fixed representation of a whole group of people. This occurs when the roles, behaviors or personal characteristics of a particular group are portrayed in a limited fashion. As indicated by Brewer (2010) the representation of women as housewives, mothers or sex objects fall under this category. The final stage of media stereotyping is the de-legitimizing of a group in comparison to the idealized images of how people ought to behave. Thus a group of people can be marginalized by the media as abnormal and peculiar. Media stereotyping, in essence, provide false impressions of certain groups and people. Williams (2003) asserts that the danger of such representation is that people may not only lose true insight into reality but ultimately their capacity for life experience might be dulled. Consequently, media stereotyping may provide false impression of a certain group.

4.3 Stereotypical Images of Women in Movies

Images of women in films reflect cultural stereotypes that depart markedly from reality. As indicated by Media Awareness Network (2008), entertainment media outlets often portray specific groups, such as women, in negative ways or as having more negative qualities than the dominant social group. Such portrayals establish context and ways of thinking about how interact with members of another group and this in turn affects communication and socialization (DeFleur & Dennis, 1998).

Often in the media, women become the stereotyped group and men become the group who stereotype (Rettew, Billman, & Davis, 1993). According to Media Awareness Network (2008) female stereotyping in media, specifically movies, can narrow the perception of what women can do and not do as well as shaping men and children’s view of women. Television and film also typically portray an unrealistic view of the ideal woman in addition to reinforcing the traditional representation of what makes a woman.

In movies, research show that stereotypical frames like weak, evil, gentle, homely, and sex objects continue to

define women in movies reinforcing culturally imprinted stereotypes and creating new ones. Brewer (2010) adds that stereotypes of women that exist in movies are not different from traditional stereotypes of women. Traditionally, the role of women is seen as subordinate to men (Ogundele, 2003). This according to Okunna (1996) and Ogundele (2003) limits women to a very narrow place within society and it is clearly reflected in movies through the projection of negative stereotypes of women which helps in furthering a misplaced socialization of women in the society. According to Shrivastva (1992), this results in the reinforcement of the stereotyped image and role specific action of women through a unidimensional projection of their reality.

Okunna (1996) criticizes images of women in movies and acknowledges that movies seem to project negative stereotypes of women rather than portraying aspect of women that would empower audiences. He affirms that many popular products especially movies convey stereotypic and misogynistic images of women. Women are identified and defined in line with men's code of perception. This according to Okunna (1996) shapes public opinion and attitudes toward women and undermines society's confidence in them. Garitanno (2008) notes that Ghanaian movies tend to recycle gender stereotypes with a long history in African popular culture and naturalize a similarly deep-rooted "ideology of patriarchy".

The movie industry is seen as not only pandering to stereotypes, but also reinforce existing stereotypes. Some researchers (Agars, 2004; Brewer 2009) insist that stereotypes that exist in the media portrayal of women do not generally originate within the media organization rather they arise from beliefs which are widespread in society as a whole concerning psychological differences between men and women. It will be unrealistic to expect the media to deviate from accepted norms especially since their appeal is to a mass audience. For instance Agars (2004) argues that the media images of women are based on stereotypes that exist in the society. Again, these scholars assert that in the case of female stereotyping in the media, it is as a result of a patriarchal society. Critics of this assertion hold the argument that the fact that the media repeatedly and constantly depict women in stereotypic roles and portray them in a negative rather than in a positive way confirm the media's role against efforts to empower women. This school of thought proclaims that the media is bias against women. These critics also admit that men have been the dominant group behind media products. Owusu & Kwansah-Aidoo (2012) contend that Ghanaian movies are full of male dominated representation of women because most filmmakers in Ghana are men. Consequently, the woman in the Ghanaian movie is depicted as tempestuous, devilish and an unsympathetic character. Many feminists such as Ellmann (1997) describe images of women in movies as stereotypic and it is a deliberate attempt by men to portray women as such. However, some of these studies acknowledge that over the years, women's role in movies have expanded beyond their original stereotypic role that existed decades ago. For instance King (2007) observes that some decades ago filmmakers produced movies that operated under a social value system designed to regulate women sexuality, keeping them as virgins for men's pleasure. However, she observes that the situation has changed and now women are allowed to explore their own sexuality. In tandem with Kings, Owusu & Kwansa-Aidoo (2012) observe that stereotypic images of women in Ghanaian movies have improved since filmmakers nowadays cast women in roles that were traditionally men's domain. They cite women being portrayed as law makers, doctors, working mothers among others.

5.0 Methodology

Six movies out of thirteen films that won awards at the 2012/2013 Kumawood Akobeng Movie Awards were selected for the study. Producers of the six selected films were also nominated under the same 2012/2013 Kumawood Akobeng Movie Awards best producer category. The movies include *Menko M'Abusua* (The Family I Have), *Adoma*, *Eno Samanpa* (Mother's Benevolent Ghost), *Abrokyire Abrabo* (Life Abroad), *Time Changes* and *Ama Ghana*. In all 114 cumulative scenes were counted for the six movies.

5.1 Synopsis of the Movies

Menko M'Abusua

This movie tells the story of two sisters Benewaa and Ama Foriwaa whose main aim is to destroy their younger brothers Akosah and Nkrumah. Through witchcraft they disable Akosah and make him jobless and mentally deranged. Through the same diabolic and mischievous behavior of spirituality, they try to prevent Mina, Nkrumah's wife, from getting pregnant. They vilify anyone who tries to help these brothers and eventually prevent any good from coming their brothers' way.

Abrokyire Abrabo

This movie tells the story of a couple, Sammy and Owusuaa, in London who work hard to invest in Ghana. Through lies and deceit, Owusuaa's parents are able to convince the couple to make them overseers of their investment in Ghana. Owusuaa's mother and father squander the money on women and fail to invest the money prudently. Sammy and Owusuaa come back to Ghana only to discover that their investment is wasted.

Eno Samanpa

This movie tells the story of a lady, Mafia, who loses her mother and siblings through witchcraft. She goes through pain but with the help of various people she encounters, she is able to redeem her life in another town. Life takes a new twist when she meets Ofori and gets married to him. She seems to enjoy life after her new

found love. Unfortunately, her happiness is short-lived because she could not conceive. Ofori's family gets even with her. This movie is full of vilification, betrayal and treachery.

Time Changes

This movie tells the story of two sisters, Akosua Dompou and Adwoa who fight over kingship positions for their sons. In order for her son to win, Akosua dompo through juju cripples her sister's son Nkansah and makes Naomi blind. Finally, truth comes to light and there is poetic justice. Everyone gets to know the evil machinations of Akosua Dompou.

Ama Ghana

Ama, a very beautiful girl in her prime faces a lot of pressure from her parents to marry a rich man. After throwing away various suitors, her parents finally find her a rich man to marry. Despite the good fortunes of the man, he is unable to make Ama happy because he refuses to consummate their union. Under influence, Ama together through the influence of other female friends begin to have extra marital affairs.

Adoma

In *Adoma*, a pastor does everything in his power to prevent his daughter Adoma from marrying the man of her dreams. In order to win Adoma's father to his side, Asante, Adoma dream love is misled by Kirashi, a witch doctor who gives him power to sleep with ladies and kill them. As the movie unfolds, Adoma encounters hatred, witchcraft, juju and betrayal.

5.2 Unit of Analysis

Kimani (2009) defines a unit of analysis as the smallest element or indicator of the phenomenon of interest in a content analysis. Wimmer and Dominic (2003) adds that unit of analysis may be a word, an image, a symbol or an entire story. In line with these assertions, the unit of analysis of this study was a scene in the movie. In this study a scene is operationalized as a continuous block of storytelling either set in a single location or following a particular character. The end of a scene is typically marked by a change in location, style, or time.

5.3 Coding and Categorization

Qualitative content analysis unlike its quantitative counterpart does not restrict the researcher to predetermined categories but opens its range so that other themes may emerge from the study, (Schilling, 2006). Through an inductive procedure based on an earlier pilot study and following the steps of Global Status of Women (2009), Okunna (1999), and Owusu & Kwansah-Aidoo (2013), the following salient thematic categories emerged from the coding:

Domestic- any scene that features a woman who is mostly at home and devoted to domestic duties. It also include scenes that feature women engaged in duties that are traditionally perceived to be in the feminine arena or womanly.

Sex object- any scene that portrays a woman as useful object for the sexual gratification of men, as promiscuous, or as commercial sex workers. Such inferences may also be made through appearances, actions or statements of any of the characters in the scene.

Diabolical- any scene that features a woman with qualities that are presumed to be of mischievous intent or that can or is likely to cause injury. Examples include scenes that portray women as witches, necromancers or women who resort to spiritualists to harm others or gather material gain.

Dependent- any scene that features a woman as entirely dependent on others especially male counterparts for survival or where women are cast in a subordinating role to men for economic, political, social and emotional support.

Gullible- any scene that casts women as garrulous, naive, ignorant, easily manipulated and susceptible to men.

Vituperative- any scene that portrays a woman as vicious, sharp-tongued, or invective casting

Enduring- any scene that portrays a woman as tolerant especially when it comes to accommodating physical and emotional abuse and pain.

Accommodating- any scene that depicts a woman as uncomplaining and contentedly waiting on people.

The above thematic categories guided the coders during the coding process.

5.4 Coding Process

Two undergraduate students of the University of Education, Winneba operating independently were recruited as coders and taken through the categories in order to serve as guide for them during the coding process. To moderate the subjectivity level of coders and also reduce errors that may result from the varying background of the coders as a measure to enhance reliability and validity, Marrying (2000) posits the testing of an inter coder reliability. In qualitative content analysis, Macnamara (2005) and Marrying (2000) agree that 0.7 coder agreement is sufficient.

The coders and the researcher watched the movie *Adoma* to serve as a pre-test for coding. Both coders agreed on thirteen scenes out of fifteen scenes. Using Holtsi (1969) measuring too, an inter coder reliability rate of 90% was achieved during the coding process.

The study also employed textual analysis as a research tool to perform an in-depth analysis of the thematic categories derived from the content analysis. The study therefore employed textual analysis to aid in explaining

the thematic categories that emanated from the coding.

6.0 Findings and Discussion

To answer the first research question, qualitative content analysis was done on the six movies per the categories obtained from the coding scheme. As sated earlier, the thematic categories that emerged include, *domestic, dependent, sex objects, gullible, diabolic, enduring, vituperative* and *accommodating*.

Table 1: Cumulative scenes and length of the six movies

Title	Length	Number of Scenes	
Menko M'Abusua	1hr 17min 18sec	22	
Adoma	0hr 53min 46 sec	15	
Eno Samanpa	1hr 19min 46sec	18	
Abrokyire Abrabo	1hr 19min 3sec		22
Ama Ghana	1hr 5min 32sec	18	
Time Changes	Ihr 27min 41sec	19	
Total	7hrs 23min 6sec	114	

6.1 RQ: 1(a) what is the degree of representation of women in popular Ghanaian movies?

This research question addresses how women are portrayed or represented in the six popular Ghanaian movies. The study first looks at the quantitative representation of the women in the movies. Many studies (Chari 2008; Okunna, 1996; Utaka, 2010; Van Zoonen, 1994) have indicated that women, in terms of numbers, are underrepresented in popular movies. This study did a count of women cast in all the six movies vis-a-vis their male counterparts to know the number of women represented in the six movies as depicted in the table below.

Table 2: Degree of representation of women in the six selected popular Ghanaian movies

Movies	N		% of Men	
Menko M'Abusua	12	54	10	46
Adoma	8	53	7	47
Eno Samanpa	9	50	9	50
Abrokyire Abrabo	15	68	7	32
Ama Ghana	8	44	10	56
Time Changes	9	47	10	53
Total	61	54	53	46

It is important to note that, generally, women were not under-represented in the movies. With the exception of *Time Changes* and *Ama Ghana* which came up with 47% and 44% respectively, women were better represented in the movies. In *Abrokyire Abrabo* 15 women representing 68% were cast as against 7 men representing 32%. *Menko M'Abusua* cast 12 women representing 54% as against 10 men representing 46%. In *Adoma*, 8 (53%) women were cast against 7 men (47%). *Eno Samanpa* represented both gender equally with 9 apiece sharing a rate of 50%. In total, women constituted 54% of the cast in the movies, whilst men constituted 46%.

The findings of this study therefore contradict findings by Chari (2008) and Van Zoonen (1994) who assert that when it comes to numbers women are underrepresented in movies. Even though in the numbers indicate that women are well represented in these movies, it does not mean that they are qualitatively represented. As cautioned by Utaka (2010) the increase in the number of women in movies does not necessarily guarantee their positive representation.

6.2 RQ 1(b): How are women portrayed in these popular Ghanaian movies?

Altogether, eight themes emerged from the content analysis of the six movies. The themes derived from each movies are depicted on a Table. Table 3 represents the frequency distribution of how women were portrayed in all the six movies, namely: *Menko M'abusua* (MA), *Adoma* (AD), *Eno Samanpa* (ES), *Abrokyire Abrabo* (AB), *Ama Ghana* (AG), and *Time changes* (TG). *Menko M'Abusua* will be represented (MA), *Adoma* (AD), *Eno Samanpa* (ES), *Abrokyire Abrabo* (AB), *Ama Ghana* (AG) and *Time Changes* (TC).

Table 3: Cumulative frequency distribution of how women were portrayed in the six movies

CATE'GORY	MA	AD	ES	AB	AG	TC	TOTAL
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Vituperative	9 (19)	2 (6)	10 (21)	11 (32)	5(14)	8(19)	45 (19)
Dependency	8 (17)	7 (21.2)	10 (2)	6 (17)	6(16)	5(12)	42 (17)
Domestic	4 (9)	6 (18.2)	8 (17%)	4 (12)	8(22)	7(16)	37 (15)
Diabolic	8 (17)	5 (15.2)	7 (15%)	3 (9)	0(0)	8(19)	31 (13)
Sex Object	7 (15)	5 (15.2)	2 (4)	2 (6)	8 (22)	3(7)	27 (11)
Accommodating	5 (11)	4 (12.1)	3 (6)	4 (12)	2 (5)	4(9)	22 (9)
Enduring	3 (6)	4 (12.1)	4 (9)	0 (0)	6 (16)	4(9)	21 (9)
Gullible	3 (6)	0 (0)	3 (6)	4 (12)	2 (5)	4(9)	16 (7)

Vituperative

This category ranked first among all the categories in its depiction of women in the movies. It scored 45 representing 19% of the entire six movies. Among the movies, *Abrokyire Abrabo* scored the highest, dedicating 32% of its scenes to this category. They were followed by *Time Changes* and *Menko M'Abusua* which scored 19% each. It was then followed by *Ama Ghana* (14%), *Eno Samanpa* (10%) and *Adoma* (6%).

Dependent

This category ranked second out of the 8 dominant categories that emerged from how the movies portrayed women. 17% of the scenes were dedicated to the Dependent category. Of all the movies, *Adoma* topped, with 21.2%. *Time changes* scored the least staking 12% with regard to employing this category in the portrayal of women. The movie dedicated 12 out of its 19 scenes to this category. The other movies ranked as follows: *Eno Samanpa* (21%), *Menko M'Abusua* (17%), *Abrokyire Abrabo* (17%), and *Ama Ghana* (15%).

Domestic

The domestic category ranked high placing third among the themes employed to analyze the portrayal of women in the six movies. With a total of 37 out of 241, being the cumulative frequency of categories coded, the domestic category scored 15% making it one of the highest categories employed to portray women. As illustrated in Table 3, the movie that highly employed the domestic category is *Ama Ghana* with a total of 8 representing 22% out of 37 (100%). The rest of the movies portrayed women in the domestic category as follows: *Adoma* (18.2%), *Eno Samanpa* (17%), *Time changes* (16%), *Abrokyire Abrabo* (12%) and *Menko M'Abusua* (9%). The movie that least employed the domestic category is *Meko M'Abusua* with a frequency of 4 (15%)

Diabolic

The diabolic category ranked fourth among the other categories scoring 31 (13%). *Menko M'Abusua* came tops among the others with 17%. Again, two movies came second, *Eno Samanpa* and *Adoma* dedicating 15% of the scenes to this category. It is also followed by *Time Changes* and *Abrokyire Abrabo*, both scored 9% each. *Ama Ghana* did not portray women as diabolic.

Sex Objects

This category ranked 5th scoring 27 (11%) in the portrayal of women as sex objects. *Ama Ghana* scored the highest by dedicating 22% of its scenes to this category. It was followed by *Menko M'Abusua* and *Adoma* scoring 15% each. It was then followed by *Time Changes* (7%), *Abrokyire Abrabo* (6%) and *Eno Samanpa* (4%).

Accommodating

This category shared the same position with the previous category. It dedicated 22 scenes representing 9% to the portrayal of women as accommodating. *Abrokyire Abrabo* and *Adoma* ranked high scoring 12% each. It was followed closely by *Menko M'Abusua* with 11%. *Time Changes*, *Eno Samanpa* and *Ama Ghana* came last with 9%, 6% and 5% respectively.

Enduring

This category ranked last but one among the other categories dedicating 9% of its themes to the enduring category. *Ama Ghana* topped in this category. 16% of its scenes were coded for this category. It is followed by *Adoma* with 12%, *Eno Samanpa* and *Time Changes* scored 9% each. *Menko M'abusua* followed with 6%. In *Abrokyire Abrabo*, none of its scenes portrayed women as characters with enduring nature.

Gullibility

This category ranked last, only 16 scenes, representing 7% were dedicated to this category. *Abrokyire Abrabo* led with 12% followed by *Time Changes* with 9% then *Menko M'abusua* and *Eno Samanpa* with 6% each, *Ama Ghana* comes in with 5%. In *Adoma* women were not portrayed as gullible therefore scoring zero.

6.3 RQ 2: How do the portrayals reinforce or contradict existing notions about the role of women in society?

Earlier review of the literature established that women are continually portrayed in stereotypical roles in movies (Azeez, 2010; Brewer, 2009; Chari, 2008). Other studies Utaka (2010), Hilton & Von Hippel (1996) posit that these stereotypes are very negative and some of them do not reflect the reality of womanhood.

From the findings, it could be inferred that women are consistently stereotyped in the movies. Classical stereotypes given to women such as dependency, domesticity and protection were identified in the movies. This

finding supports Owusu & Kwansah-Aidoo (2012) and Olujimi (2008) account that women in popular movies are normally framed around these stereotypes. As Dolphyne, (1991) puts it, the media portray women in their traditional stereotyped roles as submissive, dependent wives or mothers.

In all the movies, women were seen as occupying the domestic space. Brewer (2012) confirms that women are always seen as the weaker sex and therefore cannot survive without men. This is very evident in the movies especially when it comes to issues of finance and counselling. Men are portrayed to possess all of these qualities whilst women are portrayed as dependent on men for the same qualities. Utaka (2010) asserts that most roles of women in movies conform to the already existing stereotypes in society and this is very evident in the six local movies under discussion. Even though some studies on women's representation in the media (Hunnicut, 2009; McFadden, 2003) claim that there are fewer stereotypes of women in movies of recent times, the findings of this study run contradictory to these studies and their assertions.

The findings also revealed that women are portrayed as vituperative, diabolic and as sex objects. These thematic categories form part of what Brewer (2009) refers to as negative stereotypes. Women in these movies are portrayed with the same negative stereotypes that exist in movies worldwide and in the real world. This goes to confirm Media Awareness Network's (2008) concern that women are constantly given negative stereotypes in films. It also validates what Okunna (1996) and Utaka (2010) have said that African movies continue to put women in a negative light and also subjugate them.

As observed by some studies (Brewer, 2009; Chari, 2008) women were predominantly portrayed as sex objects in these six movies. According to Treise et al (1994) the media industry continues to stereotype women with a major area of worry being the representation of the female gender as sex objects. In both *Adoma* and *Menko M'abusua* women were constantly portrayed as sex objects for men. In *Ama Ghana*, Ama and her friends are portrayed as sex addicts who regularly seek sexual gratification from men. In one scene, Ama's friends persuade her to engage in extra marital affair. Throughout the movie most of the women were portrayed as sex-hungry and immoral characters. Indeed women's bodies as sexual commodities fit to be bought by men is portrayed more as a norm than an aberrant behavior. Examples of women being portrayed as vituperative were evident in *Eno Samampa*. In a scene, Boahemaa cast invectives on her sister-in-law every time she came in contact with her and this attitude runs throughout the movie.

Most of the scenes in the movies repeatedly present women as inferior subjects, evil people and people who are morally corrupt. Writing about female characterization in local movies, Ezeigbo (1996) observes that most women characters are portrayed as depraved and diabolic and that their bestiality beggars description. The findings from these movies confirm this observation. Brewer (2009) adds that even though the world seem to be moving from traditional misogynistic era, stereotyping of women still exist and the media is the worse culprit.

6.4 Thematic Analysis: Four Perspectives

Theorizing the portrayal of women from the perspective of Chari (2008), the six movies could be theoretically analyzed under four areas. They include; 1) *boxed women* also known as the good women; 2) the *free women* also known as the bad or evil women; 3) *insignificant others*; and *gender inequality*.

Boxed women

According to Chari (2008) boxed women are women who are represented in restrictive gender roles. As indicated by Wood (2013) these women are focused on family and are subordinate to men, hence they view life through the narrow prism of tradition and have internalised the worldview of the dominant sex. They seem to conform to traditional domestic stereotypes of women. They are usually cast as loyal wives, help mates and victims. In *Menko M'Abusua*, Mina, Nkrumah's wife is an example of a boxed woman. She remains loyal to her husband despite all the troubles she encounters from her husband's family. Again, Maafia in *Eno Samampa* is another example of a boxed woman. She does everything tradition prescribes for a wife when she married Ofori. Such domestic activities include cooking and cleaning the home. Even though Maafia shows a lot of endurance, strong will and strength, she is still cast in the shadows of men. Wood (1994) postulates that a woman is always identified with traditional feminine virtues, and in the movies, a woman is classified as strong and successful if she exemplifies traditional feminine values of subservience, passivity and possesses a personal identity linked to a dependency on men.

Free Women

These women represent all the things a good woman is not. She is stern, assertive and courageous. They are categorized as witches and wicked. According to Wood (2013) these women are represented as hard, cold and aggressive. Olujimi (2008) adds that such women are cast as treacherous, unreliable and sharp-tongued. In *Menko M'abusua*, Benewaa and Ama Oforiwaa are cast as witches who try to destroy any good that comes the way of their family. In *Adoma*, Sofomaame, a character whose name is derived from the fact that she is a pastor's wife is cast as a free agent. Her assertiveness lands her negative tags including 'loud-mouthed', 'witch' and 'a lioness'. When her husband puts their daughter under duress to marry a man of his choice, Sofomaame opposes and incurs the wrath of her husband and members of their congregation. All the movies, with the exception of *Ama Ghana*, cast most of the independent-minded women in the movies as diabolical and witchcraft-possessing

beings. As reiterated by Utaka (2010) identities of women in these movies are so diabolical that sometimes they lack reality and seem un-natural.

Insignificant Others

Insignificant others are those whose identities are vague and lack categorization. A careful analysis of the scenes reveals that some women were cast but did not play any major role in the movies. According to Chari (2008) the identity of these characters are not well defined because they operate in the background as unseen characters. Again, they are nameless and do not often speak. Once again these women are also considered insignificant when they are alienated from mainstream performances in a scene. A clear example is a scene in *Adoma* where a lot of women were cast but did not play any significant role. Also in *Time Changes*, women at the king's court house did not play any major role. Even when decisions were taken on them, they were not given much prominence or voice. In scene four of *Ama Ghana*, three men including Ama's father conspire try to marry her off to a rich person and she is not given any voice to resist or reject the machinations. This reinforces the idea that women are passive characters.

The representation of women in these insignificant roles, according to Chari (2008) marginalizes women since it implies that they are 'less human' but nevertheless are content with the roles they assume.

Gender Inequality

Also evident in the movies is the issue of gender inequality. The movies in many instances depict the inequalities that exist in gender relations in the community and societies at large. According to Media Awareness Network (2008), owing to lack of gender sensitivity among producers of popular movies, production of gender inequality is reinforced in several productions. Although there has been a lot of changes over the years in terms of what is considered appropriate societal roles for men and women, Hazel & Clarke (2008) observe that the change is not reflected in the media especially in movies. This is also evident in the movies under study. Gunter (1995) opines that women are normally cast as domestic; focused only on family and personal relationships; less competent and dependent on their male counterparts for emotional and financial support. On the other hand, men are portrayed as strong leaders and not interested in things of the home. These gender representations found in the movies create what Morawitz & Mastro (2008) refer to as patriarchal gender discrimination. The popular Ghanaian movies under study are not exceptions.

In exploring the dichotomy of gender power relations, the movies explicitly favor men. The men in the movies have more economic power than their wives. Since the men have more resources at their disposal, their wives rely on them to provide them with their needs. Scenes after scenes reveal that these movies reinforce gender imbalances in society. In *Menko M'abusua*, the one who has economic power and feeds the entire family is Nkrumah. In *Adoma*, the final authority resides with Osofo Boadi. Any decision he makes is final and no one could dispute it. In scene six of *Adoma*, Osofo Boadi reprimands her daughter for dating a guy he refers to as 'irresponsible'. Even when his wife tries to convince him to exercise patience, he vilifies her and says; "Woman I have told you not to speak. My word is final. Don't you have any respect for me?" This statement made by Osofo Boadi clearly reflect the power men wield in several homes in the typical Ghanaian or African setting. Men are the final authority in African homes (Okunna, 1996). In *Time Changes* we witness a classic traditional decision making caucus known as the Council of Elders. This caucus, led by the Chief make decisions that bind the whole community. The significant nature of the caucus is that they are composed of only men. This is also a clear indication that women are alienated from leadership roles and the scene shows a reinforcement of gender roles prescribed by patriarchal societies. Proceeding for the perspectives of Okunna (1996) and Utaka (2010), continuous portrayal of men in such dominant modes to reinforce gender imbalance in society and becomes impediment to calls for gender equality. Where women were made leaders, assume villainous characterization. For instance, *Menko M'abusua*, the leader of the witch camp is a woman. Almost all the male character in the movies are cast as independent whilst about 90% of the women in the movies are made to depend on a male figure for support. In *Eno Sampanpa* throughout the journey of pain, Maafia's once-in-a-while reliefs by way of support came from only men. Not a single female character was empowered to come to her rescue. Without the men she would not have made it through the evil forest and she would not have met her husband. All the good people in the movies are men. About 95% of the women in *Eno Sampanpa* were portrayed as wicked and diabolical. All the women Maafia came across seem to incinerate her life. A typical example is Ofori's mum and auntie. Due to Maafia's inability to conceive, they vilify and use all their energies to break her marriage with Ofori. Even though the movie is titled *Eno Sampanpa* translates "Mother's benevolent Ghost", all the people from the spiritual realm who manifest as humans with the capacity to redeem Maafia from her troubles are men. This means that even in the spiritual realm, powerful women like the 'benevolent Ghost of a mother' is incapacitated from displaying her spiritual prowess. She is rather cast in the shadows of the men. The women portrayed in these movies are always the helpless victims whilst the men are always the heroes. According to Duru (2012), men's dominance over women places women in a subordinate position.

The findings reinforce Mulvey's (1975) assertion that the representation of women in movies is on patriarchal terms and not on women terms entrenching a phenomenon where women are always portrayed to satisfy men's

patriarchal mindset. Demaris & Longmore (1993) add that social and traditional norms enhance inequality by shaping our expectations of gender behavior. The elements presented in these movies show a lack of equality when it comes to gender because they highlight male privileges in society.

7.0 Conclusion

This paper examined the portrayal of women in Ghanaian local movies. First, the study revealed that popular Ghanaian movies do not under represent women contrary to what some studies (Chari, 2008; Utaka, 2010) have established. In quantitative terms, generally, women were well represented in the movies. Second, the study showed that the dominant images employed in portraying women in the movies depicted them as vituperative, dependent, domestic, diabolic, sex objects, accommodating, enduring, and gullible. Almost all the categories identified stereotyped women. The portrayals only lead to the subjugation of women because they increase men's disdain for them, sow distrust amongst women and strengthen the forces which push them to the fringes of social life. The images of women presented in these movies, therefore, reinforce stereotyping of women and mirrors the traditional settings of women's role, performances and subjectivities in real society.

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