

**Ghanaian Women and Film: An Examination of  
Female Representation and Audience Reception**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **GHANAIAN WOMEN AND FILM: AN EXAMINATION OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION AND AUDIENCE RECEPTION**

The purpose of the study was to explore the filmmaking practices of both local and diaspora Ghanaian women filmmakers. Specifically, it focused on three women video/digital filmmakers: Veronica Quarshie, Shirley Frimpong-Manso and Leila Djansi and investigated the ways in which their backgrounds, interests and political economic conditions impact on their filmmaking and representations. It also explored the representations of women and women's issues in three selected films of theirs – one from each director. Lastly the study also investigated how Ghanaian male and female audience groups respond to and interpret the female representations in the selected films. In bringing attention to careers, practices, works, and film reception that are yet to gain in-depth scholarly attention, this study is significant in its contribution to women's video/digital filmmaking in Ghana. Consequently, the study is situated within the field of African women in cinema studies and also the emerging study of African video films.

The critical media and cultural studies approach was adopted to guide investigations into filmmaking practices and political economic conditions, the film text, as well as the audience. The study also utilised in-depth interviews and focus group discussions for data collection and employed textual and thematic analyses for analysing the data. The central findings of the thesis are: (1) Even though the female directors deal with similar themes, political economic conditions, individual sensibilities, concerns and interests have great impact on the way the filmmakers portray and redefine postcolonial women's experiences; (2) Despite working in a commercial environment where films are populated with misogynistic and stereotypical images of women, through direct and indirect approaches the three female directors/producers manage to insert

African feminist messages in their works; (3) The male participants overall were largely welcoming of progressive change in women's situations, and they supported women's freedom even at the expense of male privilege. The female participants, on the other hand, were more approving of women asserting themselves through acceptable social conducts, but they strongly believed in achieving women's independence in a just manner.

The study concludes that the women directors studied are charting a worthy course for Ghanaian, and by extension African women filmmakers and also championing the course of women in their fight against societal structures and strictures that constrain them. It also suggests that continuing on such a path of depicting women's life experiences and providing progressive female images on screen will help challenge the status quo while encouraging women in their struggles for social justice, emancipation and equality.

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This thesis has been professionally copy edited by Dr Rachel Le Rossignol according to the Australian Standards for Editing Practice. Specifically the standards applied included D1, D3 to D5 and E1, E2 and E4. These standards relate to clarity of expression, spelling, punctuation and grammar, appropriate academic editing and ensuring the document meets the examining university's format, style, referencing and sequencing requirements.

## **DEDICATION**

To the memory of my father Rev. Edward Osei Owusu who looked forward to my PhD journey, but sadly passed away just after I commenced.

## DECLARATION

I, Joyce Osei Owusu hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which, to a substantial extent, has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made.

Signature:



Date: 23/10/2015

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ABC	American Broadcasting Corporation
AMAA	African Movie Academy Awards
AMVCA	Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards
BAFTA/LA	British Academy of Film and Television Arts Los Angeles
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BFI	British Film Institute
BUSAC	Business Centre Advocacy Challenge
CFU	Colonial Film Unit
DVD	Digital Video Disc
FESPACO	Festival Panafrican du Cinéma et de la Television de Ouagadougou
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FIPAG	Film Producers Association of Ghana
FOSDA	Foundation for Security and Development in Africa
GBC	Ghana Broadcasting Corporation
GCFU	Gold Coast Film Unit
GFIC	Ghana Film Industry Corporation
GTP	Ghana Textiles Printing Company Limited
GTV	Ghana Television
ICOUR	Irrigation Company of Upper Region
IDFA	International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LEAP	Learning Education for all People
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
M-NET	Electronic Media Network
NAFTI	National Film and Television Institute

NYAA	National Youth Achievers Awards
PAFF	Pan African Film and Arts Festival
RLJE	Robert Louis Johnson Entertainment International
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SCAD	Savannah College of Arts and Design
TNJ	The Network Journal (Black Professionals and Small Business Magazine)
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
USA	United States of America
VCD	Video Compact Disc
VOD	Video on Demand
VPA	Ghanaian Video Producers' Association
WHO	World Health Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **GHANAIAN FEMALE DIRECTORS IN ACTION**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

This study explores the filmmaking practices of both local and diaspora Ghanaian female directors and their contributions to the Ghanaian film industry and culture, including their representations of societal issues, and audience reception. To do this, the study focuses on three women (two based in Ghana and one based in the diaspora), with the specific aim of delving into their biographical backgrounds, and the political economic conditions under which they work and how those influence their filmic productions. The study also seeks to understand the representational strategies used by the women filmmakers to highlight women and women's issues in selected films. By women's issues, I mean issues that relate to women such as motherhood, female oppression, female independence, and female bonding just to mention a few. In addition, the study aims to examine male and female audiences' interpretations of the portrayals of women and women's issues in the selected films<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Introduction**

Over the last two decades, the Ghanaian film industry has seen what can almost be described as a revolutionary shift, in terms of the involvement of women in production, as directors, scriptwriters and entrepreneurs. The reasons for this may be many and varied, but the two quotes below are instructive in what they reveal.

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<sup>1</sup> Some scholars such as Adejunmobi (2002, 2003, 2005, 2007), Haynes (2000, 2008), Okome (2000b, 2007a), and Ukadike (2003) in their writings use the term film to refer to the West African videos, while others like Garritano (2013a) prefer to use movie. In this study both terms are used interchangeably.

In my own small way, my aim is to see that society moves forward, society is educated with the correct values and to tell my fellow women we can also make it in a male dominated area. ~ Veronica Quarshie (2013)

Before I started making films, I often saw in local movies women in very depressive states, women at the mercy of men, women who were in bad marriages and didn't have choices ... Women who were witches and mothers-in law who dragged their daughters-in-law from their homes and put them on the streets. I knew my Mom wasn't like that. I knew I had friends who were not like that. I am not saying there were not people like that in society, but I was thinking when are we going to be able to tell *our* stories as well and that's what I set out to do. ~ Shirley Frimpong-Manso (2013)

The quotes cited above from two of the women at the centre of this study are telling in a number of ways, but two points stand out the most. First, they provide an insight into what motivated these women filmmakers to enter a field that is largely dominated by men. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the quotes serve the dual purpose of providing an overview of the state of Ghanaian women's filmmaking on one hand, and the ways in which women have been represented in Ghanaian films, on the other. These observations provide me with a strong rationale for investigating Ghanaian women and film; for delving into their film making practices, the joys and travails of working in such an exciting, but male dominated area, and their efforts at educating society and presenting women in ways that have not been hitherto done. This study is therefore a journey of discovery, one that seeks to reveal some of the inner workings of the Ghanaian film industry and women's place in it. And this journey begins with mapping out the historical antecedents of women's filmmaking in the country.

The beginnings of Ghanaian women's filmmaking endeavours as producers can be traced to 1967 when the distinguished dramatist Efua Sutherland in collaboration with the American television network ABC produced *Araba: the Village Story*, a

documentary based on her successful Atwia Experimental Community Theatre Project. Sutherland did not establish a career in filmmaking, but her pioneering production was indicative of what women were capable of contributing to the Ghanaian film industry. This notwithstanding, for two and a half decades women worked from the margins of an industry that gradually faced major economic crises, commercial failures and inactivity until the independent video phenomenon emerged in Ghana in the late 1980s. Meyer (2003a, p. 201) observes that the multifaceted challenges of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), accessibility to the new video technology, and the economic transformations that took place in the country at the time opened up the public sphere (also see Ukadike 2003). Consequently, film production became accessible to marginalised individuals such as women directors who until then had not established their place in the area. Garritano suggests that until the coming in of video technology and the video film culture, no Ghanaian woman had produced or directed a documentary or feature film in the country (2013a, p. 17).

With regard to Ghanaian diaspora women, even though it is not clear the exact period in which they began making feature, short, animation or documentary films, it is a matter of public record that Ghanaian/British documentary filmmaker Yaba Badoe produced and directed *A Time of Hope*, a forty minute art documentary for BBC Two, in 1983. Following on, in recent years, Ghanaian diaspora women such as Leila Djansi, Akosua Adoma Owusu, Akua Ofosehene, and Sam Kessie have come to the fore and demonstrated commitment in tackling various issues of interest through their films.

In 1992, the first independent Ghanaian woman video film director/producer emerged in the person of Veronica Cudjoe with her film *Suzzy 1* (1992) and subsequently, its sequel *Suzzy 2* (1993).<sup>2</sup> Over the years, Cudjoe's nascent start has been followed by a number of female video film producers such as Hajia Hawa

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<sup>2</sup> Veronica Cudjoe in 1995 was awarded by the Ghanaian Video Producers' Association (VPA) - now Film Producers Association of Ghana (FIPAG) - for being the first Ghanaian woman to have directed a video feature film.

Meizongo, Nana Ama Boateng, Cecilia Oppon-Badu, Naana Mensah, Akofa Edjeani Asiedu, Kafui Danku, Yvonne Nelson, Yvonne Okoro, and Alberta Hukporti, among others. Having joined the sporadic number of female video film directors in the industry, Veronica Quarshie, Afi Yakubu, Vera Mensah Bediako, and Josephine Anim, for instance, have handled the direction of some productions. Moreover, filmmakers such as Nana Akua Frimpomaa, Shirley Frimpong-Manso, Juliet Asante and Kafui Dzivenu, like the first woman video filmmaker Veronica Cudjoe, have produced and directed feature films.

Generally, while many of the women who attempted making films did not go on to have sustained careers in filmmaking, the few who did together with their diaspora sisters are adding to the momentum that Ghanaian filmmaking practice has gained. For instance, Veronica Quarshie<sup>3</sup> was recognised and awarded several times for her stories, screenplays and direction and had her films shown at film festivals abroad at a time when the video features were shut out from international festival circuits (see Haynes 2010b). Shirley Frimpong-Manso, Yaba Badoe, Leila Djansi, and Akosua Adoma Owusu among others have also received varying degrees of national, continental and international recognition (see Chapters Six and Seven).<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding such progress and recognition, the contributions of the female directors, their biographical backgrounds and the conditions under which they make films, which include the political economy of cultural production and filmmaking practices, are yet to receive any serious academic attention. Also, the concerns and thematic preoccupations in their works, the representational strategies they employ to focus on women and women's issues, are yet to be studied in-depth. Moreover, actual audience interpretations of their films are still to become the focus of any critical investigation.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for the details of awards Veronica Quarshie has won.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Six and Appendix A for the details and full filmography and awards won by Frimpong-Manso and Djansi.

Researchers such as Adejunmobi (2005), Badoe (2012), Dogbe (2003), Garritano (2013a), Kwansah-Aidoo and Osei Owusu (2012), and Ukadike (2003) have set the pace by tackling some aspects such as production history, narrative commerce and serialisation or aesthetics of a few Ghanaian/Ghanaian diaspora women filmmakers' work, and/or by analysing a handful of their films. This research builds on these studies and focuses on three selected Ghanaian women feature film directors – two based in Ghana: Veronica Quarshie and Shirley Frimpong-Manso, and one in the diaspora: Leila Djansi.

As one of the first in-depth studies that look at Ghanaian women filmmaking, this research is situated within the burgeoning scholarship on African video films. It is also located within the overall field of African Women in Cinema Studies, pioneered and/or developed by scholars such as Bisschoff (2009, 2010), Cham (1994), Ellerson (2012a, 2012b, 2004, 2000), Harrow (1999a, 1999b), Petty (1996), Pfaff (1988), Thackway (2003), and Ukadike (2002). These studies on African women in cinema have focused on continental, sub-continental, or individual women filmmakers involved in the less-commercial art house films, which preceded the video film culture. While some have formulated paradigms for analysing images of and by African women, others have explored women's filmmaking practices and experiences, the female gaze, feminist engagements and female representation. In addition, they have demonstrated that even though there are connected experiences, African women in cinema do not operate within a monolithic framework because by virtue of the diversity on the continent, they all hail from different locations and work under different conditions (Ellerson 2000). Foster, who studied African and Asian diaspora women, notes that the women make films with various budgets, production values, concerns and thematic preoccupations (1997).

The available scholarship shows that thematic tendencies dominating most of the less-commercial art films by female as well as male filmmakers in sub-Saharan Africa are often informed by African socio-economic, cultural and general life experiences (Bisschoff 2009; Ellerson 2000; Harrow 1999a; Thackway 2003; Ukadike 1996). On representations of women, it has also been shown that the filmmakers have

advanced a plethora of women's images that seek to reconstruct colonised subjects and stereotypical female depictions put forward by the West and patriarchal hegemony. Dovey notes that the orientation to celebrate African women and critique oppressive structures, which suppress women can be considered part of a larger reformist post-colonial tendency by post-independence African cultural producers (2012, p. 21).

The situation is however, different when we consider female representations in the popular West African commercial video cultures, which are far removed from any post-colonial agenda. Researchers posit that the commercial stake and independent status of the video filmmakers have had a great impact on the narratives and content they produce (Garritano 2013a; Sutherland-Addy 2000a; Ukadike 2003). For example, Sutherland-Addy (2000a) contends that depending on the commercial market, the filmmakers produce films with fascinating stories, which satisfy audiences' curiosity and generate debates to ensure box office success. While male and female projections may not be progressive<sup>5</sup> under such uncertainties for various reasons, the bulk of research on women's representation shows that women are often marginalised and presented in stereotypical roles (Abah 2008; Garritano 2013a, 2000; Okome 2004; Ukata 2010). This study seeks to contribute to the scholarship in this area, with a particular focus on female representation in three Ghanaian/Ghanaian diaspora women's films: *The Forbidden Fruit* (Quarshie 2003), *The Perfect Picture* (Frimpong-Manso 2009), and *Ties that Bind* (Djansi 2011). Two of these films have not been critically analysed within the scholarship.

In terms of audience reception, a survey of the field reveals that apart from a few studies such as Azeez (2010, 2013) and Okunna (1996), readings of female representations in videos so far studied have often been expressed through critical analysis and reviews by scholars and reviewers. This approach, to borrow from Ambler, tends "to privilege the film scholar-critic as the arbiter of film meaning and effectively dismisses the audience as irrelevant or assumes its passive reception of a film's putative message" (2001, p. 84). This implies that actual audience readings

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<sup>5</sup> The word 'progressive' is used throughout this thesis to imply a sense of reformation.

and interpretations of African women's representations by local and diaspora Ghanaian women directors still remain obscure. In an attempt to help fill this gap, this study also investigates actual male and female audiences' interpretations of women's representations in the three selected Ghanaian/Ghanaian diaspora women's films.

## **Research Questions**

In order to help fill the identified gaps in the scholarship and build on knowledge in the way we understand the filmmaking practices of the three Ghanaian/Ghanaian diaspora women directors, the women's biographical backgrounds, the political economic forces that shape their works, their portrayals of women and audiences' interpretations of the female representations, the study will seek to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways have the biographical backgrounds, interests, production and distribution (political economy) practices of the three selected Ghanaian women film directors, influenced their films and filmmaking?
2. How are women and women's issues represented in the selected films by the chosen women filmmakers?
3. How do Ghanaian male and female audiences interpret female representations in the selected films?

## **Overview of Methodological Approach and Conceptual Issues**

The study follows the multi-disciplinary open model offered in the tripartite approach of Critical Media/Cultural Studies proposed by Kellner (2009). This approach is about: (1) studying the *context* within which a cultural text is produced, (2) analysing the *text*, and (3) examining audience *reception* (Kellner 2009, p. 8). Here, the study focuses on a mixture of topics such as examination of historical, cultural,

biographical and political economic contexts, textual analysis, and audience reception. This approach is original to this study because it has not been employed in the study of Ghanaian women's filmmaking. The research questions have been formulated based on this approach. Consequently, the study is formulated as an investigation in three parts. The first part is divided into two sections – sections A and B. While section A explores women's participation and role in the history of film production in Ghana to provide a historical context (see Chapter Five), section B examines the biographical and the political economic contexts for the three selected films by the filmmakers (see Chapter Six).

The second part of the study focuses on textual analysis of three selected films – *The Forbidden Fruit*, *The Perfect Picture*, and *Ties that Bind* – one from each filmmaker (see Chapter Seven). Given that the purpose of this study is to understand the representation of women and women's issues, textual and thematic analyses are employed as analytical tools while Postcolonial feminist theory, African feminist theory and transnational film theory provide the theoretical lenses through which the films are analysed. Postcolonial feminist theory examines the intersections between colonialism and neocolonialism with respect to “gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities in different contexts of women's lives, their subjectivities, work, and rights” (Rajan & Park 2005, p. 53). Postcolonial feminist theory also seeks to address and appropriate voice, agency and empowerment for women from once-colonised nations who have been dispossessed, exploited or spoken for. Meanwhile, the African feminist framework seeks to enhance understanding of African women's struggle for freedom from all forms of suppression – “internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical” (Mama 2001, p. 59). Transnational film theory considers the international or cross-cultural aspects of filmmaking by examining filmmaking professionals, sources of funding, casting, thematic preoccupations, production, distribution and exhibition practices and the way that these transcend different national boundaries (Hjort 2009, p. 12).

The study takes the view that the films selected for analysis are engaged in a dialogic relationship with Ghanaian culture and the role of women, hence, postcolonial feminist theory is used in combination with African feminist theory to

help interpret female representations and women's experiences within the postcolonial environment and African socio-cultural milieu (see Chapter Two). Transnational film theory is employed as a useful framework through which the context within which the filmmaking practices and representation by the diaspora filmmaker can be analysed.

The third part of the study examines Ghanaian male and female focus groups' readings and interpretations in relation to female subjectivity and representations in the three selected films. Hence, focus group discussions were conducted to find out the ways in which men and women decode female representations in the women's films. The theoretical framework adopted to make sense of the data is the Encoding/Decoding theory postulated by Hall (2006). This framework suggests that the meaning of a text resides between the producer (encoder) and receiver (decoder). It considers the intended message encoded in a text by the producer and examines, for instance, specific social positions, cultural competency, the way these are inhabited by audiences, and how these impact on their interpretations of the message (Bobo 1988; Dyer 1977; Kellner 2009). The framework is used to identify and examine the various ways in which selected Ghanaian male and female focus group participants interpret the ways women are represented in the three selected films (see Chapter Eight). This part of the study is an attempt to understand actual audiences' interpretations of female filmic representations by women and to bring a gender comparative analysis to the area of audience reception studies of West African/diaspora video/digital films as it is taking shape.

### **Scope of the Study**

Due to the constraints of space and time the study focuses on the directorial engagements of only three Ghanaian women filmmakers. The film directors: Veronica Quarshie, Shirley Frimpong-Manso, and Leila Djansi, have been selected based on a set of "predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton 2002, p. 238). They were selected on the following basis: (1) they have prioritised women and women's issues in their films; (2) their films are popular and accessible; (3) they

have made feature films; and (4) they were ready to make themselves available for the study. Their selection does not imply that they are the only Ghanaian female film directors whose films are committed to telling female stories/experiences, but as Bisschoff notes, “every process of inclusion unavoidably also involves a process of exclusion” (2009, p. 2). As a result of the limited scope, the study does not claim to be exhaustive and the findings reported here are not intended for generalisation.

This notwithstanding, the selection attempts to reflect three interrelated paradigms associated with African women’s filmmaking in relation to the fact that women enter filmmaking at different times and they work from different locations (Ellerson 2000). The selection covers a time span from when women from Ghana began establishing themselves as filmmakers to the present – precisely from 1992 to the present. It also includes women whose careers have evolved since the second half of the 2000s to the present, a period in which the Ghanaian video movie industry made a shift from producing movies using analogue technology to producing films using digital technology and engaged in transnational productions (Garritano 2013a, pp. 154-182). It is important to point out that the selection of local and diaspora Ghanaian female directors across first and second generation<sup>6</sup> video/digital filmmakers demonstrates the quintessential multiplicity of African women’s filmmaking, as established in the literature (Ellerson 2000; Bisschoff 2009). Finally, the selection is also to reflect the different production lenses and cinematic distinctions between Ghanaian female filmmakers in the homeland and diaspora.

In view of the multiplicity of women’s filmmaking practices, the study’s first interest is to investigate the filmmakers’ biographical contexts with respect to family and film training, and political economic contexts and how those aspects intersect to shape their works. Since all three selected independent women filmmakers (Quarshie, Frimpong-Manso, and Djansi) have worked within the Ghanaian video film industry, a historical development of women’s filmmaking cum examination of the industry will be provided in order to contextualise the cultural production conditions in which the

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<sup>6</sup> By first and second generation, I imply filmmakers who started making films at the early and recent stages of the evolution of Ghanaian women’s filmmaking practices both on the local and diaspora scenes.

films chosen for analyses in this study were made. Again, because one of the selected filmmakers (Djansi) is based in the diaspora and makes her films transnationally in Ghana and the USA, the study examines the nature of her transnational filmmaking practice.

Secondly, the study is interested in examining the representational strategies that the three selected filmmakers employ to highlight women and women's issues in their films. The chosen films – *The Forbidden Fruit*, *The Perfect Picture*, and *Ties that Bind* – have been selected based on the fact that: (1) they focus on women and women's issues, which is a major focus in this study; (2) they have not been studied in-depth through the theoretical lenses employed in this study; and (3) they are accessible, popular, and considered commercially successful, which means many patrons have seen them. Despite limiting the films to be studied to one film each from the female director's body of work, an overview of their general concerns in film and filmmaking is provided in Chapter Six.

Thirdly, this study also analyses the actual interpretations that a selected group of male and female audiences from Ghana make of the visual representations of women and women's issues in the selected films by the female directors. Using one male and one female focus group discussion for each selected film, the audience analysis also examines some of the factors that influence audiences' interpretations.

It is important to reiterate that the culture explored in this study is restricted to Ghana and three Ghanaian women video/digital film directors based in Ghana and in the diaspora and focuses exclusively on their biographical contexts, the political economic conditions specific to their work, female representations in three films (one from each woman), and selected male and female focus group participants' understanding of the female representations in the three films.

## **Justification of the Study**

In 1999, Schmidt suggested that there was not enough knowledge about sub-Saharan African women filmmakers and proposed an agenda for research to be conducted in individual countries on the subcontinent. Essentially, she suggested that research should focus on collecting information on all activities including independent and self-help projects by female filmmakers in order to map out the development of film production in each country (Schmidt 1999, pp. 275-304).

Furthermore, Schmidt proposed that research identify and learn about successful and unsuccessful filmmakers in order to trace the development of individual careers and to understand the specific factors that pertain in individual African countries, which are relevant to the understanding of the roles of women filmmakers (1999, p. 292). The proposed agenda also included learning about all aspects of film production, which when broken down would include detailed information on individual biographical experiences with respect to training and evolution into filmmaking, the specific conditions of production, artistic and thematic preoccupations as well as distribution and reception. For Schmidt, generalisations on African women's filmmaking practices can only be made after fostering understanding of women's roles, works, and specific conditions that prevail in specific African countries (1999, p. 278). Sixteen years after Schmidt's proposal, Ghanaian women, their filmmaking practices and films, as demonstrated earlier, are yet to be included in the canon. It is therefore critical that their filmmaking endeavours be researched and understood. This study is a response to Schmidt's call and an attempt to fill some of the gaps in the literature mentioned earlier.

Given that the study aims to address aspects of the lacunae in the scholarship, the examination of local and diaspora Ghanaian women film directors, the historical, biographical, and political economic contexts under which they make films, the representations of women and women's issues in their films as well as male and female focus groups' interpretations of the female images, is important for various reasons.

As one of the first of its kind on Ghanaian women film directors, this study will make an original contribution to the field of African women in cinema studies and the emergent field of African video film studies by expanding knowledge to include the specificities of Ghanaian women's filmmaking and its place within the larger discourse. For instance, the study will help understanding of individual women's careers, filmmaking practices, the political economy, and how these factors interact to shape the films they make. This will in turn foster better understanding of the Ghanaian women's contribution to video/digital and to feature filmmaking particularly in Ghana and in the diaspora. The inclusion of the diaspora female filmmaker will bring into perspective the Ghanaian diaspora woman's participation in the transnational film production culture. Significantly, the study of the three women will be valuable to the discourse on Ghanaian women filmmakers and filmmaking. On a practical level, an exploration of the careers of the selected filmmakers will provide important models/examples of strategies women can employ to remain prolific, achieve commercial success, and focus on female-centred narratives in a male dominated and commercial industry.

In addition, the study will also contribute to an understanding of the ways in which the Ghanaian female filmmakers represent women and women's issues in their films. Moreover, the study will be significant to postcolonial feminist theory, African feminist theory, and transnational film theory by affirming, enhancing, expanding, and/or interrogating perspectives delineated within each of these theories/frameworks. Beyond the academy, the feminist engagement in this study will be relevant in showing models of how women's commercial films can present female images and issues in ways that coincide with feminist representations.

Furthermore, the study is important because it demonstrates one of the ways the Critical Media/Cultural Studies approach can be used to enhance understanding of how films are shaped by specific cultures and in turn reflect them. The study's importance can also be seen in how it will not only enhance the encoding and decoding theory that is employed here and its usefulness to understanding audiences and what they bring to the film understanding situation, but also

demonstrate how to reduce assumptions that have been found to be the mainstay of the theory. While the study on male and female audiences' interpretations of women and women's issues in the selected films will enhance our knowledge on the actual readings male and female audiences produce, the study will also encourage such interrogations within the larger discourse on audience reception studies on African films and possibly stimulate new areas for further research.

## **Summary of Chapter One and Overview of Remainder of the Thesis**

This chapter (One) has provided an introduction to the thesis by looking into the background of Ghanaian women directors and their evolution into filmmaking. It further situates the study within the emerging scholarship on African video films and the overall field of African women in cinema studies. The chapter also identifies the areas within the two fields where the study attempts to make a contribution, provides the research questions, overview of methodological approach and conceptual issues, the scope of the study, and justification for why the study is important. The remainder of the thesis is organised as described in the following paragraphs.

Chapter Two is devoted to "Theoretical framework". It specifically examines the theories of postcolonial feminist theory, African feminist theory and transnational film theory that underpin the analysis of Ghanaian/Ghanaian diaspora women's filmmaking practices and female representation.

Chapter Three focuses on "Methodology", covering the research design and the different methods employed in the study. The chapter examines the Critical Media and Cultural Studies approach adopted and provides the rationale for using it while demonstrating its influence on how the research questions were formulated. The methods employed for sampling, data collection and data analysis are also explained here.

Chapter Four examines appropriate literature on, “Women in African Cinema and Video”. It specifically synthesises and explores studies on African women in cinema studies and scholarship on West African video films. It critically analyses African women’s roles and contributions to African cinema and video filmmaking, and further examines female sensibility and feminist consciousness as well as their relation to representation of women and women’s issues in women’s films. The chapter also provides a critical review of visual representation of women and by women while analysing African audiences’ reception of African films.

Chapter Five and Six are contextual chapters. Chapter Five, “Contextualising Ghanaian Women’s Film: Women in Ghanaian Film History”, provides the general historical context of Ghanaian women’s film development, maps out their emergence and engagements in Ghana and in the diaspora as well as the general conditions of the Ghanaian movie industry and transnational filmmaking practice in order to establish the larger historical and cultural context from which the selected women practice their craft. Chapter Six presents individual biographical contexts to enhance understanding of the individual filmmakers’ family and training backgrounds and the specific stories about their journeys into filmmaking. It also examines the interests and concerns of the filmmakers and explores the peculiar political and economic forces that shape their works.

Chapter Seven focuses on the three selected films and is thematically structured. Using textual and thematic analysis, the chapter critically examines female representations and identified leitmotifs that cut across the selected women’s films and pays attention to the specific concerns and distinctive ways the filmmakers represent women and treat women’s issues.

Chapter Eight is devoted to focus group participants’ interpretations of female representations. This is done through critical application of the encoding and decoding theory. The chapter discusses the usefulness to help identify the various ways in which selected Ghanaian male and female audiences read women’s representation and issues in the three chosen films. While reporting and discussing

the data from male and female focus groups, the chapter examines the factors that enhance meaning making and analyses the actual interpretations the male and female participants bring to the female portraits.

Chapter Nine summarises the key findings arising from the preceding chapters and demonstrates how they help answer the research questions. The chapter also provides the implications and limitations of the study, presents the lessons learned, suggests areas for future research, and provides a summary for the whole study and a conclusion.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the theoretical frameworks for the study. Postcolonial feminist theory, African feminist theory and transnational film theory are suitable frameworks that underpin the critical discussions because apart from helping to address the research questions, they also help to shed more light on specifics in respect of filmmaking practices, conditions of production and representations by the Ghanaian female filmmakers, which this study is about. The postcolonial feminist theory will provide the conceptual lens for understanding the women filmmakers, their position as postcolonial subjects, their filmmaking practices, and how their individual and professional experiences in the postcolonial environment shape their work. Meanwhile, African feminist theory will be used as the framework for examining the representations of women and women's issues in the selected films. Transnational/diaspora film theory will be employed to analyse the filmmaking practices the selected diaspora female filmmaker is engaged in.

The following sub-sections discuss postcolonial feminist theory with particular attention on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's proposition that the subaltern cannot speak (1994), African feminist theory, and transnational/diaspora film theory.

#### **Postcolonial Feminist Theory**

Postcolonial feminist theory emerged within the general umbrella of postcolonial theory and criticism. Postcolonial theory is a confluence of theories and analytical

frameworks used in subverting colonial discourses that impose imperialistic views on colonised individuals and societies (Appiah 2001; Bhabha 1994, 2001; Fanon 1963, 2001; Said 1995, 2001; Slemon 2001; Young 1995, 2001, 2003). They are also used in examining the various effects of colonialism on the colonised, in examining texts and culture written in presently or once-colonised countries, as well as in providing alternative narratives to colonial discourses about the colonised. In other words, they are also concerned with the production of texts that speak to self-recovery of lost identities and histories of the colonised or the postcolonised. Moreover, postcolonial feminist theory also aims at reinstating the suppressed and silenced colonised subject into dominant discourses in ways that defeat the authority of the coloniser and the neo-colonialist (Childs & Williams 1997; Tyagi 2014).

Characteristically, postcolonial feminists believe that colonised or postcolonised women experience two levels of colonisation concurrently because they do not only have to deal with imperialism and its legacies, but also male-dominated systems (Peterson & Rutherford 1986). According to Mama, feminism in the post-colonial context:

presents a praxis that directly opposes the hegemonic interests of multinational corporations, international financial and development agencies and nation-states, as well as the persisting male domination of disparate traditional structures, civil society formations and social movements (2002, p. 1).

Consequently, postcolonial feminism locates issues and concerns of gender that hitherto rarely occupied the centre stage of postcolonial theory and Western feminist theory. Young (2003, p. 116) has suggested that feminism in a postcolonial context demonstrates the extent to which women continue to struggle against colonial legacies that were characteristically, institutionally, economically, politically and ideologically patriarchal.

Within the dispositions of continuous struggle against oppressive colonial legacies, the postcolonial feminist theorist, Gayatri Spivak in her influential study on the notion that the subaltern cannot speak, brings into focus the concept of “epistemic violence” where what is known about the subaltern subject is projected through the lens and knowledge of the West (1994, p. 78). In her interrogation of whether the subaltern subject can speak, Spivak suggests that the compassionate Western intelligentsia (Subaltern Studies collectives), and colonists who claim to speak for exploited groups or save oppressed women in colonial societies paradoxically reinforce a practice that silences and denies them agency to speak and be heard (1994, pp. 78-103).

Spivak therefore suggests that in the process of mediating knowledge about the subaltern woman she is not only represented as an object because she lacks agency, but also the knowledge being perpetuated about her – her actions, her status, her culture, and her history are misjudged (1994, pp. 94-104). That is to say, “the task of recovering a subaltern subject is lost in an institutional textuality at the archaic origin” because the Western historian lacks the basic contextual social and cultural knowledge to interpret her situation (Spivak 1994, p. 99). For Spivak, this imposes upon the subaltern woman an “ideological constriction” (1994, p. 101). Hence, she concludes that “between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shutting which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’” (Spivak 1994, p. 102).

As a result of misguided translation and misinformed representation of the colonised/postcolonised woman’s experiences which Spivak (1994) criticises, she raises the issue of who represents the subaltern woman and whose voice is to be heard when matters concerning her are raised? Spivak believes the subaltern as a woman cannot be heard or read because of hegemonic codes imposed on her through imperialism and patriarchy.

Consequently, she suggests that on a short term basis “strategic essentialism” could potentially be employed, for instance, by colonised/postcolonised female intellectuals, which could include female filmmakers such as the ones this study focuses on, to reconstruct the subaltern woman’s history, consciousness, and being (Spivak 1987). Despite this possibility, Spivak (1994, pp. 103-104) cautions that there are limitations in such an approach to redefine the identity of the subaltern woman because her voice and heterogeneity may not only be inadequately captured, but also the strategy may recycle the risk of perpetuating the power/knowledge factor, which postcolonial feminism attempts to circumvent. Morton (2003, p. 68) has suggested that Spivak’s deconstruction of elite representation of the subaltern may not be adequate as a political strategy in itself. However, he continues:

By foregrounding the historical and political determinants that shape representation, Spivak gradually moves from a negative emphasis on the impossibility of representation towards a more situated articulation of particular histories of subaltern insurgency and agency in postcolonial world (Morton 2003, p. 68).

While, as already suggested, the female filmmakers in this study may speak for subaltern women through their films, Morton’s submission has specific implications for this study. It is useful in the way in which we understand the roles the female filmmakers as postcolonial subjects themselves play in representing women and women’s issues; thus, recovering the cultural histories and narratives of the subaltern woman’s experiences. Bisschoff has suggested that there is a remarkable visibility and vocal power of African women who are part of African cinema as filmmakers, festival organisers, academics, actors, and writers (Bisschoff 2009, p. 239). This study attempts to understand the possible ways in which the filmmakers redefine the subaltern female character and investigate how they make her to be seen, to speak, to be listened to, to be heard or to be taken seriously within the filmic world.

Spivak (1981) and other postcolonialist feminist theorists like Mohanty (1991) have criticised Western feminism for subsuming women's experiences under a monolith category and not accounting for differences and women's postcolonial struggles against neo-imperialism and patriarchy. In a sense, postcolonial feminism privileges an analytical method that takes into consideration differences that relate to histories, gender, race, class, sexuality, and nationality, among others. As a result of the single perspective about the postcolonial woman held by the West, there are suggestions that Western feminism rarely turns its focus on, for instance, educated, urban, middle class African women as if this group of people do not exist in the African environment (Cornwall 2005, p. 2). Turning the focus on themselves, Nfah-Abbenyi's (1997) study shows that African female writers, for example, have dealt with this subgroup – the urban, educated, cosmopolitan, middle class career African women's range of unique experiences – an agenda that interests contemporary female African filmmakers not excluding the three filmmakers that this study focuses on.

Through similar criticism put forward by postcolonial feminist theorists,<sup>7</sup> African feminism also opposes the essentialist hegemonic notions of the third world woman as the monolithic 'Other' who is marginalised. Consequently, they highlight the importance of naming one's real feminist struggles and resistance on her terms (Nnaemeka 2002, p. 13). As the next section demonstrates, African feminist theorists (both on the continent and in the diaspora) have articulated specific feminist frameworks that respond to diverse African women's conditions and experiences.

Before moving on to discuss African feminist theory, it is worth pointing out that suggestions have been made to the effect that African feminism and postcolonial feminism share similarities in the ways they emphasise differences and partake in the postcolonial processes of resistance and redress gender injustices: however, the spaces they occupy are designated differently (Gqola 2001, 20). Gqola has

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<sup>7</sup> Postcolonial feminism as it is understood was actually influenced by African, Asian and Latin American feminist thinkers who contested Western feminism, which did not consider that women from different places experienced oppression in diverse ways and that class, race, nationhood, and sexuality among others were important if gender relations were to be reconfigured. See Mama in her interview with Salo (2001, p. 61).

explained that what differentiates the spaces is the creation of new language, new vision, and new realities as worlds and environs are refashioned anew (2001, p. 20).

## **African Feminist Theory**

Returning to the subject of self-naming and its importance to identifying specific lived experiences and struggles of the African woman, African feminists such as Petty (1995) and Nnaemeka (1998) have suggested that it is unsuitable to automatically adopt, for instance, Western feminist (film) theory<sup>8</sup> to examine African women's images and women's contemporary socio-cultural issues projected in films. Consequently, they suggest an African feminist framework is largely consistent with, and speaks to the specificities of the African woman's situation (Ahikire 2014; Nnaemeka 1998, 2003; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994; Petty 1995; Schmidt 1999). This study ascribes to this position because as Nnaemeka notes African feminist criticism is one of the most dynamic critical tools with possibilities for enhancing intellectual understanding of African women's experiences (1995, p. 81).

Like feminism elsewhere, Africa's brand of feminism is pluralistic and the modalities within which it is expressed are dynamic with composite backgrounds not only because of the diverse outlook and experiences on the continent, but also because of the perspectives of theorists who come from various nations on the continent (Arndt 2002, p. 71; Ahikire 2014). Mama, in an interview with Abbas (2014), succinctly describes African feminism as inherently transnational.<sup>9</sup> Nnaemeka has pointed out that to fully account for feminisms and women's conditions in Africa, it is necessary to provide a meeting ground for the various perspectives expressed so that the specific and collective 'truths' can help to produce a better understanding of the issues at stake (2005, p. 36). To this end, like others she has pointed out that

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, Mulvey's concept of the male gaze is a framework appropriate for analysing the way film form is structured by patriarchal society. Since the focus in this study is to understand the representational strategies employed by Ghanaian women filmmakers to represent women, Mulvey's concept will not be employed.

<sup>9</sup> Mama in an interview with Hakima Abbas (2014) suggests African feminism is inherently transnational because it has been theorised from all over Africa by different African nationals on the continent and in the diaspora. See < <http://thefeministwire.com/2014/10/feminists-love-amina-mama/>>.

despite diversity and fluidity there are iconic shared values and attitudes that can be used to identify the practice and concerns (Nnaemeka 2003, p. 361; also see Ahikire 2014). Generally, African feminism is an “ideological force that poses fundamental challenges to patriarchal orthodoxies of all kinds” (Ahikire 2014, p. 9).

In attempts to identify iconic shared values and interests, two broad dispositions of African feminism can be identified. A more liberal disposition proffered by theorists such as Kolawole (1997, 2004) and Nnaemeka (1998, 2002, 2003, 2005) privileges negotiation, for instance, with patriarchy. It adopts liberal approaches “to gain new scope for women”, as Arndt puts it (2002, p. 83). It falls in a similar category to what Arndt has described as reformist African feminist writing, which characteristically does not challenge the foundations of patriarchy. For Nnaemeka, “it assesses power not in the absolute but in *relative* terms – in terms of power-sharing and power ebb and flow” (1998, p. 11). The second disposition is radical African feminism, which is “concerned with radically reimagining and reshaping all power relations” (Dosekun 2007, p. 46). It is committed to displacing and transforming gender hierarchies and seeks gender equality, social and economic justice as well as women’s sexual liberation in African societies (Mama 2002; McFadden 2001, 2003; Tamale 2005, 2011a). It is worth pointing out that the African feminist framework used in this study synthesises and integrates perspectives developed within these two main broad discourses.

The synthesised perspectives delineated in African feminist discourse and discussed in the following sub-sections are crucial and useful to understanding the peculiar experiences as women fail, succumb or overcome the externally imposed and/or sometimes self-imposed oppressions as explored in the films analysed in this study. Furthermore, the framework is also partly useful in understanding some of the range of interpretative points of view the male and female focus group audiences express about women’s issues and representations projected in the films. In essence, it is useful in the way that it helps to grasp that which is opposed to or shaped by their worldview and experiences.

## **African Feminism and the Struggle against Women's Oppression**

African women's struggle for liberation on the continent dates back to the pre-colonial period. Their discontent and subsequent fight in anti-colonial struggles and formation of women's movements to confront inequalities testify to their efforts (Adeleye-Fayemi 2004; Aidoo 1998; McFadden 2001). They continue to fight against oppression and gender stratification intensified by neo-colonialism, religion, imperialism, capitalism, and recently globalisation (Bisschoff 2009; Kolawole 1997; McFadden 2001; Nnaemeka 2005; Steady 1981).

African women still live with cultural practices (patriarchal institutions, polygyny, enforced silence, forced marriage, levirate marriage, child marriage, obligatory motherhood, female circumcision<sup>10</sup>, trokosi<sup>11</sup>, widowhood rites and inheritance, unequal matrimonial property rights/settlement, witchcraft accusation) and injurious practices (rape, sexual harassment, abuse, and domestic violence) just to name a few (Steady 1981; The Women's Manifesto for Ghana 2004). Mama asserts that violence against women and children thrives because harsh cultural, social and economic conditions force women to oblige and endure (2001, p. 265). Meanwhile, Cornwall (2005, p. 13) observes that women in many African contexts still receive second class treatment, and they are "denied rights to land and inheritance, and subject to preferential basis on which men's entitlements are regarded by legislative, customary and statutory institutions." The study attempts to investigate the ways in which the selected Ghanaian women filmmakers problematise and address some of these social injustice issues in their films.

Apart from the African woman's position as a postcolonial subject, through the dictates of society she is taught and socialised to conduct herself as submissive to men. By the same token, a man is taught and socialised to conduct himself as the

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<sup>10</sup> Female circumcision could be regarded as both cultural and injurious practice.

<sup>11</sup> Trokosi is a ritual servitude system in the Volta Region of Ghana where young virgin girls are sent to their village shrine to serve the gods to atone for the sins committed by elders in their families. They are bound to live the rest of their lives in the shrine serving and suffering abuse, violence and rape from the shrine priest.

head, make decisions and be in charge. Maluleke has suggested that since the norms continue to exist without anyone standing against them, “they take on an aura of morality” in the vision of society and become legitimate (2012, p. 2). Extending beyond the personal, Tsikata (2007, p. 163) claims there are also discriminatory policies and practices in private and public systems that undermine equal rights for women and reinforce subordination.

In view of women’s passivity, liberal African feminism, for instance, advocates “for a society in which [women] can assert their innate resourcefulness by rejecting the fetters of tradition and any aspect of socialization that puts them at a disadvantage” (Kolawole 1997, p. 30). Aina (1998, p. 84) argues for an African feminism that privileges not only women’s economic and social transformation, but also a psychological development which will allow them to realise their full potential. To achieve this, African feminism encourages institutions that are of benefit to women and questions those that work to their disadvantage (Davies 1990, p. 9). It is with this understanding that the Women’s Manifesto for Ghana (2004, pp. 46-48) demands the elimination of norms and practices which affect the rights, welfare, health and dignity of women. It promotes the idea that women’s emancipation must respond to the concerns and values of the times.

To this end, Kolawole (2004) emphasises the need for a cultural revolution where women’s roles and identities can be refashioned and their voices particularly made audible. The traditional belief in “the culture of silence”<sup>12</sup> (Kolawole 2004, p. 254) which for the purposes of this study will be referred to as the muting/silencing of women’s voices is seen as one of the numerous obstacles to women’s liberation because women are rather hailed for being vocally absent. Kolawole succinctly explains that: “it is ... unwomanly to be vocal, loud and assertive; it is even an abnormality that gives off an offensive odour ...” (2004, p. 256). She suggests that

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<sup>12</sup> Muting/silencing of women’s voices is preferred over “the culture of silence” in the context of this study because of what sits uncomfortably in Ghanaian media history. In Ghana, the period of the 1980s when the military government under Jerry John Rawlings forced some newspapers to close down because they were too critical of the government, “initiated the era known as the ‘culture of silence’” (Salm & Falola 2002, p. 76). During the period, press freedom became restricted by fear of government oppression and intimidation.

this “anomalous ... silencing” affects women’s communication, particularly in their relation to patriarchy and conversations around sexuality (Kolawole 2004, p. 252). Davies (1995, p. 5-8) distinguishes between two conditions of silence – being silent and being silenced, and contends that while the former is empowering because it is a choice and could be more powerful more than speech in certain situations, the latter is oppressive because it is imposed.

This notion of silenced victim echoes postcolonial feminist Gayatri Spivak’s concept of the subaltern and the extent to which she has been suppressed and silenced. Nnaemeka (1997, p. 4) suggests that the strategy to overcome the dilemma of speaking for others should be focused on “*speaking up against/for issues*” (emphasis in original). For her, overpowering victimhood is not whether one overcomes or is crushed: what is crucial is the fact that one chooses to act. The processes of questioning and reconfiguring female oppression, exploitation and abuse, speaking for, and unveiling women’s voices and agency within the socio-cultural space are recurring themes in the films studied here.

### **Subverted Female Autonomy**

It has been suggested that African women in the pre-colonial era for example enjoyed autonomy particularly in matrilineal and even in certain instances in patrilineal systems, and as Mama (2001, p. 257) and Sudarkasa (2005) suggest, they also wielded a lot of autonomy in traditional modes of production where they owned land and engaged in farming, trading and craft production. They are also known to have held religious and political power in the public sphere. While scholars are charged not to glorify Africa’s past gender relations, arguments suggest that colonialism and Western/Arabian imperialism oppressed both men and women (Cornwall 2005; Nnaemeka 1998; Steady 1981). They expanded existing gender stratifications that disadvantaged women. Moreover, as part of bringing Africans into the global market economy, capitalist modes of production also created serious problems for women, thus, removing them rather from the source that ensured their autonomy and independence (Steady 1981, p. 11). This process, as Steady (1981,

p. 14) and Cornwall (2005, p. 5) suggest, transformed Africa's cultural fabric, reshaped gender behaviour and subsequently reinvented men and women's identities and identifications.

Mama (2001, p. 157) points out that women in the colonial period were excluded from formal education, political and administrative structures, thus denying them access to the wage economy. As will be suggested in the next chapter, this view perhaps partially illuminates our understanding of Ghanaian women's absence in filmmaking. Founding fathers of African nationalism are known to have conservatively held onto colonial ideologies and in some cases further exploited them (Mama 2001, p. 159; Steady 1987). Mama (2001) notes that women's participation in African national liberation and decolonisation struggles did not change male views that were framed in relation to women's reproductive and nurturing roles. In addition, normative gender discourse strengthened by religion and state stressed restraint and obedience for women (Cornwall 2005, p. 6). In view of these challenges, the true point worthy of note in Mama's argument is that African women were largely underprivileged when they entered the postcolonial era, and under global conditions men are relatively favoured because they control the nation's culture and politics (2001, p. 260). In the context of this study, and the quest to understand the female filmmakers and the conditions under which they make their films and represent women, the spaces occupied by the women and the challenges they encounter are important considerations.

### **Nego Feminism and the Culture of Complementarity**

Nnaemeka (2005, p. 33) suggests that liberal African feminism is fundamentally built on the worldview, cultures, and experiences of African women. Its resistance to gender segregation is an expression of the inter-gender, co-partnership and collective consciousness that is at the heart of African cultures; a consciousness that has been reinforced by colonialism and imperialist threats (Nnaemeka 2005, p. 33). In Africa, according to Sofola (1998, pp. 52-53) men and women share divine equality where they believe they have the same divine source, but have distinct roles

to play in the society they live in. Consequently, they see “human society as an organic holistic reality whose existence and survival can be achieved only through a positive, harmonious social organisation in which all the members are relevant and effective” (Sofola 1998, p. 53). This liberal perspective is based on a cultural and ideological framework that appreciates the intersections of gender difference, neutrality and balance. It incorporates a “humanistic approach that recognises and transcends gender” (Steady 2011, p. 241).

By ensuring a mutually supportive stance, Nnaemeka (2003) claims African women practise ‘nego-feminism,’ where they challenge through negotiation and compromise. In spite of unequal gender relations, African women intrinsically link their struggles with that of men. They recognise the importance of opposing patriarchy when it is responsible for their oppression, but they know “when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts” (Nnaemeka 2003, p. 378).

As a case in point, many women recognise the way patriarchy has been moulded to oppress them, but they acknowledge the need to engage in an integrative struggle with men to resist racist and other dominating global forces, believing that removing any one agent of oppression will not change their situation (Kolawole 1997, pp. 13-14). Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) contends that social transformation depends on both men and women. Moreover, Kolawole argues that women need to also involve men: particularly so because a high percentage of them are the policy makers and authority holders (Kolawole 2004, p. 261). It is believed by branding men as equal partners, women are more inclined to achieve set goals (Nnaemaka 2003, pp. 380-381; Steady 1981, p. 28). But, going by Ogundipe-Leslie’s (1994, p. 209) assumption that African men often seem irritated by the idea of equality between men and women, it is worth suggesting that achieving goals could also depend on whether men avail themselves as equal partners who are keen to participate in social transformation. Strategic negotiation may include educating men to the varied needs of women (Amadiume 2001, p. 59).

It is worth pointing out that while the support for gender complementarity is crucial for liberal African feminists, Nnaemeka (2005, p. 37) has also cautioned that “unexamined exaggeration of gender complementarity” can “mask real and insidious gender inequalities and conflicts particularly in racist and imperialist contexts.” In certain circumstances it can lead to romanticising particularly the relationship between African men and women. Nonetheless, the concept of complementarity will be useful as we attempt to make sense of gender relations projected in the films and the ways the filmmakers strategise to address particular challenges women face.

### **Self-Reliance, Independence and Woman-to-Woman Support**

African feminism stresses the importance of self-help, economic independence, and cooperation among women. As already noted it is apparent that women’s constraint in economically dependent roles makes it difficult for many to either leave unacceptable violent/oppressive conditions or seek legal intervention (Mama 2001, pp. 258- 261; Bennett 2010). According to Amadiume, there is a direct association between “poverty, illiteracy, low status of women, and ‘harmful’ cultural practices” (2001, p. 59). Education, independent economic grounding, and control of resources as one sees in Amadiume’s argument are what enable women to resist marginalisation and come into their own (2001; also see Darkwah 2010). This also means that true liberation begins with the woman herself and her self-perception since she has to defend and define her own freedom (Davies 1990, p. 7). This is specifically so because as Ogundipe-Leslie explains:

Women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of the interiorisation of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Her own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling. She reacts with fear dependency complexes and attitudes to please and cajole where more self-assertive actions are needed (1993, p. 114).

As Kolawole (2004, p. 263) observes, it is regarded as culturally correct for women to accept marginalisation. However, wallowing in self-blame and self-repression, inaction and voicelessness, only sustains external oppression. The framework for liberal African feminism is “*what* [women] do and *how* they do it” (Nnaemeka 2005, p. 32) (emphasis in the original). In effect, it is grounded in self-retrieval and agency insofar as it manifests women’s emancipation. African women’s true liberation is seen as “the development of greater resourcefulness for survival and greater self-reliance” (Steady 1981, pp. 35-36).

African feminism also encourages women’s self-help initiatives and woman-to-woman cooperation - working together, transforming structures, beliefs and attitudes to recreate and redefine African womanhood (see Adeleye-Fayemi 2004; Steady 2006). Accordingly, removing culturally sanctioned conditions of hierarchies among women and women’s so-called legitimate power over other women are major concerns. Examples of these are seen between the first wife and her power over her co-wives in polygynous marriages and mothers-in-law/sisters-in-law and their power over their daughters-in-law/sisters-in-law. Transforming these woman-to-woman relations is critical because, as Nnaemeka points out, through such power relations women become agents of patriarchal violence against other women (2005, p. 37). They do not have to live by the syndrome of being their own enemies for the benefit of patriarchy and culture wherein they retard their gender-based interests. In analysing women’s issues in the films this study focuses on, these perspectives help us to understand how women fail or make strides when they work together and support each other.

### **African Feminism and the Struggle for Absolute Female Independence**

According to Bisschoff (2009, pp. 20-22), because of globalisation, population and cultural flow as well as the complicated interplay between modernity and tradition, multiple identities for African women and new characteristics of African feminism have been defined. It is asserted that as the boundaries blur, values are exchanged through education and developmental policies, which redefine many areas in

Africans' lives (Bisschoff 2009). There is no doubt global convergence has been experienced in myriad ways and has had a complex impact on African women's lives. For example, global economic policies have had adverse consequences on women and the universalised development processes have pulled along some "leaving behind [their] African ideals of humanity, responsibility, compromise, true partnership at the heart of democratic values" (Nnaemeka 2003, p. 375). In contrast, one could also point out that globalisation is increasing demands for democratic processes and broadening the spectrum of rights for both African men and women (Adeleye-Fayemi 2004, p. 113). This emphasises the point made by Adomako Ampofo et al (2008, p. 5) that "there is no generic 'African' woman (or man), and that African women's and men's lives like those of other people are fluid and change over time" due to varying factors.

Recent perspectives in African feminist discourses express concerns similar to some of the concerns articulated in the West. Adeleye-Fayemi has argued that by linking African women's realities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century directly to feminist identities internationally, they politicise the struggle for women's rights and question the very legitimacy of the structures that subjugate them in an effort to develop appropriate strategies and action for total transformation (2004, p. 112). Some radical African feminist critics advocate radical measures and contest guarded value for "culture", "religion" and "community", which deny women their rights while they develop alternative definitions of African womanhood premised on principles of "autonomy", "bodily integrity" and "gender equality" (Horn 2003, p. 1; also see Adeleye-Fayemi 2004; Mama 2011; McFadden 2001, 2003).

McFadden (2001, n.p.) for instance, advocates for women's participation in decision-making at all levels and rejects the maintenance of the male public space and female private space divide, the sexist exclusionary economic practices, the blatant justification for women's victimisation and what she calls "culturalised expression of impunity" such as witch-hunting of older women and widows, female genital mutilation, incest, child marriages and coerced marriages as well as feminised altruism. Further, McFadden calls on women:

to reject outright (and not try to reform) those legal systems that are partial and often blatantly patriarchal: for example, the persistence of notions of male conjugal rights; refusal to recognise marital rape as a crime; allowance of polygamy and rampant sexual mobility; notions of paternity which define children as the property of the man rather than emphasising the responsibilities and obligations of parenting in democratic family relationships ... and a myriad of injustices that are allowed to circulate and reproduce through the often deliberate misrepresentation and or insistence by judicial officers that women cannot be considered persons in the ways that men are (2001, n.p.).

In a sense, McFadden (2001) suggests that these violate the rights of women, their dignity and decency as human beings. She sees women's rights as human rights and supports radical feminism and its fight to restructure society. Moreover, she calls on progressive men to become revolutionaries in order for them to transform maleness and masculinity in ways that will wipe the human-invented systems of selfishness and inequality. The radical processes of reclaiming women's autonomy provide tools to examine women's 'new' identities, which may have been taken generally for granted or hitherto identified or accounted for under the liberal African feminist framework. For this study, McFadden's interventions are particularly useful in that they provide the tools to analyse the convoluted context in which the female filmmakers may reclaim social justice for women and redefine womanhood. They are also insightful in ways that help us understand male and female focus group participants' responses to female characters that follow these processes because radical reconfiguration of Ghanaian womanhood is unpopular.

### **African Women's Sexuality and Power**

In developing alternative definitions of African womanhood, radical African feminist theorists and activists identify women's sexuality as one of the sites of female subjugation which needs redress. While sexuality is often seen in relation to biological processes such as reproduction, it has also been linked to many aspects

of human life. According to Tamale (2011a, p. 2) it is “socially constructed, in profound and troubling engagement with the biological” and as a result “heavily influenced by, and implicated within, social, cultural, political and economic forces”. Consequently, it connects with a wide range of issues like gender identity, body, pleasure, self-esteem, creativity, subversion, violence, oppression and living (Tamale 2011a, 2011b). While in discourses on development, sexuality is viewed as a source of harm and sex is seen to cause diseases (Jolly et al 2013, pp. 4-5), female sexuality in certain instances is linked to victimisation and/or death (Arnfred 2004, p. 59).

All things considered, normative conceptions of sexuality are gendered and as such also rendered in hierarchical relations. African women’s sexuality has been shaped to an extent by religious, colonial and post-colonial patriarchal structures and it is against this background that McFadden names it as a major area where women’s freedom and autonomy are suppressed (McFadden 2003). This is so because it has been regulated and controlled for the sustenance of women’s domesticity/chastity and for the survival of patriarchal and capitalist structures (Tamale 2005, p. 11; Arnfred 2004). In reinforcing the silencing of women’s sexuality, society dictates that a woman is reserved, modest and discrete in her sexual behaviour (Osakue & Martin-Hilber 1998, p. 193). Tamale stresses that sexual suppression has not only reduced women solely to their reproductive value, but also repressed their “erotic culture and sexual expression” (2005, p. 10).

African women’s sexual expression both verbally and emotionally are mostly met with moral condemnation leading to the muting of what McFadden defines as “feminist sexual memory and instinct” (McFadden 2003). And so rather than expressing for potential pleasure, women have been purposely socialised to remain muffled (Machera 2004, p. 160). As a result, Osakue and Martin-Hilber (1998, p. 195) suggest that the very idea that sexuality is a source of pleasure is beyond the imagination of many women. Hence, in reconsidering women’s rights to their bodies and re-sexualisation, theorists have sought to support African women’s sexual freedom, choice, desire, pleasure and reproductive rights. Tamale (2005, pp. 9-36), for instance, in her study on Buganda women in Uganda demonstrates the

importance for women to embrace sex not only for the purposes of procreation, but also for leisure and pleasure as it also has the potential to be an empowering resource for them against patriarchy.

Tamale argues for the need for African women to throw away assumptions and prejudices about their sexuality in an effort to unlearn entrenched sexual behaviour patterns and relearn new ones as a way to reinforce female sexual agency (2011a, p. 5). It is McFadden's contention that women's integrity and personhood lies at the core of demanding and re-socialising their sexual and reproductive rights (McFadden 2001; also see Machera 2004). Meanwhile, Horn (2006, p. 6) has claimed that the notion of women's sexual rights also includes the right not to have sex. She proceeds to argue that without knowledge and control over their bodies women cannot totally exercise their rights (2006, p. 8). This study attempts to understand how women's sexual rights are treated in some of the selected films by the Ghanaian women filmmakers.

Besides identifying female sexuality as a site of women's oppression, through ignorance and fear, it is also seen as a site for self-repression. Vance (1984, p. 5) has suggested that sexuality evokes a host of intra-psychic anxieties, which could merge with other sensations. For instance, he argues that while there may be irrational connection, during sex people also experience fears. There may be fears of break-up, self-destruction, loss of control, personal aggression, and past memories among others. For Vance, women must be encouraged not only to resist sexual suppression and victimisation but also ignorance, fear and self-deprivation (1984, p. 24). These frameworks are helpful in understanding female sexuality and expression as treated in some of the films. They are also employed to comprehend the readings male and female focus group participants bring to the issue of women's sexual expressions and choices.

## **African Feminism on Motherhood**

In upholding African women's rights to their sexuality, control over and enjoyment of their bodies, African feminism (as well as African societies) places value on motherhood, family and child bearing, but questions forced marriage and obligatory motherhood, devaluation of non-biological motherhood, as well as stigmatisation of barren women (Davies 1990; Adeleye-Fayemi 2004). African feminists believe that motherhood remains one of the institutions that allow women to resist patriarchal dominance. Citing Amadiume (1988), Adeleye-Fayemi argues that the institution of motherhood is a strategic tool for patriarchal resistance since it influences how mothers interact with power structures (2004, p. 108). This is possible because its importance emerges from African family organisation where "mother-derived ties are the most culturally significant" because the mother is not constructed in opposition to the father (Oyewùmí 2003, pp. 12-13). According to Oyewùmí (2003, p. 13), the mother is the fulcrum around which the family life is organised and the child's life revolves. This means that she has agency and power in her own right that brings her enormous obligation, security, companionship, privilege, and prestige. These accolades most times put unnecessary social and emotional pressure on especially those who through no fault of theirs cannot become mothers or have children of their own.

Adrienne Rich's (1986) view on motherhood provides a further analytical framework to interpret motherhood in the African setting. For Rich, motherhood has two meanings. The first is "the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to [her] children". And the second is motherhood as "institution, which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control" (Rich 1986, p. 13). In a sense, "motherhood" is viewed as a patriarchal institution that is controlled by men and oppressive to women and "mothering" is the experience women tend to get as they are mothering. Nnaemeka (1997, p. 5) has pointed out that the institutional construct of motherhood limits women's choices and can be oppressive, while the experience of mothering with its rewards and pains can potentially be empowering because it is based on personal choice. Nfah-Abbenyi has also suggested that while most African women may find empowerment in

motherhood/mothering, the challenges associated with it act in combination with other interrelated issues (1997, p. 25). Some of these she lists as:

... discriminatory cultural and patriarchal practices that give better socio-economic and/or political status to mothers, especially mothers of sons as opposed to mothers of daughters ... infant mortality and insufficient health care facilities that force some women to lose children and bear more to make up for the numbers that they really desire, or have more children in their search for the sons that they might not have (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, p. 25).

Steady (1981, p. 32) illuminates some of these ideas when she suggests that the high infant mortality rate in Africa presupposes that a great deal of energy is expended especially by women in ensuring the survival of their children (Steady 1981, p. 32). Moreover, in certain cases women are blamed and branded as witches for their inability to bear children or sustain their children's lives. Similarly, many women end up in polygynous marriages as a result of 'infertility' or failure to bear sons (Adomako Ampofo 2004, p. 122). It is perhaps in this regard that Lewis implicitly suggests that placing sole emphasis on women's social roles and prescribed identities reinforces gendered stereotypes (2001, p. 50). It masks women's many other potentials and capabilities, since women can do many things besides being mothers. In other words, women do not have to accept the imposition of motherhood as the sole "paradigmatic self-identity" (Tamale 2005, p. 24). As this study will show, while the female filmmakers frame various roles for their female characters, childbearing and motherhood are recurring themes in their films.

## **Transnational Film Theory**

Transnational film theory is a field of enquiry that has emerged as a result of the shift from viewing films as fixed products bearing the 'identity' of a particular nation to an unstable territory where film is seen as a product of more than one nation. It emerged in response to the dissatisfaction with the paradigm of referencing the

national as the means to make sense of production, consumption and representation of cultural identity in a time when the global world is increasingly interconnected, multicultural and polycentric (Hjort 2010, p. 8). Ezra and Rowden (2006, p. 1) suggest transnational cinema denotes the idea that there is no “stable connection between a film’s place of production and/or setting and the nationality of its makers and performers”. In effect, transnational cinema could also be seen to be produced through collaboration among filmmakers from different countries and/or by migrants or displaced filmmakers who are residents in the diaspora. Ezra and Rowden (2006, p. 1) further assert that transnational cinema in varying phases has been a corollary of globalisation. For them, the global circulation of capital, commodities, information, and human beings has given rise to films whose content and aesthetics are indications of advanced capitalism and advanced media technologies.

Hjort (2010, p. 12) argues that films have transnational dimensions when sources of funding, modes of production, distribution practices, casting decisions, thematic concerns and the various film professionals involved in making them do not just operate in a transnational mode, but also identify as transnational subjects. In a sense, cinematic transnationalism could be grounded in formal aspects of the film like camerawork and editing but also it could be determined when contextual determinants in relation to issues of production such as funding, participating film professionals and mode of production are considered (Hjort 2010, p. 14). In examining what constitutes a transnational film text/practice, Hjort further points out that the question of filmmakers setting out to make films internationally by employing visible and/or invisible transnational features is a useful way to understand when, for instance, a film passes as transnational or not (2010, p. 14). These are useful in the way they support some of the claims this study makes in relation to Ghanaian women’s transnational filmmaking engagements (see pages 153-156).

Higbee and Lim (2010, p. 9) note that the theorisation of the concept of the transnational in film studies has been approached through three key frameworks. The first approach focuses on an examination of the national/transnational binary. The second approach analyses transnational as a regional phenomenon where film cultures and national cinemas invest in a shared cultural heritage and/or geopolitical

boundaries. The third approach on transnational cinema privileges the study of diasporic, exilic and postcolonial cinemas and focuses on representations of cultural identities to challenge western, Eurocentric and neo-colonial imaging of the nation (including national culture), as well as to challenge national cinema and its limitations (Higbee & Lim 2010, p. 9).

The third approach is relevant because of its focus on diasporic filmmakers, who are partly at the centre of this study. Desai (2004, p. 18) has commented that the study of diaspora provides a critique not only about 'home', but also allows a concentration on origins and the roles they play in conceptualising the nation, race, and identity. It also offers opportunities to investigate the diasporic and its engagements with transnationality and globalisation (Desai, 2004, p. 4). What this study seeks to do is to understand broadly the Ghanaian diaspora female filmmaker and her connection(s) to filmmaking practice in the homeland and also to explore her transnationality in terms of the political economy of production, circulation, reception and representation. With regard to representation, the study also attempts to understand not only how her multiple identities as a member of the Ghanaian diaspora potentially impact on her characters and the issues she deals with, but the ways in which characters from the homeland and/or the diaspora and/or in the interstices are constructed in her narrative(s). Another interest of this study is to examine the ways male and female audiences based in Ghana respond to her 'trans/national female images'.

In relation to the mode of production, distribution and consumption, transnational filmmaking as it is related to diasporic independents takes place outside the capitalist and industrial mode of production practised, for instance, by Hollywood. As it has been argued, transnational cinema is supported by "mixed economies consisting of market forces within media industries; personal, private, public, and philanthropic funding sources; and ethnic and exilic economies" (Naficy 2001, p. 40). Moreover, the filmmaker tends to get involved at all levels of production and beyond (circulation and exhibition) either to control, shape the project, and minimise expenditure or because she is making an autobiographical film (Naficy 2001, pp. 48-49).

While transnational film theory is an emerging field of film studies in an increasingly globalised world, filmmakers such as producers, directors, writers, financiers, sponsors, crew and cast from diverse backgrounds and nationalities working on film projects located in places other than where they come from are increasingly becoming common. To an extent because of the dynamic composite identities of the makers of transnational films and again since funding and production take place across national borders, mobility of films is fostered through geopolitical and financial determinants (Ezra & Rowden 2006, p. 5). Much as transnational distribution practice is generally seen to unmoor films beyond their immediate production sites, it has been suggested that most transnational films with high funding support tend to have higher production values making it possible for such films to cross national borders with greater ease (Ezra & Rowden 2006, pp. 5-7). This is not to suggest that transnational filmmakers do not face the perennial challenge of distribution and exhibition of their films.

Naficy (2001, pp. 51-53) suggests that filmmakers working at the interstices between the local and the global have to deal with commercial forms of censorship and may receive limited distribution and exhibition because of the artisanal nature of their films or because of antagonist state-artist relations. This consequently affects the filmmakers' output. In the midst of challenges, while transnational filmmakers are in unique positions to criticise home and host societies (industries) because of their interstitial position, they are also known to receive intense criticism from their compatriots everywhere (Naficy 2001, p. 55). Information reviewed here is helpful to the way we understand some of the production and distribution practices of the Ghanaian diaspora woman's filmmaking.

Naficy (2001, p. 14) further suggests that diasporic filmmakers are displaced people living outside their home nations. Their movement could be caused by trauma, rupture and coercion or they can simply be motivated by the desire to increase trade, further their education, and look for job opportunities or to pursue colonial and imperial interests (Naficy 2001, p. 14). Journeys, the rationale for embarking on them, destination, duration and their impact on the travel and traveller, according to Naficy (2001, p. 33) are common thematic features in diasporic films. Typologies of

journeys that could be identified are journeys of escape which include home seeking and home finding, journeys of quest, and (celebratory) homecoming journeys or empowering return journeys. While the journeys mentioned are physical, Naficy further asserts that there are also “metaphorical and philosophical journeys of identity and transformation” (2001, p. 33). As this study will show through the analysis of the selected diasporic film both physical and metaphorical journeys are essential undertakings in the lives of the diaspora.

Furthermore, to a large extent, diaspora and the homeland form the backdrop to many transnational diaspora films. It is in view of this that Desai (2004, p. 20) has argued that the “diasporas, rather than being derivatives of, often are mutually constituted with the homeland nation. In other words, diasporas and nation produce each other.” Desai (2004, p. 20) is also of the view that diaspora filmmakers produce “fantastic imaginings” of the homeland because of a sense of loss and distance. Ezra and Rowden suggest this happens because:

The lingering appeal of notions of cultural authenticity and normative ideas of ‘home’ prompts filmmakers to explore the ways in which physical mobility across national borders necessarily entails significant emotional conflict and psychological adjustment (2006, p. 7).

Contrary to the idea of the diaspora and the sense of loss, Naficy (2001, p. 14) has suggested that unlike the exilic filmmaker, the diasporic filmmaker nurtures a collective memory of an idealised homeland and therefore her diasporic consciousness is multi-sited and her works are structured in plurality, multiplicity and hybridity of identity, which tend to place less emphasis on loss and absence. It is in light of hybridity that Ezra and Rowden have said “‘cosmopolitanism’” is gradually becoming one of the major tropes of contemporary identity (2006, p. 11). Eze (2014, p.139) has argued that “cosmopolitanism” for the African diaspora corresponds to “Afropolitanism” which basically reflects the diverse nature of people of African ancestry and their experiences. Meanwhile, diasporas everywhere are generally known to sustain a lasting sense of ethnic consciousness and uniqueness, which get

consolidated by occasional hostility from the homeland or host society (Naficy 2001, p. 14). These critical perspectives on transnational filmmaking are useful in understanding the filmmaking practices, conditions of production as well as interests of the diaspora filmmaker selected to be studied here.

Much as diaspora filmmakers demonstrate a consciousness of the homeland, with boundaries being blurred, transnational diaspora films are also known to challenge nationality and categorisation. It is as a result of this that Ezra and Rowden (2006, p. 4) have suggested that there seems to be a certain anxiety about correct or authentic cultural and ethnic representation in transnational films even though transnational cinema by nature arises in the interstices between the local and the global. Through an examination of the reception of the selected diasporic film, it will be shown in this study how the homeland-based male and female audiences interviewed feel and think about representations of women and women's issues.

## **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed relevant literature in postcolonial feminist theory, synthesised perspectives within African feminist discourse and transnational film theory and demonstrated their usefulness for this study, while highlighting some key areas that will be investigated. Postcolonial feminism as a framework is helpful in the way it allows for establishing the postcolonial identities as well as the historical and cultural specificities that mark the condition of the filmmakers and their works. The framework of both liberal and radical ideologies delineated within the discourse of African feminism will enable us to investigate the lived realities and experiences of the Ghanaian women we meet in the films and allow a better understanding of their representation and the context-specific issues at stake.

Amadiume (2001, p. 58) has argued that the multiplicity of perspectives of African feminism has meant that women from different strata of society, religion and political beliefs are making diverse demands and campaigning on different issues. This is also the case with the engagements of the women filmmakers in this study.

Transnational film theory allows for an understanding of an interstitial Ghanaian female diasporic film practice located within the local and global contexts. By situating the study of Ghanaian women filmmakers and their works within multiple theoretical markers, this study not only recognises the multiplicity inherent in the frameworks and the heterogeneity that characterises the Ghanaian women's filmmaking but also the interpretations that can be realised. The following chapter discusses the methodological processes employed in this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the multidisciplinary open approach of Critical Media/Cultural Studies proposed by Kellner (2009), and highlights the way it has shaped and directed this study as well as how it has been used. Taking into consideration the research questions, the chapter further presents the research processes, while detailing the methods employed to collect and analyse the data.

#### **Research Approach: Critical Media/Cultural Studies**

Considering the purpose of research and the research questions, the study adopted the Critical Media/Cultural Studies methodological approach. The essence of following this approach in any study is to understand the system within which cultural texts are produced and distributed, the meaning from cultural texts as well as making sense of audience reception of the texts. Thus, the fundamental point is that to appreciate female representations and female centred issues in selected films by Ghanaian women as well as audience readings of those representations, one must understand the *context* in which the films are made.

The Critical Media/Cultural Studies approach draws on “multiple forms of critical theories, communications, media, and cultural studies” which according to Kellner have been used across various disciplines and studies for several decades (2009, p. 6). Put differently, the approach is a combination of Media/Communication by the Frankfurt School, the Chicago School and the Toronto School, and Cultural Studies models developed by the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural

Studies that engages and allows an integration of a range of issues spanning the disciplines in one single study (Kellner 2009). According to Hammer and Kellner (2009), the dominant approaches that communication and media researchers traditionally employ include an examination of contextual relations between communication and society. They also analyse the manner in which it is assumed that propaganda media messages have a direct effect on human behaviour (Davis & Baron 1981). Within this tradition, the audience is considered to be passive and directly influenced (McQuail 2010, p. 405). They further study the political economy of media production as well as media ownership. Wasko (2004, p. 227) suggests that the political economy of film focuses on how motion pictures are produced and distributed in capitalist industrial contexts. Moreover, they also explore how audiences use media to gratify their needs (Katz et al 1974).

Cultural Studies, however, broadly examines the connection between representation and ideologies (Hall 1997), investigates how different audiences read media culture in various ways (Morley 1992), and analyses the factors that influence diverse audiences to respond to various media texts in conflicting or similar ways (Hammer & Kellner 2009, p. xxiv). It also explores the context of material conditions of production and reception and examines the dynamics of capitalism, the notions of class struggles and economic stratifications found in Marxism (Barker 2008, p. 15). Meanwhile, questions also have been raised over ideology and hegemony in cultural production (Barker 2008; Hammer & Kellner 2009). Hammer and Kellner (2009, p. xxv), suggest that the move toward ideology and hegemony shifted Cultural Studies' emphasis from economic class categorisation to the ways power and dominant or marginalised ideas reproduce dominant or resistant positions in society and in media culture. Thus, when culture is contextualised within a social theory of production and reproduction, it distinguishes ways that cultural forms either promote social control of dominant groups or enable people from subordinate groups to resist and seek transformation in their representations (Hammer & Kellner 2009, p. xxv).

The research on Cultural Studies demonstrates that media cultural forms often project hegemonic positions in favour of dominant groups, and reveals how subcultural groups resist dominant forms of culture and in the process create or

redefine their own identities (Bobo 1988; Hall 2006; Hammer & Kellner 2009; Kellner 2009; Rojek 2009). Cultural Studies generally asserts that representation is political. This suggests that cultural representations are never naïve or neutral “and that they contain positive, negative, or ambiguous representations of diverse social groups” (Hammer & Kellner 2009, p. xxxi). In portraying biased or favourable representations of specific social groups, Cultural Studies also demonstrates that textual mechanisms such as framing, editing, subtexts, special effects, mise-en-scene and pictorial images also play vital roles and carry loaded meanings (Hammer & Kellner 2009, p. xxxi). While cultural forms are considered to serve various purposes and the text is regarded to produce meaning, cultural theorists believe they position and allow audiences to formulate their own interpretations.

Hammer and Kellner have indicated that the move of Cultural Studies toward audience research in the 1980s revealed complex notions of the politics of representation and making sense of cultural texts by showing that audiences were active, innovative and creative: that they could read and react differently to cultural texts – produce dominant interpretations, construct oppositional readings, create alternative meanings or respond negatively to stereotypical/prejudiced representations of social groups they identified with (Hammer & Kellner 2009, p. xxxi). This is an indication that reading is also taken as political where the audience seeks to identify:

... negative or positive representations, learn[...] how texts [are] constructed, and discern[...] how image and ideology function[...] within media culture to reproduce social domination and discrimination, as well as how dominant cultures could be resisted and transformed (Hammer & Kellner 2009, p. xxxi).

This implies that Media/Communication and Cultural Studies offer diverse approaches to understanding various aspects of cultural forms; yet there are limitations. On the one hand, the strengths identified in the use of Cultural Studies include its suitability to study media culture from diverse locations and cultural

specificities. It embraces the politics of representation. Its other strengths are found in its reliance on theory and its discourses on various audience responses to cultural texts. On the other hand, Cultural Studies has been criticised as being too textual and theoretical, and focused narrowly on audiences (Hammer & Kellner 2009).

Likewise, research in media/communication is seen to be limiting because it is too quantitative, and falls short of theoretical and critical perspectives (Hammer & Kellner 2009, p. xxxv). In view of these, employing either a Media/Communication or Cultural Studies approach alone is regarded as too limiting. Hence, combining and synthesising the diverse approaches from the various disciplines for complementarity offer a rich methodological approach, and in turn provide an extensive framework for making sense of contemporary culture (Hammer & Kellner 2009, p. xiii). This interdisciplinary approach also helps to bring the various aspects of media scholarship and culture into a common dialogue (Holt & Perren 2009). This study ascribes to this way of thinking and therefore employs the Critical Media/Cultural Studies approach.

Kellner's threefold framework (known as the tripartite approach) of contemporary Cultural Studies draws on some of the topics discussed earlier and integrates them to present possibilities for a holistic understanding of cultural forms (2009, pp. 5-24). These are:

- (1) Analysing the production and political economy within which cultural texts are produced. This highlights the system of production and distribution, and the role of capital and technology (Garnham 2012; Kellner 2009).
- (2) Focusing on textual analysis of cultural texts, and depending on what is being examined, applying various critical theories to analyse meanings from texts or explain how texts operate to produce meaning.
- (3) Seeking to understand why and how diverse audiences read texts and create meanings.

It is worth mentioning that the threefold approach Kellner discusses is not prescriptive because different studies would require a "mixture and articulation of

different components ...” (2009, p. 7). Kellner defines a selective construction of the disciplines allowing for modification and enabling the media/cultural analyst to employ a wide range of principles, methods, and theories as determined by specific research goals. For the purposes of this study, the Critical Media/Cultural Studies approach was adopted but slightly modified to accommodate additional enquiries.

The approach largely informed the formulation of research questions and partly shaped the assumptions underpinning discussions on the systems of production and distribution within which the selected Ghanaian female filmmakers operate. However, because the study was also concerned with mapping both local and diaspora Ghanaian women’s participation in filmmaking and examining the biographical backgrounds of three selected directors, additional questions on these subjects were formulated and incorporated into the Critical Media/Cultural Studies approach.

With the tripartite approach providing the framework, the study was formulated as an investigation in three parts, with Part 1 being further divided into sections A and B. These are as follows: Section A focused on the involvement of Ghanaian women in filmmaking in the postcolonial and transnational environments (see Chapter Five), and the Section B focused on the biographical backgrounds and the systems of production and distribution of the three selected Ghanaian female directors (see Chapter Six). The underlying aim of Part 1 was to contextualise and show where the films analysed in this research originated from. Part 1 was also used to understand the interconnections among the historical, biographical, political, economic, technological, social and cultural dimensions, believing that they inform and shape the films, female representations, and how they are consumed. Purvis (2006, pp. 90-91) points out that interpretation of meaning of cultural texts is influenced by the historical, social, economic, ideological and political forces inherent in the production process. Hence, the focus on historical, cultural, biographical and political economic *contexts* was necessary to understand the filmmakers, the industrial structures and limitations in terms of what control they have and from what ideological motives they work.

Part 2 of Kellner's (2009) Critical Media/Cultural Studies approach of textual analysis was adopted in order to analyse and unravel meaning in the representations of women and women's issues in selected films by the Ghanaian female film directors. Postcolonial feminist, African feminist and transnational film theories were adopted to help examine female representations, unravel the various layers of meanings underlying the representations, and explore recurring motifs in the selected films. Secondly, they were employed in attempts to probe how the selected films produce and frame ideas and concerns, how they project female subjectivity, marginalise/elevate women and issues affecting them and/or resist dominant positions.

Part 3 of the approach on audience reception also influenced the ways in which readings of female representations by Ghanaian male and female audiences were researched and understood. The approach holds that all texts (films) are subject to multiple interpretations depending on the interpreter's subject position and perspectives (Kellner 2009, p. 15). Kellner points out that people's distinct identifications such as their gender, class, race, nationality, education, sexual orientation and political ideologies would influence their response and they would read films differently (2009, p. 15). The principal goal of audience research carried out in this study was to understand the audience's (a group of Ghanaian males and females) interpretations of female representations from their own perspectives. The purpose was to help reveal (1) how groups of male and female audiences actually understand the female-centric issues in the films, (2) the factors that interact to influence and shape their perspectives, and (3) how they decode messages in the films and produce meaning.

In analysing audiences' interpretations, the study considered the notion of the active and innovative audience as well as the notion that encoded messages in films are ideologically, manipulatively and politically driven. Kellner (2009, p. 18) cautions against the valorisation of the active audience or the manipulative text. Hence, in dissecting the possible readings the male and female audiences bring to the films, the study employed Hall's (2006) communication circuit theory of encoding and

decoding to understand shared and/or dialectical perspectives that arose from the data.

Based on the discussion so far, it can be argued that the Critical Media/Cultural Studies approach as used in this study significantly offers a far more expanded understanding of Ghanaian women's filmmaking, practices, female representations, and audience reception, delving into areas that are yet to become the full focus of any research. It helps to understand and articulate the relationship between the Ghanaian film texts and contexts, history and culture, biographies and practices, industry and technology, politics and economics, as well as texts and audiences.

### **Methods: Sampling and Data Collection**

In order to make use of what would most work effectively to get the needed data to answer the research questions, the study employed a range of qualitative methods.

#### **Sampling and Interviews: Industry Stakeholders**

Through judgment (also known as purposeful) and snowball or chain (a type of purposeful) sampling methods, Ghanaian film industry players/stakeholders<sup>13</sup> both past and present were identified in Ghana to gather information on Ghanaian women's participation in filmmaking. It has been argued that judgment sampling allows the researcher to decide the purpose informants must serve (Bernard 2013, p. 164). As Patton mentions, the logic for using it ensures the selection of information-rich cases, which can allow one to learn a great deal about matters of central significance to the purpose of the enquiry (2002, p. 230). The judgment sampling method therefore enabled the researcher to identify stakeholders who were conversant with the history of filmmaking and practices in the country.

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<sup>13</sup> Ghanaian film industry players/stakeholders as used in this study refers to filmmakers including directors, writers, actors, cinematographers, producers, editors, as well as film lecturers/researchers and film administrators, among others.

Using snowball sampling, those well-situated stakeholders initially selected were asked to recommend other valuable industry players to be interviewed. In certain instances they provided contact details of the people they recommended. By employing the snowball method, the sample units expanded for more and “new information-rich” insights to be gathered (Patton 2002, p. 237) on Ghanaian women’s participation in filmmaking.

In all, twenty eight valuable stakeholders were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide on the subject – Ghanaian women’s involvement in filmmaking from the colonial period till the present. Interviews with informants generally, as Merriam argues, are necessary when the researcher is interested in past events that are impossible to replicate (2009, p. 88), and semi-structured interviews allow issues to be probed in detail (Harding 2013, p. 31). As a result, semi-structured personal interviews were conducted to learn from individuals who had been part of the Ghanaian filmmaking journey or had researched generally on the subject matter – film history in Ghana. Semi-structured interviews, while providing the framework for the questions which were asked in the course of the interviews, also allowed the researcher and informants to explore issues in depth, allowed issues to be examined as they arose, and enabled the researcher to seek clarifications to prevent ambiguities later in the analysis (Bernard 2013, p. 219). Thus, the method allowed flexibility for prompts, probes and issues to be explored in detail, enabling me to get a bigger picture of the historical facts and issues raised.

It has been suggested that there are possibilities “for people to report inaccurate data about matters of externally verifiable fact” including past events/situations (Bernard 2013, p. 209). To reduce such errors, three processes were followed. First informants were asked similar questions and second some specific issues raised by some informants were followed up in interviews with other informants for verification purposes. Third, in some instances what Bernard (2013, p. 209) calls “cued recall” was employed where informants were directed to consult their personal archival resource that helped them to recollect some of the issues they raised. It is

noteworthy that while most of the interviews were face-to-face, a few, particularly follow-up interviews, were conducted through the telephone and emails.

### **Sampling and Interviews: Women Film Directors**

Given the scope of the research and the aim of learning about Ghanaian female filmmakers, their biographies and the systems within which they produce and distribute their work, a criterion sampling method was used to select three female directors for close study. According to Patton, criterion sampling allows sampling units to be measured against some “predetermined criterion of importance” (2002, p. 238) or enable sample units to meet a list of essential attributes relevant to the study (LeCompte & Preissle cited in Merriam 2009, p. 77).

The three selected female directors were: Veronica Quarshie, Shirley Frimpong-Manso, and Leila Djansi. In deciding on which director to select, a number of “predetermined criterion[s] of importance” were considered. (1) They had prioritised female subjectivity in their works, thus offering a rich pool of films on female subjectivity to choose from for analysis. (2) Their films were popular and accessible. This was to ensure that the Ghanaian audiences were somehow familiar with them and their works. (3) They had made feature films, which is important to this study’s investigations. (4) The women were prepared to be part of the study.

Because the study is one of the first of its kind on Ghanaian women’s filmmaking, the selection attempts to establish the multiplicity underpinning women’s filmmaking practices – women working within Ghana and in the diaspora, women engaged in commercial filmmaking activities, and women making feature/television films. Thus the selection aimed to reflect the diversity and multiplicity underpinning African women filmmakers and their practices already noted by scholars in the literature (see Bisschoff 2009; Ellerson 2000). The selection of both locally based and diaspora filmmakers shows what Ellerson has pointed out to be increasing transnationality inherent in African women’s cinema, which extends to women in the global diaspora (Ellerson 2012a, p. 224). Another significant reason behind the selection was to

establish that themes identified around femininity in Ghanaian films recur in the women's films. To seek in-depth understanding on biographical information, works, and systems of production and distribution used by the three women, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with the three filmmakers in Ghana. In-depth interviews made accessible the women's interpretations of their own lives, works, and filmmaking practices.

### **Sampling and Interviews: Production Team Members**

Also snowball sampling was used to identify production team members who had worked with the women. The filmmakers directed the researcher to some of the cast and crew members who had worked closely with them. The identified team members further directed the researcher to other members. In all nineteen individual members were interviewed. The purpose of interviewing production team members was to strengthen reliability of the data and seek additional information on the women's filmmaking practices and activities. The data collected was digitally audio-recorded and later transcribed and coded. In addition, archival materials like newspapers, filmmakers and/or their films' websites, materials written on their filmmaking practices, and other recorded interviews on the internet were used. While I did not initially plan to gather data through observation, the data collection period coincided with the time that two of the women were actually on location shooting and that provided me with the opportunity to observe the women at work, and allowed me to acquire practical insights into some of the issues they had raised during the interviews. Field notes (researcher's general comments and thoughts on each interview) were also taken during and after interviews which later helped to contextualise some of the issues raised in the transcript.

### **Sampling: Films**

For the purpose of film analysis, criterion sampling was used in the selection of films from the body of work by the film directors. The important predetermined criteria used were: (1) the films should have female centred narratives, (2) they were to be

popular and accessible, (3) they had not been studied in-depth through the theoretical lenses employed in this study, (4) they had to have less than two and a half hours of screening time to enable focus group participants to watch and discuss the films within a convenient time frame, (5) for convenience, they were not to be serialised so participants could watch one complete film. Based on these criteria of selection: *The Forbidden Fruit* (Quarshie 2003), *The Perfect Picture* (Frimpong-Manso 2009), and *Ties that Bind* (Djansi 2011), were considered suitable for the analysis. Secondary data available on the films such as reviews added additional insights to the analysis.

### **Sampling and Focus Group Discussions**

To gather group opinions and facilitate understanding of how Ghanaian male and female audiences interpret female representations, focus group discussions were adopted for data elicitation (Krueger & Casey 2009, p. 2). Liamputtong has noted that focus group methodology is productive in exploring what, how and why people think in the ways they do think about issues (2011, p. 5). As a group based method, focus groups use group interactions to create data and provide insights into topics supplied by the researcher (Morgan 1997, p. 2). Thus, they are a rich way to know people's perceptions, opinions and understanding of culture in an interactive context. Moreover, they allow the researcher to utilise information that represents group-level perspectives and reflects collective understanding (Gunter 2000). In addition, they enable the researcher to discover and confirm not only participants' thoughts and views, but also the underlying interpretations (Krueger & Casey 2009), which this study attempted to uncover.

For this research, the method allowed male and female participants to voice their thoughts and views on the topic under discussion revolving around representation of women and women's issues in the Ghanaian women's films. As has been argued, focus groups are regarded to "work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives – but don't" (Macnaghten & Myers 2004, p. 65). The intention for this study was to ascertain from a gendered perspective the range of

interpretations men and women bring to female representations, to determine the insights they bring to their readings, how they perceived female representations in the selected women's films, and to uncover factors that influenced their perceptions and opinions (see Krueger & Casey 2009).

Criterion sampling was used in selecting participants, and the basis for inclusion was people who were interested in attending movies and were ready to participate in the study. Participants were recruited by using advertising flyers which were distributed at certain social settings – the Silver Bird Cinema in Accra as well as the Efua Sutherland Drama Studio,<sup>14</sup> and American Corner<sup>15</sup>, all located at the University of Ghana. The Silver Bird Cinema and University of Ghana were chosen because they were convenient places to recruit participants. For its location and availability, American Corner was considered a suitable place to organise the focus group discussion to reduce inconvenience for particularly the participants and also help the researcher to work within the three month period set for data collection. Getting participants from different social settings – from the University community and Silver Bird – was purposely done to get participants who did not necessarily/personally know each other but shared a common interest in films. Patton points out that focus groups work better when participants have related backgrounds and interests, but are not familiar with each other (2002, p. 387; also see Merriam 2009, p. 94). This whole process employed was to ensure a degree of anonymity to solicit common but independent views and readings.

The groups were made up of people with different levels of education such as students studying diverse courses at the University of Ghana, researchers,

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<sup>14</sup> The Efua Sutherland Drama Studio (now part of the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana) – as the name suggests was named after the renowned Ghanaian dramatist and the first Ghanaian woman to make a film (see Chapter Four of this study). Much as the studio is used as a performance space for theatre programs, films are screened weekly for the University community and public.

<sup>15</sup> While the American Corner is an arm of the US Embassy Public Affairs Section of the Embassy in Accra, Ghana, which aims to provide a much more open environment for the Ghanaian public and the University community to access information on the United States, it is also a place where workshops, book readings, and film shows are organised for students and the public. It was therefore considered a suitable place to contact potential participants who were interested in a wide range of things including film.

lecturers/senior lecturers, and other staff of the University (teaching assistants, librarians, secretaries, national service personnel). Their ages ranged from twenty to sixty years and they were a mixture of participants who were married or single. They came from religious backgrounds such as Christianity and Islam. They also had different ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds but were all Ghanaians. While all the participants were Ghanaians, a couple of them had mixed nationality – from Ghana and Nigeria. Most of the participants did not know each other before the focus group discussions. Even though focus groups which constitute heterogeneous demographics are said to have adverse effects on group dynamics and result in asymmetrical distribution of responses, a conversational atmosphere was created allowing respondents to actively join in to express their views and probe other participants' views where necessary. Again, although a conversational analysis was not going to be the analytical approach, participants were encouraged to speak using a turn-taking approach (see Onwuegbuzie et al 2009, pp. 10-13).

In all, a total of three male and three female groups were put together based on the number (three) of films selected for the second part of the study. Contact details of potential and interested participants were collected at each social setting centre and these people were later contacted and put in groups. Groups constituted six to eight participants. The discussions were organised over a period of three days. On each day, one film was screened for one male and one female group together at the same time, but after the screening each group separately discussed the film simultaneously. This procedure was followed to save time and also avoid inconveniencing particularly the participants. The researcher moderated the female groups while a male research assistant from the Sociology Department of the University of Ghana moderated the male groups. Using a series of the same open-ended questions (interview guide), groups discussed questions which revolved around the themes initially identified in the films in relation to the portrayal of women and women's issues in the Ghanaian women's films.

## **Data Analysis**

The primary analytical processes the study applied were contextual, thematic, and textual analyses. While for the first part of the study data was analysed to provide the historical, cultural and biographical contexts for the film analyses and audience studies, for the second part textual and thematic analyses were employed to make sense of female representations in the selected films. Because the themes identified and focused on in the film analyses partially informed the focus group discussions, thematic analysis was again employed in the audience studies. The following discussion breaks down the processes followed in more detail.

The data collected, particularly the interviews, was transcribed with comments once data collection ended. Subsequently, interview transcripts were repeatedly read before more comments were written on transcripts and coding commenced. Coding is regarded as an essential tool and analytic resource in qualitative studies (Gibson & Brown 2009, p. 130). According to Gibson and Brown, it is utilised “to create a category that is used to describe a general feature of data; a category that pertains to a range of data examples ... draws attention to a commonality within a data set” (2009, p. 130). In other words, it helps to sort out the data for further analysis (Maxwell 2013, p. 107).

For the first part of the study, the concept of “open coding”, which often is essentially relevant to research using Grounded Theory, was employed even though there was no intention to discover theories or to use a Grounded Theory approach (Bernard 2013, p. 524). Understanding open coding enabled the breaking down of the texts (transcripts) to discover data perspectives, ideas, facts, and concepts in Ghanaian women’s filmmaking journey/participation, biographical, production and distribution practices, allowing for further refinement, detailed analysis and interpretation to be carried out. Sources of data from existing literature/research, newspapers, and other documents were also integrated and analysed alongside the research data, to broaden understanding and meanings emanating from the transcripts.

The analyses were intended to provide the general historical and biographical contexts of the films, as well as the cultural context of filmmaking practices in Ghana within which the women and their films have emerged. McKee has suggested that contextual evidence from which texts (films) are made holds an important place in making sense of film texts (2003, p. 28). Knowledge of the context helped to think through and interrogate the interpretations of themes in relation to how the films came to be produced, the circumstances and conditions of their production, in order to make sense of the representations. Knowledge of the context was also crucial in the audience analysis since as noted by McKee (2003) it informs the ways audiences read texts. For example a film made and viewed in the same culture will be read differently from a film made and viewed in a received culture.

The analytical methods applied to the films integrated processes of textual and thematic analyses. After watching the three selected films in succession repeatedly, coding was performed. Coding is said to be a necessary tool for “conducting a comprehensive thematic analysis of an issue” (Harding 2013, p. 82). As suggested by Harding, it assists the researcher to identify a cluster of categories. In addition, it helps to identify the (in)consistent patterns or the relationships among and across patterns (Harding, 2013, p. 82). Thematic analysis is also concerned with analysing data in relation to finding commonalities, differences and relationships across data sets (Gibson & Brown 2009, pp. 128-129). Thus, with respect to coding and thematic analysis, it can be argued that coding facilitates the aims of thematic analysis (Harding 2013, p. 82). Gibson and Browns’ three aims in thematic analysis mentioned above were applied to this research. This allowed clusters of themes to be identified from the films, allowing peculiarities and differences in themes to be determined, as well as enabling an understanding of how different themes relate to each other or to other general themes. In other words, while thematic analysis basically helped to locate aggregated themes inside the data, it also “provide[d] a way of linking diverse experiences or ideas together, and ... juxtaposing and interrelating different examples and features of the data” (Gibson & Brown 2009, p. 129).

Following Gibson and Brown's coding approaches, the study applied the concepts of "apriori" and "empirical codes" (2009, pp. 132-133). With apriori codes, pre-derived categories of relevant themes of interest from the literature which tie in across the spectrum of films under study were explored. Meanwhile, empirical codes emerging through the data collected brought new perspectives to the apriori codes or revealed entirely new codes for further analysis. Thus, through the coding process a number of recurring themes and motifs in relation to representations of women and their experiences were identified and analysed. The main aim for adopting these forms of coding was to enable an examination and naming of the ways the female Ghanaian directors interpret women and women's issues in their films in order to understand how they are represented and the meaning they produce.

While the approach adopted here involves some interest in themes, the Critical Media/Cultural Studies approach followed in this study also lends itself readily to textual analysis. Textual analysis is an attempt to make "an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of [a] text" (McKee 2003, p. 2). Textual analysis of cultural studies as delineated by Kellner (2009, p. 14) and used here is concerned with understanding the various layers and meanings of texts. In view of this, the gathered clues and evidence from the texts, in this particular case the thematically coded motifs and tropes of forms of female representations were broken down to learn how they are represented, the assumptions behind them, and the meanings they create.

As indicated earlier, the theoretical frameworks adopted for analysing female representations and thematic preoccupation were postcolonial feminist, African feminist and transnational film theories. The films were analysed through the lenses of these theories in order to understand the female representations and specific experiences of the female characters. It is worth mentioning that the combination of textual/thematic analyses and the theories enabled analysis of what Hammer and Kellner (2009, p. xxxvii) call "diagnostic critique" where the films studied were used to read the social realities and interrogate what they articulate about women's situations, particularly in Ghana. It is also worthy of note that the film analyses did not attempt to discuss every element of the films, but as is acceptable in textual

analysis, only focused on the aspects of the films that seemed useful to answering the research question (see McKee 2003, p. 76). Moreover, in understanding and interpreting the films, the researcher also drew on her own knowledge of the culture within which the films were produced and circulated, an approach identified as necessary for text (film) analysis and interpretation (McKee 2003, p. 118).

According to Kellner, textual analysis can explain the scope of possible interpretations and perspectives aimed at emphasising the representations and their cultural and ideological effects (2009, p. 15). While such analysis was useful to understanding or detecting bias or superficial readings by other people such as audiences who are an integral part of this study, it was not used as a yardstick for disregarding any reading. The encoding and decoding theory (discussed in Chapter Eight) suggests there is no one fixed meaning of a film text and any aspect of its content can be interpreted in more than one way. According to Stuart Hall:

there is no necessary correspondence between encoding and decoding, the former can attempt to “pre-fer” but cannot prescribe or guarantee the latter, which has its own conditions of existence. Unless they are wildly aberrant, encoding will have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will operate (2006, p. 170).

McKee argues that there is “no single correct representation of ... the world” and similarly there is “no single correct interpretation of any text” (2003, p. 63). Although integrating thematic and textual analysis of films can be used to infer or understand audience responses, it does little to tell us about or expose the actual influence and scope of potential interpretations and meanings a group of male and female audiences bring to their understanding of female representations in the Ghanaian female authored films.

The analytical approach applied to understanding the readings by male and female focus groups as already suggested was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis of focus groups seeks to identify, analyse and report patterns/themes from the data

(Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 79). Commencing from this background, coding and analysis of the focus group responses began after transcriptions were completed and transcripts read and re-read for general impressions. Since initial apriori codes derived from the literature and identified in the selected films were used as a point of departure for the focus group discussions, the coding process began with searching for how group participants interpreted those themes. This notwithstanding, empirical codes arising from the data were also noted for further analysis and interpretation. To make sense of the themes from the transcripts and identify key ways in which the themes were interpreted within each group (male or female) and across the groups (male and female), attention was paid to what was said by the participants. Macnaghten and Myers (2004, pp. 73-77) suggest that when a researcher intends to analyse themes in focus group data, attention is paid to what participants said in order to identify key issues.

The focus on themes from the group interviews enabled the researcher to analyse perspectives within and across the male and female groups to compare and contrast while also paying attention to individual and collective opinions, consensus, negotiated, deviant as well as minority (marginalised) interpretations (see Liamputtong 2011, p. 174). Thus, this enabled an understanding of individual and group reactions in terms of whether participants accepted, criticised, resisted or offered alternative responses to the treatment of gender issues featured in the films. Going by a thematically and theoretically informed analysis, factors that influenced male and female participants' readings such as subject positions and cultural competence were also considered significant to understanding participants' sense-making practices.

## **Summary**

This chapter has presented the multidisciplinary open approach of Critical Media and Cultural Studies, highlighting the way it shaped and was utilised in this study. It also discussed the research processes, detailing the methods employed for collecting and analysing the data. In view of the foregone discussion, it is practicable to realise

that employing the framework of Critical Media and Cultural Studies allowed different aspects of Ghanaian women's filmmaking to be studied. Moreover, those aspects were considered to complement our understanding of each trajectory and enabled the study to account for the general as well as the specific elements with regard to women's filmmaking in Ghana (see Maxwell 2013, p. 102). The various methods and theories applied also facilitated the means to access appropriate data for answering the research questions. While the theoretical framework (encoding and decoding theory) supporting understanding of male and female participants' interpretations of the films is discussed in Chapter Eight, the next chapter reviews specific studies that have been conducted on the topics of African women's filmmaking practices, female representations, and audience reception.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AFRICAN WOMEN IN CINEMA AND VIDEO

#### Introduction

This chapter reviews the relevant literature in the areas of African women in cinema studies and studies on West African video films. Broadly, research on African women in cinema has been conducted in two directions: (1) studies on women working behind the screen, and (2) women's representation on the screen. This study also brings these areas together not just to understand what pertains to women's film in Africa and Ghana but also create a *context* from which to comprehend how the women's films are made, the way they represent women, and how audiences interpret the images. The literature review covers studies on women working in the African celluloid art filmmaking, and the commercial video filmmaking traditions, which are what the women filmmakers studied here practice.

On the representations of women, Harrow has noted that scholarly work on African women filmmakers often includes the ways non-Africans and African men portray women (1999a, p. vii). For the purpose of this study, scholarship on representations of African women by non-Africans is excluded mainly because the interest here is on female representation of and by African women. Nonetheless, I draw on studies on the ways especially male video filmmakers depict women to firstly demonstrate the body of work done in that area to justify the importance of this study. Moreover, even though the study is not comparative (between male and female texts) as such, the findings from those studies provide insights into the positions women occupy in the women's films analysed. This enables us to see how the women video filmmakers maintain the portrayals by their male colleagues and/or reconfigure new female identities to redirect discourses on female subjectivity in African video films.

Based on the key areas this research seeks to explore, the following sections present the relevant literature relating to: specific studies on African women's filmmaking practices; African women's roles and contributions to filmmaking; female sensibility and consciousness; women's issues and visual representations of women and by women; representations of women and issues in the video films; and African audience reception of African films.

### **African Women's Filmmaking Practices**

Research suggests that African women's participation in filmmaking on the African continent started at the dawn of African cinema in the 1960s (Ellerson 2000). In light of the early visibility, Schmidt (1999), and Ellerson (2000), whose work *Sisters of the Screen* (2000) set the stage for the evolving field of African women in cinema studies, present discussions on the pioneering women whose filmmaking engagements set in motion African women's filmmaking practices. First, the Cameroonian radio and print journalist, Thérèse Sita-Bella made a thirty-minute documentary film, *Tam Tam à Paris* in 1963, which documents the Cameroonian National Dance Company on its tour in Paris. Four years later, the renowned Ghanaian dramatist, Efua T Sutherland also produced *Araba: The Village Story* in collaboration with the national US television network, ABC (Ellerson 2000, pp. 1-2; Schimdt 1999, p. 279). According to Ellerson (2000, p. 2) these women did not establish sustained careers in filmmaking, having developed careers in journalism, theatre, and literature among others. They instead used film as a means to document their works. Nonetheless, their engagements mark the very beginnings of women's involvement in African filmmaking practices (Ellerson 2000). While the arrival of Safi Faye (Senegal) with her short film *La Passante* in 1972 and Sarah Maldoror (Guadeloupe) with her films *Monangambee* (1970) and *Sambizanga* (1972) marked the beginning of sustained careers of African women's filmmaking activities, it is believed together the works by the four women are prognostic of the filmmaking practices of women in African cinema that followed (Ellerson 2000).

While research has focused on women's evolution into filmmaking, studies on women's personal backgrounds are interesting informational sites because in many cases their backgrounds and concerns in making films greatly shape their works (Bisschoff 2009; Cham 1994; Ellerson 2004, 2000; Foster 1997; Harding 1997; Pfaff 1988; Schmidt 1999; Thackway 2003; Ukadike 2002). Ellerson (2000, p. 359) suggests that the concept of African women in the cinema is not monolithic. African women filmmakers have come from distinct individual, cultural, and regional backgrounds, and they have pursued filmmaking at different times in the history of African cinema (Bisschoff 2009, Ellerson 2000; Ukadike 2002).

Some women filmmakers have received training in theatre, communication or audio-visual creation like film/television production or worked in areas like print media, radio or advertising, while others have come from totally new areas either by chance and/or by sheer passion for the profession (Ellerson 2000; Bisschoff 2009). They come to cinema with different reasons and work under different conditions and challenges. For instance, even though women work under conditions of deprivation, the Kenyan filmmaker Anne Mungai's experiences in accessing financial support for her work (see Cham 1994; Harding 1997), are different from self-exiled Ethiopian filmmaker, Salem Mekuria who is positioned in a community where she has "access to free equipment, free labour or deferred labour" (Ukadike 2002, p. 246).

Moreover, it has been suggested that African women work from different locations and use diverse mediums to produce various products. Nonetheless, Ellerson points out that there are connected experiences that inform the cinema of women on the continent (2000, p. 395). Ellerson (2000, pp. 1-13) further observes that when location is considered, there are women who work on the continent and those who as a result of relocation or displacement work in the diaspora. By focusing on Ghanaian women filmmakers based in Ghana and in the diaspora, this study attempts to reflect this multiplicity and dynamism.

In view of the vast and diverse nature of the continent, its colonial legacy, and the production cultures, the scholarship also explores female filmmakers within the

geographic and linguistic boundaries of Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone, Black African categorisations (Bisschoff 2012, 2009; Pfaff 1988; Thackway 2003). While Bisschoff and Thackway, for instance, give a sense of lingo-cultural categories, other studies have offered insights along individual and national lines (Cham 1994; Ellerson 2012c, 2004; Mukora 2003; Tchouaffé 2012). What is clear in these studies is that within the regions or countries, the foundations of the industries where the filmmakers work have been established based on varied colonial legacies and ideological policies, although new approaches to filmmaking have evolved. For example, while the British left behind a legacy of educational documentary filmmaking practice in their colonies (Bisschoff 2009; Diawara 1992; Ukadike 1994), in Ghana, economic crisis, high exchange rates and availability of technological innovations have ushered in the popular video/digital feature filmmaking culture, which is what the three female filmmakers who are the focus of this study are engaged in.

In recent times, documentary film production has become part of television programming, though there are still Ghanaian female documentary filmmakers like Yaba Badoe and Anita Afonu. Schmidt (1999, p. 279) suggested that more women work on documentaries in Ghana but in recent years it has become apparent that several women making documentaries do corporate and television documentaries. Ghanaian women filmmakers who work in the mainstream often engage in video feature filmmaking. The literature available on the women filmmakers at this point is scanty. Several scholars such as Adejunmobi (2003, 2005); Aveh (2000, 2010, 2014); Garritano (2008); Giraud (2008); Haynes (2007, 2008, 2010a, 2010b); Meyer (1999, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2006, 2010); Ogunleye (2003); Sutherland-Addy (2000a, 2000b); and Ukadike (2000, 2003) have written papers and book chapters which have sections on Ghanaian video or have explored the emergence and development of the video industry, the production practices, themes, narrative structures, political and financial component that drives the industry, marketing/distribution, exhibition/consumption, and agendas for future research.

This study draws from and builds on this scholarship particularly in Chapter Five, which contextualises Ghanaian women's participation within the historical

development of filmmaking in Ghana and the industrial conditions under which they produce and distribute their films. It is worthy of note that most of the literature mentioned above does not make mention of Ghanaian women video filmmakers or specifically focus on women or provide in-depth study on women video filmmakers in the country. From a survey of the field, it is clear that research has focused on some female video filmmakers working in Nigeria (Esonwanne 2008; Okome 2007a, 2000b). While Kwansah-Aidoo and Osei Owusu (2012) offer a feminist analysis of Frimpong-Manso's debut film and Dogbe (2003) presents aesthetic analysis of Veronica Quarshie's<sup>16</sup> *A Stab in the Dark* (2000) and Hawa Meizongo's *Dza Gbele* (1994), they do not deal with for instance the political economy and filmmaking practices of the filmmakers.

To date, Garritano's (2013a) *African Video Movies and Global Desires: a Ghanaian History* is the first major in-depth study that devotes attention to and takes a critical look not just at the Ghanaian video film industry but its relation to the globalised world. In this landmark study, Garritano (2013a) provides comprehensive insights into the historical development of the industry, and the conditions under which filmmakers make and distribute their films. Her first-hand discussions based on interviews with filmmakers and industrial stakeholders as well as the first-hand introduction of readers to the transformations and the specifics of filmmaking practice in the country are insightful and help one understand the evolution of Ghanaian video film culture.

In discussing the evolution that has taken place, Garritano also examines key female video filmmakers who have emerged in the industry. By way of background information and concerns, Garritano (2013a, pp. 115-127, 176-182) explains that female filmmakers like Veronica Quarshie and Shirley Frimpong-Manso emerged from the national film school and produce professional films, unlike the pioneer non-professional filmmakers in the video industry. Garritano also asserts that the women "have challenged gender stereotypes common in Ghanaian movies" because while they "speak from within dominant narratives of gender ... [they] open possibilities for

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<sup>16</sup> In Dogbe's article, *A Stab in the Dark* is mistakenly credited to Veronica Cudjoe instead of Veronica Quarshie.

the emergence of alternative ways of being men and women” (2013a, p. 18). This observation supports Ukadike’s (2003) finding that Veronica Quarshie presents alternative images of women that resist the abandoned chauvinistic images. This study builds on these works by not just exploring female filmmaking practices in Ghana, but by also seeking to provide in-depth examination of the filmmakers and their works including representations of women.

### **African Women’s Roles and Contributions to Filmmaking**

African women generally contributed to the liberation struggle against colonial imperialism, and also the urgent need to deconstruct racially biased images of Africa by the West. Pfaff has noted that the birth of Black African filmmaking coincided with the period most African countries were experiencing political transformation from colonial thralldom to independence (Pfaff 1988, p. ix). This is why many filmmakers felt it necessary to focus on African stories since African identity had been distorted in films made in the West. These general observations foreground Harrow’s (1999a) discussion on African cinema and women. In concurrence with Pfaff, Harrow states that the circumstances that bedevilled African societies and culture in the late period of colonialism (late 1950s and 1960s) had a strong influence on the films that were made because African writers and filmmakers during the period were mainly dedicated to the objectives of decolonisation and independence from European imperialism (Harrow 1999a, pp. xi-xii). Continuing in this vein, he notes that the revolutionary values for Africa’s independence from European hegemony are re-enacted in for instance Sarah Maldoror’s *Sambizanga* (1972) which is a film about the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and its initiatives that eventuated in the armed liberation struggles against the Portuguese in Angola (Harrow 1999a, p. xiv).

Beginning from the late 1960s and extending into the 1970s, there was a shift from anti-colonialism to protests against African leaders, state corruption, domineering figures of the society and family, and the deplorable economic conditions in the 1980s, all of which led to a concern for quotidian realities in literature and cinema

(Harrow 1999a, p. xviii). Harrow observes that the “Great Father [figure] – be he political or familiar” who defined the system of patriarchy more and more became the subject for many films (1999a, pp. xiv-xv). Thus, the abusive and oppressive traditional patriarchy – the village leader, husband or father, preoccupied the works of filmmakers like Ousmane Sembène, Jean-Pierre Dikongue-Pipa, Mahama Johnson Traore, Souleyman Cissé, Idrissa Ouedraogo and Cheikh Oumar Sissoko among others (Harrow 1999a). Despite the domination of male filmmakers who denounced patriarchy to name women’s suffering from men’s perspectives, the rhetoric of the times and the new direction for social reforms saw the entry of relatively more women filmmakers in the 1980s and 1990s (Harrow 1999a).

According to Harrow, filmmakers like Anne Mungai, Flora M’mbugu-Shelling, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Fanta Nacro, Anne-Laure Folly, Ngozi Onwurah, Salem Mekuria, Moufida Tlatli, and Yamina Benguigui who came after the early “mothers” (Sarah Maldoror and Safi Faye) of African cinema “constitute the core of an important new constituent body of filmmakers for whom the old masculinist vocabulary of engagement seems dated and inappropriate” (1999a, p. xxi). Though some images by the women may not have departed entirely from the earlier representations, Harrow maintains that the women filmmakers have refashioned new gender roles and are in the process of creating new cinematic practices (1999a: xxii). Ellerson has also stated that women’s visibility on the cinema landscape can still be identified as an evolving process (2000, p. 1). It is in view of this evolving process that the present study seeks to primarily chart the contributions and works of the Ghanaian women filmmakers to the development of women’s filmmaking practices in Ghana and by extension the continent.

Ellerson argues that women have important roles to play in the development of Africa and by the media’s portrayals of women, Africa’s development can be impeded or fostered (2000, p. 6). To this end, women’s primary roles span from their commitment to employ creative ways to present alternative views of their societies to their formulation of new identities for Africans and women in particular (Bisschoff 2010, 2009; Ellerson 2000; Petty 1996; Ukadike 1996). Ellerson further argues that women filmmakers’ roles through their works “reflect personal experiences, their

search for identity ... as well as the self-imposed duty to teach, to reveal injustices, and to construct positive images of women and African societies in general" (2000, p. 13).

Research based on women video filmmakers working in the Nigerian and Ghanaian commercial video film industries shows that the women are also guided by specific interests. For instance, while Okome's (2000b) study on the Nigerian video filmmaker Emem Isong reveals that she uses her film to name the suffering of educated youth who are unemployed, his study on Helen Ukpabio (Okome 2007a) also shows that the filmmaker uses her films to evangelise and proselytise her church congregation. Amaka Igwe in an interview with the film and literary critic Esonwanne (2008) suggested she used her television soap operas and video films to tackle social issues. These broad yet specific individual visions and roles of women filmmakers suggest that women in this study will have personal conceptions of their roles as filmmakers. They also suggest that those visions and interests often will drive and manifest in the content and narratives of the films. In this study, the filmmakers' interests and concerns are seen as indications of how they perceive their roles and the contribution they make to film and its growth in the country.

## **Female Sensibilities and Consciousness**

Ukadike has argued that African women's filmmaking activities can be understood as offering "a rich and varied portrait of the African woman via canonical modification and revisionism - something that the male-dominated narratives have not completely grasped" (1996, p. 201). This raises the question of whether there are well-defined sensibilities associated with men and women. While many male produced images of African women have been negative and biased (Werewere Liking 1996; Ayari 1996), several male film directors, particularly from Francophone West Africa producing arts house films, have advanced female emancipation and agency as espoused in the agenda for Africa's development (Bisschoff 2009; Dovey 2012; Harrow 1999a; Thackway 2003). Thackway, for instance, claims the female filmmakers such as Safi Faye, Anne Laure Folly, and Fanta Regina Nacro as well as prominent male

filmmakers who make “womanist” films such as Cheick Oumar Sissoko, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Med Hondo, Souleymane Cissé, and Ousmane Sembene use the medium of film to “formulate a range of alternative, empowering representations of African women” (2003, p. 176).

Notwithstanding, some scholars allude to the fact that the rampant stereotypical female representations by male filmmakers are a consequence of the fact that male perspectives lack the female sensibility that women filmmakers bring to bear in their representations of women and women’s issues (Ayari 1996; Bisschoff 2009; Cham 1996; Ellerson 2004, 2000; Harrow 1999a; Ukadike 1996). That is to say “the notion of a woman’s sensibility in filmmaking often translates to the [woman] filmmaker’s identification with her subjects as women even where she may not necessarily have the same experience” (Ellerson 2009)<sup>17</sup>.

From the foregone discussion, it is clear there are nuanced perceptions of the concept of female sensibility among scholars and it is reflected in how African women film directors define their sensibility. Ellerson’s (2000) *Sisters of the Screen* is again useful in the way that it helps us understand the trajectories of female sensibility at work within African women’s filmmaking practices. While some female filmmakers uphold the view that there is a female sensibility when it comes to their approach to making films, others contend that there is a human sensibility, which by implication means they rather view sensibility as individualistic and heterogeneous rather than it being feminine or masculine (Ellerson 2000). Indeed, it has been suggested that some male filmmakers are “capable of a sensibility that rejects the masculinist depiction of women, as well as men” (Ellerson 2009)<sup>18</sup>. Based on similar observations, Bisschoff (2009, p. 52) has suggested that the difficulty in identifying and defining female sensibility is a demonstration of the multiplicity of African women’s experiences. She further claims:

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<sup>17</sup> See <<http://africanwomenincinema.blogspot.com.au/2009/04/gendered-sensibilities-and-female.html>>.

<sup>18</sup> See <<http://africanwomenincinema.blogspot.com.au/2009/04/gendered-sensibilities-and-female.html>>.

There is not a single specific way in which women make their films, and therefore no single female aesthetic. Female filmmakers follow a very wide range of approaches, and thus the aesthetics (such as style, form and genre) and themes (contents) they employ in their films are multiple, diverse and plural (Bisschoff 2009, p. 52).

Much as Bisschoff is conscious of the plurality of women's sensibility and approaches, her findings are that regardless of the sensibility female filmmakers identify with, their works mostly present female subjectivity and broadly correspond to the tenets of African feminism, which are not a monolith (Bisschoff 2009, p. 236). In a sense, there are distinctions between female sensibility and feminist consciousness. Feminist consciousness is a "political consciousness that refers to an explicit understanding of women's oppression and assumes a set of critical factors about women's history, economics, and so on", while female sensibility "is informed by women's experience, as distinguished from the experience of men" (Aptheker 1989, p. 274).

Recognising the distinctions between female sensibility and feminist consciousness and acknowledging that there is no one single sensibility is useful for this study. While the study has purposely chosen to focus on the leitmotif in the Ghanaian female filmmakers' works, the choice is not to suggest or lump the representations by the women into a single category but to enable an identification and examination of women's images and issues that are important and pertinent to them. In view of this, much as the study is cautious not to equate female sensibility with feminist consciousness, the plurality of female sensibility and approaches will enable distinctions to be identified in the way the recurring themes are treated in the women's films. Besides, appreciating the multiplicity and uniqueness of the themes and representations will foster a comprehensive understanding of the range of responses and interpretations the male and female viewers bring to the representations and how they relate to the Ghanaian female film texts.

## **Women's Issues and Visual Representations of and by Women**

It is clear from the literature that by postulating that African women film directors adapt to individualistic and heterogeneous approaches, one also asserts that their cinema is susceptible to different thematic concerns when they project their visions and define female subjectivity. Thackway contends that generally Francophone art house African cinema for instance criticises traditions that oppress women and explores basic social issues that have at their core the role and status of African women (2003, pp. 147-178). Several scholarly works have further shown that the thematic tendencies dominating many non-commercial films or art house films by African women film directors are informed by their socio-economic and cultural life experiences (Bisschoff 2009; Ellerson 2000, 2004; Foster 1997; Pfaff 1988; Ukadike 1996). Bisschoff (2009, pp. 36-37) suggests that female filmmakers from Francophone West Africa and Lusophone and Anglophone Southern Africa, like many other women in different parts of the world, have shown that African women have peculiar issues and confront social and cultural structures that subjugate their development and suppress their contribution to society and Africa as a whole. Consequently, projecting women's emancipation in various forms has logically preoccupied many of their contents. Harrow points out that female film directors critique female marginalisation, identify alternative solutions to women's oppression and write new images which are indicative that African woman's empowerment lies in peculiar specificities (1999b).

Female filmmakers have also explored issues about women's bodies and realistic representations of female beauty, women's sensuality and female sexual expression, often invoking their own experiences to redefine and reclaim ownership from masculinist representations (Bisschoff 2009; Ellerson 2000; Pfaff 1996). Ellerson, for instance, found out that from all regions of Africa – north, west, south, east, and central, some female filmmakers use their films to investigate intimate and personal issues concerning sexuality, conjugal violence and forced marriages, as well as to explore women's responses to male infidelity (2000, p. 359). Furthermore, women have also shown Africa in its complexities usually echoing the intersections between tradition and modernity, rural and urban as issues key to African women's

emancipation (Bisschoff 2009; Mukora 2003). Filmic expressions of the relationship between men and women, women and women, mother and daughter, grandmother and granddaughter project the importance of gender complementarity, female solidarity, support, and communal coherence espoused by African feminism (Bisschoff 2009, 2010; Ellerson 2000; Thackway 2003).

Moreover, it has been suggested that some female filmmakers humanise and present their African characters as three dimensional human beings (Tchouaffé 2012, p. 192). Mukora's findings on films by two female Kenyan filmmakers are that they rehumanise their characters and question whether "their cultures should not evolve so as to contain all that any African woman can be" (2003, p. 226). Similar conclusions are also drawn in the works of Bisschoff (2009, 2010, and 2012), Ellerson (2000, 2004), Harrow (1999a), Marker (2001), and Thackway (2003). Others deal with societal and customary laws that compromise women's rights in any form and they further raise consciousness and educate their viewers on health issues (Ellerson 2000, pp. 359-360). Meanwhile, there are examples of female leadership and revolutionary struggles for political freedoms, self-actualisation, and socio-economic independence in films by African women (Bisschoff 2009; Ellerson 2004, 2000; Marker 2001; Mukora 2003; Pfaff 1988; Thackway 2003; Tchouaffé 2012). While these findings are evidence of the multiplicity of expressions scholars identify with the works of African female directors, they set the context within which to anticipate and/or analyse the range of issues and concerns by the Ghanaian filmmakers being studied here.

With regard to filmmakers who live and work in the diaspora, Bisschoff (2009) and Ellerson (2012a, 2000) suggest that female filmmakers who relocate to the West or African descents who return to the continent work in transnational frameworks, which denotes the idea that their practice is not a monolith. Consequently, Ellerson observes that there are exemplary models of African/Diaspora interconnecting filmmaking practices (2000, p. 12). These models are exemplified in the works of Sarah Maldoror, Safi Faye, Salem Mekuria, Anne-Laure Folly and Shirikiana Aina (Ellerson 2000, p. 12). The interconnectedness foregrounds the premise from which I

discuss the Ghanaian diaspora director and how she interlinks the diaspora not only to Ghanaian experiences but also the practice of filmmaking.

It is known that often, through location and relocation, diaspora women filmmakers acquire a multiplicity of experiences and identities, which then reflect in their works (Ellerson 2012a, p. 224; also see Bisschoff 2009; Dovey 2012). While some are bi-racial or mixed-race and their bi-national or multi-racial identities raise issues that are problematised in their films, others focus on displaced and migrant experiences. In addition, while some women have dealt with events situated within African American and African histories (Mekuria 2012; Ukadike 2002), others, like women working on the continent, have sought to put the spotlight on systemic gendered discrimination that dehumanises women in the homeland (Badoe 2012). Analysing other themes that mark films by African diaspora female filmmakers, it also becomes clear that many of the women do not focus on black or African characters or issues (Ellerson 2012a, p. 224; Bisschoff 2009; Dovey 2012). While this study specifically focuses on the representation of women and women's issues, it builds on this scholarship and privileges Ghanaian diaspora filmmaker(s) who have hitherto not received (full) critical attention in the scholarship.

### **Representations of Women and Issues in Anglophone West African Video Films**

Dovey (2012, p. 19) has drawn a distinction between female representation in the less-commercial Francophone art films and the commercial Anglophone West African video films by suggesting that before the arrival of the video films, African films were not voyeuristic and did not objectify women. It has been suggested that many market-driven products such as the Nigerian videos respond to viewers' preoccupations (Gugler 2003, p. 178). While there are recent indications that some video filmmakers are concerned with artistic presentations, the survival of the African video industries, particularly the Nigerian and Ghanaian industries, is driven by commercial success. Thus, depending on the commercial market, the filmmakers produce films with fascinating stories that satisfy audiences' curiosity and generate

debates to ensure box office success (Agorde 2007; Garritano 2008, 2013a; Meyer 1999).

By some logic, video filmmakers also use the platform to address issues of daily concerns (Aveh 2014; Haynes 2007; Tomaselli 2014). In this regard, Nigerian video films, for instance “carry pertinent information regarding a range of agendas, both individual and collective, that speak of the enduring community, and redefine state and national citizenship. While depicting the everyday domestic, social, political and economic lives of the people [a]s the mainstay of the industry,” the videos have also “tried to represent the disintegration of societal values such as women’s rights, civil society and governance” (Abah 2009, p. 733). These preoccupations, according to Adejunmobi (2002, p. 80), are similar to the ideological values promoted in other urban popular art forms like theatre and music. As a popular art form, they are less profoundly concerned with the cultural reclamation agenda or the African pride ideology found in the art film tradition (Sutherland-Addy 2000a, p. 267; also see Dogbe 2003; Meyer 1999; Ukadike 2000).

Meyer states that Ghanaian video films take as a point of departure how people perceive the “physical” and “spiritual” worlds, focus on the domestic and related problems, deal with modern and city life, and with the relationship between husband and wife (2003a, pp. 211-212; also see Garritano 2012; Wendl 2007). Sutherland-Addy explains that a number of video filmmakers specifically in Ghana show a concern for the correction of social evils where good and evil are interlocked in countless conflicts with a moralising denouement (2000a, p. 276). She further contends that they “concern themselves with the fickleness of human nature, domestic, and the stresses involved in” contemporary living (Sutherland-Addy 2000a, p. 276). Moreover, they are often carved to illuminate harsh living conditions and show how despondent characters will devise means to challenge the realities (Ukadike 2003). In the midst of harsh living conditions and realities, the visual representations of African women have been short-changed (Garritano 2013a, 2000; Okome 2000a; Ukata 2010).

The bulk of research on women's representation in the African video films shows that women are often marginalised and presented in stereotypical roles (Abah 2008; Agbese 2010; Anyanwu 2003; Chari 2008; Ewrierhoma 2008; Garritano 2013a, 2000; Okome 2004, 2000a; Okunna 1996; Ukata 2010). Essentially, in reference to contemporary demands and modern social life, Abah (2008, p. 339) argues that Nigerian video films "celebrate African women of all shades, shapes and sizes. They depict women in varying professional roles ranging from prostitutes ... [to] high ranking civil servants to domestic roles such as wives [to] girlfriends". In spite of this, the videos also "issue dire warnings for women who fail to meet the expectation placed on their dreams by construed tradition as well as women who fail to meet the expectations placed on their domestic roles by cultural institutions" (Abah 2008, p. 339). In a sense, when women are depicted in progressive roles they are continuously positioned to adhere to and meet traditional and cultural expectations; without that they are considered aberrant.

Meanwhile, Okome (2000a, pp. 150-164) argues that women are portrayed as helpless victims of poverty and male-dominated systems as well as depicted as appendages and ornaments to brighten a man's life. This implies that the oppression of women in urban Africa is doubly framed in some of the video films through first, their struggle against poverty and second, their struggle against an active patriarchal system. To keep this active system alive, the videos silence women's social presence (Okome 2000a, p. 54). These readings are not different from what Garritano (2000) discovered in her analysis of three Nigerian video films, that women are depicted as helpless while they live in the shadow of men. She also found out that when they are portrayed as autonomous, their independence becomes the source of their wickedness, thus an evil wife and vengeful mother-in-law (2000, pp. 167-168).

Agbese (2010) has suggested that most mothers-in-law are imaged negatively in most video films. He grounds his argument on Mikucki's six categories of mothers-in-law, which are: (1) the jealous, (2) the ambivalent, (3) the embracing, (4) the accepting, (5) the indifferent, and (6) the aloof. Through his own analysis, he

concludes that Nollywood films<sup>19</sup> portray mothers-in-law as vindictive, manipulative, troublesome, controlling, jealous, intrusive, talkative, wicked, and problematic (Agbese 2010, p. 99; also see Okome 2004, p. 12). These negative attributes Agbese (2010) identifies with the character of the mothers-in-law are based on the decisions and actions they personally initiate and not oppression they receive from outside. Hence, his findings validate Anyanwu who has argued that the worse degrading image of womanhood in the videos is the fact that women become the culprits of evil through their volitional participation (2003, pp. 87-88).

Similar criticisms surface in Chari's (2008) work on women's representations in Zimbabwean films and videos. Chari identifies three broad categories of women's images. The first is the "free agents" who are made of sterner stuff, courageous, and assertive, yet at the same time they are constrained by tradition and patriarchal bondage (Chari 2008, p. 138). The second is the "boxed women" who are portrayed in confining gender roles (Chari 2008, p. 139). They are also subservient to patriarchy and tradition. And the third is what he terms the "insignificant others" who are an "amorphous lot" constituting part of the backdrop (Chari 2008, p. 140). While Chari acknowledges that these video texts are polysemic and could have multiple readings, he concludes that even when the films are encoded with female empowerment messages they "somehow unwittingly undermine women and their struggles for emancipation and equality" (2008, p. 144).

With findings along a similar trajectory, recent studies conducted on the representation of women in six award winning Kumawood films<sup>20</sup> found that the images reinforce women's subordination because they potentially boost men's contempt for women, sow distrust amongst women and strengthen the forces which push them to the fringes of social life (Ofori-Birikorang & Donkor 2014). Okome has suggested that the negative representations of women in the videos are partially a result of the fact that "the social dictates governing the video films come, not from the

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<sup>19</sup>Nollywood films are video films from southern Nigeria.

<sup>20</sup> Kumawood films are films produced in Ghana from the Kumasi based Akan video film industry. The industry exists alongside the English video film industry mainly based in Accra. The films are produced in the Akan language with the Akan population as the target audience though other ethnic groups patronise them. They are also popular with Ghanaians in the diaspora.

enlightened views of educated members of society, but from popular opinions governed by the imperatives of traditional phallocentrism” (2000a, p. 45).

Studies that have focused on examining images of women constructed by both male and female video filmmakers have not made comparative submissions, but have set out to analyse the ways the images reinforce gender imbalances and power relations in African societies. Okome, for example, in his examination of Kenneth Nnebue’s city video film *Glamour Girls 1 and 2*, and Helen Ukpabio’s hallelujah video film *End of the Wicked* presents critical perspectives on how women are marginalised in these video films (2004). By analysing city videos which are focused on city life and its intricacies and a hallelujah video which focuses on the business of proselytisation, Okome (2004) demonstrates that women in both genres lack critical positioning. While in Nnebue’s films he sees a patriarchal pursuance which insists on defining womanhood as docile, calm, pitied, merely patronised, or mere weaklings, he contends that Hellen Ukpabio’s message of proselytisation does not address the place of women in society in any dialectic way (Okome 2004, pp. 6-12). Okuyade’s findings support Okome’s conclusions that Ukpabio’s *End of the Wicked* and *High Way to the Grave* use women as “powerful tools for proselytising, but they are also portrayed as agents of destruction employed by marine spirits and the world of the coven to wreak havoc and pain on man” (2011, pp. 1-14).

In contrast to Okome’s and Okuyade’s results, Ukata discovered that whereas female representations in films by some male and female filmmakers present “women in ways that lead them to success”, the heroines in a group of films all by men transcend “the docility and mediocrity that a sheepish acceptance of patriarchal constructs can turn women into” (2010, p. 209). In a sense, her findings from films produced by men show female characters are made to personify evil and their education and professional benefits are given negative connotations in order to reinforce patriarchal structures inherent in society (Ukata 2010, p. 210). With these findings, Ukata maintains that women’s roles in contemporary African societies are diverse and as such the visual representations do not reflect their full capacity as key contributors to society and Africa’s development (Ukata 2010, pp. 208-214). It is in relation to this that Igwe suggests that Nollywood videos depict “the image of a

woman who is neither Nigerian nor western both in behavior and appearance ...” (2014, p. 61).

Garritano’s (2013a) analysis of a whole range of video films by both male and female filmmakers in the Ghanaian video film industry situated in her study of the historical development of video film practice in Ghana provides in-depth critiques of gender relations and representations from 1987 to about 2010. Situating her argument in the evolving capitalist and consumption culture at the time, Garritano argues that in three films of the first wave of video movies, *Zinabu*, *Big Time*, and *Menace* (by self-styled male filmmakers) which she analyses:

The consuming female, represented by Zinabu, Nana, and Sophia, embodies the anxieties and ambivalence generated by new forms of consumerism and economic individualism, and in this, she is similar to the monstrous feminine ... in that she is a ‘site of conflicting desires’” (2013a, p. 84).

Much as the female characters desire to consume, they are seen as “voracious consumer[s]” and their ability to satisfy the insatiable desires that eventually destroy them is appropriated through their involvement with occultism and witchcraft, through drug trafficking and prostitution and through defrauding and seducing men while infecting them with HIV (Garritano 2013a, pp. 70-84, 2008; Wendl 2007). Garritano (2013a, p. 83) describes the seductive woman as “a good time girl who likes money” (also see Dogbe 2003). The second wave of movies, *Ghost Tears* and *Jennifer*, which were directed by men also image the “good time girl” who follows money till her ruin (Garritano 2013a, p. 105).

Contrary to these representations, Garritano argues that Veronica Quarshie’s successful film *A Stab in the Dark* and its series redefine and transform “the good time girl” from “a one-dimensional figure into a historical subject” (2013a, p. 116). Quarshie has been cited as one of the female video filmmakers in Africa who are exploring innovative strategies that “challenge Eurocentric and male chauvinistic

assumptions/readings of black female subjectivity” (Ukadike 2003, p. 130). Garritano affirms that Quarshie and Frimpong-Manso use their films to refashion stereotypical representations of women in their video movies (2013a, 18). For her, Frimpong-Manso’s *The Perfect Picture* presents strong independent women to subvert gender conventions that condemn women as they seek pleasure and personal fulfilment without men (Garritano 2013a, p. 181). Kwansah-Aidoo and Osei Owusu’s (2012, p. 67) observation that Frimpong-Manso is able to slip in a feminist message into a film environment that is dominated by stereotypical images of women aligns with Garritano’s argument. The present study seeks to build on these studies by examining the representations of women.

In regard to the functional role of African films, several scholars perceive the predominant stereotypical images of women in the videos as drawbacks (Anyanwu 2003, p. 88). Hence, a call for alternative perspectives on women’s experiences to promote progressive female subjectivity in films has been put forward (see Abah 2008; Agbese 2010; Anyanwu 2003; Chari 2008; Okunna 1996; Ukata 2010). To this end, Ukata believes that like female literary writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, and Akachie Ezeigo who rewrote and reconstructed marginalised and stereotypical ways of depicting women perpetuated by early literary works of male writers, more female participation in video production and feminist readings of female representation can raise consciousness and reverse the current situation (2010, pp. 39-40; also see Harrow 1999a). It appears female filmmakers themselves believe they can bring transformations (Ellerson 2000, p. 8), and this study seeks to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which Ghanaian women filmmakers are helping to reconfigure representations of women in film.

### **Audience Reception Studies on African Films**

Coincidentally, while Africans were denied authority over their cinematic images during colonialism so too it seems the audiences missed access to African art cinema when they were finally made during the post-independence era (Burns 2002; Mahoso 2000). This notwithstanding, the dramatic boom of West African video films

across Africa and beyond has increasingly attracted scholarly attention, with scholarship revealing that it has succeeded in redefining African cinema and sustaining a new African audience who hitherto were aficionados of Kung Fu, Hollywood and Indian films (Ukadike 2000, 2003). It is worthy of note that scholars such as Larkin (1997, 2003, 2008), Fuglesang (1994), and Fair (2010) studied particularly the popularity of Indian films among African audiences.

Academics such as Haynes (2007) and Adejunmobi (2010) have suggested that audiences' interest in Nigerian and Ghanaian video films has been made possible partly because of their mode of cultural expression and mode of distribution, which Lobato (2009) describes as "informal" – distinct from conventional channels of distribution. Audiences also see it as a "collective expression" because it is developed solely on local finance rather than foreign capital and support (Austen & Şaul 2010, p. 7). That is to say, their contents tend to represent the broader African society and focus on local and regional tastes (Adejumobi 2007; Cartelli 2007; Evuleocha 2008; Haynes 2008, 2011; Okome 2007a).

Moreover, research suggests that women are the major consumers of, and so endeared to these videos that even a young woman might ask the man who seeks her hand in marriage to add a video player as part of her bride-price (Abdoulaye 2008).<sup>21</sup> However, this is not to imply there are no other categories of audiences who consume the films. Men for example from lower income areas are said to constitute the video parlour or the street audiences (Okome 2007b). In a sense, although women are conceived to be in the majority, what is particular about the overall audienceship is that it cuts across gender, generational, ethnic, social class, and national boundaries (Adejumobi 2002; Haynes 2008; Ukadike 2003).

In fact, a classification of audiences identified cut across religious, illiterate and semi-literate, the sit-at-home, the new elite, and the émigré or non-African audience

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<sup>21</sup> It was usually the case that cinema going was largely a man's business in many African societies, but with the advent of home video technology many more women have become avid and regular viewers of video films because they can access them without any difficulty or any social derogatory naming (Fuita & Lumisa 2008; Fuglesang 1994; Haynes 2011).

(Emasialu 2008). The viewing contexts have also been looked into where some audiences in places such as Kenya (Waliaula 2014), Tanzania (Krings 2010, 2013), and Democratic Republic of the Congo (Bouchard 2010) are said to experience the films through commentaries and oral performances. Indeed, the films are so popular that they have inspired filmmakers in other African countries and in the diaspora and they have also inspired transnational productions between Nollywood and/or for instance Ghana and/or other countries on the continent and also in the diaspora (Aveh 2014; Garritano 2013b; Haynes 2013; Hoffman 2013).

Scholarship has examined the huge audience and the popularity of particularly Nollywood videos among Africans, while identifying and explaining the various functions the films have for different audiences (Adejunmobi 2002, 2010; Aveh 2014; Becker 2013; Dipio 2014; Ekuwazi 2014; Esan 2008; Haynes 2008; Obiaya 2010; Pype 2013; Santanera 2013; Tomaselli 2014).

Scholars writing on factors that foster the audience appeal (local, regional, continental) of the films have sometimes cited the similarities in cultures to be the driving force. For example, in his discussion on Congolese audiences and Nollywood films, Katsuva argues that Congolese audiences relate to Nollywood films because they can identify with the subject matter, the language, cultural elements such as marriage ceremonies, names and titles of characters (2003, pp. 91-103). He further notes that the moral message the films “preach to the Nigerian society is in agreement with the lifestyle of most Congolese, be it in urban or rural areas” (2003, p. 101). Adejunmobi, however, argues that the primary appeal for African audiences in general “is not cultural proximity in the sense of shared cultural heritage, shared cultural patrimony or devotion to a common store of values” (2010, p. 109). She notes that African audiences look up to the video for good entertainment (Adejunmobi 2010). However, despite the entertainment value there are suggestions that one should not overlook the underlying representation of African realities and notably what Dipio sees as the “amalgam of Nigerian society and its philosophy of life” (2008, p. 71). According to Dipio (2014), what draws the Kampala-based Ugandan audiences she studied to Nollywood videos are the African stories they tell, the family tales, the star actors, and the aspirations they offer (also see Bryce 2013).

In contrast, Adejunmobi (2010) recognises that audience appeal first and foremost comes from the representations of common conflicts, fears, desires, and fantasies which they consider familiar. For her, many African audiences respond to what she calls “perceptions of substantive relevance” where the audiences relate to the outcomes of what are presented in the narratives because those have implications for their own everyday struggles and interests (Adejunmobi 2010, p. 110). She further asserts that when the postcolonial subject is considered, the situations, conflicts and resolutions audiences are presented with can be seen as “experientially proximate” (Adejunmobi 2010, p. 111).

Drawing and building on Adejunmobi’s (2010) findings, Garritano in her ethnographic research conducted in Ghana over a period of ten years, notes that the videos provide audiences with “a multiplicity of pleasures derived from the oscillations between mimesis and fantasy, proximity and distance, desire and revulsion” (2013a, p. 10). While audiences fantasise about the luxurious lifestyles, which are remote to their everyday experiences, they identify with characters’ struggles against poverty, yet they “*disidentify* with immoral practices” that characters indulge in to acquire riches (Garritano 2013a, p. 11). Because of these contrasts Garritano (2013a, p. 11) contends that Ghanaian video films, for instance produce intense ambivalence where they criticise greed and immoral acquisition, but position the viewer to gaze and desire the lavish commodities displayed. This study also draws from and builds on these findings, but it is distinct in the sense that it focuses on male and female interpretations of women’s representations and issues presented by female filmmakers.

A survey of the field reveals that female audiences, who are conceived to be the majority consumers of the videos, have their own share of frustrations and misgivings toward the portrayal of women in the videos. In her examination of the reaction of young women towards the depiction of women in Nigerian Igbo home videos, Okunna observes that all the respondents she studied, report that women’s roles in the videos are predominantly negative (1996, p. 31). This is so because the issues of “barrenness, polygamy, materialism and desperate quest for husbands”

feature repeatedly to bring out the worst in women (Okunna 1996, p. 31). While women are unrealistically portrayed as one-dimensional creatures without any complex characterisation, Okunna believes they are capable of influencing the perception of women which can simply:

Lead to the subjugation of women because they can increase men's disdain for women, sow mistrust between women, undermine their confidence in themselves and strengthen the forces which push women to the background in this patriarchal society (1996, p. 34).

Similarly, the elite women audiences Azeez (2010) studied oppose the images of women in the videos and critique the system that produces such representations. Even though the less educated women and men in Azeez's research accept the images, the aberrant interpretations by the elite women are key signals for a remodification and a new orientation towards women's images. The industry is dominated by men and so the desired change according to Okunna will be realised through female actresses refusing to play roles that dehumanise women (1996, p. 34). She also calls for what she terms an "alternative video", which is to be produced by women to present narratives from women's own perspectives. For Ghanaian female audiences, Osei Owusu (2009) found in her study that the 'alternative video', which is also defined as positive/progressive images, must provide relevant, realistic, and empowered images of women.

While the preceding discussion points to the desire by both scholars and female audiences for alternative videos devoted to a fresh view on womanhood, this study brings into perspective how selected male and female audiences interpret the representations of women and women's issues in the Ghanaian women's films. Actual Ghanaian audience readings of women's video films and interpretations of female representations in women's video films, as the review has demonstrated, have been given little attention in the scholarship.

## **Summary**

In summary, this chapter has reviewed relevant literature on African women's filmmaking practices in the art house filmmaking tradition and the video culture, while synthesising perspectives on women's contributions to filmmaking in Africa. The chapter also discussed the impact of female sensibility and consciousness on women's work, the representation of women and women's issues by female filmmakers who are making art house films, the representation of women and issues in the videos, the conditions under which women produce, distribute and exhibit their films as well as audience reception of African films. The review has shown that while most studies have focused on African women filmmakers and their works in some parts of Africa, in-depth specific studies on Ghanaian women filmmakers hardly exist.

To this end, this study attempts to help fill the gap. In doing that it seeks to explore three Ghanaian women filmmakers, their biographical backgrounds, the conditions within which they produce, distribute and exhibit their work, and the strategies they employ in their visual representations of women and women's issues. It also investigates how male and female audiences respond and interpret the representations. To establish the general context within which to explore these areas of interest specific to Ghana, the next chapter examines the historical and cultural contexts of Ghanaian women's filmmaking.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONTEXTUALISING GHANAIAN WOMEN'S FILM HISTORY AND CULTURE**

#### **Introduction**

Like in many other countries, men dominate filmmaking in Ghana. Women evolve and work within specific historical environments as well as face institutional constraints (Kaplan 2003, p 16). They “work with various budgets, production values, and social and economic concerns, and they all have different visions of what it means to them to be a woman filmmaker in today’s society” (Foster 1995, p. xi). Echoing similar observations, Ellerson notes that African women “come to cinema along different paths, for different reasons, and at different moments” (2000, p. 359). Bearing these in mind, two of the aims of this study are: (1) to explore the biographical backgrounds of the three selected film directors and examine the political economic conditions within which they produce, distribute and exhibit their films, (2) to examine female representations and issues in selected films by the women.

Biographical contexts and examination of female representations will be dealt with later in Chapters Six and Seven, but before we get into that, this chapter provides some perspectives by presenting historical and cultural contexts of women’s filmmaking practices in Ghana. It is worth pointing out that historical accounts of the development of film in the Gold Coast<sup>22</sup> and in Ghana have already been provided in the literature (Diawara 1992; Garritano 2008, 2013a; Haynes 2007; Meyer 1999, 2003a, 2015; Smyth 1988, 1992; Sutherland-Addy 2000a; Ukadike 1994, 2003). This chapter, while presenting a historical account, provides more insight into how women rose artistically and are gradually growing with and within the Ghanaian film industry.

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<sup>22</sup> Gold Coast became Ghana when it gained independence in 1957.

The chapter is significant in two major ways. First, it provides a meaningful context to understand Ghanaian women filmmakers and their directorial engagements. Second, it traces with empirical evidence Ghanaian women's participation in filmmaking in the country as well as in the diaspora – an area that has not yet been fully explored in the literature. The discussion that follows presents an overview of the various stages of the development of film in the Gold Coast and Ghana to trace women's involvement, artistic participation and production practices.

### **The Early Days: Film in the Gold Coast and Independent Ghana**

Film production started in the Gold Coast (present day Ghana) as in other parts of Africa primarily as an educative and propagandist tool to support colonial interest (Diawara 1992; Sutherland-Addy 2000a). Davis notes that European settlers who invaded African lands in the nineteenth century not only wanted to exploit the land, but also required the cooperation and the work hands of the natives (2002, p. x). To bring into fruition their aspirations, they needed to exert control and convince Africans to embrace new ways of life and European supremacy.<sup>23</sup> In the case of British colonisers like other settlers, cinema would become one of the driving tools for the campaign beside the implementation of new laws, establishment of schools to indoctrinate the indigenous people, missionary works, and press control (Davis 2002, p. x). Also, it would become a propaganda tool during the Second World War.

At the beginning of the war in 1939, the British Colonial Film Unit (CFU) based in Britain was formed to distribute films in the colonies, soliciting moral and physical support and providing Africans with important news on the war exploits. According to Diawara, the end of the war meant a shift from a policy of distribution to one of production of instructional films (1992, p. 3). For the purposes of mass education, the films to be produced were to instruct Africans in the areas of self-improvement,

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<sup>23</sup> Besides other forms of knowledge associated with domination held by the coloniser, it must be noted that colonialism and imperialism as Edward Said (1995, p. 9) mentions were supported and possibly driven by profound ideological dispositions based on the notion that some regions and people for the benefit of their own development needed to be controlled.

health, business, social development and agriculture among others. The relevance of the shift was that it set in motion the prioritisation of film production in Africa, with Africans, and for Africans in the context of long-term production. For its realisation, the British Film Institute (BFI) sponsored a Conference on “Film in Colonial Development” in 1948, which became a significant facilitating avenue. John Grierson, the British pioneer documentary filmmaker and Films Controller from the Film Division of the Central Office of Information, which oversaw the operations of the CFU, at the Conference advised the importance of putting film into the hands of Africans for their own development (cited in Smyth 1992, p. 165). As reported by Smyth, the then CFU director at the conference also noted the potential and democratic value of having films for Africans, with Africans, and by Africans (1992, p. 165). These statements were made in response to international criticisms on how the British conducted affairs in the colonies.

However, if the colonial interests were for the “purposes of better health, better crops, better living, better marketing and better human co-operation in the colonies” what better way to bring them into actualisation than to produce films “on the native soil with native characters” (Middleton Mends cited in Meyer 2003a, p. 205). Besides transforming Africans into better people, there was the need to maintain and carry on a strong British Commonwealth of Nations and friendship into the impending post-colonial period (Smyth 1992, p. 164). To this end, following Grierson’s report written to UNESCO, the CFU established a film training school (for the West African region) in Accra, Gold Coast to prepare West Africans to assist in filming developmental activities in the colonies as well as making films for themselves (Diawara 1992, p. 3). The focus of the training was to help students to reach the level where they could film local events in newsreel style and make straightforward propaganda films (Smyth 1992, p. 168).

When it came to the crucial decision to select candidates for the local manpower training, the chosen candidates from the Gold Coast were Sam Aryetey, Robert Ofoe Fenuku, and Bob Okanta, all men, who later were at the forefront of film production in the country (see Aveh 2010). Aryetey and Fenuku specialised in editing and cinematography respectively while Okanta trained in still photography. Following the

successful outcome of the training program, the independent Gold Coast Film Unit (GCFU) was formed in 1949 even before the CFU folded up and Gold Coast gained independence. The graduates assisted Sean Graham, a former trainee of John Grierson, who spearheaded production during the days of the GCFU. The Unit's director of photography was another British national, George Noble. It was only a matter of time before the assistants took charge of the productions. Bob Okanta went to work with the Information Services Photographic Department as a still photographer and later headed the division. Sam Aryetey became the head of the Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC) after the overthrow of Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah in 1966, and was later succeeded by R. O. Fenuku.

With regard to women's absence at the training school, various factors perhaps accounted for it. While all over the world women's participation in film production has been found to be low due to various reasons, in the Gold Coast one could postulate that the practice at the time, which excluded women from acquiring formal education could be a peculiar factor. Mama has pointed out that the colonisers brought with them to Africa a "bourgeois Victorian ideology of domesticity" (2001, p. 257). As a result, the majority of women were denied access to formal education, political and administrative work as well as access to the newly introduced wage economy, thus constructing these as masculine sectors. The minority of women who got some kind of education were schooled to concentrate on becoming suitable wives for African men who assisted the colonial administration (Mama 2001, p. 257). Until Nkrumah's Convention People's Party government through affirmative action passed the Representation of the People (Women Members') Act of 1960, there was no reasonable advancement in women's education, employment and social life (Manuh 2007, p. 129). This perhaps explains why by the time the film training school was relocated to London in 1955, no woman had been trained. The GFIC over subsequent years sent employees to Britain, India, and Poland for training but none included women.

Another possible reason for Ghanaian women's absence in the film-training program and involvement, for example, in film directing probably could be explained with the argument frequently put forward universally. Kaplan explains that women's early and

constant underrepresentation in filmmaking has to do with their relation to technology (2003, p. 15). She notes that since gendered construction of technology is often presented as masculine, this inhibits women's involvement in film directing since they see it as an unfeminine profession. Filmmaking in Ghana has been seen as a male profession and as such at the beginning women were not encouraged to pursue careers in this area.<sup>24</sup> A South African film and television school director Masepke Sekhukhuni, in an interview with Ellerson (2000, p. 9), makes the point that women are often intimidated by the filmmaking environment with all the gears and cameras. This appears to be similar to the case in Ghana. Yao Ladzekpo<sup>25</sup> in a personal interview pointed out that even though some women go to the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) with the initial interest of becoming, for instance cinematographers, they end up in areas less involved in gears and equipment (2013, 14 February). While perceptions probably are slowly changing, the general impression has always been that some roles within the filmmaking profession are, particularly, for men.<sup>26</sup>

While there may be several other factors, I posit that the factors mentioned so far likely combined with others to hinder women's admission into the colonial film school and later the industry. Based on the above observations, I reason that Ghanaian women's denial from formal education, their social orientation, their attitude to technology and assumptions about their (in)capabilities did not only keep them from pursuing professions including film directing, which demanded technical know-how, but it also delayed their filmmaking engagements. Garritano confirms that before independence in Ghana, the GCFU's staff included three Europeans and twenty Africans, who were all men (2013a, p. 31).

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<sup>24</sup> A couple of women filmmakers I interviewed told me that even in the 1990s when they wanted to pursue careers in filmmaking their parents disapproved because they thought it was not a suitable career choice for women.

<sup>25</sup> Yao Ladzekpo is a lecturer at the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI).

<sup>26</sup> Afi Yakubu told me in an email that when she entered NAFTI in 1982, she wanted to study scriptwriting and film directing, but the academic board (all men) thought she would be better off studying television production, editing or just scriptwriting because they are easier courses for women. Despite these though, she made her independent decision and specialised in documentary directing (2014, 21 January).

During this period, women working in front of the screen were, however, common. John Collins in his study on 'The Entrance of Ghanaian Women into Popular Entertainment' explains that although there were exceptions, due to social and traditional African attitudes there was a reluctance generally to accept women into concert party groups, leaving men to play female roles and voices up until the 1990s (2007, pp. 47-48). This was not the case for early actresses in front of the screen because right from the beginning women played female screen roles. The GCFU's first ever feature film, *The Boy Kumasenu* (1952), directed by Sean Graham, starred Rosina Ampofo as Grace Tamakloe and Angela Nanor as Adobia. They were non-professionals, but having set the stage for screen performance, women never relented in their efforts. The first feature film after Ghana's independence, an adaptation of a stage production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Hamile: the Tongo Hamlet* (Terry Bishop 1964) was performed by students of the then School of Music and Drama (now School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana). It was filmed on location in Northern Ghana, Tongo. The Queen and Habiba representing Gertrude and Ophelia in the original *Hamlet* were played by the then students Frances Sey and Mary Yirenkyi respectively. It also included several female minor roles played by other female students.

In an interview with the veteran cinematographer and film director, Chris Hesse, who worked with the GCFU and the GFIC from 1954 to 1994, he revealed that by 1963 women had also begun performing secretarial duties for the Corporation (2013, 7 November). Some of those women came from the newly established cultural and academic units (which included the Institute of African Studies and its extension, the School of Music and Drama), which were to work closely with the GFIC to serve the independent state and help champion Ghanaian/African history, art, and culture.

It is noteworthy that throughout the early years of the GFIC women rarely took up roles such as producing, screen writing, editing, sound engineering or cinematography although the facilities were available. The Nkrumah government after independence invested heavily in top class production facilities consisting of sound studios, editing equipment and laboratories for both 16mm and 35mm black

and white processing (Diawara 1992; Ukadike 1994, p. 111). According to Aryetey, Ghana owned “the best cinematographic infrastructure in tropical Africa” (cited in Ukadike 1994, p. 111). Ukadike suggests Ghana saw film as an important element for nation building and as a result sought “to integrate film into its national culture” (1994, p. 111).

The Corporation was responsible for producing and disseminating films designed towards Pan-Africanist and nationalist vision, which included enlightenment on Ghanaian sovereignty and the glorification of traditional African/Ghanaian values; awakening of a collective African consciousness; challenging stereotypical representations of Africans by the West; encouraging national pride; and promoting African cultural heritage and unity, which the CFU had paid no attention to (Diawara 1992; Garritano 2013a; Meyer 2003a; Ogunleye 2003; Sutherland-Addy 2000a). As Harrow explains, early African filmmaking was committed to the psychological redemption of Africans from European hegemony (1999a, p. xiii). Hence, to ignore such obligation would have meant to forsake the Ghanaian/African sense of self, dignity, pride, and culture. After Nkrumah’s overthrow, however, the GFIC’s new policies did not help maintain those interests for long.

### **The Ghana Film Industry Corporation and the Role of Women**

The GFIC’s speciality was documentary filmmaking. However, despite the colonial heritage in that line of production, the Corporation continued to produce a few more classic features (Ukadike 1994, p.111) committed to accentuating Ghanaian cultural and national identity. Aryetey became the first Ghanaian to direct a feature, *No Tears for Ananse* (1965), a film based on the important Ghanaian oral tradition, the Ananse folktale about the spider. As Garritano explains the “film taps into a reservoir of cultural knowledge in its incorporation of oral tradition ... to produce a sense of national identity based on the articulation of a shared culture and the organisation of a national space” (2013a, p. 48).

Continuing in the nationalist consciousness, R. O. Fenuku produced and Egbert Adjesu directed, *I Told You So* (1970).<sup>27</sup> The film is an adaptation of a stage play, a model of the Ghanaian artistic performance tradition, the concert party, by the actor/comedian Bob Cole. It remains popular in Ghanaian film history and critiques women's love for money and their dependence on men in neo-colonial urban Ghana.<sup>28</sup> Aryetey again went on to produce *Doing Their Thing* (1972), the first Ghanaian feature film in colour, directed by the London trained Bernard Odjidja, who also edited *I Told You So*. The purpose here is to show that up until the early 1970s, as Garritano again notes, there were no women among this group of filmmakers (2013a, pp. 47-48). It is also important at this point to state that unlike the Francophone filmmakers such as Senegal's doyenne filmmaker Safa Faye, who received support from the French in the early 1970s to make films, Anglophone filmmakers did not have such 'privileges' (see Pfaff 1988; Ukadike 2002). In relation to this observation, the point to be made here is that when the GFIC achieved early crucial production milestones, women in technical positions were still invariably absent even though generally they had already begun to engage in a lot more areas of the corporations' productions than just acting and performing secretarial duties.

Some women were brought in to work on specific productions. Elizabeth Shepherd, a beautician and a model, for instance, is credited with being in-charge of make-up for the film *I Told You So* (cf. Essah 2008). While some women were invited to work on specific productions, others were trained on the job. In interviews with Chris Hesse and Ernest Abbeyquaye, they revealed that there were women trained on the job to become staff of the company. Those women assumed the usual designated female roles in filmmaking and became production managers, continuity persons, editors, and laboratory technicians (2013, 7 November). For example, Mary Yirenkyi, who trained as an actress at the School of Music and Drama, University of Ghana, and further trained in radio production in Nairobi, worked as production manager

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<sup>27</sup> Some of the female roles were played by Margaret Quainoo as Araba Stamp and Baba Buckle as Rosina.

<sup>28</sup> *I Told You So* is a comedy modelled on the popular Ghanaian theatre tradition called the Concert Party and tells the story of a young woman who refuses advice from her father to avoid marrying a rich man and follows the advice of her mother and Uncle. She goes ahead to marry the supposed rich man, Jones who turns out to be a diamond thief. He is arrested on the day of their wedding.

together with Margaret Okai and other women. Mary Yirenkyi in a telephone interview mentioned that she rose through the ranks to become a producer even though she never produced a single film (2013, 26 November).

Lena Mixon was a pioneer woman editor working in the editing department of the company and she helped train many of the young ones who joined the department. She mostly edited documentaries and news reels. There were also other editors who joined the department including Naadu Lartey and Yawa Amoah. Yawa Amoah also worked as a cameraperson. Due to their background, the editors often acted as continuity persons and script supervisors as well. Women also worked in the welfare department. Together with others, Salomey Oko and Matilda Asante worked in the Film Processing Laboratory Department. They cut, preserved the negatives and developed the films. Salomey Oko at a point in time also became the Deputy Head of the laboratory. Hesse in a personal interview suggested that women dominated the laboratory department since it was believed they were more meticulous in handling the exposed film (2013, 7 November). Others also worked in the film library and the commercial division specifically in the exhibition section. Persons like Susan Neequaye and Theodora Laryea took many of the company's films out on exhibition at centres in and outside Accra. Meanwhile, according to Abbeyquaye some women in the exhibition section who were initially in charge of ticketing went on to become film projectionists (interview 2013, 7 November).

The GFIC's legacy inherited from the British and the social duty of making documentary films meant that women as well as men worked on documentary and newsreel projects more than on feature films. Garritano's account of the GCFU and GFIC points to the fact that between 1949 when the Gold Coast Film Unit was founded and 1996 when the Ghana Film Industry Corporation was divested it had produced "over 200 documentaries, and approximately 385 news reels, but only 14 feature films" (2013a, p. 54). If the top cinematographic facilities were anything to go by, the GFIC was expected to have produced a lot more films. However, due partially to an administrative decision, this expectation went unfulfilled. To share production cost and access distribution channels beyond Ghana and Africa, Aryetey as the managing director of the company from the second half of the 1970s adopted a

policy of co-productions and by-passed Ghanaian expertise to sign on Europeans to make films with Ghana (Diawara 1992, p. 6).

On one hand, through the co-productions the company retained production equipment brought in by the foreign companies. On the other hand, the co-productions set back the growth of Ghanaian film production to where it was when the CFU departed (Diawara 1992, p. 6). It also set back Nkrumah's vision of Africanising filmmaking and his aspirations for self-development. The films produced were not concerned with the cultural reclamation agenda or the national pride ideology set for the GFIC.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the decision thwarted the growth of the professionals already in the system and as Ukadike (1994, p. 112) points out, it severely slowed down the dreams of aspiring Ghanaian filmmakers (which perhaps included women).

Somehow, the co-productions were commercially unsuccessful and as Ukadike (1992, p. 112) reports, "the GFIC was less inclined to push for further government financial assistance". It is important to state that during the period the government's interest in the film industry was unfavourable. Meyer suggests that state resources were rather appropriated to television (2003a, p. 208). This was also a period where the GFIC's commercial department, which was to raise funds through distribution and exhibition of foreign films, faced tough competition from private distributors and exhibitors. Again, it was a period where high currency exchange rates prevented the importation of large numbers of new films for the theatres.

Furthermore, the situation was exacerbated by the on-going political condition and persistent curfews that kept potential audiences at home in the evenings (see Garritano 2013a). Meanwhile, the corporation from the beginning was expected to become an economically viable organisation that could sustain itself. In view of these

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<sup>29</sup>Two of the co-productions were: (1) *Contact: the African Deal* (1975) directed by an Italian, Giorgio Bontempi, is about interracial relationship, and (2) *The Visitor* (Tom Ribeiro, 1979) features the world rock star, Mick Fleetwood with Micky Shapiro and some Ghanaian musicians in the making of Fleetwood's record of the same name and a concert in Ghana.

realities, “for over a decade the corporation was incapacitated, producing no feature films either on its own or in partnership with foreign producers” (Ukadike 1992, p. 112). This led to a gradual halt in the production of Ghanaian films on celluloid as personnel, laboratories and theatres belonging to the company became idle and underutilised. Given this circumstance, it can be argued that in a situation where a state funded film unit is no longer functional; the future rests on independent filmmakers (cf. Diawara 1992, p. 7).

### **Independent Filmmakers**

Outside the GFIC, there was only one woman who made a film on celluloid. The renowned theatre practitioner and children’s author Efua Theodora Sutherland merits special mention here, even though she is not recognised among those who pursued careers in filmmaking. Sutherland was educated both in Ghana and in Britain and she credibly established herself as a dramatist and a scholar in the arts at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. Among her vision was to formalise storytelling – folk drama, stage drama and the concert party culture – and she succeeded in doing so.

In 1967, Sutherland partnered with the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to make *Araba: the Village Story*, a documentary, which tells its story from the perspective of a young Tuesday born girl, Araba, played by Naana Nketia. To a large degree *Araba* is considered a pioneering film by a Ghanaian woman (Ellerson 2000). It is set in the village of Atwia in the Central Region of Ghana, which was one of Sutherland’s primary oral tradition research sites. The film documents the success of her Atwia Experimental Community Theatre Project, a project that has been internationally acclaimed to be a pioneering model for contemporary popular theatre for development (Ellerson 2000, p. 2). While ABC produced the film, Sutherland used the sound studios at the GFIC. According to Hesse, she also did voice over narration on some documentary projects for the Corporation (interview 2013, 7 November). This was in line with the cultural promotion and collaborative tasks assigned to the GFIC and the Institute of African Studies where she worked.

Independent filmmakers who emerged after Sutherland were all men. Kwaw Ansah, the multiple award winning filmmaker and his contemporary King Ampaw made huge contributions to the film industry in the country when the GFIC was virtually in hibernation. Independence meant autonomy, but the filmmakers succeeded under “tremendous difficulties” (Garritano 2013a, p. 53; also see Diawara 1992; Meyer 1999; Ukadike 2002, 1994). As is well known, celluloid filmmaking is capital intensive and when it comes to accessing funding there are persistent constraints and all filmmakers do not have equal opportunities. Both Ansah and Ampaw had to privately generate their own finance to fund their productions. Ampaw entered into successful co-partnership with German companies to release classics including *Kukurantumi*, *the Road to Accra* (1983) and *Juju* (also known as *Nana Akoto*, 1985), which he co-directed with the German, Ingrid Mertner. Ansah on the other hand, in his bid to avoid external control on his productions, took bank loans which were hard to secure to make the internationally acclaimed *Love Brewed in the African Pot* (1980) and *Heritage Africa* (1988). There were tremendous challenges to Ansah’s work, which explains the almost ten year interval between his acclaimed films. After winning prestigious awards with his first two films, his sponsored documentary *Cross Roads of People*, *Cross Roads Trade* won best documentary at FESPACO 1995.

Ato Yanney is another independent filmmaker. He was on the staff of the GFIC and during the crisis period he made *His Majesty’s Sergeant* (1984), a film that was never distributed internationally until recently. The above observations point to the fact that both the GFIC and independent filmmakers faced various challenges, which stalled their work. Nonetheless, the GFIC provided support for the independents. Like Sutherland, even though the filmmakers worked independently, they used facilities and engaged some staff members from the company. Records show that a number of Ghanaian male diaspora filmmakers also made films during the period (Dadson 1991a, 1991b; Garritano 2013a). Mention should be made of Kwesi Owusu and Kwate Nee-Owoo, who made *Ama* (1990), and Kofi Nartey and Robert Johnson, who have to their credit *Back Home Again* (1995).

The economic deterioration in the 1980s in Ghana and distribution challenges affected independent filmmakers to either end their aspirations or move into video filmmaking, a trend that took off in the mid-1980s and would also be followed by the GFIC and subsequently GAMA Films. From the foregoing, it needs to be reiterated that if already established institutions and independent filmmakers could hardly keep their heads above water, logically those who were yet to join the profession would find it extremely challenging considering the circumstances (cf. Ukadike 1992). Ukadike explains that, economically, the imposition of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to rebuild the Ghanaian economy, its drastic failures, coupled with the devaluation of the Ghanaian currency all made it impossible for filmmakers to purchase equipment, film stock and also accomplish postproduction tasks (2003, p. 128).

The measures imposed by the SAP to liberalise, for instance, state institutions including the media eventually led to the sale of 70% shares of the then defunct GFIC, which was renamed GAMA Film Company Ltd. in 1996.<sup>30</sup> The sale as intended was to recapitalise the company, but the buyers' speciality and interests were in television rather than film production. Also, some of GFIC's cinema houses were taken over by private individuals and converted into restaurants, church venues and football viewing theatres. Under the new ownership, the company rather made a number of video films and then branched into producing television drama series and reality shows for TV3, which were well received,<sup>31</sup> thus advancing into areas previously not included in the company's core agenda.

It is important to realise that during this period commercialisation and the dictates of the market as to what was popular with audiences and the new administration meant a new vision; one that was not necessarily about reclaiming national pride and identity (Meyer 2010, p. 49). It is also worthy to mention at this point that in

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<sup>30</sup> Seventy per cent of GFIC shares were sold to the Malaysian TV production company, Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad of Kuala Lumpur, which established TV3. The Ghana government maintained 30%. As a result of the divestment the GFIC then became GAMA (Ghana Malaysia) Film Company Ltd., an affiliate of the television station, TV3.

<sup>31</sup> GAMA went into television production and produced TV drama series such as *Cape Coast Motel*, *Colonial District Court*, *Chorkor Trotro*, *Barber and the Shoe Shine*, and reality shows including *Looking for Love*, *Bands Alive*, and *Hottest Host*.

November 2011 after the expiration of the 15 year build, operate and transfer agreement between the Ghana government and the Malaysian company, GAMA reverted to the State. However, in March 2013, GAMA was sold to the new owners of TV3 and its staff laid off. It has long been evident that the factors noted previously largely accounted for the shift in the cinematic culture from celluloid to video feature filmmaking (Aveh 2010; Garritano 2013a, 2008; Ukadike 2003). This shift would be significant for Ghanaian women's entry into filmmaking as writers, producers, and directors - areas which had eluded them for decades.

### **The Video Boom and the Rise of Ghanaian Women Directors**

Some scholars such as Garritano (2013a, 2008) and Ukadike (2003) have indicated that the video alternative in Ghana (and also in Nigeria) was largely prompted by the conditions and realities of globalisation. Garritano for example, notes that the period in which video filmmaking in Ghana evolved was:

characterised by radical transformation put in motion by developments generally associated with globalisation; the emergence of new media technologies, unprecedented in their reach and rapid progress; the liberalisation, privatisation, and global integration of state economies, driven by international economic institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF); and the simultaneous weakening of nation-states (2013a, pp. 61-62).

By implication, in as much as the country faced economic downturn as a manifestation of the global integration of the Ghanaian state economy, the salient changes brought in by global dictates such as the liberalisation of the state media industry and the free flow of global media technologies presented new opportunities and ways for cultural production and consumption. With the availability of the inexpensive video technology, "a potentially democratic medium" (Meyer 2003a, p. 208), a new independent popular cinema emerged out of Ghanaians' "desire to see

their own culture mediated” once again through the cinema screens (Meyer 1999, p. 98).

With this, the video phenomenon began in earnest with the release and success of the first commercial video feature, *Zinabu* (1987) by the film importer and distributor William Akuffo. Even though Akuffo’s film lacked technical and aesthetic values, it highlighted the prospects and viability of the production of feature films on video (Ukadike 2003, p. 131). While it is important to note that the technology enabled non-professionals (amateurs)<sup>32</sup> who had no associations with the established filmmaking institution to experiment with video, it is equally essential to emphasise that the trend was an escape from the economic realities that hit the private film importation and exhibition businessmen. Like the GFIC, they faced financial challenges and restrictions in the importation of foreign films. The economic challenges were so harsh that in the filmmakers’ efforts, the films they produced articulated “deep ambivalences generated by global capitalism” that many Ghanaians faced (Garritano 2013a, p. 63). Thus, the videos provided the platform for Ghanaian cultural producers to address issues of daily concerns and for audiences to make sense of the insecurities prevalent in the society.

Several scholars recognise that many video feature films often vocalise issues of the moment bringing to the fore low rank urban characters/audiences’ shared fears, anxieties, and desires (Garritano 2013a; Meyer 1999, 2003a; Sutherland-Addy 2000a; Ukadike 2003). For instance, the early video films depicted abject poverty and the use of supernatural powers as a means to traverse from poverty to wealth and power (see Meyer 1999, 2003a, 2004). They showed how despondent characters devised means to challenge the realities, while at the same time as Garritano points out they were held to present moments where characters’ desires were ubiquitous and yet unreachable (2013a, p. 73). Given their moralistic intent,

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<sup>32</sup>Garritano argues in her endnotes that the “label ‘amateur’” needs to be questioned since most of the self-trained filmmakers during the period were not complete novices to the field of film (2013a, p. 208). Before engaging in video film productions, they were already working as film distributors and exhibitors and as such had experience in the field. They also worked with trained actors who brought their expertise to bear on the first video features. I concur with her argument and propose the label “non-professionals” as used by some scholars including Ukadike (2003).

they displayed the uncertainties about wealth and power by emphasising the dangers they precipitated and fantasised about the prestige they offered in the capitalist society. In this way, as most producers claimed, the narratives served to correct characters' sinister modes of refashioning their adversities in order to maintain a moral truth (Sutherland-Addy 2000a, p. 267). These, they asserted, appealed to audiences who could relate to them.

Several film critics and commentators regard the videos to offer "crass commercialism, ideological conservatism, sexism, superstition, and negative stereotypes about African culture and peoples" (Dogbe 2003, p. 99). In recent years, there has been gradual emphasis on romance, nudity, sex, and violence. Within these contexts, in many ways both men and women's representations in the films are often replete with stereotypical constructions. With regard to female representations, the consequential observation one makes after watching many Ghanaian video films made over the years is that women play crucial roles in terms of plot development, but yet their representations "are highly problematic" (Dovey 2012, p. 23; Garritano 2013a).

In many instances, women are shown to be victims or treacherous perpetrators of evil who by the close of the narratives are judged, found guilty and punished in varied forms or pardoned without providing any sound alternative models (Osei Owusu 2009). As an illustration, such women will sometimes be knocked down by a car, confess and die after keeping for themselves foreign monies meant for a colleague's needy wife and son – Rose in *Who Killed Nancy?* (Hammond Mensah, 1995); they go insane after using juju (spiritual powers) to take other women's husbands and attempt to kill their stepchildren – Efe in *Meba* (Sidiku Buari, 1993); they get infected with HIV after cunningly taking their best friends' husbands while sleeping with other men – Afia in *Power of Love* (Socrate Safo, 1994); they become avenging ghosts after they are killed by their husband snatchers – Dee in *Ghost Tears* (Socrate Safo, 1992); they are killed after jilting their fiancés for their friends' husbands – Anette in *Promises* (Ashong-Katai, 1998); and they are killed after plotting and killing their husbands to inherit properties – Joile in *A Reason to Kill* (Raja Asrase, 2011). They are flat characters who act in Garritano's words, "as

grotesque figurations of a capitalist morality that transforms ... relationships into economic transactions” (Garritano 2013a, p. 109).

The observation made is that underneath the problematic representations, the women’s struggles (those being cheated) and desires (those doing the cheating) to depend on men for wealth and wellbeing is tied in with their traditional gender positions as wives and concubines. Films like the ones mentioned appear to speak to a “cultural anxiety about ... globalisation ... and new cultures of consumption” (Garritano 2013a, p. 116). At the same time, in films where women are found to be achievers, their achievements are usually not the main focus of the narratives. Often when they become “heroes”, their affirmative conducts are also aligned with their traditional sex roles as wives and mothers and their choices are restricted to social construction of gendered identities and expectations (also see Ukata 2010).

Although the video phenomenon began purely as a commercial enterprise, with the entry of cine-literates it is gradually progressing into a “sophisticated art of entertainment and information” (Ukadike 2003, p. 138; Garritano 2013a). There is no doubt the movies do not share in the artistic national heritage discourse, even though Dogbe argues that they are pan-African by the very fact that they command a wide continental viewership (Dogbe 2003, p. 99). In broad terms, with the increased participation in globalisation the Ghanaian video films, for instance, encapsulate contemporary Ghanaian experiences situated within what has been described as “universalised themes” in order to cater for the ever growing local and diaspora audiences’ interests (Ukadike 2003, p. 131).

Garritano explains that Ghanaian video movies pursue a “generic global look” (2013a, p. 102). They merge predominantly African middle-class characters and experiences with cosmopolitan tropes and popular cinematic codes and techniques. These, she further suggests, are prevalent in other global cultural forms including American and South African soap operas and series, Nollywood movies and South American telenovelas, which Ghanaians have become avid consumers of (Garritano 2013a, p. 103). This is to say the movies are a confluence of both local and external

cultural expressions and values. In essence, topics set around for example the nouveaux riches, consumerist culture and gender discourses have succeeded in becoming part of the video productions (Garritano 2013a), and women are actively sharing their perspectives on those topics.

While the video movies enabled Ghanaians to integrate the local with the global, the technology also created opportunities for women's "social mobility" in the film industry (Ukadike 2003, p. 129). The availability of the video format increased Ghanaian women's chances of engaging in areas where they were previously denied admittance or had shown no interest. I propose that globalisation and consumerism despite their ills have been a source for Ghanaian women's entry into filmmaking. Also contributing to this growth has been the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), which was founded in 1978 to provide training to both men and women in all aspects of film and television production. Like their male colleagues, in the last three decades and more, many local women in television and film production have received training from NAFTI.<sup>33</sup> In recent years a few private training institutions have also sprung up. However, this is not to suggest women have come in full force to pursue careers in filmmaking. Even when female enrolment gradually increased at NAFTI women were still relatively in the minority. By the mid-1990s, the few women involved in filmmaking were directors, producers, cinematographers, editors (Garritano 2013a, p. 116), art directors, and even presently only a few remain particularly active in directing. Nevertheless, given their long under-representation, it is significant as they expand their expertise on the local scene. Since 1992, women on the local scene have been involved in writing, producing, directing, costuming, and editing various video feature, documentary, and short films.

Based on the manner in which the industry operates some of the women who work as producers and/or directors do so either as independents controlling entirely their own production companies or work for other companies. Others also collaborate or

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<sup>33</sup> Whereas NAFTI has trained many of the technical personnel for the Ghana film and television industries, over the years some of the trained theatre artists from the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, have transitioned to film though others have come from private institutions and a lot more have been followers of their own talents.

get contracted or commissioned to work on specific projects. Added to this, in many instances the films some of the women write and/or produce are directed by men and in other cases the films they direct and/or produce are written by men. There are only a few who have directed what they have written and produced, and a few have co-written or co-directed video films with male partners in the industry.

Based on the conditions of the industry, women operate in a highly commercialised space and as such similar to their male counterparts the success of the films they produce strongly depends on audiences' taste, acceptance and approval, which according to Meyer are sometimes shaped by their consumption of "other forms of entertainment" (2010, p. 50). Meanwhile, the Opera Square oligopoly marketing and distribution system,<sup>34</sup> which is the main channel for distributing VCDs and DVDs, is closely networked, dominated and controlled by a few distributors (see Meyer 2015; Ukadike 2003). The system is such that most distributors are producers and as a result they prioritise the sale of their movies and marginalise or sabotage the films by other producers who do not have distribution divisions in their companies. Film is not yet a consumer product in Ghana, hence when circulatory channels are sabotaged, making the films accessible proves challenging. Oftentimes piracy also sets in when distribution turns dodgy. Writing on informal film distribution, Lobato (2009, p. 3) has explained that distribution does not only supply "audio-visual goods to the consumers who desire them but also work to shape those very desires. Film distributors place limits on the range of options available to ... [audiences] by supplying some films rather than others" thereby shaping the consumption of what they put out in the market. This he further adds is achieved "through sophisticated commercial technologies ranging from advertising and public relations to price differentiation, release strategy, release timing, and so on" (Lobato 2009, p. 3).

Meanwhile, for a film to succeed in the Ghanaian context it must largely appeal to the audiences' constructed taste or a producer must own his own distribution outlet and strategise to build a primary market and gradually create a niche or shape

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<sup>34</sup> Opera Square is a location in Accra, Ghana where VCDs and DVDs are sold and purchased. The name is also synonymous with the marketing and distribution system (oligopoly) in the country, a system which is controlled and favours only a small group of distributors. Filmmakers who do not belong to the closed network system find it difficult to distribute their films.

audiences' desire for the kind of films s/he makes. These determining factors have implications for understanding how much control women exercise in pursuit of forging a female point of view or (re)writing the familiar visual perspectives on the representation of women and women's experiences, which have been found to be the chief focus in many African women's films (Bisschoff 2012, 2009; Ellerson 2012a, 2000). Ellerson, in her theorisation of African women in cinema, points out that crucial to the understanding of women's film are:

The intent of the film-maker, the targeted audience, the politics of representation, the cultivation and forging of structures for critical discourse, the enhancement of cultural readership of the audience, and, perhaps most importantly and ultimately, how the film-maker is allowed to tell her story and to whom (2012a, p. 227).

With these tendencies in mind, the Ghanaian woman filmmaker is faced with limitations as she executes that which many women filmmakers around the world have challenged in mainstream representations of womanhood. Several factors come to bear on the kind of stories she writes, produces or directs and how she does her work. Using these as backdrops, alongside mapping Ghanaian women who have emerged and their engagements in filmmaking, it is necessary to appreciate the tangled web of politics and economy in which their films are financed, produced, and distributed to understand how they address female subjectivity or how they (re)define the 'standardised' visual representations of Ghanaian women and their experiences. The following section looks at women directors and producers' participation in video production and the motif in their works in relation to women and women's issues in the video films.

### **Ghanaian Women Filmmakers and Their Productions**

Although the first pioneering students from NAFTI including two women graduated in 1981, women moving into key production positions began after 11 odd years coinciding with the nascent period of professionalising the video film industry

(Garritano 2013a). Veronica Cudjoe, a television drama producer/director and a pioneering graduate was the first woman to direct a video feature in Ghana in 1992 and she is also known to be the first female video feature director in the Sub-Saharan Africa video making tradition that initially emerged in West Africa. She claims she entered into filmmaking because she saw that the television drama production in which she was involved at the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) was similar to the new trend of filmmaking since both utilised the video format (interview 2013, 14 March). Hence, with her training and experience in television she made the commercial video feature, *Suzzy 1* (1992) whose success prompted a sequel, *Suzzy 2* (1993). The films critique patriarchal promiscuity and interrogate Ghanaian beliefs in ghost and reincarnation while making room for the avenging ghost and controlling mother. Being the first full length film by a Ghanaian woman, it was reported that the film may have disappointed its female audiences because it perpetuated female stereotypes (Dadson 1993, p. 11).

In 1997, Cudjoe went on to make another film, *Eyes Closed*, at a time when issues of economic adversities were no less relevant than today. In *Eyes Closed* she cautions against unattainable aspirations where her protagonist overtly expresses the desire to consume and share in the out of reach pleasures of affluence visible in contemporary capitalist societies (Garritano 2013a). After her experience with two video film productions, Cudjoe concentrated on her television work, thus following many African women who merge other careers with filmmaking like Sutherland (Ellerson 2012a, 2000). After Cudjoe, more women have taken to the video format to produce their work.

Among the pioneers who started writing and producing video features is Hajia Hawa Meizongo whose narratives are set in everyday Ghanaian experiences around the family. With a career spanning two decades there are no doubts her films resonate well with Ghanaian audiences. Like the pioneers of commercial video filmmaking, she did not acquire any formal training. She began in 1992 as a librarian operating her own library, Silver Line Library where she rented out novels and video films to the public. In 1993, she moved into video film production and formed her own production house, Silver Line Production, which also has a branch of distribution

mainly distributing her own films because of the difficulties producers encounter with distributors in recouping their investments. As already noted it is favourable for producers to distribute their own films in order to ensure returns and sustained careers. Operating a building construction firm alongside, Meizongo has produced dozens of video features all directed by men and cut across a range of themes from the curative and ruinous powers of women in *Zadia* (also known as *Djabele* or *Till Death* 1993), to the plight of the house girl in *Whose Fault* (1994), the wicked Auntie/step-mother and unfaithful wife in *Indecent Favour* (1998), and the mysterious lesbian relationship between mother and adopted daughter in *Forever Young* (2010).

As can be seen, in many cases the films women work on deal with diverse issues relevant to the Ghanaian situation, which may or may not necessarily be committed to a direct promotion of female subjectivity. Writer/producers such as Cecilia Oppon-Badu examine the effects of lesbian practices on women's fertility in *Supi (The Real Woman to Woman, 1996)*, and the adverse effects of marriage challenges on children in *Birthday Gift* (1998). Christyn Agwu Michaels' *The Broken Wall* (1996) deals with much the same theme as in *Birthday Gift*. Nana Ama Boateng's attempt at writing and producing resulted in *A Mother's Revenge* (1994), a video film produced by her father's company, Ananse Systems Production, and directed by the veteran filmmaker Ernest Abbeyquaye. As the title hints, the film follows a mother's ghost that requites her death by punishing her husband's snatcher to save her daughter.

A trained editor, Ethel Cudjoe Amissah's screenplay *Jewels 1* (1999), directed by Dugbartey-Nanor for Miracle Films, depicts and juxtaposes the quintessential corrupt urban women and the dutiful and most enduring village wives. In 2000, Amissah's screenplay *Lost Hope*, co-written with Godwin John and Atta Sarpong, and directed by Ifeanyi Onyeabor, treated audiences to the consequences of parental interference in children's choices of future partners due to class stratifications. Similarly, Irene Akoto's screenplay, *Improper Conducts* (1998) employs class differences and a mother's own troubled past as major drivers in her decision to disallow the marriage between her son and her housemaid. I would argue that due to the nature of the industry, many of the films by the women have been purely for commercial and entertainment purposes. However, they are also directly committed to a social

commentary project that exploits day-to-day realities and imagined Ghanaian experiences that appeal to audiences' moral sense of right and justice.

Under the commercial and entertainment conditions, other filmmakers have found it necessary to alter the normative discourse to present alternative perspectives on women's (in)actions, deception, suffering and punishment. For example, Ellen Anim Mensah, who produced *The Noise of Silence* (1997), and Josephine Anim, who directed *Victims (A Cry of the Innocent)* (1998) do not only project female subjectivity where the narratives' point of views are aligned with that of the female characters, but also emphasise the evil that men perpetrate against women to critique patriarchal dominance. Nana Akua Frimpomaa is credited with writing the story, producing, and co-directing *Heated Emotions* (1998), a video film that explores the psychological trauma a woman suffers after losing her children in a boat tragedy while they were on a school excursion.

Veronica Quarshie, the most prolific director in the group of her contemporaries, emerged during the mid-1990s and throughout her career she has worked closely with her husband and editor, Samuel Nai, with tremendous success. As we will see in the next two chapters, many of the stories and screenplays she directs have been results of their collaborative undertakings where they assiduously view familiar female subjectivities from perspectives that refashion African womanhood and experiences. Garritano has said of Quarshie: she "purposely responded to the representation of women dominant in video movies of the period" from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s (2013a, p. 117; also see Ukadike 2003). In another light, others also have pursued subjects, which are not female-centred such as Elizabeth Erzuah's co-directed film, *Innocent* (1998) on family and business feud.

The evidence gathered so far suggests that, apart from Quarshie and Hawa Meizongo, who have had sustained careers, several of the women who attempted directing, producing or writing mainly had brief careers and made single or few movies. Meyer has observed that the industry is highly fluid as sometimes filmmakers move on to other roles or activities (1999, p. 98). But it is not clear

whether some of the women branched into other areas in the industry or pursued new areas of interest. What is known is that persons like Afi Yakubu as well as Vera Mensah Bediako, both graduates from NAFTI, after making films pursued other interests, often making use of their filmmaking expertise in audio visual departments of their new found fields.

Afi Yakubu was the next woman director to come after Veronica Cudjoe. Her school documentary film project, *Marrying in Ghana* on bride wealth and forced marriages in Northern Ghana won the Goethe Institut Award; it was adjudged the Best Student Documentary film in NAFTI in 1985. After film school, her work with the Irrigation Company of Upper Region (ICOUR), made it possible for her to make several video documentaries on agronomy, irrigation engineering, agro-chemistry, nutrition, community health for agricultural extension and training purposes. In 1994, she wrote, produced and directed her independent docudrama video film, *Bondage*, which looks at the subtle coercion of Ghanaian girls who are trapped in the commercial sex trade. Since then she has been involved in several advocacy works. At the beginning of the 2000s, she helped establish the Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA) where she has been audio visually documenting several peace-related projects.

Vera Mensah Bedaiko wrote and directed *Choice 1 and 2* (2000) for Miracle films and directed *Bells for Sale* (2003) for Vision One Systems. Before moving away from feature filmmaking to the audio-visual department of Compassion International Ghana, when GAMA Films shifted to video feature production she directed films like *Broken Heart 1 and 2* (1998) and *Ramatu* (2001) for the company. It is worth noting that the video option opened new opportunities for women writers, producers and directors to work with GAMA Films. Women including Betty Aubin, Leila Djansi, Marian Mantey and Abena Yiadom were able to write or direct for GAMA. Naadu Lartey for instance continued as an editor and producer for the company during the video era. Naana Mensah in 1999 produced *Cry for Love* for GAMA Films and Dateline Movies.

It has been observed that women generally and particularly in the African context are not able to maintain a steady presence in the filmmaking environment (Dovey 2012, p. 21). In Ghana, even though several independent production houses have cropped up during the video era, many trained cultural producers move into areas other than filmmaking. More women are certainly visible and involved in television production than filmmaking. Doris Kuwornu asserts that television is often the platform on which she exhibits her work. For example, after working on her telemovie, *Mirage*, which was shot on U-matic like many of the video films of the early 1990s – shot on location and out-of-sequence, it was not released in the theatres or on VHS but on Ghana Television (GTV). Gyasiwa Ansah had a unique beginning. She worked on most of her father's Film Africa Productions, commenced training in filmmaking in the USA, but later focused on managing the television station TV Africa founded by her father, the acclaimed Ghanaian independent filmmaker Kwaw Ansah. Nana Adjoa Awindor manages Premier Productions, producing successful popular content for television as well as managing Premiere Media Academy (PMA) where she trains personnel for television networks. Women such as Bridget Abadzi, Pearl Adotey, Wilhelmina Quartey, and Veronica Cudjoe became director/producers at GBC long before Cudjoe and other women film directors emerged in Ghana. Television unlike film continues to offer women more opportunities for long-term careers.

As independents, raising funds or getting sponsorship as well as making it into the biased distribution network in the country have been major constraints for many filmmakers. Hence, some trainees after graduating from film school branch to work for NGOs or pursue unrelated careers like banking because they cannot access funding for projects they may have. It is often extremely difficult for freshly trained filmmakers since there is no record of their marketing value and potentials (Aveh 1996). Considering the nature of the profession, it is true that some women may want to pursue careers that will give them ample time to raise families at some point in their lives or they may simply lack sustained interests, but these do not negate the fact that there are no support avenues for filmmakers to explore. Unlike film industries in countries such as France, Britain, Australia, India, Burkina Faso, and Senegal, filmmakers in Ghana rarely have access to non-commercial funding opportunities. The draft policy of the National Film Bill drawn in 1995, which proposed

a National Film and Video Fund to make financial support available to filmmakers to produce their projects, is yet to be passed into law by parliament (*Perished Diamonds* 2012; cf. Aveh 1996).

What is more, interest rates are not stable and obtaining grants or loans from banks and other corporate institutions remains remote. In Ghana, investors hardly show any interest in film sponsorship due to unforeseeable risks involved particularly in distribution. As a result, only a few women have had exceptional stories to tell. Anita Afonu, a NAFTI trained documentary filmmaker after successfully having her thesis documentary film, *Skin Canvas* (2010) included in several film festivals around the world, was able to secure a grant from the Goethe Institut and with support from Life Forms Ltd. Ghana, made the documentary, *Perished Diamonds* (2012). The film looks at the Ghana Film Industry Corporation, its history, divestiture, and the eventual rundown of Ghana's heritage materials shot on celluloid. As at writing, Afonu has received full funding from the Goethe Institut for another documentary film, *African Maestro*, which explores the life and works of Professor Emeritus Joseph Hanson Kwabena Nketia, a distinguished professor of music.

Corporate documentaries could be an option for women filmmakers but organisations rarely or sporadically commission films. Anastasia Korsah-Brown, a graduate from NAFTI, after forming her own production company, Dream Television Production, has made a number of commissioned corporate documentaries on environmental issues, work safety, maternal health in Ghana, insurance and tourism, and mining companies as communal agents of change among other topics.

Garritano has made an interesting observation noting that through collaborations with directors, Ghanaian actresses wield enormous influence (2013a, pp. 116-117). Having contributed tremendously in screen performance, some actresses have extended their participation beyond acting and moved into areas like writing and producing, a trend which began in the 1990s but has gained momentum in recent

years. The contributions of Grace Omaboe<sup>35</sup> and Akofa Edjeani Asiedu are notable. The multi award-winning actress Edjeani Asiedu produced *Fools in Love* (2005), written by Ethel Cudjoe Amissah and directed by Joyce Arthur. She moved on to produce *Not My Daughter*, a short film on female circumcision (2008), and also produced *I Sing of a Well*, directed by Ghanaian diaspora film director Leila Djansi in 2009. Helen Omaboe and Selassie Ibrahim all began as actresses featuring in many local dramas and video features, but have moved into production. Kafui Danku, Yvonne Nelson, Yvonne Okoro, Juliet Ibrahim, and Zynell Zuh have joined the trail, producing their own movies. Nadia Buari has produced and made her directorial debut with *Diaries of Imogen Brown*, which was released in 2013.

Meanwhile, Lydia Forson and Bibi Bright have also begun telling their own stories through scriptwriting. Forson and Habiba Nelson, CEO of Zedec Entertainment, co-scripted the story for the film, *Masquerades* (2011). Anima Misa-Amoah, after a long break from film and stage acting, has co-produced with Kwaw Ansah on some of his *Good Old Days* series. She works with her brother Kwaku Sintim Misa of Sapphire Ghana Ltd., and together they have written, produced, and directed film and television programs including *Ogya FM*, a TV drama series on the power of advocacy using humorous situations and characters. It was commissioned by the Business Sector Advocacy Challenge (BUSAC) fund and produced by Ama Misa. *Ogya FM* won the third prize in the television category at the 2013 FESPACO held in Burkina Faso. Moreover, there are a few whose works have not come into the limelight. For instance, actress Kasoume Sinare produced two films *Calamity* and *Trotro* but due to undisclosed challenges the films as at now have not been released. Barbara Anakwa does not fall within the category of actresses who have produced films, but as the CEO of Chrisloe Entertainment, which produced *Purple Rose* (2014), she co-produced the film with Nigerian film director Pascal Amanfo. Alberta Hukporti, who was recently elected as the treasurer for the Film Producers Association of Ghana (FIPAG), has also produced a number of video films.

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<sup>35</sup> Grace Omaboe is a successful and popular actress, who produced *It's Too Late* in 1995.

Juliet Asante began as an actress but collaborated with Shirley Frimpong-Manso to produce content for television. Asante is also a producer/director, an activist for women's empowerment, an entrepreneur in media and the founder of Eagle Productions. In the Ghanaian film and television industry, she is a trailblazer in producing and distributing short movies made for mobile phones called the MobileFliks Movies in partnership with mobile phone networks, and through the MobileFliks app which can be purchased from the Google store. Frimpong-Manso moved into feature filmmaking under her production company, Sparrow Productions during the mid-2000s when there was an influx of Nollywood videos onto the Ghanaian market. As the discussion in the next chapter will show, since 2007, she has regularly written, produced and directed a range of movies including *Life and Living It* (2007), *Perfect Picture* (2008) and *A Sting in a Tale* (2009), which have received nominations and won several awards locally and internationally. Generally, improvement in production values and the free flow of global media has increased the consumption of both local and diaspora films.

### **Ghanaian Diaspora Women Reclaiming the Local**

In the new millennium according to Dovey (2012, p. 23), African diaspora women filmmakers have appeared on the screen media scene making diverse contributions to the cultural landscape. In the last decade or more, an increasing number of Ghanaian diaspora women based in the United States, Britain and other places have also become visible making documentaries, short films, feature films, animation, music videos, as well as commercials among others. As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, while some diaspora filmmakers work as independents in the diaspora, there are those who tend to extend connections with filmmaking in the homeland (Ellerson 2000; Naficy 2001). In the Ghanaian context, even though there are exceptions, diaspora women filmmakers work transnationally where they do not only engage the local and the global by way of interconnecting with the Ghanaian independent film industry or professionals, but they simultaneously tackle pertinent issues in the diaspora and in Ghana/Africa, and they combine Ghanaian/African cultural consciousness with diaspora voices. I would argue that they adapt

heterogeneous forms of approaches and individually engage the mould of transnational diaspora filmmaking by often shooting relevant stories that are situated in Ghanaian and/or diaspora lived realities, with Ghanaian and/or diaspora setting and subjects.

As previously suggested by Ellerson, issues of the “Diaspora” concerning immigration and other relatable situations are central to the works of African diaspora women filmmakers (2012b, 2000). This is true in the case of Ghanaian diaspora female filmmakers who find themselves as emigrants or the second generation of migrant parenthood. The women through their films reflect and speak to several issues including the issues of race and the tension it generates, bi-racial identities, Afropolitan/cosmopolitan identities, historical events and cultural/ethnic identities among others. While multiple experiences of diaspora filmmakers tend to inform their work, as Naficy (2001, p. 14) reminds us diaspora filmmakers maintain ethnic consciousness as well as consciousness of the homeland.

The Ghanaian-British documentary filmmaker, teacher, writer, researcher and a feminist advocate, Yaba Badoe, who schooled in Britain, began a career in the civil service in Ghana, and later went on to work as a broadcast journalist in Britain. In recent years, she has not only pursued a transnational filmmaking practice, but also has pursued an interest in telling stories about experiences of Ghanaian women in both the public and private spheres. Badoe has produced and directed several commissioned documentaries shot around the world for BBC and other terrestrial British television stations mainly on stories around development with some of her major preoccupations also focused on racial identities, black sexuality, and social attitudes towards people with disability.

Badoe has worked most of her life in Britain and her work has been influenced by the British “fly-on-the-wall” tradition in the way that she primarily puts emphasis on “the importance of people [she films] and the detail of their lives”, to borrow from Bruzzi (2000, p. 76). Since 2007, she has focused on educational documentaries shot on location in Ghana and has produced and directed three significant films all about

Ghanaian women. Using her production firm Fadoa Films as an avenue for social change, Badoe produced and directed *Honourable Women* in 2010, a documentary film based on research conducted by the West Africa Hub of the Pathways in collaboration with Abantu for Development to document experiences of women involved in Ghanaian local governance. In the film, she explores the domestic, social, and political lives of three Ghanaian Assembly Women with different political affiliations and visions of change for their communities.

In the transnational context, Badoe also co-produced with one of Africa's leading feminist scholars Amina Mama and directed her first independent film, the internationally acclaimed award winning documentary, *The Witches of Gambaga* (2010). The film closely unveils the social canker of witchcraft accusations of women in Northern Ghana and explores gender suppression and its inhuman effect on women and society. This was followed with another transnational collaboration with Amina Mama to produce *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo* (2014), which celebrates the life and works of one of Africa's most renowned novelists, poet and feminist writer Ama Ata Aidoo. Badoe said in a personal interview that she felt as a writer herself it was important to make a series that celebrates that untold stories of the lives of African women writers and the alternative histories they write about in their works and that is why she and her colleagues embarked on the project beginning with Ama Ata Aidoo (2013, 20 February). As is known with independent transnational productions, the funding for Badoe's independent documentaries has come from multiple international and local sources – public, crowdsourcing, private and she has also received “assistance in-kind arrangements” to make her films (Naficy 2001, pp. 47-59).

Leila Djansi, who is currently based in Los Angeles, works mainly as a feature and short filmmaker. Her production company, Turning Point Pictures, also based in Los Angeles, has ancillary offices in Australia, London and Ghana. I provide her biographical data, the conditions under which she makes her films, and an analysis of her film, *Ties that Bind* in Chapters Six and Seven respectively. Her feature and short films have received awards and a lot of attention internationally. Djansi's films so far explore human rights and social issues such as forced marriage, puberty rights, violence against women, and gender inequality, which are relevant to women.

I would argue that Djansi's films are partly typical studies on strengths and weakness in humanity, particularly of women. They humanise women, giving them the courage and voice to free and be freed.

There is also the multiple-award winning experimental filmmaker Akosua Adoma Owusu, whose works and contributions to Ghanaian women's filmmaking both at home and in the diaspora are uniquely avant-garde. Owusu, born in Alexandria, Virginia, studied filmmaking and earned her MFA degree in film, media and art from the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 2008 in the USA. Kevin Jerome Everson, a prolific Black American experimental artist and filmmaker and an honouree of many awards, mentored her. Like Everson, Owusu's works "exist on the cusp between reality and fiction and the displacement between America and Africa".<sup>36</sup> Thus, in her view, her films often attempt to create a space which allows her audiences to experience what it is to be one's self while being a foreigner. In describing her own identity and experience, she explains that unlike the African American whom, according to W.E.B. Dubois, struggles to reconcile a double consciousness of being African and American, she as an African immigrant struggles against a triple consciousness. This is based on the fact that while she has to assimilate in White American culture, she is classified with African Americans because of her skin colour even though she does not always identify with African American history and culture, and then she has to deal with the African world and her own line of descent.<sup>37</sup>

After receiving several grants including Creative Capital Foundation Film/Video Grant, Art Matters Grant, Berlinale World Cinema Fund, Sarah Jacobsen Film Grant, Eastman Kodak Film Grant and CalArts Interdisciplinary Grant over the years, Owusu has made several award winning experimental short films which have been shown at film festivals, museums and galleries. In 2012, she wrote and directed a semi-autobiographical short film which won the Best Short Film at the 2013 African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) and was nominated for the short film category at

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<sup>36</sup> See, <<http://www.luggagestoregallery.org/2011/01/cusp/>>.

<sup>37</sup> Akosua Adoma Owusu shared this on her website. See, <<http://akosuaadoma.com/home.html>>.

the 2015 edition of FESPACO. It is a coming of age story marked by a transnational element where the Ghanaian diaspora female protagonist, Nyan Koronhwea takes a journey to the homeland to attend her father's funeral. The journey is a "metaphorical" expression of Owusu's own journey to reconnect with the spirit of her late father whom she had come to appreciate after his death.<sup>38</sup> The narrative is interwoven with one of the popular spider folk tales about Kwaku Ananse. According to Owusu, the film is her attempt to preserve one of the many fables her father passed on to her which is part of a rich oral tradition in Ghana but almost extinct.<sup>39</sup> Owusu has said that the film is a transnational effort between Ghana, the USA and Mexico.<sup>40</sup> This effort is consistent with what Hjort (2010, p. 14) describes as a "transnational arrangement in the context of production". In 2013, through her Kickstarter campaign, which raised over \$9000, she refurbished the Rex Cinema, one of the many abandoned cinema houses in Ghana, to create a cultural space where emerging artists can converge, rehearse, perform and exhibit their work. This is a significant contribution since the Ghanaian creative community is growing.<sup>41</sup>

Akua Ofosuhene is based both in Britain and in Ghana. She has produced several television and radio programs, and through documentary and animation filmmaking her films *Anokye, the Truth of Destiny* (2011) and *Yaa Asantewaa and the Golden Stool* (2009) revisit the unsung Ghanaian history and legendary tales about iconic moments and figures of the past. Naficy has suggested that even though transnational diasporic filmmaking is not strongly motivated by money, it is enabled by capital (2001, p. 43). In 2013, Ofosuhene mentioned in a personal interview at the 23rd edition of FESPACO that she had branched into business to enable her to raise money to embark on new film projects.

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<sup>38</sup> See Owusu's interview with Djia Mambu of Africine at, <<http://www.africine.org/?menu=art&no=11796>>.

<sup>39</sup> See Owusu's website, <[http://akosuaadoma.com/artwork/2946514\\_Kwaku\\_Ananse.html](http://akosuaadoma.com/artwork/2946514_Kwaku_Ananse.html)>.

<sup>40</sup> This is from Owusu's interview with Djia Manbu. See, <<http://www.africine.org/?menu=art&no=11796>>.

<sup>41</sup> See, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOTIEazY LX0>>

Sam Kessie is a British born Ghanaian filmmaker whose background and multiple experiences uniquely shape her work. She was raised both in Britain and Ghana and she studied at American InterContinental University, Atlanta. She has made various films including experimental films, feature, promotional films, documentaries, and music videos. She has made a number of projects not only in the diaspora but also transnationally, specifically in Ghana. Kessie's low-budget documentary, *Zoom Zoom – The Professor* (2010) celebrates the inspirational boxing career of the well acclaimed Ghanaian former WBC Featherweight Champion, Azumah Nelson. Kessie explains that she wanted to tell Azuma's story not only to celebrate his life and work, but also to raise awareness and funds for Azumah's foundation to complete an educational sporting complex.<sup>42</sup> After successfully telling the Azumah Nelson's story, Kessie has made other projects in Ghana including a short docudrama, *The Samaritan* (2012), a short film she developed with her mother and friends, which critiques outdated belief systems inhumanly conceived to degrade and cause havoc to innocent lives. Naficy (2001, pp. 10-19) has suggested that engaging the services of family and friends is a recurrent feature in transnational diasporic productions. Meanwhile, Kessie's recent feature film, *A Letter to Adam* (2014) was produced and written by the Ghanaian actress Lydia Forson.

Florence Amerley Adu and film student Frances Bodomo in diverse ways are engaging projects and stories situated within the transnational context. Adu formally lived in the diaspora, but she is currently based in Ghana as the Chief Executive Officer and co-founder of LEAP (Learning, Education for All People) Transmedia Ltd. With strong commitments to support Ghanaian teachers in the classroom and to help nurture and inspire future minds, she and her co-founder Ekem Amonoo-Lartson and their partners produce content to facilitate the teaching of literacy and numeracy in Ghanaian schools. Frances Bodomo was born in Ghana, but grew up in Norway, California and Hong Kong. She is currently training in the USA to become a

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<sup>42</sup> See Sam Kessie's interview with Amma Sarfo at <http://globalfusionproductions.com/filmphotography/global-fusion-playlist-the-movies-ones-to-watch-getting-to-know-sam-kessie-africas-greatest-boxer-azumah-nelson/>.

filmmaker.<sup>43</sup> While so far she has not shot her films in Ghana, the experiences she captures in her films resonate with African/diasporic identities and her films have been funded through Kickstarter and from everyone she knows including family and friends in Ghana, UK and USA.

Hawa Essumane is a Kenyan film director originally from Ghana. With a background in theatre and television, Essumane directed her debut feature *Soul Boy* in 2010 as a result of a mentorship program with the German director Tom Tykwer. In addition to directing, she has written other scripts including the script for *Logs of War*, which was one of the two films to have been awarded the first International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) Worldwide Award.

In 2004, the Ghanaian British-born Amma Asante after modelling herself as an actress and a writer successfully launched her directorial filmmaking career on the international stage with her film, *A Way of Life*, which she also wrote. The film, set in South Wales, is a dynamic exploration of racial presumptions, misconceptions and racism, issues which were part of her own experience growing up in Britain in the 1980s. Despite the common experience of racism against black people, in the film Asante uses a Turkish immigrant who is racially abused which proves a stronger point that racist confrontations and abuse go beyond people labelled black. *Belle* (2013), Asante's second feature, based on a true story, visits the issue of social discrimination, deprivation, struggle for self-discovery and recognition that people of bi-racial descent face while critiquing/questioning the politics of identity. Asante is among diaspora filmmakers who managed to break into mainstream filmmaking. In all, like the diasporic film practices and identities Naficy (2001) theorises and Ellerson (2012b, 2000) studies, the identities and experiences of the Ghanaian diasporic filmmakers reflect in their films.

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<sup>43</sup> Brooks, B 2013, 'Discover: Frances Bodomo Crosses Cultures with Boneshaker', viewed 27 November 2014, <<http://www.filmlinc.com/blog/entry/discover-frances-bodomo-boneshaker-quvenzhane-wallis-african-film-festival>>.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have traced the historical development of filmmaking in Ghana and mapped out women's engagement and participation, the historical practices which preceded their involvement and the conditions under which they emerged and worked. While in the era of the GFIC women were limited to less technical areas apart from editing and laboratory work, the onset and uptake of video technology and the establishment of the training Institute (NAFTI) opened up opportunities for women to occupy key roles as writers, producers and directors. This chapter has also touched on the contributions of Ghanaian diaspora women filmmakers working both in the diaspora and in Ghana. While they have been involved in appropriating diaspora related issues and/or general themes, they have also focused closely on specific African and local issues.

The main intent of this chapter has not only been to map Ghanaian women's engagements in filmmaking, but importantly it has been an attempt to provide a historical and cultural context from which the selected female filmmakers who are discussed in the next chapter have evolved and made their films. As mentioned earlier, women come to cinema at different points, through different paths, with different visions and concerns; they work with different production values and filmmaking practices. For the purposes of this study, the following chapter presents biographical information on the three selected Ghanaian female directors: Veronica Quarshie, Shirley Frimpong-Manso, and Leila Djansi, while also discussing their filmmaking practices which include production histories, and the political and economic systems within which their films are made and consumed.

## CHAPTER SIX

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION AND FILMMAKING PRACTICES

#### Introduction

Following Kellner's (2009) open, albeit delineated tripartite approach, which has been adopted in this study, the previous chapter presented a historical and cultural context of the role of women in the development of filmmaking in Ghana. In accordance with the way the approach has been designed for this study, this chapter explores specifically the biographical as well as specific political economic contexts under which the three chosen local and diaspora women: Veronica Quarshie, Shirley Frimpong-Manso, and Leila Djansi have made their films. It is worth reiterating that they were selected based on the fact that they have focused on female subjectivity, which is a major interest in this study. Also, their films are accessible and popular, which gives them visibility. Again, their participation in filmmaking reflects exemplary sustainable careers in a space dominated by men.

Furthermore, the chapter also examines the women's interests and thematic preoccupations, in so far as it provides a meaningful *context* to understand the specific conditions under which they work, their concerns, and the representational strategies they employ to represent women. In what follows, I discuss each woman and her biographical background and filmmaking practices.

#### Veronica Quarshie: A Pioneer and Social Commentator

Veronica Quarshie is perhaps the only female director, who has had a long visible presence in the highly male dominated Ghanaian video film industry since its early

years. Beginning as the third woman to have directed a feature film in Ghana, Quarshie has repeatedly used her films to comment on social issues.

### **Early Family Background, Education and Training**

Born in Accra to R.A. Quarshie, a FIFA referee and a construction company administrator and his wife Madam Elizabeth Otoo,<sup>44</sup> Quarshie is the fifth child in a family of eight children – six boys and two girls. She believes that growing up among six brothers prepared her for the male dominated profession she chose because she and her sister had to learn to be assertive at a young age. Between 1981 and 1986, she attended Bolgatanga Girls' Secondary School for her Ordinary Level Certificate and later went to Secondi College in the Western Region of Ghana for a two-year Advanced Level Certificate. An interest in performance arts led to her active participation in drama club activities at both schools, and during the senior years at Secondi College she took up the position of drama club president to manage its activities.

With this interest, after secondary school Quarshie was convinced that theatre was the legitimate profession, which was going to allow her to stay true to her fascination. In her view, there were so many social issues that she wanted to draw on her interest to help address them. She therefore planned to pursue training at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana. However, her father opposed the idea with the common assumption that performing arts only taught people how to drum and dance, which did not need all the secondary school education she had already acquired. Moreover, in that part of the world it was not a lucrative career to choose. In a personal interview, she recalled that a family friend spoke to her about NAFTI and after making initial enquiries her father had a change of mind and agreed to allow her to study film (2013, 17 January). For her, studying film was not just another performance medium, but one that also would allow her to stay committed to making a contribution towards social change.

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<sup>44</sup> Her parents are from the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

Quarshie entered NAFTI in 1989 to pursue a three year course in film directing with persons like Ivan Quarshiga, Kenny McCauley, and Nana Adjoa Awindor<sup>45</sup>, who like herself would become acclaimed television and video film directors in Ghana. The training school, like the film industry at the time, was hit by the general economic crisis that thwarted growth and film production in the country. As a result, while students were being trained in 16mm celluloid in the late 1980s, expensive film stock and the breakdown of the school's colour laboratory meant that training had to be carried out in the video format. Quarshie and her colleagues were among the last batch of students to receive training in celluloid in their first year, but went on to receive training in video for the rest of their course. In citing Kofi Middleton-Mends the then Head of Directing, Ukadike (2003, p. 132) suggests that the institute switched to video to use equipment donated and installed by German Parastatal.

Studying film directing under the direct tutelage of Kofi Middleton-Mends,<sup>46</sup> Quarshie describes the training she and her colleagues received as vigorous and intensive (interview 2013, 17 January). Despite the intensive nature of the training, as the only female directing student in her class, she was determined to follow in the steps of the few women like Veronica Cudjoe and Afi Yakubu who had gone before her. She worked hard and graduated in 1992 as the Best Student Director of the year for her thesis film *Action Plan*, a radio play adaptation, which explores the reasons some women go into prostitution. While several professional filmmakers at the time were disillusioned with shooting commercial films on video, by virtue of her training, after school Quarshie did not have to deal with the transition from celluloid to video production, which many professionals before her had to do.

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<sup>45</sup> Nana Adjoa Awindor studied editing in school after which she set up a television production company and school. Ivan Quarshiga after school went into advertising and established his own firm Farmhouse Productions. He is also known for his direction in the popular Ghanaian TV series *Things We Do for Love*, which launched the careers of several current film actors such as Jackie Appiah, Adjetey Anang, and Majid Michel. McCauley as a film consultant also directed in the late 1990s some of the most popular video comedy productions for GAMA Films like *Behind the Box*, *Without Her Consent* and *Heart Strings*.

<sup>46</sup> Kofi Middleton-Mends was one of the candidates and group of men who through an arrangement between the India High Commission in Ghana and the GFIC received scholarships from time-to-time to study filmmaking in India.

## Political Economic Conditions and Collaborations

Quarshie and a group of her mates made up of two directors, two cameramen, two sound men and one editor decided to team up and collaborate because employers often seek employees who have work experience. The two directors were Quarshie and Kenny McCauley, the editor was Samuel Nai whom she would later marry. Fortunately, the group got a producer in Takoradi who engaged their services on a number of productions. The group saw this as a good opportunity, and shuffled between their national service posts<sup>47</sup> in Accra and shooting the video films in Takoradi during the weekends.

In the course of their work, the two directors often assisted one another, so when McCauley directed, Quarshie became the assistant director or production manager and vice versa, a practice they would extend to other projects later in their careers. The group's first movie, *Twisted Fate* (1993) was produced by the Takoradi based businessman who was also a professional still photographer, Pius Famiyeh of Piro Film Production. The film was directed by McCauley with Quarshie as the assistant director. It is worth remembering that as at 1993, the only woman who had directed commercial video films in the country was Veronica Cudjoe (*Suzzy 1*, 1992 and *Suzzy 2*, 1993). Consequently, I suggest that in spite of Quarshie's early achievements with her school project *Action Plan*, people still had doubts about her abilities when she began her career because generally women were yet to prove their capabilities. Quarshie noted in a personal interview: "It was only after I had shot my first, second, and third successful films that people began to trust that I could do it." (2013, 19 January). This is similar to the experience of the Kenyan film director, Anne Mungai who faced funding challenges at the beginning of her career as a result of her gender because society at the time saw film directing as a man's profession (Cham 1994; Harding 1997).

In spite of early doubts, in 1994, Quarshie directed her first commercial video feature, *Twin Lovers* also financed by Piro Film Production. After this first

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<sup>47</sup> National service is a compulsory service to the nation program for students who graduate from tertiary institutions in Ghana.

commercial video film, for two years in a row Piro Film Production financed a few more films, two of which Quarshie directed – *Tears of Joy* (1996) and *When the Heart Decides* (1997). It was in 1996 that Quarshie and Samuel Nai co-wrote their first screen script for the film, *Come Back Lucy*, which was produced by Kwesi Fletcher, then another Takoradi based businessman. This 1996 film sets the tone for several of Quarshie's video films, particularly screenplays she would co-author with her husband where they examine social issues and the tensions in relationships between men and women. After gaining experience and exposure through the collaborations the group dissolved, though they still maintained close ties. Moving on, Quarshie worked closely with her editor and husband Samuel Nai.

By 1998, Quarshie's skills were fully recognised in the video film industry and not long after she was sought after to direct films for other producers and production houses. One such producer who has engaged her services over the years for thirteen films so far is Moro Yaro, a man who, like the early independent non-professional video makers and producers, also began as a businessman and video film exhibitor. It is important to note that while she worked with other producers and founded Media Kraft Pix Ventures with her husband to purposely make commissioned documentaries and commercials, the discussion here focuses more on her work with Yaro not only because she worked as a director on several of his projects, but also to set the context from which *The Forbidden Fruit* (2003), which will be analysed in the next chapter, emerged.

In working together, both Quarshie and her producer Moro Yaro have suggested that the director's expertise and the relationship they established together on their first collaboration, *Victim of Love* (1998), allowed her to exert control and pursue a vision, which guided most part of her work.<sup>48</sup> Unlike her engagements with other producers, Quarshie made her films with limited interference when she worked with Moro Yaro. First, in my interview with Yaro, he said that "We usually had discussions, but I trusted their [Quarshie and husband] expertise, and so my job was to provide the

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<sup>48</sup> Quarshie and Moro Yaro mentioned this in my interviews with them on the 17th of January 2013 and 22nd of January 2013 respectively.

money and resources ... I never borrowed money to produce and I did not produce in partnership ... they sometimes helped.” (2013, 22 January). In light of this, I would argue that because the producer did not interfere with the goal and vision of the film director and her editor husband and because the producer did not partner with other producers there was also negligible external influence. Consequently, Quarshie and her editor/husband played major roles in choosing artists and crew members for their productions. In addition, her husband served as the production consultant and editor for all the films they made with Yaro. Again, being aware of their writing skills, Yaro no longer searched for film scripts from outside the team they had built. Veronica Quarshie and Nai teamed up to write their own stories and screenplays enabling the director to focus on her interest in telling social issue stories.

It is noteworthy that while they wielded control in working with Yaro, they did that with commercial considerations because as a practice in the video industry the producer and his team relied mainly on audiences to stay in business. In a personal interview with Quarshie she said that for her, “once a producer invests money it is a commercial venture” (2013, 17 January). On her part, Adejunmobi has asserted that Quarshie almost like a rule deliberately treats her “artistic work as a commercial commodity designed to sell to the largest number of potential consumers” (2003, p. 295). To achieve this, Quarshie, her producer and consulting producer employed strategies to get audiences at the time to patronise the films they called, ‘crowd-pleasing films’ – films that got audiences talking. To stimulate discussions, several of Quarshie’s narratives often did not have clear resolutions, leading to the serialisation of some of her narratives such as *A Stab in the Dark*, *Shadows from the Past* and *A Call at Midnight*.

In fact, the “short serials” as Adejunmobi (2005, p. 283) calls them have come about as a result of the popularity and the interest they generated among viewers. Serialised narratives, according to Adejunmobi (2005, p. 283) favour commercial interests of producers and directors. Yaro has said that their films captivated audiences and that also expanded the commercial success of the films (2013, 22 January). In a sense, the audiences had discussions even after they had experienced the films and that made the films popular and also incited audiences to

want to see more. It can be argued that commercialisation and popularity are not mutually exclusive because for a film to generate more discussions, it requires a lot of patronage and popularity, and serialisation of talked about films means “more opportunities to make money from the same story” (Adejunmobi 2003, p. 284).

A common recurring approach that Quarshie took to her serials is that apart from the first two instalments, she usually shot the rest of the series long after the first two had been released, unlike several serials at the time that were shot continuously together and edited into parts. For instance, the last three instalments of the *A Stab in the Dark* series were based partly on samples of the popular audiences’ comments and perspectives on possible outcomes of the narrative and characters’ behaviour.<sup>49</sup> This did not only allow audiences to contribute to shaping the narrative, or enable the filmmaker to captivate the audiences, but also helped the filmmakers to embrace audiences’ participation in the process. A similar scenario happened with the series of *A Call at Midnight* (2001-2002). *The Forbidden Fruit* (2003) was not serialised. A contributing factor for this was that the film culture and production by 2003 had gradually declined because as Haynes (2007, p. 4) observes, the Ghanaian film industry entered a crisis period with the avalanche of cheap Nollywood films in the Ghanaian film market and on Ghanaian television (also see Garritano 2013a). Consequently, video production slowed down and like the few films that were produced, *The Forbidden Fruit* was released straight onto video cassette.

Haynes has suggested that because of the format of video and the low budgets of most video films, they were often shut out from international film festival circuits (2010, p. 12). Since Quarshie is known to maintain high production values in her productions (Garritano 2013a, p. 117), it is therefore not surprising, but significant that despite the fact that *The Forbidden Fruit* was not released in theatres, the film went on to screen at the Africa in the Picture Film Festival in Amsterdam in 2003. A

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<sup>49</sup> It is as a result of this that the titles of the later instalments often change. For example, *Ripples 1 and 2* (2000) are the third and fourth titles of what are supposed to be *A Stab in the Dark 3 and 4*. *Rage* (2003) is the title for the fifth instalment. In the same way, the third instalment of *A Call at Midnight* is titled *The Third Night* (2002).

year earlier, *Ripples* received a screening at the 2002 edition of the Women in Filmmaking Film Festival in Bordeaux, France. Essentially, other film festivals have screened Quarshie's works including Amiens International Film Festival in France. Quarshie's films have also been televised not only in Ghana, but also in Kenya, South Africa and other African countries.

While Quarshie is considered the most successful female video film director of the late 1990s and early 2000s, after collaborating with Apostle Kwadwo Safo of Kristo Asarfo Mission Church and making *The Forbidden Fruit*, in 2003, she took a break to start a family. It is not clear though whether her decision merely coincided with the challenges the industry was starting to face with the popularity of Nollywood films in Ghana. By 2008 when the industry was beginning to pick up, she returned to direct a transnational production, *Heal my Heart 1* and *2*, a film written and produced respectively by the Nigerians Pascal Amanfo and Kingsley Okereke. This collaboration is typical of the numerous collaborations that take place between Ghanaian and Nigerian filmmakers, which Garritano (2013a, p. 166) has described as a minor-to-minor transnational collaboration (also see Adejunmobi 2007).

Upon Quarshie's re-entry into the industry, she has also worked with the renowned veteran filmmaker Kwaw Ansah as an assistant director and collaborated with her husband and Yaro on another project, *Otilia*, an Akan language film. Garritano has observed that at the time Quarshie began making films with Yaro, "almost all Ghanaian movies were produced in English" (2013a, p. 119). In recent years, there has been a growing trend of popular Akan language video films produced in Kumasi. Because they have been in high demand lately (Garritano 2013a, p. 173), some producers who were originally producing the regular English video films have also turned their attention to that market. It is in line with this new trend that *Otilia*, which was originally co-scripted by Quarshie and Nai in English was translated and filmed in Twi.

## **Production Practices**

As has been indicated, Quarshie directed both scripts she wrote with her husband and scripts producers sourced from other writers. As co-writers, she and her husband usually had a script pool so after a producer agreed with them on a script the producer wanted to invest in, and after getting the script ready, the time from pre-production to post-production approximately took three months. Editing often could take a month because at the time there were few editing studios, which were generally heavily booked. Quarshie usually worked with relatively high budgets and high investments, and it was this that allowed her to uphold high production values, which also contributed to increased audience appeal for her films. Apart from the partially State owned GAMA Film, she was among the first independent video film directors to switch from Super VHS video camera to Betacam which was more professional and of higher quality than the camcorder many video filmmakers used at the time. Garritano has argued that most professionals who turned to the video format, “aspired to a more global or cosmopolitan style” to produce “a global product that could be compared to a Hollywood film” (2013a, p. 92). To achieve this, Quarshie usually worked together with a host of experienced Ghanaian actors and professionals including Psalm Adjetefio, Agnes Dapaah, Edinam Atatsi, Pascaline Edwards-Asante, Portia Tibu, Juliet Asante, Kwame Owusu Ansa, David Dontoh, Dzifa Glikpoe, Nat Banini, Eunice Banini, Nana Ama McBrown, Kwame Sefa-Kayi, Grace Omaboe, Abeiku Acquah, Fred Amugi, Gavivina Tamakloe, and Kofi Adjorlolo just to mention a few.

With regard to her professionalism, Quarshie’s directing style has been described as methodical. Contrary to the common practice of many video directors shooting with “a more or less brief outline[s]” (Meyer 1999, p. 94), Quarshie usually went on location with a detailed shooting script and a visualised mental edited version of her films. Hence, she knew which portions of her films were going to go into a master shot and what shot scales were going to be used at what point, making the shooting less time wasting and exhausting. Considering the busy schedule of several artists her approach on location was seen as helpful. In an interview, one artist who has worked with her says this of her: “She is a director, who practically edits the movie

before beginning a shoot, so when I see her on location I smile because we are not going to waste time” (2013, 20 March).<sup>50</sup>

Given the mental visual edit, it is worth mentioning that Quarshie usually had discussions with her editor/husband and consulting producer during writing, before shooting and during post-production – at least this was to allow her to maintain the visual picture she had envisaged. While directing for Yaro (and other producers), after post-production, she handed over the film to him with promos, posters, flyers, and adverts for publicity, marketing, distribution and exhibition. As the producer and owner of the film, he takes care of marketing, distribution and exhibition. This implies that while Quarshie always owns the intellectual property of her video films, her financiers are the owners of the films.

### **Production Challenges**

There is no doubt that when we contrast Quarshie with her contemporaries, she has been in a position to have co-written and directed her films, but as a director who worked for producers there have been some constraints. Even though the producers she worked with readily sought after her, like many other African filmmakers generally and specifically women as observed by Bisschoff (2009) and Ellerson (2000), her major challenge has been funding. Much as she has generally worked with committed producers, there have been occasions when the resources provided ran out not because she over spent her budget allotment, but because the provided funds did not match the proposed expenditure. According to her, a producer may approve the budget and give the assurances of providing the full funding, but halfway through production it becomes evident that the resources are limited (interview 2013, 17 January). When that occurs, the production is often affected by an inability to purchase or hire the right props or transport artists and crew to and from locations. In such a situation, the director and her husband then commit their own funds to avoid delays and receive reimbursement later.

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<sup>50</sup> This was revealed in a personal interview with Ekow Smith Asante, who has worked as an actor in a couple of films directed by Quarshie.

In the course of her career, even though she had total control in her dealings with Yaro, she did not always have full control when working with other producers. For instance, there have been occasions when she had problems with the scripts she did not write and had little room to make changes. Moreover, during some of those productions, she also did not have absolute control over the planning or making important decisions such as choosing artists and crew members, which she had been privileged to do under Yaro.

Interestingly, she has faced opposition in her gender representations. Her aim of striking a 'fair balance' between male and female portrayals, which I would argue sometimes challenged prescribed gender roles for women, invited criticism from the artists she worked with on set. According to her, particularly some male artists sometimes questioned her motives on some of the female characters she created (2013, 19 March). Another challenge she confronts is with actors. Many artists in Ghana are said to be underpaid. Hence, often they take on several film roles at the same time, making them busy and sometimes less prepared on location, which then consequently slows down the productions. Much as this appears to be a major challenge, Quarshie in an interview said that at the time she began making films in the 1990s, the situation was much better than in recent years (2013, 17 January).

Furthermore, because the industry consists of independent filmmakers and structures are not in place, video filmmakers usually go on a hunt for locations for filming. Accessing appropriate locations that help to communicate the film's meaning and mood is sometimes challenging. Filmmakers in Ghana usually use public, corporate and individuals' private properties as backdrops and/or locations for their film projects. Whether she works with a producer who allows her absolute control to choose locations or one that does not, Quarshie like many other directors in the video industry sometimes faces the unwillingness of property owners to allow filmmakers to use their premises. When they do, occasionally the director has to rush through the shoot because they may have overstayed the permitted time, or the property owner is not too comfortable allowing the production team to shoot continuously for long periods. It is even more challenging when new arrangements have to be made for a re-shoot at the same location on later dates.

Quarshie has also faced what Ellerson describes as the challenge of women filmmakers reconciling various roles in their lives (1997). While she is not as active as she would want to be, for instance, as a mother, since she resumed her filmmaking career, there have been a few occasions when she had to break in the middle of a shoot to be in the hospital because her son was hospitalised. Despite these difficulties, the passionate reception of her films by audiences as well as the support her editor/husband and others have provided her, has kept and sustained her interest in making films.

### **Dominant Interest and Thematic Preoccupation**

Many non-professional moralistic video plots in the 1990s and early 2000s emphasised magical matters tinged “with special effects that visualised spiritual forces, such as ghosts, witches, ancestor spirits and mermaids” (Meyer 2010, p. 51). Quarshie and Nai, who were products from the national film school, were devoted to using their films as a “vehicle for public enlightenment, education, and entertainment” (Meyer 2010, p. 51). They were not preoccupied with the African heritage or national identity reclamation agenda, but they used their films to comment on social issues. Quarshie has said of her films in an interview, “We term our films as social commentaries. We look at issues that happen in society. I would say experiences in life ... things that happen around us ... the way my parents brought me up ... and then we put them on the screen, so that people can learn from them and change” (2013, 17 January). In a way, Quarshie’s films in principle often pursue a didactic agenda, though some eschew direct prescriptive or imposed messages. This interest, as will be seen, has had great influence on the themes she explores and the mode in which her stories and narratives are structured.

Most of Quarshie’s stories and films have been inspired by everyday events in society and the home because she aims to use her films to comment on social issues. Accordingly, since her commercial directorial debut, she has predominantly made films dealing with quotidian human emotional and relational conflicts. Her films advertently revolve around widely-known social and domestic issues on medical misfits, cultural practices and gendered victimisation, corruption, parenting,

infidelity/sexual exploitation, betrayal and revenge, forced marriage, female friendship, family conflicts, and marriage and property rights among others. As Quarshie has said in an interview, these were topical at the time, and they appealed to audiences (2013, 17 January). Sutherland-Addy (2000a, p. 277) in a survey of themes and the way they are treated in a corpus of video films produced in the 1990s, suggests that in anticipation of the taste of audiences, the tendency of filmmakers was to:

dramatise and portray elements of popular culture engendered by features such as urbanisation, straitened economic circumstance, alienation from traditional values, and the stresses of domestic life as well as by disturbing issues of topical interests.

As already pointed out Quarshie's earlier films, which she did not write, and the ones she co-wrote were all inspired by the notion of representing the everyday. For instance, the filmmaker's commercial debut, *Twin Lovers* was inspired by a true story that happened in Takoradi, and tells the story of a man who denies a pregnancy by a woman he drugged and raped. There is medical misfit when the woman decides to abort the pregnancy and the babies miraculously survive, but they are brought up separately. As fate will have it, they find each other and fall in love to get married, however, at the altar their blood ties are revealed and the marriage is stopped. According to Ukadike, the film conveys several challenges women face in modern African societies, but "blames [such challenges on] the patriarchal system that has entrenched male dominance in almost all facets of life" (2003, p. 130). Similarly, Quarshie's second film, *Tears of Joy* (1995) focuses on a common assertion in most Ghanaian societies that a man's external family members are most often interested in his property, rather than his welfare or that of his wife and children. Another example, *When the Heart Decides* is an excellent illustration of how cultural practices are appropriated to wrongfully discriminate against women.

It would appear that while dealing with social issues, Quarshie also deals with social issues that somehow affect women. This is interesting when we consider her first co-

scripted film, *Come Back Lucy* (1996). This film explores a man's obsession to control a woman and the woman's compulsion to use men to get what she wants. Similar tensions like the one that erupts from relationships and individual im/moral choices can be identified in other films such as *A Stab in the Dark* and its series (1999-2003), *Shadows from the Past 1* and *2* (2000) and *The Forbidden Fruit* (2003). In another film *Victim of Love* (1998), the director is preoccupied with women and education and alludes to education as a vehicle that will ultimately earn for women their self-sufficiency and independence. Education as a means to empower women is central to African feminist thought (Ogundipe-Leslie 1993, p. 116; also see Amadiume 2001).

While these suggest that in dealing with social issues Quarshie sometimes displays a sensibility toward issues that affect women, and other times she leans towards tackling issues as they relate to African feminist concerns, she suggests her films are more on social matters rather than demonstrating any sensibility or preaching any kind of feminism. According to her she is not a feminist and she does not consciously set out to deal with feminine/feminist themes or promote women in her films (2013, 19 March).<sup>51</sup> As my analysis of her film in the next chapter will show some aspects of her film(s) display a sensibility towards social morality, which sometimes overlooks hegemonic notions; however, other aspects orient indirectly towards particularly liberal African feminist consciousness.

According to Garritano, Quarshie's films "have challenged gender stereotypes common in Ghanaian movies" (2013a, p. 18). As part of professionalising the cultural field, many films during the 1990s and early 2000s made by professional video filmmakers, registered their professionalism by engaging in women's issues and worldwide discussions on gender (Garritano 2013a, p. 93). Garritano suggests that Quarshie's series, *A Stab in the Dark* performs a professional style by engaging in women's issues. She writes:

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<sup>51</sup> Quarshie intimated this in a personal interview.

This series shifts attention away from male characters and toward female characters who confront, assimilate to, exploit, or fight patriarchal ideologies and the double standards these ideologies normalise (Garritano 2013a, p. 125).

In a sense, the series follow women who form alliances and assume androgynous statuses to access power to fight patriarchal dominance and defeat female waywardness. Garritano has claimed that the series was among the first video films in Ghana to represent female solidarity progressively (2013a, p. 125) because at the end the protagonist and her friend settle their differences and work together. While *Shadows from the Past 1* and *2* (2000) do not focus on female solidarity, they express what happens when a woman is disappointed in a deceitful romantic relationship. *No Easy Target* (2001) exposes a woman's struggle against her father's plans to forcefully give her in marriage to his friend's friend in order to access a bank loan. This film underscores the woman's willpower to resist patriarchal dominance and baits such as money, to gain her freedom and contentment. *Otilia* (2011) deals with single parenting and critiques women's senseless sacrifice for men as well as questions male ingratitude towards women. *Otilia* markets itself with clear liberal and yet radical African feminist messages because in the end the protagonist overcomes male domination in a subtle but ruthless manner. Quarshie has also focused on issues affecting men as in the case of *Heal my Heart 1* and *2* (2008), and *A Call at Midnight* and its series, which present what men (including their families) go through after they squander corporate money.

While Quarshie often explores women's issues in her films, it is obvious that just like Burkinabe director Fanta Regina Nacro (Bisschoff 2009, p. 81), the social details of issues are more important. She has said that she favours a social critique approach where she "tr[ies] to strike a balance" in male and female representations (2013, 17 January; also see Garritano 2013a). For her, the balance she offers often centres on irresponsible behaviours of both men and women to emphasise how each person's actions impact on one another, and how they impact on personal and social advancement or retrogression. Thus, where individual's moral choices are concerned, the balance to her is to critique and commend where necessary.

## **Shirley Frimpong-Manso: Entrepreneur Imaging Progressive African Stories**

“Our aim is to tell progressive African stories and with the skills that we have acquired I don’t see why we can’t” (2013, 23 March). As the CEO of her own motion picture production company, Frimpong-Manso’s defined aim explains why her films focus on refashioning everyday life on the big screen.

### **Early Family Background, Education and Training**

Born on 16 March 1977 as the first of two daughters from her mother’s side and one of nine children from her father’s, Shirley Frimpong-Manso comes from a mixed ethnic parentage. Her father originates from Kwahu Pepease in the Eastern Region of Ghana, and her mother is half Ga paternally from Osu Kinkawe and half Akuapem maternally from Akropong also in the Eastern Region.<sup>52</sup> Growing up, Frimpong-Manso reveals that her mother<sup>53</sup> relocated to work in the United Kingdom and even though she and her sister would live with their father and family members and occasionally travel to their mother for holidays, her sense of independence began taking shape around the period.<sup>54</sup> This was because she felt she naturally had to look out for herself and her younger sister. This sense of assertiveness also shapes her attitude and the characters she creates in her films.

After basic education, she enrolled as a boarding student at Mfantseman Girls’ Secondary School, where she soon discovered her interest in literature, English, film, history, and athletics. Like Veronica Quarshie, she joined the Mfantseman Girls’ Drama Club right from first year, and she immediately found herself on a path she appreciated – writing, singing, acting, and dancing. Throughout her seven years

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<sup>52</sup> In the Ghanaian cultural setting, it is characteristic of the people from Frimpong-Manso’s ethnicities particularly the Kwahus and the Gas to be business oriented. It is therefore not surprising what she would make a career as an entrepreneur.

<sup>53</sup> Frimpong-Manso’s mother relocated to the UK to pursue a career as a legal administrator in the health sector.

<sup>54</sup> At this stage, Frimpong-Manso was about ten years old.

(1989 to 1996) education at Mfantseman Girls, as a drama club member she acted in and wrote her own plays including *God's Time is the Best*, *All that Glitters is Not Gold* and *The Bachelor Boy*, a play, which several of her school mates on Facebook and on the internet still remember.<sup>55</sup> She also performed in many of the club's stage productions and often preferred playing male roles since it was a single sex school. In addition, she impersonated and performed songs by several of the 1990s' Ghanaian music icons such as Akosua Agyapong, Azigiza Junior, Kwadjo Antwi and Nat Brew. Frimpong-Manso's active engagements in drama club activities and entertainment enabled her to assume the position as the school's entertainment prefect. In becoming the prefect, it became clear to her that she did not so much want to be on stage, but to coordinate activities behind the scenes. This was the lead-in for what she would become later – an event organiser and film director.

In 1996, during the era of media liberalisation and the proliferation of private FM stations, Frimpong-Manso stumbled into radio after Mfantseman Girls. She became one of Ghana's first female presenters in private radio and worked full time at Radio Gold for four continuous years from 1996 to 2000. She was devoted to presenting some of the stimulating programs on air at the time such as *Afrakoma*, a program dedicated to playing inspiring songs from women around the world. Among various new radio programs, she engaged in the *Battle of the Sexes* where she and one of Ghana's media personalities Kwame Sefa Kayi battled it out on the exceptional qualities women and men demonstrated on different tasks respectively.

It would be safe to suggest that while Mfantseman Girls boosted Frimpong-Manso's awareness of her gender dynamism and identity, it was at Radio Gold that she began to express her interest in women related issues and her opinions on gender imbalances and struggles. Since radio, she has pursued and pushed an agenda for African women's progress and as noted elsewhere, her works were often feminine

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<sup>55</sup> Shirley Frimpong-Manso revealed this in our interview in 2013, 23 March. Hence, I decided to see if I could find information on the internet to confirm it. On my first search, this is what I found. One commentator identified as Aba in a commentary column of a story had this to say, "Shirley has been writing good stories since she was a teen. I know that b'cos she was my entertainment prefect at the secondary school and will never forget one of her plays: 'Bachelor Boy'". Viewed 25 November 2014, <<http://www.nigeriafilms.com/news/4543/10/jackie-again.html>>.

and “feminist-oriented, reflecting a locally-grounded gender awareness that continues to be very much in evidence in some of her later works as a filmmaker” (Kwansah-Aidoo & Osei Owusu 2012, p. 56). As the next chapter will demonstrate, similar to Quarshie but not always identical, her films overtly challenge stereotypical images of women that are abundant in Ghanaian video films (also see Garritano 2013a, p. 18). Again, similar to Quarshie, she does not directly call herself a feminist. But, unlike Quarshie, she admits her movies are feminist oriented. In one interview she stated “I have been called a bit of a feminist ... I would like to promote the cause of women, especially African women and so you will see that some of my movies, you know, are into that direction. I am trying to make a point.”<sup>56</sup> This is clearly the case, as the discussion on her thematic interests will show.

After four years of excitement in radio, Frimpong-Manso in the year 2000 decided to pursue her bona fide dream and train in film directing at NAFTI. It was at the film school that she met her then classmate Juliet Asante, who she teamed up with in 2002 to create and produce two seasons of the then popular television reality show, *Heart to Heart*. According to Frimpong-Manso, teaming up with Asante and organising *Heart to Heart* taught her a few entrepreneurial skills, which prompted her to set up her own production house, Sparrow Productions in November 2003 (interview 2013, 23 March). These skills she would master to build a successful career.

### **Early Display of Entrepreneurial Skills, Collaboration and the Woman Agenda**

At the age of twenty six, her company with the help from investors and sponsors including Somotex Ghana Ltd., The Honda Place (Ghana) Ltd., and TT Brothers Company Ltd. bought the franchise of the prestigious Miss Ghana Pageant and became its sole organiser from 2004 to 2008. In partnership with her long-time friend, Jayne Awoonor-Williams, Frimpong-Manso committed to grooming Ghanaian

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<sup>56</sup> This statement was made in an interview with BB Menson posted on YouTube by George Bright. See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhT0753DNzo&list=UUXCJqRZwwue4prL6U RLdFNQ&index=6&feature=plcp>>.

beauty queens for the world stage and motivated winners to institute national programs to develop opportunities for marginalised groups in society, particularly women and children. “This work”, according to Kwansah-Aidoo and Osei Owusu “reflects her particular vision for women’s self-determination and her commitment to helping [young] women rediscover themselves and embrace new identities” (2012, p. 56).

In addition, it could be seen as her way of challenging the subaltern voice by inscribing the postcolonial subject onto the global stage, where her presence has often been on the periphery. It was also a process that allowed her to build confidence in writing successful business proposals, speaking publicly, pitching and selling ideas to her partners. As she intimated in an interview, despite all the drama and squabbles, Miss Ghana “made me into a much stronger, you know, person ... I ... learnt a lot about business, communication, public relations ... I ... had my fair share of education.”<sup>57</sup> She reiterated this again in my interview with her when she said, “All in all, Miss Ghana was a very good experience. It shaped me into the entrepreneur that I am today” (2013, 23 March). Through the organisation of the national pageant, Frimpong-Manso and her Sparrow Productions were not only thrust into the country’s big leagues, but the event organiser was also prepared and introduced to the Ghanaian business world proper.

### **Filmmaking and Political Economy of Productions**

Four years after graduating from NAFTI, Frimpong-Manso successfully went into film production in 2007, thus entering into production just a year before returning the organisation of the Miss Ghana pageant to Media Wizkid. She entered the industry around the period when transnational flow and appeal of Nollywood ‘wonder films’ rife with suspense, sensation, advanced special effects, magic and violence were still popular in Ghana (see Haynes 2007, Garritano 2013a, Meyer 2010). This was the period characterised by transnational collaboration between Ghanaian and

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<sup>57</sup>The interview was posted on YouTube by George Bright. See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_P2cgqsg-U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_P2cgqsg-U).

Nigerian filmmakers, which had resulted in creating big-budget films known as “glamour movies” (Garritano 2013a, p. 170). These are movies that display luxurious life styles, magnificent locations and star “actors, many of whom are biracial and model Western standards of beauty and sex appeal, sometimes displaying their international credentials by adopting contrived and poorly executed British or African American accents” (Garritano 2013a, p. 171). Furthermore, it was a period when production activities in the industry were once again at a nascent stage – a renaissance period. The digital age of filmmaking in Ghana had just commenced in 2005, even though some filmmakers were yet to make a switch from analogue. Shirley Frimpong-Manso became one of the renaissance cultural producers, who turned her attention to producing Ghanaian English films while their production was still in decline.<sup>58</sup>

As an entrepreneur and having set up her own independent company which is also a motion picture production company (Sparrow Productions), Shirley Frimpong-Manso has not only been able to remain as one of the few prolific and visionary female filmmakers so far to have come from Ghana, but she also has been able to exercise control over her productions. Since 2007, she has worked closely with her partner and creative director Ken Attah. Apart from the fact that she directs, for the most part of her career, she has also written her stories and screenplays. Sometimes, she edits her own films, produces or co-produces with Attah.<sup>59</sup> As an independent producer, her films are *mainly* funded through her company’s own coffers, bank loans and also support from corporate bodies. In fact, a characteristic of Frimpong-Manso’s work is that she has managed to bring on board to her productions corporate support. Her films and television series and shows are often sponsored and supported by corporate institutions. This practice began right from her television (*Different Shades of Blue*, 2006) and film (*Life and Living It*, 2007) debuts to her latest film (*Grey Dawn* 2015), and Web series (*V Republic*, 2014).

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<sup>58</sup> Garritano (2013a), Haynes (2007), and Meyer (2010) are instructive on the factors that accounted for the high demand and appeal for Nollywood films over Ghanaian films at the time.

<sup>59</sup> It is worth mentioning that Frimpong-Manso co-produced *Contract* with Yvonne Okoro and Attah.

To reward her sponsors, during marketing and press screenings of the various movies, Frimpong-Manso provides them the platform to exhibit their services and products. Meanwhile, as the director, producer, and writer (co-writer) of her films, Frimpong-Manso purposely places adverts before the opening sequence of her DVDs or VCDs and/or integrates seamlessly commercial content into the fabric of her narratives, where brand names, signage, products, services, and other trademark merchandise are used or “consumed in their [imagined] natural settings” by the characters in her films (Williams et al 2011, p. 2).<sup>60</sup> For instance, the contestants in her television show, *Personality’s Kitchen* (2006) cooked rice by Rice Master.<sup>61</sup> Her characters contextually use Kasapa telecom services in *The Perfect Picture* (2009) and *A Sting in a Tale* (2009); characters are given Christmas bonuses in MTN polythene bags and drive KIA cars in *6 Hours to Christmas* (2010); and they are seen airborne in a Virgin Atlantic First Class deck in *Adams Apples Chapter 9* (2012). It could be argued that this arrangement helps to maintain high production budgets, high production values and help to create the glamorous outlook of Sparrow Productions’ films akin to the “glamour movies” noted earlier. Similar though not identical to Quarshie’s films, the films are high-end products (Garritano 2013a, pp. 174-175) designed to appeal and make profits.

Usually, the support Frimpong-Manso receives does not work in the same vein as what Mahoso (2000, p. 211) calls “a predetermined logonomic system”, which reflects a sponsor’s fixed determination to prescribe ideologies and messages to be conveyed in sponsored films. As to what has pertained to all her films, Frimpong-Manso has noted that by and large her sponsors do not determine the messages her films convey, though product and service placements particularly add to or take away from her creativity because she has to infuse promotions, which sometimes do not quite fit her original concepts (interview 2013, 23 March). As she and her team have successfully generated a fan-base for their films, to her, the market rather

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<sup>60</sup>For insight into product placement see Williams et al (2011), “Product placement effectiveness: revisited and renewed” in the *Journal of Management and Marketing Research*, vol. 7, pp. 1-24.

<sup>61</sup>*Personality’s Kitchen* was Sparrow Production’s television show sponsored by Rice Master, which aired on TV3 in 2006. During the show, two Ghanaian public personalities from government ministers to fashion designers competed by cooking their favourite rice dish after which they were judged by a studio audience.

dictates the kinds of films her company churns out, even though she is also driven by her own vision to tell progressive African stories (interview 2013, 23 March).

In her campaign to tell these progressive stories, her films are often about everyday contemporary cosmopolitan, affluent, and urban lives of women and their issues. Thus, like the professional filmmakers including Veronica Quarshie, as Garritano (2013a) describes, it could be suggested that Frimpong-Manso's films also perform their professionalism by engaging in generic cosmopolitan and global discourses on women. Garritano has observed that similar to most of the professional video films made earlier in the industry:

Frimpong-Manso's movies are generic and secular, sanitised, including no markers or mention of historical or cultural specificity, nor any trace of poverty or hardship, and stripped of any references to juju priests or charismatic preachers... they captivate through their power to produce entire fantasy worlds built around consumer goods (2013a, p. 177).

While Frimpong-Manso's big budgets have enabled her films to successfully establish a style closer to that of Hollywood partly because of their quality, perhaps as Garritano suggests this generic outlook and her ability to produce fantasy worlds removed from specific cultural markers also allow her to achieve the routine popularised by Hollywood (2013a, p. 175). In fact, by reimagining popular Hollywood style, Frimpong-Manso's aim has been to reach an international audience. She said in an interview that,

To find inroads to continental and international markets have given us a pretty good idea of how to position our productions because for you to be able to show a film to an international audience, it has to be of a certain type and quality, and we have to be able to maintain it or make it better (2013, 23 March).

In relation to this, Garritano notes that Frimpong-Manso's films have attained a significant local, regional and international viewership in Ghana, Africa and in the diaspora (2013a, p. 175). In her attempt to present alternative African stories and expand viewership for her films, Frimpong-Manso in addition to Ghanaian actors engages a transnational cast by using at least one continental artist to feature in her movies. Particularly, in her recent movies artists have included South Africa's Hlomla Dandala in *Contract* (2012) and Nigeria's Joseph Benjamin also in *Contract* (2012). There are other Nigerian artists; Damilola Adegbite in *Six Hours to Christmas* (2010), Olu Jacobs in *Potomanto* (2013), Nse Ikpe-Etim in *Devil in the Detail* (2014), and Okechukwu Ukeje in *Love or Something Like That* (2014). These inclusions have not only expanded distribution opportunities, but also extended continental/international appeal.

### **Production Practices**

As already noted, Shirley Frimpong-Manso and her Sparrow Productions team since 2007 have worked together with her partner Ken Attoh and his design-driven studio, Portraits and Illusions. Several cast and crew describe Frimpong-Manso as a multi-task filmmaker, who is involved in every aspect of her movies because she is a director, who dreams about what she wants to achieve, though her primary task consists of writing, producing and directing. Despite her involvement at every stage of production, she understands the collaboration between the director, the artist and crew and this is why Ken Attoh, her partner and creative director plays a substantial role in her productions. He handles cinematography and post-production tasks, but ultimately he and his Portrait and Illusions team design Sparrow's image, brand, and websites as well as fan pages. Furthermore, Attoh and his team ensure that the visuals of each film coordinate and articulate the aesthetic vision of Frimpong-Manso and the team. After designing props such as framed pictures for interior decorations, signing of location buildings, motion graphics, visual effects including chroma keying, and colour correction for Sparrow Productions films, they also design and organise marketing materials such as photo shoots, bill boards, press ads, flyers, and see to the packaging of the films, which includes VCD/DVD covers among others. These specialised design works add to the professional image of Sparrow films.

As independent companies aspiring for progress and quality, Sparrow Productions together with Portrait and Illusions work with modern production and post-production equipment and technology. For example, Sparrow owns its own cameras, lighting and sound equipment, costume, accessories, and make-up shops, props shop as well as post-production facilities, which allow most operations to be done in-house. In addition, Frimpong-Manso and Attoh have maintained and worked constantly with a consistent professional crew. She has also worked with some fashion designers to promote a sense of fashion in her movies where authentic Ghanaian textile like GTP Nuystyle has been designed as formal and informal wear, bags, hair accessories, rosettes, and hats for her characters. In a personal interview, Frimpong-Manso stated that this gesture is her way of supporting the idea that the traditional Ghanaian or African fabric is as good for funerals as it is for corporate board meetings (2013, 23 March).<sup>62</sup> It is worth pointing out that by designing the African fabric in western cuts, Frimpong-Manso combines the South with the West.

Apart from preparing her scripts and doing all the pre-production preparations such as auditioning, casting and signing of contracts especially with artists, finalising shooting schedules, securing locations, props and costumes, securing police permits and insurance where necessary, actual shooting for each film takes between three to five weeks. Post-production lasts between one to three months often depending on the particular production and the time it is scheduled to be released.

Following the formal standard of a mainstream commercial film distribution model, Frimpong-Manso's films are first premiered, marketed and exhibited in theatres before they are released on VCDs and DVDs, unlike the general practice in the video industry (Garritano 2013a; Ukadike 2003). Her films have premiered in various countries including Nigeria and the UK and they have been exhibited at various film festivals and on television in Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, the US and the UK. For international distribution, often the distribution rights are sold to a distributor. Sparrow Productions does not own its own distribution outlets in Ghana, hence, the films are

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<sup>62</sup> Originally, the fabric has been used in sewing kaba and slit, used in traditional settings, and for informal and some formal activities.

often distributed through a 'middle man'. This practice has brought its own challenges, but it is worth mentioning that recently Sparrow Productions has explored new channels of distribution. I will return to this later in the next section.

## **Production Challenges**

While Frimpong-Manso may have been fortunate to have had the exposure to the business component of filmmaking in contrast to several filmmakers in the industry and elsewhere, funding remains her biggest challenge. She has said that much as she combines administrative work of her company and manages the artistic and production sides of her work, they are not as challenging as searching for funding to produce a movie (interview 2013, 23 March). For her, finding financiers is a huge problem since it is tough to make people believe in the intangible ideas she sells to them. She intimates: "most of the times we need to borrow from the bank because the money we have and get is not enough" (interview 2013, 23 March). This is an indication that no matter how successful filmmakers become and despite their high quality pitching abilities funding still remains a perennial challenge.

As one might expect, apart from funding, Frimpong-Manso also faces the challenge of restricted locations and the issue of busy artists just like Quarshie. For her, the difficulties with getting appropriate luxurious locations tie in with cash flow because certain locations she may want to use are sometimes too expensive. Therefore by implication, using such locations puts pressure on her budget. On her challenge with actors, she notes:

we don't have a lot of professional actors around here and a lot of actors are distracted with a lot of productions. While they are on your production, they are thinking of two others because we don't pay them well, honestly ... As a result people come on set and they haven't read the script or assessed their roles, making my work difficult.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Frimpong-Manso revealed this in our interview (2013, 23 March).

While this may relate to the economics of a production, to minimise this challenge, Frimpong-Manso rather works around actors' schedules so she uses them when they are available. Much as she relies on professional artists, one other way she is getting around the challenge is to introduce fresh artists. Hence, her films have also had non-professional cast several of whom kick-started their careers in screen performance through their contacts with Sparrow Productions. Gideon Senanu Gbedawo, Lydia Forson, Nana Kwame Osei-Sarpong, Naa Ashorkor Mensah-Doku, and Zynell Zuh are a few who readily come to mind.

As suggested earlier, the issue of inadequate distribution and exhibition channels also remains a perennial challenge. When films are distributed through a 'middle man', the resulting outcome is that sometimes accountability takes a long time, or the so called middle man/distributor could run away with the money or sabotage distribution and after a long time return all the VCDs and/or DVDs claiming they were not patronised. When it comes to exhibition, Frimpong-Manso notes, "Presently, we have only one cinema in Ghana. After Silverbird Cinema [in Accra] you need to call people, talk to people. Perhaps you need to hire a hall; if it doesn't show well or it rains then you are not getting your money back" (interview 2013, 23 March). In early 2014, Silverbird officially opened another multiplex at Weija also in the Greater Accra Region, but that is still not enough. In the midst of these challenges, what has accounted for Sparrow Productions' success among other things has been Frimpong-Manso's business sense and Attah's creative contribution. The branding, packaging and marketing have been substantial factors. The marketing team always creates intense media attention and public awareness for Sparrow Productions' films even when shooting is in progress, and after it is completed. Interviews are granted before and after shooting, and when the films are ready for the market, press screenings and premieres are organised for media coverage to generate hype and interest. The presence of particularly her cast at these screenings is always a side attraction.

Given the distribution difficulties, Sparrow Productions has also explored channels like DISCOP Africa, Amazon, YouTube, Hulu, and recently [sparrowstation.com](http://sparrowstation.com),

which is Sparrow Productions' online video on demand service. For the first time in the history of Sparrow Productions and in the history of film exhibition in Ghana, Frimpong-Manso premiered *Devil in the Detail* (2014) at the Silverbird Cinema in Accra and online at [sparrowstation.com](http://sparrowstation.com) simultaneously on 14 February 2014. Indeed, as a release and timing strategy, Frimpong-Manso is known to adopt seasonal themes like Christmas and love/Valentine to sell her films. A few more examples illustrate this point. In addition to *Devil in the Detail* mentioned above, *Adams Apples* season two, episode one was set on Valentine's Day and premiered on Valentine's Day 2013. *Six Hours to Christmas* was premiered and released around Christmas in 2010.

Even though Frimpong-Manso's films are hugely successful, there have been criticisms against her and her company for often focusing on women and producing films that her critics describe as 'un-Ghanaian'. Garritano (2013a, p. 175) has suggested that her critics regard her films to "imitate Hollywood romantic comedies and drama; they accuse her of remaking Tyler Perry films [or African American films] for an African audience or producing movies that are too Western" like *Sex and the City*. They regard her films to project people who live glamorous lives and speak in foreign English accents, which are not representative of the average Ghanaian. It has been suggested that perhaps those criticisms have been due to the fact that Frimpong-Manso's films perfectly reimagine Hollywood and capture "Ghanaian aspirations to be as good and as modern as the characters in Hollywood films" (Garritano 2013a, p. 175). I will return to this discussion briefly in the next section and in Chapter Eight when I discuss male and female focus groups' responses to Frimpong-Manso's *The Perfect Picture*.

### **Dominant Interests and Thematic Preoccupation**

While it could be mentioned that Frimpong-Manso's films may have left some commentators critical of their lack of authenticity, her films have often been inspired by real life experiences – things that happen around her, her family and her friends, as well as in books and movies. She has explained:

I am a big movie fanatic ... you see a movie and it sort of stays with you. And so when you are going to do your own obviously you don't take what is in the movie and put it in yours, but it influences you to write in a certain direction, write certain things in a certain way ... So you take what you saw and then apply it to your own environment ... And also real life experiences, you know friends, family ... everyday things that happen ... I think I take a lot more message from things that happen around me. I think I would say that a huge percentage of my writing comes from things that happen around me.<sup>64</sup>

Much as these indicate the bases of Frimpong-Manso's influences, they as well show that in her attempt to film progressive stories about Africa, she combines sources to create hybrid and cosmopolitan identities in the postcolonial African city. For her, progressive African stories are not only cultural restoration accounts because culture is constantly evolving. It is for this evolution that she tackles social issues relevant to contemporary society such as youth unemployment (*A Sting in a Tale*),<sup>65</sup> drug trafficking (*Checkmate*), and illegal harvesting of human organs (*Potomanto*). Significantly, she often focuses on women and how the socio-cultural transformations affect their lives. Even when her films are not directly projecting a female lead or point of view, women participate in the progression she envisages (Kwansah-Aidoo & Osei Owusu 2012). As a woman, her interest in depicting this transformation in relation to women is a personal obligation because according to her, "there are not enough platforms where women are celebrated and encouraged" (interview 2013, 23 March).

Frimpong-Manso's mother's independence and hard work served as motivation for her career, and her interest to progressively allow women to aspire and inspire. In doing so, she has not only created some of the most memorable independent female

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<sup>64</sup>This is an excerpt from an interview posted by George Bright on YouTube. See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cy8pPvvpSyU>>.

<sup>65</sup>*A Sting in a Tale*, one of Frimpong-Manso's exclusive favourites and a piece which satisfies perhaps her artistic penchant is an extended version of her thirty minute thesis film of the same title submitted to NAFTI in 2003 which won her Best Student Screenplay of the year.

characters in the history of Ghanaian film such as Dea in *Scorned*, and Jennifer Adams in the *Adams Apples Chapters* and series, but also created women who challenge the status quo. Female characters, for example, in *Life and Living It*, *The Perfect Picture*, *Adams Apples*, and *Devil in the Detail* are independent/professionals, who also negotiate social barriers to appropriate their identities. She shows both their strengths and weaknesses/vulnerabilities. Often, the women's agencies are not merely to contest imposed barriers, but also to relocate their liberation for personal and collective growth. In short, in her movies the dynamics that predominantly play out in the lives of often urban middle/upper class women are staged. Kwansah-Aidoo and Osei Owusu have argued that in doing so, Frimpong-Manso "manages to slip feminist messages into a film environment that is rife with stereotypical images of women" (2012, p. 67).

In more explicit ways, she has dealt with subjects that are traditionally considered taboo, social issues that in society's view are regarded as unconventional or out of place. She tackles them in a way many Ghanaian movies rarely do and she is not afraid to, for instance, deal with radical African feminist subjects such as women's sexual rights (*Life and Living It*, *Scorned*, *The Perfect Picture*, *Adams Apples*, *Love or Something Like That*, *Devil in the Detail*, *Grey Dawn*), the issue of older women and younger men in romantic relationships (*Life and Living It*, *Adams Apples*), friends talking about orgasm (*Adams Apples Chapter 4*), and mother and daughters discussing sex and daughter's ex-boyfriends (*Adams Apples Chapter 9*). Given the focus on women's sexual rights with regards to the representations of women who are sexually expressive, women who have control over their bodies, and women who decide when and with whom to have sex, Frimpong-Manso appears to unconsciously support radical African feminist ideas on women's sexual freedom, choice and pleasure (Horn 2006; McFadden 2003; Tamale 2005).

Moreover, the filmmaker has also tackled single father parenting (*Adams Apples Chapters*), focused on HIV/AIDS (*Adams Apples Chapter 9*, *Love or Something Like That*), and surrogacy (*Contract*) in an environment where these are not readily spoken about or embraced as the norm or part of everyday life. These issues are often considered private or society believes they are not the realities of Ghanaians or

Africans. *The Perfect Picture* (2009), which will be analysed in Chapter Seven, presents portraits of twenty first century independent Ghanaian women and deals with some of these 'taboo subjects'. By tackling these so-called taboo or unconventional issues in unconventional ways, Frimpong-Manso demystifies and lessens the tensions that culturally make them unacceptable to address. In so doing, she projects what in her view constitutes progressive African stories.

### **Leila Djansi: Creating Awareness and Making Human Rights Visible**

Leila Djansi is one of the few Ghanaian female diaspora feature filmmakers. She is focused on using her films to educate people and create awareness about social issues and human rights with the belief that they can be used as catalysts for social change.

#### **Early Family Background and Education**

Leila Djansi is a Ghanaian based in the diaspora, a director, scriptwriter, producer and founder of the Los Angeles motion picture production company Turning Point Pictures. She is an independent filmmaker who began as a writer in Ghana before moving to the United States to pursue professional training and a career in filmmaking. Born in India in 1981 as the second girl to her mother and the fifth girl to her father, Djansi partially grew up in India, but also in the Volta Region of Ghana, where her parents originated. Growing up she recalls storytelling was part of the family culture where her mother would tell them all kinds of stories while they were cooking (interview 2012, 21 December). One could argue that storytelling is an activity she learnt from her mother and took up as a profession later.

Djansi had her high school education at Mawuli Secondary School in Ho, also in the Volta Region of Ghana. Like most young adults growing up with visions for their future, Leila Djansi initially planned to study medicine to become a gynaecologist; however, she later became interested in forensic science, and then later changed

her mind again to finally settle on a career in filmmaking because a story she had written was made into a video film.

### Early Career Training

To ascertain whether her new decision was what she really wanted, she moved from Ho to Accra in the Greater Accra Region, the hub of Ghanaian commercial video filmmaking in the late 1990s to understudy Socrate Safo, one of the prolific non-professional pioneer video filmmakers, whose overwhelmingly successful film, *Ghost Tears* (1992), according to Garritano enticed professionally trained filmmakers into the video film industry (2013a, pp. 89-90).

While in Accra and motivated by her love for storytelling, Djansi wrote for Safo's Movie Africa Production several movie stories including *Subcity: A Tale of Survival*, about prostitution, HIV and ghetto life in Ghana.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, she had already written the story for Ashangbor Akwetey-Kanyi's popular horror film, *Babina*<sup>67</sup> (1999), which starred the popular Ghanaian actress Kalsoume Sinare in the lead role and tells the story of a woman dedicated to the spirit world, which was among popular themes explored by non-professional filmmakers at the time as previously discussed in Chapter Five (see Garritano 2008, 2013a; Meyer 1999, 2003a; Ukadike 2003). In addition to writing for the non-professional filmmakers, Djansi also independently wrote for GAMA Films, notably *Legacy of Love* (2000), directed by Lambert Hama. From these, it is obvious the young Djansi was naturally creative, had the flair for storytelling and the producers she wrote for testify to that. However, because of her position as an 'intern' so to speak, for several of the scripts she wrote she was not rewarded financially and was mostly credited with the story and not the screenplay. This for her was acceptable because it was a learning process.

In the process though, Djansi became convinced a career in filmmaking was worth pursuing and fortunately, right about the time with the help of a close relative she

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<sup>66</sup> *Subcity* was screened at FESPACO 2001 and won the Special Prize Health.

<sup>67</sup> This is the script that convinced her to take filmmaking as a profession.

submitted a screenplay, *The Prince* into a competition in Canada. It was the screenplay that won her, the Artistic Honours Scholarship to the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Georgia, USA, to formally begin training in filmmaking in 2003. Once at SCAD, she specialised in scriptwriting and film production. By relocating to the USA, Djansi's training and involvement in filmmaking naturally assumed a diasporic transnational dimension (Naficy 2001). For a major thesis project, she wrote and produced *Grass Between my Lips* (2007), a thirty minute film directed by the then Indian-American film student director Amardeep Kaleka, who in 2010 would win an Emmy Award and a Silver Telly Award for his short documentary *Jacob's Turn*. *Grass Between my Lips* was awarded a Platinum Award at the 2009 WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival.

In 2006 while at SCAD, Winrich Kolbe (well-known for his direction for almost fifty episodes of the *Star Trek* series) mentored and encouraged her to set up her own motion picture production company – Turning Point Pictures. This set the stage for her to chart her own path as an independent diaspora filmmaker as she had envisaged and enabled her to pursue her interest in visualising human rights matters and telling social issue stories. As part of her interest to tell human and social stories, from SCAD Djansi in 2008 took courses in cultural anthropology at Glenville State College, and in the fall of the same year she moved to the Art Centre College of Design in Pasadena, California to build on her scriptwriting skills and add film directing component to her expertise.

At Art Centre, under the tutelage of the screenwriter, game producer and film director Michael Gottlieb, she wrote a few screenplays including *Sinking Sands*; *Ties that Bind*, which she would produce, and *Insects of Tobacco* about homosexuality in Africa, which is yet to be produced.<sup>68</sup> Throughout her studentship at both SCAD and Art Centre, Djansi worked on several productions often as producer, production

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<sup>68</sup>*Sinking Sands* and *Ties that Bind* have already been produced. On Turning Point Pictures' website, there is an indication that *Insects of Tobacco* is in development. See <<http://www.turningpointpics.com/#!/about/c786>>.

manager, make-up artist, or production assistant to keep up with her training as well as support herself.<sup>69</sup>

### Political Economy and Production Practices

Before completing Art Centre in 2010, in 2009 with a modest amount meant to settle her school fees and from some individual private financiers including Ghanaian actress Akofa Edjeani Asiedu, Djansi took time off to film in Ghana her directorial debut, *I Sing of a Well*, an epic drama and a spin-off of her earlier script, *The Prince*.<sup>70</sup> While some independent filmmakers may re-invest profits/proceeds from an earlier film to produce a subsequent project, unfortunately, due to a misunderstanding between the director and one of her investors, *I Sing of a Well* (2009) was not distributed commercially when it was made, although it was donated for a couple of television screenings in Ghana.<sup>71</sup> Consequently, Djansi and her investors were not able to recoup their investment, so similar to modes of film production adopted by independent diaspora filmmakers, Djansi raised funding from “peculiar mixed economies” including private, public, and philanthropic sources to make her subsequent films (Naficy 2001, pp. 43-47).

In a personal interview, she revealed that there have been immense challenges raising funds and describes the funding for her subsequent films as a miracle (2012, 21 December). After going through all the protocols of drafting proposals, meeting studio executives, attending angel investor meetings, pitching to financiers and waiting in line for support, she finally met an investor who got convinced and invested in her company to become a partner. That investment provided the capital that helped to produce her subsequent two features, *Sinking Sands* (2010) and *Ties that Bind* (2011) all of which were shot in Ghana. *Ties that Bind* will be analysed in Chapter Seven.

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<sup>69</sup> A few of those productions are *Red Thread* (Teddy Sharkova, 2005), *Playing the Part* (Tony Pombo & Stephen Stanley, 2007), *Love Letter* (Amardeep Kaleka, 2008), and *The Rub* (Kamal Robinson & Jameel Saleem, 2009).

<sup>70</sup> *I Sing of a Well* is the first instalment of a trilogy she scripted, ‘Legion of Slaves’.

<sup>71</sup> *I Sing of a Well* is now available on IrokoTV.com.

Ezra and Rowden's (2006, p. 7) suggestion that transnational films in their many forms unmoor films "to 'migrate'" beyond their immediate environment is relevant to the way Djansi's subsequent films have been distributed. The distribution right for *Sinking Sands* was taken up by IndieFlix Studios in the USA,<sup>72</sup> and IrokoTV<sup>73</sup> exhibits it on their online platform to its patrons most of whom are African and African diaspora audiences. While M-NET bought the rights to *Ties that Bind* for exhibition on Africa Magic, the film also got Djansi's Turning Point Pictures a distribution guarantee. Image Entertainment of RLJ Entertainment, Inc.,<sup>74</sup> agreed to distribute it and RLJ Entertainment, Inc. gave a guarantee deal to finance and distribute five subsequent productions by Djansi and her company. The first and second, *And Then There was You* and *Where Children Play* were shot in the USA and released in 2013 and 2015 respectively.

Djansi's filmmaking practice is situated within a transnational cinematic space where her productions are not just transnationally made, but also her work inherently reflects women and issues both in her home country as well as her host country, the United States. Her dual focus has been influenced by her source of funding (interview 2012, 21 December). This partly explains why the films for which Djansi acquired funding privately were able to be shot in Ghana and the ones financed by the USA based independent studio have been shot in the USA. In addition to this reason, Djansi has explained that she has turned her attention to focus her stories and shoots outside of Ghana because she thinks there is lack of support and unity among filmmakers in the Ghanaian film industry (2012, 21 December). This discussion will be picked up in the next section, but in the meantime, it is important to point out that her decision to shoot outside Ghana has not stopped her from writing, directing and filming in Ghana for close associates. For instance, the feature, *A Northern Affair* (2014) and web series, *Poisoned Bait* (2014) were written and directed by Djansi and filmed in Ghana for IrokoTV/Rokstudios.

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<sup>72</sup>The film has also been made available for sale and VOD on Amazon, SnagFilms, and iTunes, African markets in the diaspora and Lifestyle bookshops among others.

<sup>73</sup> IrokoTv.com is Iroko Partners' online platform for distributing free and paid for Nigerian and Ghanaian movies on the web.

<sup>74</sup>RLJ Entertainment Inc. is an independent owner, developer, licensee, and distributor of entertainment content and programing in primarily North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

Similar to Frimpong-Manso, Djansi has said that her investors and philanthropists do not interfere with her creative processes, or the kinds of stories she tells (interview 2014, 4 March). Apart from her debut film, her financiers have attached and made commitments specifically based on her previous work and also on their interest in the script she presents to them. This means that since she writes and directs, she is able to maintain credible control over her core vision of telling stories concerned with social and human rights issues that often tend to be about women.

For marketing and distributing purposes, Djansi's financiers may influence who is cast in a particular role (interview 2013, 4 March). This is particularly the case for the films RLJ Entertainment Inc. has financed, although she exercised control over the cast she used for the films she shot in Ghana. For instance, while *And Then There was You* is highly dominated by a Hollywood cast, in *A Northern Affair*, she used a Ghanaian cast and a Ghanaian/Nigerian cast in *Poisoned Bait*. In Djansi's other feature films shot in Ghana, she used a transnational cast by casting both diaspora and African actors in order to secure what she calls territories to enable her company to expand distribution opportunities transnationally both in Africa and in the diaspora (interview 2014, 4 March). It is possible that these transnational casting choices may have expanded territories for distribution, and also contributed to the films' successful reception in Africa and in the diaspora.

In Djansi's work, while there are traces of independent transnational filmmaking praxis where family members support productions (Naficy 2001, p. 59),<sup>75</sup> throughout her engagements she has consistently worked with a highly skilled technical crew several of whom are based in the USA and also Ghana. Her films maintain high production values because she and her crew invest a lot of time to maintain high professional standards. In addition, several of her theme songs have been composed by the popular hip life Ghanaian professional musician Okyeame Quophi.

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<sup>75</sup> For example, in *I Sing of a Well*, Djansi and her paternal Aunty Mary Djansi Mc-Palm, who is a music professor performed songs for the film and her sister Julia Djansi, a trained nurse served as the production nurse for *Sinking Sands* and she was also one of the producers for *Ties that Bind*.

When shooting in Ghana, Djansi flies in several of her crew and logistics/equipment from the USA and by the same token when shooting in the USA, she also flies a few of her crew from Ghana. She has said that whether shooting in Ghana or in the USA, on the average pre-production takes between six to twelve months because after getting her script ready, there is location hunting. Permits are sought where necessary and insurance bought to cover both crew and equipment. After casting, her actors usually spend time to understudy people in society whom their characters represent. Once pre-production is over, shooting often lasts between eighteen to thirty days and post-production normally lasts between three to four months depending on the budget she is working with and also when the film has been scheduled to be released (interview 2014, 4 March). When possible, like Frimpong-Manso, Djansi also gets companies to provide sponsorship for her productions. In Ghana, Royal Richester and Golden Tulip hotels have supported her productions by granting hotel discounts for her cast and crew. Da Viva supported *Sinking Sands* and *Ties that Bind* with fabric for costume.

In *And Then There was You*, Cort Furniture in the USA was a brand partner. While Djansi advertises for her sponsors at the beginning of the VCDs released in Ghana and by extension Africa, unlike Frimpong-Manso she does not create product placement opportunities in her narratives and the sponsorship she receives from those businesses is not cash related. However, just like Frimpong-Manso, she premieres her films in various countries before they are released on VCDs/DVDs and made available on different online platforms.

### **Production Challenges**

As already indicated by several scholars (Barlet 1996; Ellerson 2000; Garritano 2013a) and particularly seen in the cases of Quarshie and Frimpong-Manso, one of the perennial challenges with filmmaking is funding. Ethiopian self-exiled independent filmmaker, Salem Mekuria has revealed that as a diaspora filmmaker, accessing funding to make films about issues in Africa is a huge challenge, even

though by her location in the diaspora she finds herself in a privileged position compared to several women making films on the continent (Ukadike 2002, p. 246). Mekuria's experience is comparable to that of Djansi. In my interview with Djansi, she explained that even though she has had private individuals and philanthropists as well as an independent studio supporting her work, her major challenge has been funding (2014, 4 March).

In Djansi's view, the challenge stems from the fact that she is an independent black African woman who works in an environment where white filmmakers and their stories dominate. In Djansi's view, to be a black independent African woman filmmaker in the midst of white and male dominance, and to pitch and sell ideas about black African female-driven stories is often difficult given the fact that many financiers are not interested in funding such projects (interview 2012, 21 December). This notwithstanding, she finds her race, accent and gender as a double-edge sword. She has said that, "Sometimes things get me through the door, but other times there are people who discriminate against me because of my identity as a black African woman, my accent and the kinds of stories I write about" (interview 2012, 21 December). Despite these challenges, she believes that the industry in the USA is well-organised and that is why she is still able to access financial support not just from individuals, but also from an independent studio.

Djansi has criticised the Ghanaian film industry for a couple of reasons. Her criticisms have focused on her view that the industry is poorly structured and there is lack of unity and support among filmmakers in the industry. In my interview with her, she emphasised the need for the industry to build a strong front in order to put support structures in place and consequently boost its image (2012, 21 December).

Djansi believes that with the right structures filmmakers could organise themselves into strong effective guilds to expand opportunities for members. To expand opportunities for her career, Djansi is a member of Film Independent based in the USA, a community of filmmakers where member benefits include workshops for professional development and networking among many others. It is important to

mention that Djansi has faced a lot of counter-criticisms from some producers in the Ghanaian industry who sometimes find her criticisms harsh.<sup>76</sup> Naficy (2001, p. 55) reminds us that diaspora filmmakers are not only in a position to criticise the home society, but they themselves also stand to receive intense criticism from their compatriots. Djansi has suggested that her assertiveness and success are sometimes taken as offensive when she said, “When you are a woman they don’t consider you worthy of what you have achieved and yet you are confident, [consequently] they come up with all these tags; ugly, controversial etc.”<sup>77</sup> It is possible to surmise that sometimes Djansi’s criticisms are received as coming from a privileged African in the diaspora, who believes she is an authority on how things can be improved in the home-land.

One other challenge, which Djansi faced when particularly working in Ghana, is closely linked to the fact that there is lack of support. She describes distribution and exhibition challenges in the industry as consequences of the absence of support and inadequate organised structures within the ungoverned industry. The benefits of a well organised industry to her will support a fair practice, which could help create distribution channels for all to reduce the sabotage of other peoples’ work by other producers, and de-regularise piracy. Djansi herself has had to deal with piracy issues when her film, *Ties that Bind* was among films some students were arrested for pirating in Ghana (Aglanu 2012). It is her view that when the industry becomes organised it will attract investment, help build exhibition theatres, help filmmakers and producers to produce high quality films, and also make the profession attractive. It could be suggested that an organised industry with fair and open regulations will help reduce the Opera Square oligopoly where only a few filmmakers are able to distribute their films. In fact, lack of structural organisation and support are partially why, like Frimpong-Manso and several others in the industry, Djansi has deemed it necessary to access alternative channels of circulating her films particularly through the Web.

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<sup>76</sup> This is suggested in an interview which was posted by Quojo Ike. See <<http://www.ghanafilmindustry.com/leila-djansi-story-read-leilas-djansis-interview-newsone-inspiring-informative/>>.

<sup>77</sup> See <<http://www.ghanafilmindustry.com/leila-djansi-story-read-leilas-djansis-interview-newsone-inspiring-informative/>>.

Like Quarshie and Frimpong-Manso, Djansi has had to deal with the challenge of accessing locations for her films in the home-land. As already suggested, it is often a challenge to find appropriate locations that give the director absolute control. For this reason, Djansi is known to build sets for key scenes in her films not only to exercise control, but to help create the envisaged mise-en-scène and ambiance. Building sets is a move rarely practiced in the local Ghanaian industry. Djansi claims that building of sets is one of the reasons why her budgets are usually high (interview 2012, 21 December). She asserts that her film, *And Then There was You*, which was shot in the USA, cost less because production facilities and sound stages were available. Other factors that usually have great impact on the budget are the fact that she has to buy insurance cover for the crew and equipment, fly several of her crew from the USA and ship equipment as well as clear the shipment on its arrival in Ghana. Moreover, the consequences of flying in several of her crew members are often beyond soaring budgets, because the foreign crew also have to adjust to the environment and weather, adjust to working with the local crew and vice versa. But in all, this could be seen as an exchange of experience between the local and international crew.

### **Dominant Interest and Thematic Preoccupation**

Unlike the argument Bisschoff (2009, p. 36) makes about Francophone West African and Southern African female filmmakers who are geared towards artistic expression rather than commercialisation, Djansi's approach can be defined both as commercial and artistic. In my interview with her, she revealed that she takes a lot of inspiration from Dutch painters such as Rembrandt van Rijn, and Vincent van Gogh as well as French Post-impressionist artist, Paul Gauguin (2012, 21 December). One would also think that her artistic training at SCAD is a major influence. Yaba Badoe, a fellow Ghanaian diaspora filmmaker, has described Djansi's films as being concerned with social issues and leaning towards an "artsy' Francophone aesthetic" (2012, p. 82), thus driven by a social realist style and with less emphasis on gloss and glamour. Yet, like Quarshie the fact that she and her investors expect returns makes it commercial.

The social realist disposition of Djansi's films engages with the everyday where social and women's human rights issues are put forward, but sometimes in doing so references are made to life as lived in specific historical contexts. According to Djansi, *I Sing of a Well* was inspired by an amalgam of historical events about Mansa Musa of the Malian Empire (c.1230- c.1600), the in-land slave trade,<sup>78</sup> as well as King Agokoli I of Notsie<sup>79</sup> whose harsh rule over the Anglos led to the building of the infamous wall, its eventual break down and the escape of the Anglos (interview 2014, 4 March). Thus, while the film is not a direct re-enactment of the real historical events, there are direct and indirect historical references interlaced with a love story.

As discussed by Cham, several African art house filmmakers including Ousmane Sembène, Sarah Maldoror, Flora Gomes, Med Hondo, Haile Gerima, Salem Mekuria, Ngangura Mweze, and Mahama Johnson Traoré have purged distorted and imposed African histories to privilege "the voices of hitherto suppressed subjects in order to construct different histories of Africa and Africans."<sup>80</sup> In Ghana, beside the GFIC's news reels and documentaries, as well as independent feature and documentary filmmakers like Kwaw Ansah, Ato Yanney, Akua Ofosehene and a few others who have made films based on the legacies and historical experiences, Djansi through *I Sing of a Well* could be seen as one of the few Ghanaian diaspora filmmakers, particularly, in contemporary film production to reference however remote such epochal events in Africa on the cinema screen. The film is significant in the way it fictionalises vestiges of Africa's past, infusing female subjectivity with bravery to overcome adversity.

Thackway has asserted that Francophone African filmmakers use a socially and morally pedagogical style to examine African women's concerns in society (2003, p. 150). Djansi's films follow this trend in varying ways as she deals with social issues

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<sup>78</sup> Beckles has noted that the in-land slave trade in Africa took place long before the existence of the transatlantic slave trade, which took place between 1492-1870 (2002, pp. 16-25).

<sup>79</sup> King Agokoli I became King of Notsie just before the middle of the seventeen century (Dotse 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Mbye Cham in a paper, "Film and History in Africa: A Critical Survey of Current Trends and Tendencies" presented at Film and History: An International Conference in 2002 at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

affecting women. This mode of examining issues permeates both the films she has written and produced as well as films she has written and directed. For instance, in adding her voice to the international campaign on, “say no to violence against women”, *Grass Between my Lips* touches on the delicate feminist subjects of forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) in Ghana. Djansi returns to the subject of FGM and the infibulation procedure<sup>81</sup> in her short film *Ebbe* to dramatise the long term effects on women.

Significantly, Djansi’s films also combine the social as well as the personal. As this study will argue, her films draw on her own experiences to project female subjectivity. Bisschoff argues that the thematic considerations that African filmmakers address “often reflect the lived experiences of the filmmakers” (2009, p. 34; also see Ellerson 2000). In my interview with Djansi, she revealed that some of her films have been inspired from her own personal places of compassion. She notes, “What is important to me reflects in my work” (2012, 21 December). Hence, though less important but still significant to mention is the fact that her characters serve society as bankers, educators and particularly as health workers, which reflects the popular female career choices in her family (interview 2012, 21 December).

Essentially, Djansi’s private and family life occurrences have led her to interrogate and examine themes on a personal level for personal healing. For instance, in *Sinking Sands*,<sup>82</sup> she draws on her own personal dark experience about a scar she bears on her body as a result of a domestic accident, which for years she blamed one of her sisters for (interview 2012, 21 December). She mentioned that writing the script was therapeutic for her because she began to delve into her relationship with her sister, herself, and what she felt about her body and discovered that there was

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81 The infibulation procedure according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) is one of the four main procedures of FGM. It is the “narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer, labia, with or without removing the clitoris”. See <[www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/)>.

82 Before *Sinking Sands* was released, UNIFEM Ghana endorsed it as part of the Goodwill Ambassador and Academy Award winning Australian actress, Nichole Kidman’s campaign to raise awareness on violence against women. This was reported in an online article, which was viewed 2014, 28 November. See <<http://thechronicle.com.gh/unifem-ghana-endorses-%E2%80%9Csinking-sands%E2%80%9D/>>.

abuse in the emotions she self-imposed and what they imposed on each other (interview 2012, 21 December). This double imposed emotional torture as she experiences it, is what she projects in *Sinking Sands*. The central character suffers abuse and is engrossed in self-blame until emotionally and physically drained she finally leaves her marriage. As part of the filmmaker's own healing, the film creates a voice to reach out to other people in similar situations in her continuous efforts to raise awareness of violence against women.

Like *Sinking Sands*, *Ties that Bind* which will be analysed in the next chapter, draws on familial experiences. *And Then There was You* critiques the whole idea that a woman's worth is dependent on the children she bears and questions why the value of her womb should be the validation of her womanhood and existence. *A Northern Affair* continues Djansi's penchant to expose violence against women. As this study would argue, while Frimpong-Manso sometimes unveils issues that hitherto are seen as unconventional, Djansi focuses on well-known persistent socio-cultural challenges in women's lives, but provides them with solutions that are often off-limits.

The point to be made is that unlike many diaspora filmmakers who position themselves to address issues of displacement and identity as noted in the works of Ellerson (2012a, 2000) and Bisschoff (2009), Djansi's films so far do not often border so much on issues of displacement, but relate to peculiar socio-cultural matters confronting particularly women on the continent and in the diaspora. It could be said that it is because of the way her career began that she follows effortlessly the "exemplary model of African/Diasporan interconnecting in filmmaking", which began at the inauguration of African cinema by a filmmaker like Sarah Maldoror, the Guadeloupian-born, who made and set her films in Africa (Ellerson 2000, p. 12).

## **Summary**

This chapter has discussed the biographical and specific political economic contexts from which the three Ghanaian female filmmakers make their films. It has also provided an overview of the thematic preoccupations in each filmmaker's oeuvre.

Considering the various aspects of production, the chapter has shown that the filmmakers do not produce their films in a vacuum, but are shaped by political economic factors and individual interests. While they practise as independent filmmakers both in Ghana and/or in the diaspora, they work under varying conditions, and share similar challenges in different ways. In their individual practices, the filmmakers' own personal experiences, everyday occurrences, social and cultural experiences and the quest to comment on social issues, redefine progressive images of Africa and women, and bring attention to women and human rights are central to their films. The following chapter takes a closer look at how they represent women and deal with women's issues in specific films – *The Forbidden Fruit* (Quarshie 2003), *The Perfect Picture* (Frimpong-Manso 2009), and *Ties that Bind* (Djansi 2011).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN AND WOMEN'S ISSUES

#### Introduction

As part of the Critical Media and Cultural Studies approach (Kellner 2009) that has been employed in this study, this chapter uses textual/thematic analyses to examine the ways the three selected Ghanaian women filmmakers represent women and women's issues in their films – *The Forbidden Fruit*, *The Perfect Picture*, and *Ties that Bind*. By including two films from women working directly in the Ghanaian video film industry and one from a diaspora woman, who has worked partially in Ghana, this chapter seeks to integrate female representations by local/diaspora Ghanaian women filmmakers and to broaden the scope of the growing discourse around women's representations of women in Anglophone West African films.

As discussed in Chapter Three, in recent years researchers have begun theorising about the ways West African women video makers present/represent women and project women's voices and issues in their films (see for example, Garritano 2013a; Kwansah-Aidoo & Osei Owusu 2012; Okuyade 2011; Okome 2004; Ukadike 2003; Ukata 2010). This chapter contributes to these studies and is relevant to discourses on Ghanaian women's visual representations of women and women's experiences. It is worth pointing out that the films selected for this study are in a dialogic relationship with Ghanaian society and more particularly the roles of women in the society. In order to examine women's roles and issues central to the selected women's films, the chapter employs postcolonial feminism, African feminism and transnational film theory as conceptual frameworks for analysis. Before moving onto the analysis, the synopsis of each of the feature films – *The Forbidden Fruit* (Quarshie 2003), *The Perfect Picture* (Frimpong-Manso 2009) and *Ties that Bind* (Djansi 2011) is provided.

The sections which then come after present the analysis of five recurring themes identified in the three films. Under each theme, the three films are discussed.

## Synopses

### ***The Forbidden Fruit*** (Quarshie, 2003)

*The Forbidden Fruit* explores some of the challenges in marriage focusing on issues of infidelity, betrayal, revenge, marriage and property rights in a Ghanaian setting. In the film, the female protagonist, Joan, is told that her husband Joe has fathered a baby boy in London. After confronting Joe, who boldly owns up to it, Joan plans to exact revenge and leave a legacy, which will scar Joe's life forever. For that, with support from Maame, her loyal friend, who seems to have gone through a similar experience, Joan decides to have an affair with Ato, her husband's employee and use him to get the property documents from the office. Maame flirts with Charles, her new boyfriend who happens to be a lawyer and is helping her to seek legal redress in court on issues relating to property ligations she is involved in. Joan on the other hand, uses sex to lure Ato to get from Joe's office the documents to properties, which Joe is keeping away from her. In her cynical manipulation, she promises Ato a reward of five million cedis, but Ato has dreams of traveling abroad to seek greener pastures and so he demands thirty million cedis to enable him to acquire his travelling documents.<sup>83</sup>

Meanwhile, Joe seeks support from his friend, mother, pastor, and lawyer as he goes through marital challenges. While living in an estranged marriage, he is unaware of his wife's adulterous activities, though he is suspicious. He suspects Joan's intentions to get a share of the properties, despite giving her one estate house. Consequently, he meticulously gathers evidence by recording moments when Joan attacks him as well as uses the pastor to spy on her late outings with the motive of using them against her when he starts divorce proceedings. While all these

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<sup>83</sup> The amounts of money mentioned here are in the old Ghanaian currency. When converted to the new currency, five million cedis will be five hundred Ghana cedis and thirty million cedis will be three thousand Ghana cedis.

events are happening, Kojo, Ato's cousin informs Ato's parents about Ato's relationship with Joan and they warn him, but he does not pay heed. Even though he has a girlfriend (Ivy), Ato flirts with his office colleague Gloria, and he is carried away by the reward he demands from Joan; he threatens to expose Joan should anything go wrong. Joan on her part develops affection for him, but in the end when he submits photocopies of the property documents, she gives him fake cheques. Unsure of what Ato might do, she follows Maame's advice and with her assistance she poisons and kills him. After this incident, even though she is calm she becomes psychologically disturbed. Neither she nor Maame are caught up in any legal battles. The film's ending does not provide a conclusive resolution since Joan feels uneasy and plans to travel to London to get over all that has happened, even though Maame assures her that the "poison leaves no traces". On the other hand, Kojo is devastated and intends to investigate Ato's death. The feature ends on a long shot of Kojo as he walks slowly through a long corridor of the hospital where Ato was pronounced dead.

***The Perfect Picture*** (Frimpong-Manso, 2009)

*The Perfect Picture* follows the story of three 21st century independent professional Ghanaian women in their thirties: Aseye, Akaysie, and Dede, mainly focusing on their love lives and the bond they share, despite their unique personalities and approach to life. Aseye is a banker, who used to work with her fiancé Larry at the same bank. But, when they decided to get married they also decided that Aseye will give up her job to satisfy the work place policy on relationships. After their wedding which opens the film, Aseye discovers on their wedding night that they cannot consummate their marriage because she cannot get Larry aroused. Their inability to make love initially appears to be triggered by stress, anxiety, inexperience or natural causes. However, the problem persists for several months and even though they seek medical help there is no improvement.

Aseye by chance sees Larry masturbating "on a freaking magazine" and convinces her friend Dede to seduce him to ascertain his potency. Dede protests initially, but she agrees to do it. One night after Larry has had a few drinks with his friends, they carry out their plan and Dede gets him aroused; however, she is unable to tell

Aseye, thinking she might be hurt by the truth. Larry originally mistakes that 'foreplay' to be an indication of the end of their problem, but in a coincidental encounter he finds out that the woman in his bed was Dede and not his wife. Aseye finds the truth about Larry's potency and admits that love is not enough to carry them through the challenge. She therefore ends the marriage, despite Larry's proposal for them to continue working together to find a solution. She begins online dating and when she finally meets her date he turns out to be her ex-husband, Larry. With some hesitation, she gets back with him and they somehow at that point consummate their union.

The second friend, Akaysie, at thirty is a corporate lady whose loving mother pressurises her to get married, even though her fiancé Taylor has walked away from their relationship for several months. Taylor is a wealthy, egoistic, and domineering man, who often shows his affection by showering Akaysie with gifts and lunch. Akaysie by chance meets Fela repairing the air-conditioner in her office. On their first encounter, Fela mistakenly breaks an empty flower vase sitting on Akaysie's office desk. The next day, he replaces the vase with an exact replica and when Akaysie tells him he should not have bothered, he replies in a soft voice, "I didn't want to give the impression of a guy who breaks valuable things." Meanwhile, he offers Akaysie a lift home on a couple of occasions because her car has gone for servicing. On the second night in Akaysie's house they share a drink, dance to Amakye Dede's song, 'Odo Da Baabi'<sup>84</sup>, and have sex. Akaysie is drawn to Fela, but being aware of society's view on a cross-class relationship (corporate lady and a tradesman), she feels ashamed to see him again. In the interim, her mother encourages her relationship with Taylor. However, because of his domineering nature and self-centred attitude she completely breaks off with him when he visits with a gift and instead pursues Fela, who has already given up because of the manner in which she treated him. He eventually agrees to take her back and reveals his true identity as a professional lawyer who takes repair work as a hobby. With such a fairy-tale twist, in the end they get together.

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<sup>84</sup> Amakye Dede is a popular Ghanaian Highlife musician and his song 'Odo da baabi' is a song from a man brooding over the love he shared with a woman who has been separated from him as a result of mistrust, which stems from the fact that the man is poor.

Dede is the third friend, an independent woman who makes the choice to date married men. In an early sequence of the film, the wife of one of her men warns and pours water on her right in her house. After the experience she decides to end her relationship with married men. Meanwhile, when Frank Appiah, her boss proposes a relationship with her he lies about his marital status. Dede accepts his proposal and declares her love for him. She later discovers that Frank has been married for five years and his wife, who lives in the United States, owns the hotel he manages. In her immediate reaction, she decides to punish Frank at gun point by putting him through a test where she makes him go nude in public. Unlike Aseye and Akaysie, based on her disappointments with men, she in the end decides to invest her love in an adopted baby boy.

By the final sequence all the three women are in high spirits as they celebrate Akaysie's wedding, even though she at a point had said, "No, no, no, you know I don't do weddings. It's not happening. No weddings". Her statement notwithstanding, she is happy because she is finally together with the man, who fulfils her fairy tale dreams and "makes her feel like a real woman". Unlike *The Forbidden Fruit*, *The Perfect Picture* provides an idealising denouement where each character's goals or redefined goals are all fulfilled – Aseye finally gets over the sexual challenges and becomes pregnant and Dede overcomes her disappointments. By adopting a child, she finally has "the dream relationship" she has "always wanted with a man". In the final sequence, the viewer is made to reflect on the various female lived experiences, desires, struggles, failures as well as achievements knowing that what becomes of women's lives are not exclusively, though largely based on the choices/decisions they make and how they live them. Together their stories prove that in spite of numerous challenges, women can have it all – love, friendship and fairy tales. As Aseye says in the movie, they just have to be "positive, worry less, live more because what will be will be".

***Ties that Bind*** (Djansi, 2011)

Set in the land of Krobo in Ghana, *Ties that Bind*'s narrative, like *The Perfect Picture*, foregrounds some issues contemporary women face in their daily lives. It tells the story of four women – Buki, Adobea, Theresa, (three main characters) and Maa Dede (minor character) – from diverse backgrounds, who share friendship and a common pain of 'losing a child or children'. The film opens with pregnant Adobea at the mill waiting to grind her maize. She is shown to be a woman, who seems to be preoccupied with perhaps the child she is carrying since she glances and attempts to touch the feet of a baby resting at its mother's back. On her way home, she meets Buki, a newly transferred medical doctor, who engages her attention to ask for directions to the village's old clinic. They soon discover that they were old secondary school mates.

From the film, it is apparent that Adobea has become a voiceless submissive rural housewife and a woman, who has buried six of her children and is pregnant with her seventh child. Her husband shows little interest in her well-being and unknown to herself and her husband, she is suffering from lung cancer, which makes her often vomit blood. As a medical doctor, Buki has made the decision to leave the city for Krobo land to rehabilitate a 'ghost haunted' clinic to enable her to provide medical services to the villagers. Buki's decision to go to the village is equally influenced by her opportunity to have time to put into perspective her relationship with Lucas. They love each other, but Buki has had two miscarriages unknown to Lucas and her fears are that should she agree to marry him and find herself unable to bear children for him, his mother, sisters and aunties will severely torment her. She believes Lucas will find another woman to bear children for him to prove his manhood, even though she loves him and thinks he is the kind of man society approves for a woman like her to marry.

As the film unfolds, the viewer learns that Theresa is an African American professor, who teaches anthropology at the university, but she is haunted by her past. At a point in the film, she goes to the altar to pray for forgiveness, although she finds it difficult to forgive herself. In a conversation, she reveals her past experiences to Dan, the investigator she has hired to track the whereabouts of her daughter

Amanda and ex-husband Marcus. As a child, she suffered abuse from her depressed mother. Before arriving in Ghana, she used and abused drugs and suffered postpartum depression, which left her so deranged that she wanted to harm her baby. She tells Dan that she did not want to turn out to be like her mother and therefore she signed full custody of her daughter to her ex-husband. Later, she got medical help, got a degree, but not the courage to fight for Amanda. She is in Ghana to connect with her identity, work and find strength to face the future. After twelve years, her desire to have her daughter back has grown strong. Through dream sequences used as flashbacks, she sees visions of incidents from her past – particularly when she used drugs and when she wanted to harm her child. Wanting to redefine herself and get close to her daughter, she makes a call to Arizona, United States to speak to Amanda, but Marcus warns her not to call the house. She posts a box full of clothing and toys to Amanda, but they are returned with a restraining order.

At home in the village, Buki's new neighbour Maa Dede pays her a visit to introduce herself and extend a helping hand to assist Buki settle in. Adobea is frequently seen helping Buki to clean the clinic and is seen defending her against villagers who go to warn Buki about the 'ghost' in the clinic. Maa Dede as a former clinic aide also assists and even supports Buki to attend to patients. Meanwhile, at a particular moment after Adobea returns from fetching water she meets her husband's family members, mother-in-law and a medicine man<sup>85</sup> in her house. In their attempt to protect the unborn child, they demand to perform a ritual on her and ask that she removes her clothes in the presence of everyone including her husband. After going through such an agonising ordeal, she breaks down crying. In the meantime, Buki delivers a woman of her baby at a temple. The woman had previously had three still births. Lucas is seen visiting Buki in the village and he brings along a ticket for an upcoming comedy show, which his firm is sponsoring in the city. Upon receiving the ticket Buki tells him, "I will pay you back" to which Lucas replies, "I don't need your money", and walks away. This encounter parallels a later scene where Buki visits Lucas in the city and finds Estelle, Lucas' childhood friend in his house. In her rage, Buki packs a few pieces of her clothing and drives away in a depressive mood.

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<sup>85</sup> A medicine man is a traditional healer who is believed to have spiritual powers.

Back in the village, Buki visits Adobea's husband at home and informs him about Adobea's pregnancy and blood vomiting condition. She explains to him the effects his smoking has on his wife although it is too late. Adobea loses her seventh child, but Buki with her expertise, resources and support, steps in to foot the bills to help her go through an operation to cure her lung cancer. In an emotional scene shot on the land Adobea inherited from her father and a place, where she has buried all her seven children, she at that point opens up and reveals to Buki the deaths of her seven children. Meanwhile, her mother in-law with an intention of bringing in another wife for her son misinterprets Adobea's situation and brands her a witch for killing all her children. At this point, Adobea's husband, who has said little throughout the film, stands up to defend his wife against his mother.

Still at the village, Theresa pays Buki a visit and together with Adobea they learn that Dede, Maa Dede's only daughter has been raped by her husband. While Buki, Theresa and Adobea take the child to the city for medical attention, Maa Dede attempts to protect her family and therefore shields her husband. In an encounter at a public pipe, village women who have come to fetch water for their various homes confront her about the rape incident, but she remains tight-lipped. Upon their safe return with the child, Buki accuses Maa Dede of covering up for her husband, but she reveals that he is HIV positive; therefore, she could not abandon him at such a time. Meanwhile, in the scene that follows when a mob attempts to kill her husband, she in a typically compassionate fashion runs to his rescue, but later gets the courage to make a turnaround to confront him, throws his marriage band at him and leaves him to his fate.

In the end, the three main characters, Buki, Adobea and Theresa hold onto hope because like Maa Dede, they find the courage to confront their fears. Symbolically, they discover that the 'ghost' they had all been afraid of in the 'haunted clinic' is a ten year old Sudanese refugee girl Fauzia, who uses the clinic's old mortuary as her place of abode. All three women draw on each other's courage, faith and renewed strength. The closing of *Ties that Bind* combines both conclusive and open denouements. Buki marries Lucas without any fear of the unknown because they

both accept that together they are “possible”. Adobea with the help of Buki and moral support from her husband is beginning treatment for her cancer and hopes to pursue nursing to help Buki at the clinic, that is, if Buki decides to stay in the village. Theresa adopts Fauzia, the refugee girl with support from Dan, her investigator. Further, in the company of her newly adopted daughter and Dan, Theresa is travelling to the United States to seek shared custody of Amanda, her child. While some of the incidents are sometimes melodramatic and exaggerated, *Ties that Bind*, like *The Forbidden Fruit* and *The Perfect Picture* presents a strong female subjectivity.

The three films summarised here span diverse, yet, similar life stories of women, showing how each one of them deals with issues affecting their lives. As indicated earlier, the themes are organised under five sections and under each theme the three films are discussed.

### **Theme 1: Repossession of Voice and Women’s Independence**

One issue affecting women’s lives that the films directly or indirectly address is the struggle against the muting or silencing of women’s voices. As Kolawole suggests, the silencing of women’s voices in African societies is unacceptable and unjustifiable irrespective of the ideologies one believes in (2004, p. 254). As the discussion under the theme, ‘Repossession of voice and women’s independence’ will show, Djansi’s transnational production, *Ties that Bind* demonstrates that the traditional belief in the suppression of the subaltern’s voice is an indictment of the so-called socio-cultural values and hierarchical gender relations that enforce timidity, push women to the background, keep them invisible and rob them of their fundamental rights.

Rather than redefining the culturally laden image of the silenced woman to transform gender relations and women’s socio-cultural lives as seen in Djansi’s *Ties that Bind*, Frimpong-Manso’s *The Perfect Picture* and Quarshie’s *The Forbidden Fruit* circumvent the traditional belief in the silencing of female voices by projecting women whose voices serve as signs of their independence. In what follows, the

analyses of *The Perfect Picture* and *The Forbidden Fruit* are preceded by the discussion on *Ties that Bind*.

### ***Ties that Bind***

Leila Djansi's *Ties that Bind* problematises and portrays efforts to resist the socio-culturally subdued voices of African women and celebrates their courage to overcome enforced voicelessness. From the very beginning, Djansi shows her awareness of imposed suppression on women's rights to speech and makes attempts to reveal the significant impact that this may have on several areas of women's lives. "People in the diaspora", Naficy has argued "maintain a long-term sense of ethnic consciousness ..." (2001, p. 14). Djansi is conscious of what Davies (1995, p. 5) describes as the socio-cultural orientations and dominant concepts, which press on women what they should be – to be subservient and to be seen but not heard. Thus, the woman has to stick to prescribed gender roles irrespective of the condition she finds herself in.

The filmmaker portrays this through the representation of Adobea. She represents a rural woman orientated to dutifully uphold her position as a devoted wife, who charts her dreams to leave her parents, moves into her husband's house to bear his children and assumes all domestic duties in suppression. Adobea's suppression is depicted through the spaces she occupies, her actions and the way she is framed in several shots. For instance, even though throughout the opening credit sequence, she is seen at the mill in close up shots, in the establishing shot that opens the film proper she is depicted carrying a load on her head, exhausted while walking on a dirt road. Within the frame, she is small and the landscape is overwhelming. The load she carries on her head and the overwhelming landscape are symbolic of the overbearing difficulties (the death of her children, the challenges with her new pregnancy, her lung cancer, and the suppression from society and her mother-in-law) she faces as the narrative unfolds.

The various shots of her at the mill, on her way home carrying milled corn and palm nut fruit as well as fetching water for her home are worthy of note. From a cultural

perspective, what this means is that she is a diligent and dutiful wife. In spite of the fact that she is heavily pregnant, she performs her domestic chores in pain and without complaint (in silence) because “every African woman grows up knowing that it is the woman who cooks the meals and generally sees to it that the house is clean and well-kept” (Dolphyne 1991, p 5). As a result, the film does not seem to question her contributions or view those “roles as liabilities” (Kolawole 1997, p. 32). In fact, she appears to be content and she epitomises Kolawole’s (1997, p. 31) image of the African woman who cherishes her role as a homemaker.

The filmmaker appears to acknowledge Adobea’s tenacious role in those moments, but she criticises her voicelessness, which she maintains at the peril of her own life. Even though she shows her dislike of removing her clothes in front of her husband and his family, she embarrassingly goes ahead with the so-called ritual, which is meant to protect her unborn child. The filmmaker suggests the patriarchal system, which inscribes authority in the man and indirectly his family reinforces a disparity in power relations, leaving the woman to obey without expressing any opinion on how she is treated, or what she is made to go through. This enforced muteness is further explored in another scene, when Buki visits Adobea’s house to talk to her husband about her health. A medium close-up of her while she listens to Buki’s conversation with her husband reveals her agitation and palpitation. The scene appears to suggest that compliance to imposed silence indeed causes her to lack courage. For her, the social orientation to be silent and submissive to her husband’s authority includes timidity and keeping quiet over personal pain and suffering.

Alternatively, one could suggest that Adobea’s acceptance of speechlessness in relating to her husband is because she sees herself as dependent. Unlike Buki, she did not continue schooling after secondary level and married out of convenience because of poverty. Adeleye-Fayemi’s (2004, p. 102) claim that in Africa there are many who live below the poverty line and lack access to resources, is relevant here. Poverty sometimes causes girls to be married off early despite the fact that the practice tends to support the maintenance of male domination. As the man and husband, Koo is Adobea’s benefactor. Therefore, she believes she cannot relate any differently to the man she addresses as “mewura” (translated “my lord”). She

believes being submissive under her husband's lordship and silent about her personal pain is "culturally correct" (Kolawole 2004, p. 263). But, one would have thought that as 'her lord', she should be able to tell Koo about her health issues given that she is pregnant.

Culturally, to talk to one's husband about a health problem is not tantamount to insubordination. Her reason for keeping silent as already suggested is possibly because of social orientation, her position as a dependent and her own personality. However, her reason for not opening up to speak to her husband particularly about her health is not clearly spelled out, although timidity and other factors could be alluded to. Ogundipe-Leslie's (1993, p. 113) view that African women's own attitude, backwardness and ignorance limit their liberation could help explain the situation. Adobea's own attitude towards interiorisation of being silent and lack of basic health literacy make her incapacitated. African feminism suggests that education empowers and inculcates positive values in women (Ogundipe-Leslie 1993, p. 116; Amadiume 2001). For instance, due to lack of education she is not aware that her husband's smoking could have adverse effects on her health.

Adobea's silence could also be as a result of the perception that her husband is her voice and therefore he is supposed to convey her thoughts. Her character resonates in African feminist discourse, the woman who is spoken for since "she herself [is] no speaking subject" (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, p. 5). The filmmaker reveals this to be problematic for the woman who relies on her husband as her mouth piece because traditionally, even though husbands by their authority take initiatives and make decisions, it is impossible to always speak and decide for their wives, and in Adobea's situation even to know what is happening in her body.

Ironically, although Adobea is not vocal when she relates with her husband, she possesses a voice outside her marital home. She comfortably expresses her views in her dealings with Buki and even goes to her defence when the town folks warn her (Buki) against the "haunted clinic". What this means is that in reconsidering her speechlessness, Adobea is able to define her voice in the public space and engage

in female support, an action which directly ties-in with McFadden's (2001) notion of transforming women's marginalisation and also the notion of woman-to-woman support (Nfah-Abenyi 1997). Thus, embracing and possessing a voice within the public space is seen to be progressive. The juxtaposition of her expression outside the marital home and lack of expression within the domestic space could be read as the filmmaker's consciousness and critique of the structures, which condition women to accept second class treatment particularly in the domestic space. One significant scene captured in visual combination of shots – two shots and close-ups of Adobea and Buki – clearly articulates the need to refashion Adobea's identity in the domestic sphere.

Buki: You cannot expose yourself to dangers like that. When you refuse to speak up it's like running a knife through your throat on purpose. Would you do that?

Adobea: (She shakes her head to signify the negative).

Buki: Well, you're doing it, your compliance attitude – being the quiet passive woman.

Adobea: I know no other way. This was how we were all brought up even you.

Buki: Yes, but I stopped when I realised I had a responsibility to voice my opinions.

Kolawole (2004, p. 257) has noted that women's voicelessness is imposed by socialisation. Given my interview with the filmmaker, allowing Buki to re-socialise Adobea on the basic essence of female empowerment seems to align with the changes she anticipates for women. In advocating for a restoration of voice to the silenced woman within the domestic space, Buki tells her: "change is the only thing that changes". With regard to this, self-transformation is viewed as important. Through a gradual process, the viewer observes Adobea's transition from passivity to owning her own voice and making the independent decision of going back to school to become a nurse. Liberal African feminist thought asserts that educating women about the true causes of their plight is a possible modality for effecting

change (Ogundipe-Leslie 1993, p. 114). What becomes obvious is that in the end the film provides optimism for women in such a way that they do not just want to speak, but they want to become useful to themselves and their communities. In a sense, the filmmaker raises the awareness and the importance of education and its implication for women becoming audible, thus allowing the subaltern to speak (Bisschoff 2009, p. 239), and also to take herself seriously.

A second area in which female audibility is traditionally suppressed that the film explores is female conversations around sex and sexual issues. This is projected through the character of Maa Dede. In stark contrast to Adobea, Maa Dede is utterly vocal in the domestic space and beyond. She rebukes her husband for his joblessness and drunkenness right in the presence of Buki. It is worth mentioning that to rebuke your spouse in front of others is also considered extreme and unacceptable within the Ghanaian culture. Through her expressive attitude, she embodies the authoritative female family head. She appears to occupy the empowered position as the family provider, even though her source of income is not clearly stated. It is suggested that she assumed responsibility for her family when her husband migrated to the city for better job opportunities, and after he returned with nothing other than HIV she wielded more power and control.

Despite the fact that Maa Dede finds herself in a position of authority and control, she fails to speak out when her HIV positive husband rapes their daughter Dede, who is only six years old. To understand her difficulty in speaking directly about the rape, we have to keep in mind social norms, which make it challenging for women to name or have conversations around sexuality or anything that relates to it particularly in public. This should bring to mind Kolawole's (2004) and Machera's (2004) suggestion that for women, having conversations around sexuality is unnerving and regarded as vulgar. Moreover, Davies has also noted that rape and incest for a long time were among certain issues regarded disgraceful and consequently unspeakable (1995, p. 4). Seen from the cultural point of view, the act of rape and incest that Maa Dede's husband commits and her voicing it as a woman, are both regarded as taboos. Even though it could be argued also that Maa Dede refuses to speak because as Dolphyne (1991, p. 19) suggests, a woman is expected to remain in

marriage despite the circumstances for the sake of her children, the norm is that culturally, one does not wash her dirty linen in public. These could be seen as some of the reasons Mama (2001, p. 253) suggests, oblige women to cajole and tolerate violence.

It is Timothy her son who reports to Buki, Theresa and Adobea what his father had done to Dede. He is also the one who reports it to the village folks.<sup>86</sup> Maa Dede rather directs her sense of responsibility to getting medical attention for her daughter. As a result, she ignores Buki's question on the whereabouts of her husband and rather asks for her help to cure Dede. She further refuses to talk when the village women confront her in unison about the news Timothy spreads around the village and the whereabouts of her husband.<sup>87</sup> Maa Dede's repeated action does not only show the tension between traditional constraints on women talking about sex, and family obligation, but also serves as a classic example of how some cultural norms may suppress moral obligation.

In all, considering Adobea and Maa Dede's plight, the film makes a significant point. It suggests that patriarchal societies are evolving and as such women must redefine their roles and responsibilities. Koo's reaction to Adobea's voicelessness adds more meaning to this interpretation when he tells Buki he expects Adobea to be able to tell him about her health issues. By implication, he expects her to utilise her voice. This must be seen in the light of the African feminist shared view that culture is evolutionary (Kolawole 2004, p. 255). Women's thoughts and strict adherence to socially approved behaviours are sometimes outdated or misconstrued. In view of these, there are indications that a lot rests on women to re-learn as well as re-socialise themselves and change accordingly. Also as seen in the film, the village's young men and women rather demand instant mob justice for the father rapist. Even

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<sup>86</sup> It is worth mentioning that Timothy's actions of reporting his father are in themselves cultural conflicts. Culturally sons are supposed to support their fathers, but also protect their families, and especially their sisters. His decision to report his father emphasises the filmmaker's commitment to creating awareness about violence against humanity – in this case children.

<sup>87</sup> What is also interesting in the scene is that while the women condemn Maa Dede for refusing to tell them the whereabouts of her husband or deny/confirm Timothy's story, the woman who leads the accusation is also unable to name 'rape' by its name in the vernacular language she speaks in.

though the filmmaker critiques taking the law into their hands by introducing police intervention, their actions prove that they do not condone male sexual deviance and assault.<sup>88</sup>

Maa Dede at the end locates her agency by voicing her sentiments on her husband's infidelity and his abominable behaviour. She literally leaves him for the sake of her children, even though ironically she is expected to remain in marriage for their sake. Her action signifies a rejection of a system that somehow forces her to accept cultural values to the detriment of her child. Moreover, it also reinforces Buki's assertion that possessing one's own voice is not a privilege, but a responsibility, which facilitates agency. Through Maa Dede and Adobea, the filmmaker re-inscribes new identities for the so-called rural woman to disrupt the imposed and self-enforced barriers. Similar to the African art films being social reformist (Harrow 1999a, pp. xx-xxi), these representations demonstrate Djansi's interest in exploring socio-cultural issues that affect women and in identifying alternative solutions to women's oppression. This is also in keeping with Naficy's (2001) observation that the diaspora maintain long-term ethnic consciousness.

*Ties that Bind* further displays another kind of 'silence' represented in the characters of Buki and Theresa when they chose to remain silent about their individual challenges and realities despite the fact that they are independent and vocal in every sense. Their silence can be read as positive since those are borne out of personal decisions. One may also argue that their silence is a result of their own internal struggles. The silence is not enforced through external oppressive forces, but may be seen as self-suppression. Theresa and Buki had been friends, but she does not tell Buki about her child until much later when she is confident and comfortable to open up on the matter. Even though Buki does not share her pain and loss with Lucas because of fear and pride as Adobea points out to her, she tells him after gaining courage and inspiration from the experiences of her friends – Adobea and Theresa. Adobea does not also disclose the death of her seven children to Buki until much later. Therefore, through Buki, Theresa and Adobea's characters, the film

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<sup>88</sup> It is worth mentioning that traditionally, the rape incident would have been met with expulsion from the community.

accounts for personal decisions to keep quiet over private issues, which are not directly enforced by society or any external force. The actual issue here is that much as culturally such deep personal and emotional matters are not easily divulged, the women break through their silence as Davies has theorised (1995, p. 12) after they form positive friendships, learn from each other and develop self-assurance and confidence.

What Djansi succeeds in doing is emphasising that while the women may all be facing unique situations and similar challenges, in many respects, the lack of independence and education make a huge difference. As educated, independent and professional women, Buki and Theresa are visibly vocal as well as mobile. Their audibility and mobility are staged through their interaction with particularly the public space. According to radical African feminist ideology, gaining access to the public space enables women access to rights, entitlements, economic and social justice (McFadden 2001) as well as voice. In light of this, the representation of education is seen as a way to subdue enforced silence and viewed as bedrock of becoming empowered - a depiction similar to that which is portrayed in Frimpong-Manso's *The Perfect Picture*, to which we turn our attention now.

### ***The Perfect Picture***

In the film, the female characters – Aseye, Akaysie and Dede, like Buki and Theresa in *Ties that Bind*, are successful professional women, who are not afraid to express themselves. They are articulate, and that trait is first and foremost central to the film's construction. For example, right from the pre-credit sequence (the wedding picture-taking scene) to the end of the film, the filmmaker's use of voice-over narration where Aseye provides the backstory, introduces her friends and interjects comments throughout the film, does not only present a first person narration, but more importantly illustrates the well-developed depth of the female voice and its significance to the overall narrative.

Among the three friends, Dede is depicted as the most outspoken. Beside her voice, her costume, make-up, the props she uses, and her actions function as visible signs

of her uninhibited voice. She does not suppress her voice and opinions especially when she feels mistreated or marginalised. For instance, without hesitation she ends her relationship with one of her dates after his wife pours water on her. In a doorway to her room, a medium close-up shot of an opened red umbrella designed with yellowish broken heart symbols covers her face from her visitor. When she gradually moves the umbrella away, she is revealed to be wearing a yellowish 'ready-to-fight'<sup>89</sup>. The outfit, props, shot scale and composition do not only bring attention to her and prepare the viewer for what she is about to say, but they are also extended articulations of her voice. In the absence of diegetic and non-diegetic music, the only significant sound one hears after a brief exchange of words between her and the man is what she says to him: "Take a hike". After this, a medium shot reveals her closing the door behind her with a smile on her face, suggesting the pleasure she gains from taking that bold step in anticipation of a promising relationship with Frank, her boss. When she finds out Frank also lied to her about his marital status, she drills him at gun point.

Dede's actions characterise her as vocal, vibrant and unconventional, a characteristic I have argued in Chapter Six as partly defining Frimpong-Manso's oeuvre. Dede's vocalisation is equated with independence and her action of drilling at gun point challenges the status quo. She is presented as a woman, who sees muteness as unfavourable to her sense of freedom, a woman whose voice drives her agency. By giving her such an expressive position, energy, and control, Frimpong-Manso consciously redefines day-to-day conceptions of Ghanaian womanhood and like Djansi, she recognises the need for women to be audibly responsible for themselves especially when they are taken for granted.

While the three friends presented in the film are audible, the representation of their voice and independence tie in with their sexuality. They are audibly and sexually liberated women, who are not afraid to talk about sex, sex techniques, and sexual pleasure. For instance, Dede is an expert on sex related issues. Even though the

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<sup>89</sup> 'Ready-to-fight' as it is commonly called in Ghana refers to a tank top or sleeveless T-shirt worn by both men and women.

filmmaker is circumspect because of her engagements with married men, the fact that she voices her intentions and leaves those relationships suggests she has control over her sexuality.

Aseye takes the initiative to find a solution to their marital sexual dilemma. When she and Larry visit Dr. Anderson, she is bold to describe to the doctor their real condition even though Larry is embarrassed. While her situation is different, Aseye, unlike Maa Dede in *Ties that Bind*, is able to not only talk about sex with her friends, but is prepared to tell Dr. Anderson, “Doctor, my husband and I haven’t once had sex since we got married”. She does not hesitate to mention the name and the act although Larry rather preferred she used the compound word, “love-making”.

It could be observed that Aseye’s independence is partly constituted in her knowledge and articulation of her sexual needs. Horn suggests that awareness of sexual rights and needs are the beginning point of the practical application of basic rights (2006, p. 8). Aseye is sexually not repressed through ignorance and self-deprivation, which Vance (1984, p. 5) encourages women to desist from. In this respect, going by an African feminist view on reclaiming female sexual agency (Tamale 2011a, p. 5), Aseye fits into the category of the woman progressively relocated “on a new level of awareness” (Kolawole 2004, p. 253). She does not fail to advance beyond conventional boundaries. Further, instead of staying in a marriage where she is not sexually fulfilled, she openly speaks to her husband about her decision to leave the marriage even if it is a difficult decision for her to make.

Furthermore, the filmmaker’s view of female voice linked to independence is shown through Akaysie the corporate lady and typical African woman, who wears braids and enjoys Amakye Dede. She is sometimes seen as soft in expressing herself, particularly in her relationship with Taylor in the beginning. On their first encounter in the film’s narrative, even though she seems to be disappointed with his long disappearance, she somehow accepts his excuses without probing further when he hands her a gift. When we hear a vehicle horn from Taylor’s driver off screen signalling his approaching exit to attend a meeting, we see her smiling as she

receives the gift he brought her. An eye-level shot filmed across a stair railing then a cut to her point of view shot of the gift – a necklace – gives the impression of entrapment. In a later scene, having spent the night with Taylor at his house, Taylor tells her, “You were something else last night”. She responds, “You were not bad yourself”. And he replies, “Not bad? Baby I get better compliments”. Again, she smiles and says, “Sure”. At this point, Akaysie’s refusal to say anything could be seen more as self-restraint than influenced by traditional constraints. It could be suggested that her silence is a sign of indifference. Her attitude almost fits into what has been described as “strategic deafness”, where a person says nothing verbally (Davies 1995, p. 3), but tactfully knows what she is doing.

From the beginning of the narrative, the conversation Akaysie has with her mother indicates that she is not going to waste her energy on that relationship because she would not allow herself to be subdued by his egocentrism. The scene where she breaks up with Taylor to maintain her freedom is emphatic on her views as to the kind of man she wants and the life she envisages moving forward. She expresses readiness to receive a man who will love, understand, and respect her. This portrays her as an independent woman, who has personal desires. While the interior monologue used is partly punctuated by flashback, the internal processes of her thoughts become part of her voice.

Similar to Aseye and Dede, Akaysie’s audibility and independence also ties in with her sexuality. Much as she feels guilty for sleeping with the so-called man below her status, her erotic pleasure is completely satisfied as she admits to her friends, “Have I mentioned it’s the best sex I’ve had forever?” One could perhaps argue that Akaysie’s consciousness of liberation is concretised when she finally calls off her relationship with Taylor and goes in for Fela, who gives her love, sexual pleasure, and respect. Even though culturally a woman is not encouraged to pursue a man or be the first to express affection, she goes to Fela and indirectly expresses her interest telling him, “I came for my letter”. It is worth noting that in an earlier scene Fela wrote her a love letter, but because Taylor unknowingly interrupted him at the time of delivery he did not deliver it. Given that after approaching him Fela goes back to her, Akaysie’s actions could be taken to mean that she has control over her mind,

voice, and sexuality. She exercises the power to articulate and go for what she desires. In all, the point here is that through these representations the filmmaker manages to put together women whose voices and sexuality do not only define their independence and contributions to the plot, but demonstrate their awareness of the integral role of their audibility and sexuality to their wellbeing.

### ***The Forbidden Fruit***

Circumventing female voicelessness is also represented in Quarshie's *The Forbidden Fruit*. In the film's narrative, Joan and Maame are seen to be vocal and they express their views on issues happening in their lives. Joan confronts Joe when she hears the news of the new born baby. By possessing her own voice, she is able to confront the pastor who spies on her nocturnal activities. Joe tells his friend that Joan asks too many questions about the property as if she is taking inventory. Maame as well, through her interaction with Joan, is seen as vocal and strong willed. Both women's audibility subverts the traditional muting of female voices, although their utterances deserve to be analysed critically. Both women could be seen as contesting male authority in words and in action. Joan particularly confronts and attacks Joe in an unconventional manner. Her vindictive behaviour and resentful attitude, which does not conform to social expectations, is captured in the following dialogue:

Joan: Be the man that you think you are and open this bloody door and I will show you who the real whore is. I am not the one who has just had a bastard son with an international call girl, am I? They haven't told you the kind of horror she is doing out there in London ha! You are the biggest fool thinking you've found an angel.

Joe: She is a much better woman than you.

Joan: You son of a bitch. People see you and they think you are a nice smart gentleman and all that, but they don't know that you have only so much sense as a fucking donkey in your stupid fat head. And the next time you bring the bloody pastor to spy on me, I will kill you both.

It is obvious that Joan is embittered, but as Kwansah-Aidoo and Osei Owusu have suggested, social norms make it inappropriate for a woman and for that matter a man to rudely speak or relate to anyone in the manner that Joan does and to use such foul language regardless of the person's social status or offence (2012, p. 62). This means that if a woman (or a man) should want to express her views, courtesy demands she expresses herself responsibly. Even though Joe's interjections are provocative, the impression one gathers is that the film subtly critiques Joe's infidelity, which gets Joan provoked because culturally society does not frown upon "rampant [male] sexual mobility" (McFadden 2001).

Consequently, the viewer is made to condemn Joan on the verbal abuse she rains on Joe and her contestations because adultery committed by the husband is not justifiable grounds for the wife to disrespect, commit adultery and act as though she wants divorce from her husband (Salm & Falola 2002, p. 132). In a sense, because she did not have rights to her husband's property, Joan could be thought of as victim of "culturalised expressions of impunity" (McFadden 2001), and male dominance, which reside at the centre of social injustice. However, the foul language she uses, the murder and infidelity she commits are considered to be illegal and immoral. Joan's image fits with Anyanwu's description of the woman who becomes a culprit of evil through her own volition (2003, pp. 87-88). Moreover, the representation concurs with the stereotypical female portraits identified in many of the video films (Garritano 2013a; Okome 2000a; Ukata 2010).

What is being suggested is that the film heavily criticises Joan's insolence because apart from Maame, everyone else in the film seems to be suspicious of her or condemns her. Joe calls her a "whore" and a "snake", "cunning and calculating" leaving his pastor to conclude, "Her behaviour is strange". Apart from Joe's mother, who criticises him for having a child outside his marriage, throughout the film Joe's infidelity is never questioned. Moreover, he justifies his actions before his mother and blames Joan for pushing him to take another woman. By these representations, the film reinforces socio-cultural tolerance of male sexual mobility and presents it as the status quo that must be left untouched.

According to the film, what accounts for Joan's failure is the offensive speech and inappropriate behaviour of committing adultery and murder. She represents the image of what Dogbe describes as the "‘dangerous’ Ghanaian woman who threatens the so-called traditional boundaries of ‘natural’ virtues of womanhood" (2003, p. 107). Thus, at the end of the narrative she does not only appear to have fought a fruitless battle, but also she is emotionally disoriented. The filmmaker Quarshie in an interview indicated that "women are wronged every day and they have good reasons to fight for things to be changed, but the language and approach they sometimes use rather make them turn to be the villains" (2013, 19 March). Were Joan to adopt a different approach acceptable to society, she may be a heroine.

The filmmaker's vision to critique social ills and promote socially acceptable behaviour particularly for women with regard to the way one uses voice and tackles problems, supports the interpretation above. Thus, in appropriating women's audibility and rights, the film is circumspect. In the cultural setting, women who use coarse language are regarded as disrespectful, and as a result the film does not endorse such inappropriate behaviour. The filmmaker through her interest indirectly leans toward a liberal African feminist consciousness that recommends power be negotiated and accessed in relative terms (Nnaemeka 1998, pp. 6-11).

## **Theme 2: Motherhood**

Similar to the premium placed on family, motherhood as noted by Steady (1981, p. 32), is valuable to both men and women in African societies and reduces conflict between the sexes. Children are central in the African social structure because they ensure continuity of the race and safeguard the bond, which exists among the ancestors, the living and the unborn (Steady 1981, p. 32). As Adrienne Rich (1986), Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) and Nnaemeka (1997) have suggested, motherhood can be a source of oppression or empowerment for (African) women. The following subsections examine the theme of motherhood in the individual films.

### ***Ties that Bind***

*Ties that Bind* is notable because of the way it portrays oppressive and affirmative aspects of motherhood. It explores the multi-faceted implications of motherhood vis-à-vis childlessness by focusing on the benefits and the challenges. For instance, it shows how the in/ability to have or sustain children's lives can liberate or oppress women in African societies. Djansi herself said in my interview with her that the film was inspired by her own mother's experiences of delayed childbirth in marriage (2012, 21 December). Like many diasporic filmmakers whose diasporic consciousness is multi-sited covering both the homeland and the diasporic world (Naficy 2001, p. 14), in examining motherhood as it pertains to the homeland, Djansi also integrates some aspects of motherhood as may be experienced through her diasporic character.

The film's central female characters fundamentally deal with issues, which relate to childbirth, childlessness, and losing child/children. With its concerted focus on the rural (Adobea – not so educated), urban/middle class (Buki – highly educated and professional), and diaspora (Theresa – highly educated and professional) women, the filmmaker does not only problematise for redress the daily issues women confront in relation to motherhood and childlessness, but her juxtaposition of the situations shows how the women share in similar experiences. Regardless of their socio-economic status or identity, they share different, yet similar concerns - each woman experiences her own grief, her own pain, but those are the things that bring them together and unite them.

As depicted in the film, Adobea, a minimally educated woman loses seven children; some of whom died in her arms. Even though her mother-in-law blames her situation on witchcraft, the film suggests that the problem resides elsewhere. Nfah-Abbenyi's (1997) claims that the African woman's problems associated with motherhood are combinations of other interrelated issues and Steady's (1981, p. 32) explanation that high infant mortality is due to poor medical services especially in rural Africa are relevant here.

Until Buki arrives and provides medical services for the village, it is suggested that there were many deaths particularly infant mortality due to the absence of health facilities and skilled attendants. Much as some women have had their children delivered safely like Maa Dede, there are many whose pregnancies and childbirth turned out differently. The woman Buki delivers of her baby at the Holy Fire Temple had had three stillbirths before finally she gets a live child. After three stillbirths she and the husband according to the priest conceived their fourth child “inside the church” and “in front of the altar of God”. They were expecting to have the child delivered at the church’s sick bay without a skilled health attendant. The husband’s timely intervention of calling on Buki’s expertise to help deliver the baby, the film suggests, facilitates the difficult but successful delivery.

Of relevance is the fact that maternal and neonatal care is a major concern in almost all communities particularly in rural Africa. A media publication by the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that one third of nearly a million stillbirths on the continent occurs during labour.<sup>90</sup> The publication identifies that some of the causes of stillbirth and mortality in the neonatal period relate to complications that arise as a result of lack of care during pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period (Pearson et al 2006, p. 64). It is as a result of these conditions that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs – 4 and 5) established by the United Nations aim to reduce infant mortality and improve maternal health by 2015.

It could be seen that even though in *Ties that Bind* Adobea loses all her children under poor medical conditions, diagnosing her lung cancer, referring her for further examination and subsequent treatment are made possible through Buki’s medical expertise and that of the specialist. In view of these, the argument here is that assessing the inadequacies in the health system should be viewed as Djansi’s way of pointing out the pointless blame imposed on women in relation to childbirth or child death. It is not just the filmmaker’s means of drawing attention to some of the systemic failures that tend to cause women to be traumatised, but her conscious call

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<sup>90</sup> Pearson, L, Larsson, M, Fauveau, V, Standley, J 2006, ‘*Childbirth Care*’, WHO, viewed 15 October 2014, <[http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/publications/aonsectionIII\\_3.pdf](http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/publications/aonsectionIII_3.pdf)>.

to have such issues addressed if the nation is to reach the MDGs 4 and 5 and if the society's premiums on child birth and family sustenance are to remain.

*Ties that Bind* examines another health issue related to motherhood – mental health and postpartum depression, through the character of Theresa, who is from the diaspora. In one of the film's sequences, after the package she sent to her daughter Amanda is returned with a restraining order, she reveals the details of her past life to Dan, the investigator. The scene begins with a medium shot as Theresa answers the door to let Dan in with a non-diegetic music bridge from the previous scene, where Buki was seen sobbing. The sound is totally muffled by the time Dan enters and by the time Theresa gets to the middle of divulging her past the camera is focused on the two in a one continuous close up shot reflecting directly Dan's sympathetic gestures and Theresa's confession of her remorseful past life. She reveals she had an abusive childhood at the hands of her mother causing her to seek comfort in drugs.

It remains unclear the motivation for Theresa's mother's behaviour, but she speaks about the extent to which her indulgence in drugs made her insensitive. As an already mentally disturbed woman, after her baby was born she became depressed leading her to entertain thoughts of killing her child. It was to avoid repeating her mother's actions that she signed full custody of her baby to Marcus, her former husband, sought help, got educated and travelled to Ghana. Theresa's journey to Ghana could be viewed in what Naficy (2001, p. 33) has described as a journey of escape and a metaphorical journey of transformation. Theresa mentions that she went to Ghana to heal and to find strength. Consequently, the viewer witnesses her remorsefulness and regret for abandoning her child, who is autistic.

Hearing Theresa's account and having the knowledge of the transition she has made to become a lecturer and a compassionate friend to Buki (and the other women – Adobea and Maa Dede whom she comes to know), the viewer is left to sympathise and agree with her personal view that she deserves a second chance. Much as her past life is complicated with abuse and drugs, the representation can be seen as an

attempt to create awareness of postpartum depression, which to my knowledge is an issue that has not been given much attention in the Ghanaian local setting. By linking the psychological trauma Theresa suffered at the hands of her mother, the drug abuse and post-partum depression, *Ties that Bind* lays bare health conditions that women could suffer from. Hence, it is the filmmaker's effort to show how a woman's mental state and postpartum depression could eventually turn her into an absentee mother and destabilise the mothering process, which, according to Rich (1986), Nnaemeka (1997), Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) and Oyewùní (2003), is empowering.

Motherhood recognised as oppressive by Rich (1986) and Nnaemeka (1997) is also explored in *Ties that Bind*. Oftentimes women are pressurised to marry because of the importance society places on childbirth. As Adomako Ampofo (2004) observes, when there are no signs of children in the marriages they enter, they are stigmatised, called names, driven out of their marital homes often by their mothers-in-law, divorced or end up in polygynous marriages.

*Ties that Bind* problematises the suppression of daughters-in-law by their mothers-in-law given that this reproduces woman-to-woman victimisation for the sake of family continuity and survival (Arndt 2002; Nnaemeka 2005; Steady 1981). Adobea's mother-in-law oversteps the power she wields as a mother/mother-in-law and demands to have grandchild/children and subsequently great grandchildren to enable her or her husband and son to attain the status of an ancestor after death. Culturally, to be recognised upon death as an ancestor by one's descendants depends on the fact that family lineage is not broken. Dolphyne (1991, p. 30) suggests that a woman is required to have children to continue her own lineage in matrilineal societies and that of her husband in patrilineal societies. It is as a result of these needs that Adobea's mother-in-law accuses her of witchcraft believing she killed all of her seven children. It can be seen that as an illiterate, she has little knowledge, let alone consideration for health related conditions. Hence, she misinterprets Adobea's coughing of blood, which is a manifestation of her lung cancer as evidence showing that she feasted on her children.

The filmmaker by way of education and social reformation neutralises superstitious belief in mothers killing their own children and critiques abuse of motherhood privileges and agency that benefit, for instance, patrilineage to the detriment of other women (Nnaemeka 2005, p. 37). Given that Adobea's mother-in-law fails in her attempt to remove her from her marital home (with the intention of bringing in a new wife for her son), the film correlates with African feminist critique of woman-to-woman abuse. It is Koo's intervention that saves Adobea's sanity and marriage. Following from this, the filmmaker does not only critique the oppressive treatment women receive in the name of motherhood and at the hands of other women, but also subverts the so-called status quo by reinventing male roles where she depicts a man who challenges the structures that oppress women. We can usefully refer here to Nnaemeka (2003, pp. 380-381), who suggests that women achieve results when men complementarily support them in the struggle for their freedom.

Furthermore, the filmmaker makes a point by suggesting that women's oppression in regard to motherhood and childlessness is not limited to the lower class, semi-educated or rural women, but also educated middle class urban women. Adobea's utterance, "pain knows no class", as women "we are all chosen to bear pain" literarily alludes to the fact that for women pain transcends political, economic and social classes. Apart from the general pain every woman experiences at childbirth, Kolawole (1997) and Oyewùmí (2003) point out that society places a lot of premium on children. Consequently, whenever women fail to live up to society's expectations their lives automatically become littered with grief as a result of pressure and stigmatisation. For instance, Buki does not live the physical subjugation associated with motherhood, but the emotional suppression that parallels it. As a doctor, who is obviously educated in health matters, she is well informed about her situation and is aware that the two miscarriages she suffered are the result of the mismatch in Lucas' and her blood types. As an independent professional woman, who is not married and might not have any obligation to have children to satisfy her in-law or society, she lives in constant fear and anxiety. The issue is that she believes when she gets married to Lucas and she becomes childless, his mother, sisters, and aunts will brand her a witch just as Adobea's mother-in-law does. They will call her barren and a prostitute, believing her childlessness is a punishment for immoral behaviour.

Buki's fears are grounded in the fact that culturally, a woman who is unable to have children is looked on with suspicion (Salm & Falola 2002, p. 132). Culturally, in such cases the basic assumption is that she is infertile. Salm & Falola (2002, p. 132) suggest she is sometimes considered to have led an amorous life in the past, which she is being punished for. Buki indicates she may even lose her patients because people will view her as the doctor, who cannot cure herself. Even her husband will be ridiculed and he will not be able to hold political office because someone will point to his wife's barrenness. Buki is driven by social and personal expectations and therefore even alludes to the fact that child adoption is not an option for her because as she says, in Africa "society demands" couples "make them". While these allusions may reflect social demands, they are aimed at unmasking the psychological burden women like Buki battle with daily. Even when they are not directly victimised as a result of the institution of motherhood, they still struggle against personal desires and what society might do if they are unable to live up to expectations.

By way of illustration, the film demonstrates that society actually ridicules women who may not have children. In one scene, when Buki tells Maa Dede she would not endanger the life of her child the way she has done by shielding her rapist husband, Maa Dede responds by asking, "Have you ever had a husband and a child?" This rhetorical question suggests a woman unmarried and childless has no business engaging in matters that affect married women, mothers and children. Marriage in African societies, as Dolphyne (1991, p. 16) explains, "confers on a woman a high degree of respectability ... [and she] is also expected to have children to prove her womanhood". Hence, it is as if Buki's value as a person in society is dependent on her marital and motherhood status in spite of her professional achievements. Due to the way society has been socialised, for a woman to be valued she must be married and must have children. Herein lies her fears.

Whereas *Ties that Bind* might be attempting to critique the notion of mandatory marriage and motherhood as the sole yardstick for determining a woman's value, the fact that Buki gets married at the end not only affirms the filmmaker's acceptance that societal conceptions about female identities of wifehood and motherhood are

part of the social fabric, but also reflect her position for African women to, “fluctuate between and within identities and subject positions” (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, pp. 32-33) because Buki still continues in her profession as a medical doctor. With Lucas’ assurance of cooperation, the filmmaker seems to suggest that so far as women will not become victims of marriages and motherhood, they can combine such social and professional roles. Even though the narrative does not travel to reveal whether Buki is able to bear children, by maintaining a career and a marriage, she is able to overcome social ridicule and also defies prescribed social roles as the sole “paradigmatic self-identity” (Tamale 2005, p. 24). Thus, the film’s narrative acknowledges the need for women to have choices beside defined social roles.

Much as there are gross socio-structural challenges, health related and oppressive issues with respect to motherhood, *Ties that Bind* also presents the benefits that come with motherhood as an experience as described by Adrienne Rich (1986). Maa Dede’s experience is specifically notable. Nfah-Abbenyi (1997, p. 24) has noted that most African women locate empowerment in their children and family. Unlike Adobea, Maa Dede enjoys the fruit of motherhood. She has four children – three boys and a girl. In one scene, she talks about them with pride and affection in her conversation with Buki. She glows with delight when she informs Buki that her son, Timothy, who attends a vocational school, has enough strength and ability to lift Buki’s heavy boxes. Timothy is the person the village chief sends to get Doctor Buki to attend to the hunter who is wounded from gunshots. He is also the person, who takes care of Dede when his mother goes to help at the clinic. While Steady (1981, p. 32) has noted that children maintain the link between the ancestors and the living as well as the unborn, Timothy’s role also brings to the fore children’s contribution to the household and society, which is a cultural expectation.

Much as Maa Dede feels honoured in her position as a mother, which in her view is beneficial, she endures what Nnaemeka (1997, p. 5) describes as “wifery pains” when her husband abandons her and goes after prostitutes and harlots. She further has a slightly different type of experience of motherhood when her husband commits the abominable and obnoxious crime of raping their daughter. This could be described as “motherhood pain” as she feels ashamed and guilty for her inability to

protect the child. It is an act no woman wishes on her child. These point to the film's reflection of how reward and pain are intrinsic to the experience of motherhood.

### ***The Perfect Picture***

The themes of obligatory motherhood and non-biological motherhood are explored in Frimpong-Manso's *The Perfect Picture* as well. As pointed to earlier in *Ties that Bind* with regard to Buki, it seems for a woman to gain recognition in society marriage and childbearing are very important. Claims have been made to the effect that traditionally African societies put emphasis on procreation due to the value attached to children (Gecaga 2007, p. 143). Marriage is therefore important and understood to have been divinely instituted and sanctioned for the purposes of procreation (Gecaga 2007, p. 143). In *The Perfect Picture* Akaysie's mother pressurises her to get married and have children. At thirty, even though Akaysie feels she is not ready because of her busy career life, her mother thinks her life is getting complicated because she had her when she was nineteen. While Akaysie's disagreement with her mother is shown to be the result of generational gap and the way they view issues, it is also indicative of the open relationship that exists between mother and daughter. They express themselves openly to each other without inhibitions as culturally expected where the daughter has to be less opinionated and act with utmost decorum. The mother desires to see her daughter get married because as she says, "everyone needs someone to depend on; that's key", Akaysie however, thinks depending on others implies weakness. Their opinions could be seen to reflect the dichotomy between traditional and modern views women in society hold on issues.

Generally, in the Ghanaian culture young people, particularly women, are encouraged to settle down by way of marriage and begin their own families (Dolphyne 1991). When a woman is approaching a certain age threshold after which it is considered unsuitable to bear children, pressure is brought on the individual to find a suitor quickly or a suitor is arranged for her. In Akaysie's case, at thirty she complains the men she meets are either "broke" (poor) or married. Taylor is rich, not married, but he is unstable or not committed. In spite of the fact that he walked away from their relationship several months earlier, Akaysie's mother arranges to reconcile

them in her bid to ensure her daughter settles down to make babies. In one scene, she takes a packed chicken sandwich to her for breakfast, but Akaysie complains she rather prefers a tuna sandwich. While the gesture reminds the viewer of the cordial relationship between mother and daughter, it is symbolic in a sense that the mother, who is trying to help her daughter choose a suitor, does not even know the kind of sandwich her daughter wants. In the absence of finding in her opinion the ideal man like Will Smith or Tom Cruise, she insistently advises Akaysie to find a man to make her pregnant. Her shift from marriage to children denotes society's ultimate expectation toward obligatory motherhood.

Even though culturally marriage in Ghanaian societies is not seen as an option but a requisite, essentially it is believed the spirit of parents continue to live on through their children (Salm & Falola 2002, p. 127-130; Steady 1981). Dolphyne contends that culturally the respect motherhood confers on women is greater than that conferred by marriage, though marriage is important (1991, p. 30). Hence, while her role fulfils the mother whose desires somehow subvert social expectation of marriage, it offers insight into society's interest in mandatory motherhood. Through Akaysie's marriage to her own ideal man – Fela and her anticipation to raise her own family, *The Perfect Picture* can be thought of as promoting the idea that women marrying and becoming mothers on their own terms should be the ideal practice.

One can argue that while *The Perfect Picture* unconventionally undermines obligatory motherhood, it offers non-biological motherhood as an alternative choice available to women, offering the viewer a glimpse into the experiences of non-biological mothering. Whereas *Ties that Bind* queries the demands society makes of African women to for instance make babies and not adopt them (though it introduces the concept of adoption), *The Perfect Picture* explores non-biological motherhood as a means for women to subvert wifehood and motherhood challenges. Nnaemeka has suggested that adoption is demonstrative of “women's eagerness to ‘mother’ while rejecting the abuses (physical, sexual, emotional, etc.) of the institution of motherhood under patriarchy” (1997, p. 5). Dede leaves her bitter and disappointing love experiences with married men to adopt a baby boy, which allows her a space to develop the relationship she never had and to taste the joyful experience of

mothering. Given the significance society attaches to motherhood and children, Oyewùmí (2003, p. 13) has suggested that “being a mother is perceived as an attractive and desirable goal to achieve”. It is therefore not surprising when Dede openly declares that she has never been more serious with any relationship than becoming a mother. Her ability to take on such a responsibility affirms her tenderness and ability to love another person’s child as her own – a quality, which is greatly admired and respected (Dolphyne 1991, p. 30).

Dede’s decision is projected as progressive and it could be read as Frimpong-Manso’s direct gesture to give hope to women who desire to become mothers and to demonstrate to society that adoption is healthy for women, families and society. While women and society get fulfilment, children who are less privileged to have their biological mothers caring for them can have women whose roles go beyond what Oyewùmí (2003, p. 13) refers to as “co-mothering”.<sup>91</sup> They can have mothers who will take full responsibility for their upbringing and wellbeing thereby reducing society’s obligation to care for them.

In the film’s final sequence all three women are mothers, expectant mothers or intending to become mothers. This does not only emphasise the importance of children in the Ghanaian and by extension African societies already pointed out by African feminists (Nnaemeka 1997; Oyewùmí 2003; Steady 1981), but also promotes the notion that in dealing with the issue of motherhood African women should have the option of child adoption. With this alternative, women faced with challenges of fulfilling society’s demands and their own desires can reconcile their expectations with that of society. The filmmaker has commented in an interview that society “... needs[s] to be able to desist from the mentality that every woman must bear her own children” (2013, 23 March). By promoting the value of child adoption, the film also promotes the idea of moving the socially excluded woman who has not borne her own children from the periphery to the centre for inclusion. McFadden (2001) has criticised the practice that relates patriarchy to power and that only recognises that

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<sup>91</sup> According to Oyewùmí (2003, p. 13) co-mothering is a communal and social practice where women in the community all assume responsibility for a child’s upbringing.

women marry men in order to create legally and socially recognisable family units. It can be argued that through adoption women may be able to break that barrier.

### ***The Forbidden Fruit***

Motherhood and its relation to power structures is the perspective from which Quarshie's *The Forbidden Fruit* examines the theme of motherhood. The film examines mother/son relationships through the characters of Joe and Ato and their mothers. Joe has a healthy relationship with his mother, who supports him throughout his marital challenges, even though she reprimands him for having a child outside wedlock. She also advises him to remain responsible for his daughter, Kate. As a mother, she feels responsible for her son despite his age. She accompanies Joe to see the pastor who is supposed to help dissolve the marriage between Joe and Joan. However, unlike Adobea's mother-in-law (in *Ties that Bind*), who attacks and accuses Adobea for killing all her children, Joe's mother is not intrusive. Even though in supporting Joe, she believes Joan is sinister and evil, as African feminism will have it, the film subverts the common expectation of confrontation between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997). By far, this projection of the mother-in-law also subverts the common images of the vindictive, manipulative, troublesome, jealous and wicked mothers-in-law Agbese (2010) finds in the Nollywood videos.

*Ties that Bind* seems to be making the point that finding solutions to marital challenges must not lead to woman-to-woman confrontation and victimisation. Like Joe's mother, Ato's mother is projected as one, who will reprimand her son when he goes wrong despite his gender, age or status. She exercises her authority as a mother. When she is informed about Ato's abominable behaviour of having an affair with a married woman (Joan), she advises him by drawing on her Christian faith to teach him morality. Similar to Joe's mother, she too does not confront Joan, even though she thinks Joan is an "oversized" woman for her son. By choosing to project women who in their own distinct ways attempt to help their sons address life's challenges, the filmmaker demonstrates a liberal African feminist sensibility where mothers use their positions to enhance their children's lives rather than to abuse other women (Nnaemeka 2005).

### **Theme 3: Confronting Self-imposed Fears and Remoulding Perspectives on Self-Restraint**

African feminist criticism suggests that African women experience different levels of oppression. Closely linked to enforced oppression is self-imposed suppression. Ogundipe-Leslie has said that the African woman herself can be the obstacle to her own progress, citing instances where she can stifle her own growth and freedom (1993, p. 114). Women's own inaction and reaction to situations where they need to be proactive and bold often serve to suppress their assertiveness (Ogundipe-Leslie 1993, p. 114). Where they need to uphold self-confidence to struggle for social justice, they cripple their endeavour and defeat themselves through self-imposed fears. The argument to be made here is that when women fail or are incapable of fulfilling personal and/or social expectations, they often blame and restrain themselves from advancing progressively to achieve their goals. That is why the African feminist critic Aina has suggested that African feminist orientations to liberate women should not stop with economic independence and social benefits, but also should include the "the psychological development of the total self" (1998, p. 85) of the woman.

*Ties that Bind* and *The Perfect Picture* deal with the way women internalise fear and engage in self-blame and self-pity not only because they believe they let themselves and society down, but also because they fear what society might do to them. The films explore explicitly how experiences of intrapersonal suppression affect women's personal well-being and growth. The films reveal that while such inhibitions are dangerous due to their self-destructing nature, they are the easiest to eliminate. They suggest intervening dimensions, but those aspects of the films are developed by first demonstrating that self-imposed restrictions manifest in different forms and may be triggered in the context of other experiences of suppression. Most of all, they also suggest that overcoming internalised oppression is the first step towards subduing any kind of suppression. *The Forbidden Fruit*, which will be discussed later

in this section, remoulds perspectives on the themes of self-imposed fears and self-restraint.

### ***Ties that Bind***

*Ties that Bind* maps out experiences of socialisation and personal aspirations as well as the tensions they create in women's inability to engage and/or reconcile those social and personal expectations. As a result of those tensions women often get muffled through their own self-inflicted agony. For example, Maa Dede restrains herself from addressing her husband's abhorrent behaviour in order to protect her family to uphold her prescribed role and cultural values. Adobea is afraid to speak and be heard due to her own attitude and the barriers imposed on her through prescribed gender relations and sexual identity. In her inability to defend herself, she internalises bitterness and anger when she is forced to go through the child protection ritual. Moreover, she is overburdened with emotional disappointment due to her inability to sustain the lives of her children and saddled with constant fears of family and society's response to her situation.

Similar to Adobea, Buki is troubled by the fact that she cannot have a fruitful marriage and her fears basically stem from social and personal expectations to become a mother despite the miscarriages. While she is confident, she is at the same time afraid of the unknown and therefore refuses to marry or tell Lucas about the miscarriages. The image of her being afraid functions to expose the anxiety women deal with. It reflects on her personal struggles and fears of being stigmatised. Through personal desires, class prejudice and views on cross-class marriages, she is burdened with the idea of marrying an elite man who will match up to her status. She is not only suppressed by social expectations and personal impositions, but those also suppress her agency and prevent her from taking meaningful action.

In all, Buki's desires and panic magnify her problems beyond reality and she chooses to pity herself by retreating. She retreats until she falls within the stereotype of the prideful professional woman who does not need a man, even though she retreats to find normalcy. Similar to Adobea and Buki, while Theresa internalises her

past experiences of childhood abuse and postpartum depression, she also blames herself for the love she never gave her child, Amanda. Much as she continuously experiences nightmares, it is interesting to note that like Buki, she also retreats to find strength and healing by going to Ghana while at the same time she keeps pushing to get closer to Amanda.

Altogether, self-restraint and fear keep the women from being happy. They are individually haunted by their own personal 'ghosts'. As per their experiences, they go through constant internal struggle and retribution, until they get to the point where they individually and collectively, as Adobea puts it, "take a leap of faith". In one significant scene, Adobea runs off, leading Buki to the land on which her seven children have been buried. The scene's integrated use of extreme long shots, long shots, medium shots and close-up shots depicting the two women, the graves, and the landscape as a scenic backdrop, presents a visual representation of Adobea's loss and pain. More significantly, it reveals the stigma she has come to interiorise as well as her relationship to nature and motherhood. The visit to the gravesite and finally opening up to talk about her pain become therapeutic for Adobea because as Bennett (2001, p. 92) contends "naming abuses" or one's pain plays "a key role in any therapeutic process ...". In the scene, she is able to open up for the first time to tell Buki about the death of her seven children. The audience is aware that in the preceding scene Buki spoke to her about her own miscarriages. In grief, Adobea compares herself to the land and proclaims to Buki that she is barren: "This is my land. I inherited it from my father, but it grows nothing, nothing. It's barren. It's dead, dead just like me".

In the Ghanaian cultural setting the land referred to as "asaase yaa" is conceived as the goddess of fertility and "mother earth", that which gives and supports life (Kwansah-Aidoo 2003, p. 392) and Adobea's reference to it can be interpreted in various ways. By comparing her situation to the land that receives the dead, Adobea puts pressure on herself and accepts her 'uselessness'. However, it should not be forgotten that in order for the land to produce or sustain life it must be cared for. Culturally, the principle of reciprocity resides in Ghanaians' understanding of the relationship between humans and the land (Kwansah-Aidoo 2003, p. 392). If the land

is treated well, it will bear good fruits to sustain life. It is the same in Adobea's situation. In order to sustain the lives of her children she requires the correct care, which she does not have or get. Having said that, the analogy she actually draws is fallacious since we are aware that she has had seven children. Likewise, the land on which they stand is not as useless as she claims because there is life on it and it is believed that there is room for regeneration.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that by naming the burden she carries, she personally confronts her fears and overcomes self-imposed oppression (Ogundipe-Leslie 1993, p. 114). Even though the narrative does not give the viewer the chance to witness Adobea having any more children, from that point on she becomes aware of the need to restore a commitment to self-improvement. Of significance here, is the filmmaker's suggestion that ultimately the task of helping women suppress any kind of oppression begins with themselves.

This process of self-reformation is appropriated for the rest of the women to overcome their own personal 'ghosts', which is symbolised in the 'ghost' at the clinic, the ghost they run away from throughout the film. Maa Dede is the one character, who stands against the status quo. She goes to where her husband is being stoned and she does not wail in the back, but runs to the front. In a sense, by running to the front she overcomes self-restraint and confronts the status quo right there. Much as she asks for her husband to be pardoned after raping their daughter, the monologue she delivers marks an important moment in the film, where she offers herself an opportunity to speak about issues she had hitherto been afraid to talk about. She questions her position in protecting her husband and realises that it is not enough to hold onto a family, which has already disintegrated. In this case protecting the child should take precedence over keeping the family intact.

Theresa and Adobea's determination to go after the 'ghost' is significant because we notice their transformation into women, who are at that moment not afraid of even death. Finding the 'ghost' is a metaphor of overcoming their fears. They overpower the fear factor when at the climax together with Buki they discover the 'ghost' is a

harmless Sudanese refugee child. It is at this moment that through Theresa, the film encourages its viewers to understand that “sometimes the things ... [they] fear the most, [they] needn’t fear at all. A lot of courage then bravery, that’s all [they] need”. The women after discovering the so-called ‘ghost’ realise they have been cruel to themselves and their progress. By allowing the women to discover the ‘ghost’, Djansi contests dominant notions of femininity as weak to promote ideas of empowerment, of confrontation, of acceptance and of hope.

### ***The Perfect Picture***

In *The Perfect Picture*, the danger of self-imposed blame is demonstrated by Aseye as she feels responsible for the challenges in her marriage – first, for not discovering beforehand Larry’s inability to have an erection, and second, for her inability to get him aroused. Despite the fact that she initially identifies exhaustion to be the cause and even encourages Larry that they should take it easy to find their rhythm, she goes out the next day to lament and ask her friends, “what if I waited too long to find out?” While she stirs up excitement and initiates sexual foreplay in unconventional spaces like the kitchen, she is still consumed in self-doubt and in her own words asks her husband, “... do you think I’m sick? Is something wrong with me?” ... We haven’t had sex before or after we got married and I am beginning to feel I am the problem or shouldn’t I?” In the context of her questioning, the narrative defines her as frustrated. While in her frustration she blames herself, by interrogating and fighting for the possibility to experience sexual pleasure (Horn 2006, p. 8), and to reclaim her “feminist sexual memory and instinct” (McFadden 2001), Aseye could be seen to be sexually liberated. However, one gets the impression that Larry may also be worried, but he does not allow frustration to define him.

From an African feminist ideological perspective, it appears the film’s point is that continuous self-doubt and blame can have adverse consequences for women. After Dr. Anderson confirms that Aseye and Larry are both healthy and that pressure from society could cause sexual performance anxiety, which could in turn cause erectile dysfunction, Aseye convinces Dede to seduce Larry. In this lies the real impact of self-blame and personal doubt. Her fragile mental state is compounded when she sees Larry masturbating and discovers Dede succeeded in arousing him. Although

she is endowed with the ability to persevere, after discovering what seemingly appears to be the truth, she rather quits the marriage. In attempting to understand Aseye's actions, one is tempted to think that personal doubt actually destroys her self-confidence to the point that in her own words: "Every man's face I see looks like my ex-husband's. Can you believe I actually wear high heels to buy wakye?"<sup>92</sup> ... Because if or whenever I run into Larry, I want it to look like I've moved on". The suggestion here is that after separation, Aseye continues to impede her own progress and it is not until she deals with her low self-esteem that for the first time she discovers her sexual rhythm with Larry. The manner in which they discover their sexual appeal is ambiguous, yet the film appears to echo Ogundipe-Leslie's (1993, p. 114) ideas on the need for women to address suppression imposed on self by portraying its distressful effect and what it could make women do.

The theme of self-restraint is also explored in *The Perfect Picture* via the character of Akaysie. Similar to Buki in *Ties that Bind*, when Akaysie falls in love with Fela the air-conditioner repairer, she entertains fears because she thinks that as a successful corporate woman she is expected to marry an equally successful man. In spite of the fact that she discovers they are sexually compatible and they share the same kind of music, something she never shares with Taylor, she is still hesitant to have any relationship with him because society "will frown on a pair" like them. She admits she likes him "in a weird sort of way", but for her that does not change the fact that she is higher than him on the social ladder. Generally in the Ghanaian social setting, it is viewed that in a cross-class relationship the woman reminds the man of the position he should have occupied. As a result, the man is usually insecure and it is believed the woman is not humble enough to accept male authority. Moreover, there is the belief that such relationships are not successful because the couple might not share common interests.

The class difference appears to be the reason Akaysie refrains from pursuing a relationship with Fela; nonetheless, she is also embarrassed by the fact that as a self-respecting young woman she had sex with a man on their first drink because

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<sup>92</sup> Wakye is a popular food in Ghana prepared from rice and beans. It is usually sold by the roadside.

women are expected to remain sexually reserved (Osakue & Martin-Hilber 1998, p. 193). It is because of guilt and shame that she later avoids Fela. It would be safe to suggest that through Akaysie and Fela, *The Perfect Picture* at a point appropriates personal and social attitudes towards cross class relationships since finally they get together. However, it fails to sustain it as the narrative reveals Fela to be a successful lawyer whose hobby is repairing things such as air-conditioners. Akaysie's personal decision to leave the rich, domineering Taylor for the learned romantic Fela could be read as emancipatory as suggested by African feminism (McFadden 2001). It could also be seen as the filmmaker's way of recognising the prevalent challenges associated with cross-class relationships in the society.

### ***The Forbidden Fruit***

Unlike *Ties that Bind* and *The Perfect Picture*, *The Forbidden Fruit* remoulds perspectives and takes the viewer on a different tangent with regard to the dangers of self-blame and self-pity. Thematically, it attempts to refashion perspectives on self-imposed fears, blame and restraint to show the effect they can also bring when not dealt with properly. The video's main characters, Joan and her alter ego Maame do not exercise restraint or engage in self-blame. They rather confront their challenges without self-questioning their strategies and the ramifications thereof. The filmmaker appears to question that aspect of female agency and will-power. Quarshie reshapes our perspectives and takes the idea of women confronting self-imposed fears and restraint further by showing the need for women to react objectively to challenges after overcoming self-imposed restrictions. Because of the filmmaker's aim of commenting on social ills, the film cautions that if women do not employ impartial strategies, the consequences of their actions may as well be self-defeating. The way this is developed in the film can be understood in the light of Nnaemeka's ideas of balancing and knowing how to detonate gender inequalities (2003, p. 378). For Nnaemeka (2003), the framework for liberal African feminism promotes power sharing rather than power shifting or vengeance.

In *The Forbidden Fruit*, revenge, for example, is the focus of the main character Joan. She embodies the "avenging woman", a popular character type common in the West African video films, which Garritano (2013a, p. 122) identified in Quarshie's

film, *Ripples* (2000). Like most 'avenging female characters', Joan employs rough, rude, aggressive, and violent tactics in attempts to exact revenge on her husband. The portrayal of her as an assertive and daring woman, who confronts her husband's infidelity by committing adultery herself with a young man, luring him to steal property documents under lock, receiving photocopies of the property papers, and killing the young man because he made outrageous demands, suggest that the filmmaker is asking women to seek redress of their problems with circumspection. Joan in the film's finale is left worse off than she is seen at the beginning. Her husband at the end is off in London ostensibly to see his new found love and child. Joan does not have the original property documents, which she thought could allow her ownership, and she has become a murderer.

The fact that Joan does not consider carefully the ramifications of her own actions, which rather defeats her own motives, could be considered to be part of the process of cautioning women to employ strategies that will not cripple their efforts, or turn them into villains, or give the system more control to discriminate against them. It is worth noting that while Joan is made to suffer psychological trauma as her punishment, unlike many of the videos where women are killed for similar offenses (Garritano 2013a; Osei Owusu 2009), without being killed, Joan has a second chance. Nonetheless, what is more significant is that the film suggests women need to sometimes exercise restraint to enable them to assess their problems objectively and put in place solutions that will help them combat inequalities at home and in society.

#### **Theme 4: Gender Complementarity**

In reference to the preoccupation of liberal African feminism, Nnaemeka (2005, p. 33) maintains that the discourse foregrounds the sharing practices that emphasise the communal human living, which is firmly rooted in African cultures. That is to say, inter-gender power sharing and collective consciousness are at the centre of African feminism and African cultures. The films selected for analysis ascribe to the African feminist ideology of gender complementarity and depict it as an effective means to

resolve gender inequalities and conflicts. They advertently endorse gender complementarity as another solution in the female struggle for equity. Rather than shift unbalanced gender relations in favour of women, the female filmmakers critique individualism, disunity, and the misuse of power by both sexes to suggest a process, which is based on collective understanding and interdependence of men and women.

### ***The Forbidden Fruit***

*The Forbidden Fruit* simultaneously explores the notions of negotiation and inclusiveness in marriage vis-à-vis individualism, disunity, mistreatment of partners, abuse of power, and opposition through the portrayal of husband and wife relationship. It closely juxtaposes a married couple who through customary practice work together to deal with issues and a couple who work against each other. The film does not only provide insights into the deterioration that can ensue when couples fail to compromise, but also offers an example of a woman who does not readily avail herself to negotiate in the struggle for gender equity and social justice and transformation. Joan's attitude and radical response to her husband's power and control does not support liberal African feminists like Nnaemeka (1998, 2002, 2003), Ogunjide-Leslie (1994), and Steady (2011), who suggest that because women are often subordinated to men they are the ones who readily adopt a humanistic approach where they challenge discrimination and inequality through negotiation and partnership with men.

Far from embodying the frameworks of cooperation, accommodation and power sharing, Joe and Joan are presented as individualistic and uncooperative. Instead of getting together to identify workable solutions that will help address their problems, they resort to taking drastic actions to provoke each other. This is not only projected through their actions, but also through the screen time they spend together. Apart from a couple of scenes, where Joan is seen attacking Joe, in the remainder of the film they are seen in spaces divided by walls or doors as well as seen in what could be described as 'camps' where they scheme with family or friends to hurt each other. In light of this, the disunity between them is embedded in the way the narrative is constructed and how the film is shot and cut. In their individual spaces, they plan

their actions insensitively. While Joe deliberately plots to engage in an extra marital affair to have a child outside wedlock just to provoke Joan to leave the marriage, Joan callously schemes to commit adultery and to steal property documents just to take over Joe's properties to spite him. Joe claims that Joan avoided any form of reconciliation and cooperation, despite several efforts on his part to get family members to help resolve issues.

The representation of the degeneration of the marriage and the image of Joan as a self-defeated wife could be a way the filmmaker portrays the need for women to situate their struggle within the framework of gender complementarity and inter-dependence, just as it is found in African cultures and advocated by liberal African feminism (Nnaemeka 2003; Steady 1981). While it has been suggested that men need to be educated about the needs of women and gender equality (Amadiume 2001, p. 59; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994), the film appears to suggest that women also need to be educated to involve men in correcting inequalities and social injustices, and women also need to avail themselves as equal partners in transforming the home and society. It is worthy of note that the way Joan contests her husband's power and dominance does not also directly fit within the tenets of radical African feminism that recommend that women reject, for instance, uncontrolled sexual mobility by men and challenge gender discrimination through "*new democratic*, life enhancing cultural notions and practices" (McFadden 2001).

In the film, Ato's parents instead are the ones, who team up to address their son's misguided relationship with Joan. When Ato's cousin, Kojo goes to report to Ato's mother (and his Auntie) about what he describes as a dangerous game, the mother arranges with the father to have a chat with Ato. Ato's father is depicted as ill-humoured, and his mother is seen as a woman, who upholds traditional values and consults her husband before making decisions. In their intervention, the mother seems more moderate in her reprimand than her husband, but together they cooperate to scold and advise their son to end his affair with his boss's wife. Even though Ato pays no heed and dies in the end, their efforts constitute complementarity and inter-dependence that is at the heart of liberal African feminism. The father and

mother complement each other in their roles as parents who seek the wellbeing and protection of their child.

### ***The Perfect Picture***

*The Perfect Picture* explores the theme of inclusion and gender complementarity and what it means for a successful intimate marriage. The projection of an unconsummated marriage between a couple who attempt but stop working together to end their sexual starvation offers insights into the mechanics of sexual intercourse and its relation to the concept of cooperation, co-partnership and joint participation. Much as the film is ambiguous on the actual cause of Larry's inability to get aroused by his wife, he appears to do little to improve the situation. Following his initial attempts, whenever Aseye initiates sex he is seen giving excuses to take quick showers or to sleep early because there are long working days ahead. After he joins Aseye to see Dr. Anderson, he is not seen making efforts to find a solution other than masturbating. While he does little, he believes it is never too late to work at any marriage and that they can work together. It can be argued that because of Aseye's proactive behaviour, Frimpong-Manso takes a step to represent a woman who is sexually not repressed through ignorance and self-deprivation as Vance (1984, p. 5) asserts. In the midst of her active involvement in finding a solution, Aseye is seen luring Dede to seduce Larry, though one has to question whether that is the best solution.

It would be safe to argue that lack of direction and cooperation leads them to disconnect. After being shown their tearful separation, the montage sequence of the good moments they shared together, intercut with the emotional struggle each one goes through and the intervention of their online dating, they find their sexual rhythm when together they decide to try again. The film as already suggested, is ambiguous on what caused the erectile dysfunction as well as what actually helped them to stimulate erection. In spite of that, during the last sex scene the extra-diegetic soulful music, the slow motion and close-ups of their bodies, movements as well as facial expressions punctuated by profound kisses underscore the film's position on cooperation in sex acts. This is in contrast to the earlier sex scenes, where the sexual stimulation preceding the intercourse was characterised by complaints about

nibbling of ears and positions of bodies among others. Through the depiction of Aseye and Larry's transformation from lack of intimacy to passionate experience of intercourse, the film reinforces the idea that collaboration, cooperation and coordination foster sexual wellness and pleasure for both men and women.

### ***Ties that Bind***

Leila Djansi's *Ties that Bind* also examines the themes of gender complementarity and inter-dependence in the way that they serve as recourse to build trustworthy and dependable relationships. Through the film's narrative, one finds that complementarity promotes the idea to support and be supported. In the film, Buki and Lucas' relationship is troubled with Buki's self-imposed fears of childlessness and victimisation as well as self-restraint. Similar to Larry in *The Perfect Picture*, Lucas believes the problems in the relationship can be resolved if they trust each other and work together. However, unlike Larry he takes bold initiatives to encourage Buki to see that there are alternative solutions that could work for them. He represents the ideal man similar to the one described in the works by Newell (2005) and Garritano (2013a). He is romantic, caring, committed, loving and regards Buki as an equal partner. Despite Buki's self-restraint and relocation to the village, he pays her a visit and brings her a ticket for the comedy show his firm is sponsoring. He even tries to allay and calm Buki's fears and anger by gently explaining to her the relationship between him and Estelle. When Buki finally tells him about the miscarriages, he confesses he is angry with the situation, but has no resentment against Buki. The common presumption is that generally the man will be angry with the woman for hiding such information from him. Much as he is a loving and devoted fiancé, it is when Buki finds the strength and decides to uncage herself and work with him that they begin their journey into sharing their lives together.

The film's interest is to show that unity is strength, that each partner has a significant role to play. The seesaw scene near the end of the film underscores this notion of complementarity and working in tandem to achieve common goals. The scene comprises of long shot, alternating close-up shots of the two, and a close-up shot of holding hands as they enjoy a swing on the seesaw. In light of this, one could suggest that the theme of complementarity permeates the filmic construction, and

the dialogue that ensues also reinforces interdependence. The following is a portion of the conversation on the swing.

Buki: Before you say anything, I need you to know that I may be strong on the outside, but I'm very weak inside.

Lucas: I'm very weak inside too. You are the part of me that I'm not.

Buki: Which part?

Lucas: The part that gives me strength to wake-up in the morning. The part that makes me believe that I'm possible.

Buki: I'm possible.

Lucas: We are possible.

Indeed, neither Buki nor Lucas regards herself or himself as totally complete. It is by recognising their strengths and weaknesses as well as the role each person plays that their relationship becomes possible. In other words, it is after accepting each other that the possibility of having a trustworthy life together becomes a reality. In the film, the closing montage sequence highlights the tenets of gender complementarity as Buki and Lucas get married and Adobea's husband is also seen sitting by her bedside in the hospital supporting her to get her through the surgery. Based on these, it is clear that the film enacts the principles of negotiation as theorised in nego-feminism by Nnaemeka (2003) where the couple challenges each other through negotiation until they reach a compromise and accomplish their goals. Unlike the general perception of lack of devoted male support (Steady 1981, p. 35), here male support is guaranteed. It is worth emphasising that particularly for Buki and Lucas and similar to negotiations/compromises seen in *The Forbidden Fruit* (child wellbeing) and *The Perfect Picture* (sexual wellbeing), the focus is not based on gender equity, but on the wellbeing of their relationship. This perhaps explains the dedicated male support because the wellbeing of a relationship is to the benefit of both parties.

## Theme 5: Female Bonding

While the power invested in women or the power they attain is extolled, Nnaemeka (2005, p. 36) warns that "... one must gauge critically both the *use* and *abuse* of that power particularly in the promotion of woman-to-woman violence and abuse" (emphasis mine). She observes that culturally sanctioned institutionalised hierarchies among women foster support for woman-to-woman abuse and violence (2005, pp. 36-37). In view of this, what is of utmost importance to African societies and African feminism is to promote the development of woman-to-woman cooperation, female bonding and self-reliance among women (Steady 1981, pp. 15-17). All the three selected feature films examine these issues by looking at (female) intra-gender relations.

### ***The Forbidden Fruit***

*The Forbidden Fruit* explores the bond between Joan and Maame as their friendship is represented by the support particularly Maame extends to Joan. They are characterised as middle-class women with Maame likely widowed or divorced while Joan's marriage is almost on the rocks. As they share their challenges and experiences together, Maame's experiences as a woman who is battling with property litigation herself inspires Joan. They both have had bitter experiences with men and their actions are indicative of paying men back to get what they want; hence, the collaboration to outwit them. Their bond and friendship are inscribed in the way they appear in scenes (described as woman-to-woman scenes) and shots. Throughout the film, they are often framed together. They spend time talking particularly about Joan's problems, they report on the "juicy bits" of their escapades, and they scheme and plot their actions. Apart from scenes where Joan assaults her husband and where she encounters the pastor whom she drives away from her house, when they are not together, Joan is often seen executing the plans they plot.

Even though Joan is depicted as assertive and makes decisions, Maame's influence on her as a close confidant is significant. In one of the series of woman-to-woman scenes, she tells Joan that Joe's London based concubine is well versed in getting

rich men to father her children for the sole reason that she gets in line for the men's property. It appears this information partly energises Joan to intensify the struggle for her husband's property. Whereas Maame advises her to give Ato money to get the property documents without an affair, Joan rather would have him deeply involved in the scandal; therefore, she sleeps with him. It is Maame's plan that leads them to poison Ato – she provides the poison, coaches Joan how to use it and also distracts Ato to enable Joan to poison his drink to kill him. While the friendship between them is portrayed as one of devotion and loyalty, it is used to reflect the negative influence friends can have on others even though Joan is also responsible for her actions. Their friendship is juxtaposed with the relationship between Ato and Kojo. Kojo becomes Ato's voice of reason, but Ato ignores his warnings about Joan's likely sinister motives and dies.

By presenting both intra male and female friendship and bonding, the film portrays disillusionment that can happen despite the existence of friendship. While friends can influence friends positively or otherwise by way of advice or behaviour, the onus rests on individuals to act accordingly or differently. For the friendship between the women, the film reflects *agency*, which Nfah-Abbenyi (1997, p. 30) has identified as an attribute of woman-to-woman bonding. However, the bond they share runs counter to the notion that self-support among women could often offer safety and be progressive in advancing women's interests (Nnaemeka 1997, p. 19).

### ***The Perfect Picture***

Aseye, Akaysie and Dede in *The Perfect Picture* are friends, who share a strong bond, despite their varying experiences. Unlike *The Forbidden Fruit*, the film presents an optimistic idea of bonding and friendship among women. As part of the filmmaker's intention to present progressive African women's images, the film demonstrates not necessarily a female bond that contests patriarchy or gender inequalities, but it shows a relationship among women where they support each other through life and general life challenges. Thus, its interest is to reveal the things independent women share and do as friends. Apart from Akaysie whose mother we see, the women are represented "completely autonomous, without ... extended family" or families (Garritano 2013a, p. 112). Their friendship is manifested on

personal levels as they spend time together and share in each other's jolly moments, pains, and triumphs. In a total absence of competition, the three friends commend, assure, advise, encourage, support, rely, criticise, and tease each other during their daily contacts. It is in view of this that Garritano asserts that the women seek pleasure and personal fulfilment without men (2013a, p. 181).

In the film's pre-credit and closing sequences the women are seen together sharing in Aseye's and Akaysie's happy wedding moments respectively. They laugh about Dede's revenge on Frank. When Aseye blames herself after she discovers Larry's inability to get an erection, Akaysie and Dede allay her fears and assure her of Larry's commitment and the fact that they believe, "he will bounce back" – "big and tall". On their part, Aseye and Akaysie commend Dede for adopting and taking the responsibility to love someone else's child. Moreover, when Aseye and Dede experience disappointments after their relationships fail, Akaysie assures them, "You are all beautiful intelligent Ghanaian women. You don't need any man to let you feel better about yourselves". While this may sound anti-male, in the context of the film it is to assuage their resentment and discomfort.

As devoted friends, Aseye relies on Dede's sexual expertise, trust and discretion to help stimulate erection in her husband. Much as Aseye gets angry with Dede for not telling her the truth after successfully arousing Larry, following her apology it is Dede, who provides her shelter and company when she leaves her marital home. This illustrates the point that female friendship and its benefits are multifaceted. The women remain good friends throughout the film. They share personal information although sometimes they are careful as to when to divulge such information. Among the friends Akaysie is depicted as relatively shy and reserved when it comes to sexual matters. Hence, Aseye's request for Dede to seduce Larry is kept away from her. By implication while each of the women have their own opinions, they work together with the one they believe can help achieve their individual goals.

The filmmaker constructs the bond among the women as strong and allows them to lighten their personal challenges with dancing, going to the pub/movies, and then the

swimming pool. They ridicule and tease each other, but they still maintain close ties, which subverts the common perception that female friendships are offensive and competitive. In a couple of scenes Dede playfully teases Akaysie for having an affair with an air-conditioner repairer and Akaysie also makes fun of Dede for having affairs with married men. The issues they jokingly pick on could be revealing of what they think of each other, but in each case they seem to lighten the tension or 'guilt' surrounding their actions. The friendship projected serves to illustrate a healthy relationship among the women. Given their belief that they can have it all – love, friendship, and fairy tales, the bond does not only serve as a source of optimism for them, but what they share is in itself a buoyant female companionship. Through this representation, the film seems to urge women to maintain strong bonds as a way of life and use that as a progressive force to overcome other challenges. Nffah-Abbenyi has suggested that woman-to-woman bonding is important for African women's agency (1997, p. 30).

### ***Ties that Bind***

Leila Djansi's *Ties that Bind* deals with a profound woman-to-woman bonding that could form among women from diverse backgrounds. While Buki (a medical doctor), Adobea (a village house wife), and Theresa (an expatriate and a lecturer in anthropology) share the similar pain of losing child/children, it is the relationship they share that leads them to embrace courage and strength to overcome cultural barriers and/or personal 'ghosts'. In the context of the film, the bonds must be understood as systems of support, motivation as well as inspiration, which serve as conduits for self-discovery and self-actualisation (Adeleye-Fayemi 2004; Steady 2006). In many ways therefore, the film highlights the ways female bonding is used to transform experiences of female self-imposed suppression and externally imposed oppression.

Despite their individual pain, the women reach out to one another and show support. It is not a coincidence that Buki and Lucas' relationship problems are brought before her friend Theresa. Much as Theresa could be seen as a displaced character in Ghana, she is constructed as someone who undertakes what Naficy describes as a "journey of identity" (2001, p. 31) where she travels from being weak to being courageous. She journeys from being an outsider to becoming an insider and part of

the female community, even though she is still learning the culture of the people. Through the bond she shares with Buki she assumes the role of the voice of conscience and advises Buki to look on the bright side of her fears of childlessness. In the midst of Buki's self-imposed barriers in relation to childlessness, it is Theresa, who assuages her fears and encourages her to do what is right for herself. She tells her, "This is a decision you don't make with other people in mind. This is a decision you make for yourself". Within an African feminist framework, this can be read as a source of female self-empowerment since the decision is considered to be in the interest of the woman herself. Much as in the end the decision is not exclusive to Buki's benefit, but also for Lucas' happiness, it would appear her decision primarily banishes her fears.

Moreover, as a friend and a medical doctor, Buki supports Adobea when she provides help, sends her to the city for advanced medical attention and offers to pay the surgery bills to save her life. It is also through friendship that Adobea finds her voice. She learns from Buki and is inspired by her independence, career and her service to mankind. Consequently, she is inspired to train as a nurse. Furthermore, through companionship among the women, *Ties that Bind* redefines conservative roles for married women. Culturally, it is never frowned upon the kind of friends a married woman keeps, though it is expected that she takes friends who are also married. Despite Adobea's marital status, she is able to be in the company of Buki and Theresa. She spends time with them and particularly helps Buki as they renovate and clean the clinic. Together, they take Dede to the big hospital in the city after the rape incident.

The fact that Adobea's husband is all accepting and does not complain or abuse her as a result of the time she spends outside the home, makes it seem like the filmmaker consciously redefines gender relations and inequality because traditionally, a woman will go out with the husband or go out with the permission of the husband. It is by allowing Adobea the freedom to have choices beyond prescribed roles and spaces, that she potentially gets support. Even though she married out of convenience, as they are rural folks her husband is not in the position to pay for the surgery. Moreover, Buki also learns from Adobea's experience. Buki's

fears are mitigated when she witnesses Adobea's experience as her husband defends her against the mother-in-law. Through that intervention, she is encouraged to have faith to believe in Lucas' assurances of support.

The bond among the women is reinforced in the scene where they lie down to watch the stars. The scene is set in the dark and lit by a burning wood fire outside the clinic, denoting night time. However, it also intensifies the sense of fear and uncertainty, which has overshadowed their freedom throughout the course of the film. The integration of long shots, close-ups, medium shots and a bird's eye view shot taps into the emotions and vulnerability of the women. Whereas the scene echoes for the viewer their weaknesses, it also marks the turning point in the film. Through Maa Dede's courage to confront her husband in the preceding scene, Theresa confesses that she has been motivated by that experience to have hope of reconciling with her child in America.

Even though Adobea all along thought she was weak and voiceless, it is through her strength in enduring the loss of her seven children that Theresa is encouraged to find her daughter. Considering everyone's troubles, Buki finally admits her self-restraint and cowardice and therefore is encouraged to tell Lucas the truth about her miscarriages. Given these representations, I would argue that by keeping strong transnational bonds among female friends, women are not only inspired to aspire for independence, but the friendship can be used to save lives both physically and emotionally. Adobea's life is physically saved, while Buki and Theresa experience emotional freedom.

Through the bond between the women, their experiences become the sources of motivation leading each of them to liberate themselves from self-imposed suppressions and oppression. The diegetic song they sing, "This Little Light of Mine" by Harry Dixon Loes foreshadows that liberation and the discovery of the "ghost", who happens to be a refugee child, symbolically represents overcoming their fears. It seems the physical and emotional experiences and support they show each other reflect the filmmaker's notion of interdependence among women (Adeleye-Fayemi

2004). Essentially, each woman somehow is the force behind the other woman's agency and resilience. The point to be made is that the filmmaker uses the friendship among the women to depict empowerment, tolerance, respect and strength in diversity, attributes that sit squarely within the tenets of African feminist thinking (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997).

## Summary

This chapter has discussed the representation of women and women's issues in the three selected films by the three female Ghanaian local and diaspora filmmakers. In all, five recurring themes treated in diverse ways were analysed. The analysis demonstrates that whether in Ghana or in the diaspora the filmmakers deal with similar themes relevant to the Ghanaian socio-cultural milieu and women's experiences, even though the treatment and representations are nuanced. By suggesting that there are recurring themes across the selected films, this study is by no means suggesting that women's lives and experiences are homogenous, but pointing to the fact that because women are defined by their gender they share similar challenges though in different ways. It can be argued that the filmmakers' distinct interests to comment on social issues, to tell progressive African stories, and to educate and raise awareness of human rights are also great influences on how they represent women.

As postcolonial subjects, the female filmmakers through their films focus on "*speaking up against*" women's oppression and inequality such as the traditional belief in the muting of subaltern women's voices, abuse of female power and independence, and woman-to-woman abuse (Nnaemeka 1997, p. 4). They also criticise obligatory motherhood, stigmatisation of childless women, and violation against children. It is important to recognise that by speaking up against issues, the filmmakers do not only speak against unequal social relations between men and women and between women and women, but also speak against lack of social facilities that may compound, for example, women's health problems. As an illustration, they show that lack of health facilities do not just worsen women's

situation with respect to child birth and personal health, but also show that its ripple effects can be devastating for women, families, and society.

Another significant strategy the filmmakers adopt in their visual representation of women is the way they resort to “*speaking ... for issues*” they consider are useful for women’s liberation from oppression, discrimination, gender inequality and social injustices (Nnaemeka 1997, p. 4). Through this they negotiate and reconfigure women’s identities. The films provide examples of female independence and what it means for women’s wellbeing. Much as the filmmakers question the impact of socialisation and patriarchal dominance on women’s lives, as a way of addressing gender inequalities, they overtly and subtly endorse interdependence between men and women and between women and women for social transformation and collective growth.

In all, the analysis has shown that the female characters are depicted in roles that humanise them; they are often portrayed as women with strengths and weaknesses. The films also demonstrate how women struggle, attempt, fail and/or overcome life’s challenges. This chapter has been the textual/thematic analysis of the selected films. Following the tripartite approach (Kellner 2009) utilised in this study, the next chapter considers audience reception and provides analysis of male and female focus groups’ interpretations of female representations and issues in the selected films.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **AUDIENCE INTERPRETATIONS OF FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

As part of Kellner's (2009) approach adopted by this study, this chapter presents analysis of audience reception. Films are meant to be consumed by audiences because their communication is addressed to them (Kent 1994, p. 1). Consequently, without the audience the communication circuit is incomplete. Hall points out that if audiences do not make "meaning" from a film text, "consumption" cannot take place and before a film's message can yield any "effect" however defined, gratify a "need" or have the message put to "use", it must first be meaningfully decoded (2006, pp. 164-165). It is in this vein that Karin Barber also notes the importance of studying audiences since they have a hand in the constitution of meaning in a film (1997, p. 356). Moreover, a suggestion has been made to the effect that understanding audience reception of a given text helps to understand the social implications of that particular text (Jensen 1993, p. 22). Hence, following from these positions, understanding and engaging the discourses about audiences' perceptions of films and women's representations, in this case by Ghanaian women filmmakers, is essential.

As already noted, the decision to focus on Ghanaian male and female focus group audiences' responses to the representation of women and their issues in selected Ghanaian women's films has two aims. First, to integrate the Ghanaian women's films and audience studies, which has rarely been done, and second, to understand empirically the levels of interpretations and readings the audiences bring to the women's work (Livingstone 1998). This is done to help uncover the actual interpretations and perceptions male and female audiences have of women's

representations in the Ghanaian women's films. Thus, the aim is to determine the collective interpretations among respondents in the male and female group situations. To analyse this, Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model is employed as the theoretical framework. This framework together with its interventions presents a comprehensive way of understanding and explaining male and female focus groups' responses to female representations and issues encoded in the selected Ghanaian women's films. What follows is a discussion of Hall's encoding and decoding theory and its interventions as they apply in this study. Subsequently, the findings from the male and female focus group discussions on the selected films by the Ghanaian women filmmakers are discussed.

### **Encoding/Decoding**

The paired concept of encoding and decoding promoted by Stuart Hall and his associates of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies outlines the encoder/producer and decoder/receiver processes of production and reproduction of culture (Hall 2006). It helps to appreciate the ways different audiences respond, interpret and use films distinctively and also helps to explore determinate moments, and circumstances that would make audiences interpret and respond to films in varied ways (Hammer & Kellner 2009). The model does not challenge totally the assumption of the affective power of a film's message or how it may be used. In this model, Hall introduces a semiotic paradigm, which empowers researchers to break away from the behavioural and attitudinal effect approach and instead move towards an interpretive framework, where an audience member's responsiveness is largely determined by the interpretations he makes (Alasuutari 1999). Here, the film is seen to constitute complex organised signs which the audience must unpack to determine their signification.

Taking a Marxian approach, particularly influenced by Louis Althusser's model of ideology and Antonio Gramsci's model of hegemony, the encoding and decoding framework fundamentally focuses on the ways in which media culture appropriates ideologies that pursue and legitimate the interests of dominant groups who also

dominate the production of culture (Hammer & Kellner 2009). Hall contends that every society or culture at different levels has a tendency to impose its ordering of the socio-cultural and political world. This dominant cultural order of power and ideological norms are subsequently organised into what he terms the “dominant or preferred” ideologies which accordingly become embedded as the dominant codes in films (Hall 2006, p. 169).

The understanding is that media messages are composed of assumptions about beliefs and practices that then influence the perceptions of everyday realities and that these assumptions further work together to emphasise hegemony (Rojek 2009, p. 51). In other words, the media codes become “the means by which power and ideology are made to signify ... [hegemonic] discourses” (Hall 2006, p. 169). This is, however, not to suggest that the dominant socio-cultural order inscribed in a film is unambiguous. For Hall, the dominant meanings encoded are not fixed and as such they do not involve an “overall determining logic” that allows the audience to “decipher the so-called meaning or ideological import of the message against some grid” (Hall 1994, p. 254). Following from this therefore, the meaning and circuits of communication are multi-layered in the encoding and decoding processes (Rojek 2009, p. 52).

This is the case because the process of encoding happens in a social and cultural context where the cultural producer is influenced by ideologies, his intertextual cultural knowledge (knowledge of other texts or media products), and his own store of experiences. Consequently, it is understood that in coming up with any cultural product, producers may often tap into their prior knowledge (media and cultural), consciousness, and experiences to reflect their outlook of the world (Bobo 1994). Significantly, this also means that in producing cultural products by any minority group, in this case Ghanaian women directors who are underrepresented in the Ghanaian film industry, they tell stories based on their store of experiences of the world guided by their individual interests and concerns.

As will be shown in this chapter, this is also the case for audiences (Ghanaian male and female focus groups participants). As audiences decode media texts they depend on their cultural competence, which is determined by their personal ideologies, experiences of the world and ideas expressed by other people to them as well as their knowledge of other media texts (Bobo 1988). Bobo (1988, pp. 102-103; 1994) explains that within an “interdiscursive space”, which is the moment of the encounter between the audience and the text, cultural competency plays a major role because the audience brings to bear a range of knowledge in creating meaning from a text. Similarly, Morley has noted that the meaning of a text is constructed based on the discourses such as knowledge, prejudices and resistances the reader brings to bear on the text (1992, p. 80). It is useful to understand that in this study the Ghanaian male and female focus group participants’ cultural competencies constitute a reservoir of discursive strategies which in part delineate the boundaries within which they decode the films.

Moreover, as suggested by Bobo (1994, p. 304), Staiger (1992, p. 97), and Hammer and Kellner (2009, p. xxv), audiences’ individual prior media and cultural knowledge as well as their position in the social structure in relation to, for instance, their race, age, gender, class/economic status, sexual orientation, nationality, culture and ethnicity as well as other social factors and dominant or oppressive forms of identities will often mediate their construction of meaning. It has been argued that each viewer occupies multiple social positions and even though relatively each social position has its own explanatory power on the meaning the viewer creates, multiple social positions combined differently also exert significant effect on audiences’ reading practices (Kim 2004, pp. 91-92). In a sense, as Bobo notes, when a person goes to view a movie he/she does not leave his/her social, cultural, economic, racial, and sexual histories at the door (1994, p. 304). These social factors, how they serve as sources of meaning and how they influence meaning making are especially useful for this study in that they do not only allow us to understand the social and cultural positions or combination of determinants that shape Ghanaian male and female audiences’ individual perceptions of the representation of women in the selected films, but also help us to understand the determinant factors that manifest within and across the groups during the reading processes.

In addition to the cultural competency and social subject positions of the audience, Hall also suggests that the context and circumstances within which the moment of exposure and audience engagement with the text takes place also inform the way the audience makes meaning from a text (2006). These by implication are indications that the audience/text dialogue is a complex cultural activity and as such there is no one single meaning inscribed in a text and accordingly no one single interpretation or meaning. For Hall, meaning is polysemic in its nature and as such audiences attaching various meanings to a given representation are normal conditions in the viewing processes (Rojek 2009, pp. 52-60). Hall's understanding of a multiplicity of interpretations is useful in recognising the various interpretations that will be made within and across male and female groups studied here.

### **Typology of Constructed (Producer) and Reconstructed (Audience) Meanings**

In discussing the complicated nature of the communicative exchange between the encoder/decoder, Hall notes that the correspondence between the two is not given but constructed (2006, p. 171). He explains the paradigm, that is, the processes of the producer/encoder production and audience/decoder reproduction of culture through a hypothetical analysis. Drawing on Parkin's study, he identifies three hypothetical decoding positions within which audiences make meaning from media texts.

Firstly, according to Hall, there is a dominant-hegemonic position or preferred reading where the viewer accepts in straight and full the preferred meaning encoded or the ideological intentions of the text.<sup>93</sup> In this case decoding takes place within the overall world of the encoded signification. The transparency between the two moments, the encoding and decoding moments is what he calls the moment of hegemony where the audience is "hegemonised" – understands and accepts the legitimacy of the message being communicated without question (Hall 1994, p. 262).

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<sup>93</sup> The "preferred meaning" Hall argues is when the whole social order of dominance, power and control, practices, meanings, values, and beliefs are embedded in a media text.

It has been pointed out that preferred readings cannot be only inferred through hegemony (Rojek 2009, p. 57). This is because the encoded message in, for instance, a film text may not always articulate hegemonic perspectives (Dyer 1977). An audience member can also accept the values embedded in a film because his/her own prior values may resonate with the ones the text engages and as a result will decode the text through a preferred reading that concurs with what the producer (likely) intended (Morley 1999, p. 292). These perspectives on the way audiences can accept the content of films without question are particularly useful in the way we understand how Ghanaian male and female audiences can accept the messages in the selected films based on the fact that their inhabited values and social experiences align with the films' content.

The second reading code Hall identifies is a negotiated code or position where the audience fully understands what has been predominantly defined or signified. The audience in this situation questions or modifies particular segments of the text based on his/her own position and interest, and partly accepts the validity of the preferred meanings the film promotes. The third code Hall identifies is an oppositional code, which is when the audience understands the hegemonic order presented in a text, but, rather chooses to dismiss and oppose the message outright and entirely (Hall 2006; also see Bobo 1994; Rojek 2009). The oppositional reading may be offered by people of particular strata having developed beliefs and values that resist the dominant or preferred order inscribed in a film. According to Morley, oppositional readings are not regarded as “wrong”, but instead understood as a running critique of the preferred meaning (1992, p. 82). Hall (2006) and Morley's (1992) interpretations of negotiated and oppositional readings enhance our understanding when the male and female audiences question parts of the films, but accept the overall content or are at odds with them.

Hall's hypothetical model was not developed based on any empirical evidence, but subsequently several investigations conducted by Morley (1992), Bobo (1988) as well as Katz and Liebes (1990) found empirical evidence to support and modify the

model. Employing predominantly qualitative audience reception studies<sup>94</sup> and audience ethnography<sup>95</sup>, the model has been used to explore the socio-cultural framework within which communicative exchange takes place and how audiences may present polysemic readings of media texts. Citing the usefulness of the model, Jacqueline Bobo (1994) draws on Hall's paired concept and uses empirical data to offer a contextual analysis of how marginalised audiences can construct different readings based on their experiences and social positions. Her contention is that due to dominant encoded messages in mainstream films, a subculture or minority group such as people of colour, women, and people below the economic ladder, for example, are never adequately represented. As a result, audience members from such subcultures or minority groups may be prompted by their knowledge of the not so progressive images of their group in mainstream films or they may have views that differ from the dominant messages encoded in the text and therefore take oppositional standpoints as they make meaning from mainstream culture (Bobo 1994, p. 304).

Focusing on the audience oppositional stance, Bobo suggests that in addition to the position where the 'marginalised' audience rejects the text because of its ingrained hegemonic values, there can be a subversive or an alternative reading (1994). The subversive or alternative reading, according to Bobo, "comes from something in the work that strikes the viewer as amiss, [and] appears 'strange'" (1994, p. 304). As things appear strange to the audience, they may then bring to bear other points of view as they interpret the text and may arrive at perspectives other than what the filmmaker intended. Hence, the audience will read the text "against the grain" (Bobo 1994, p. 304). For example, in this way the audience may be interpellated by

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<sup>94</sup> Qualitative audience reception study is an audience research design and Alasuutari (1999, pp. 6-7) suggests it involves analysing a text and studying its reception through in-depth interview with its audience.

<sup>95</sup> Drotner (2000, p. 172) defines audience ethnography as an epistemological alternative to other forms of media research with a focus on a particular group of people where the researcher may observe and study how audiences engage with various forms of media in their everyday lives and how they appropriate them as materials and symbolic cultural resources. In doing audience ethnography, Drotner recommends the researcher studies the group for a long time to eschew his preconceptions to formulate new cultural patterns. However, Alasuutari notes that what is identified as "ethnographic study" mostly amounts to qualitative "in-depth" interviews of a group of people because when it comes to audiences' private media engagements there are restrictions for the possibility of long-term participant observation study (1999, p. 9).

important aspects of their lives, which are pervasive in the text and so move on to ferret out those aspects, dismissing the rest to negotiate their responses and construct alternative readings (Bobo 1994). This reading code, which is often seen as aberrant because it deviates from predictable interpretations, is useful to identify and make sense of subversive interpretations in the male and females' interpretations of women's representations in the Ghanaian women's films.

It is important to note at this point that while the encoding and decoding model has been used to study audiences' responses to mainstream culture often produced by men (Azeez 2010, 2013; Bobo 1994; Morley 1999), this study believes that the same typologies and interventions, which are discussed in the next section could be used in relation to audience's responses to culture produced by female filmmakers. This is because the focus on women's encoded texts could also be decoded in diverse ways by various audiences based on the social and cultural framework within which communication takes place. If films according to the model are outcomes of ideologies a filmmaker shares based on his/her intertextual cultural knowledge, his/her own background and store of experiences of the social and cultural milieu as well as interests among others, then texts (films) by minority groups such as Ghanaian women filmmakers could also promote ideological stances they believe in, viewpoints, interests, and experiences; especially if they write their own scripts and have control over the political economy of their productions.<sup>96</sup>

### **Reworking of the Encoding and Decoding Theory**

Despite the fact that the encoding and decoding model is used to determine the factors that influence audiences as they respond and construct meaning from media texts as well as understand the various interpretations they make from a text, there have been criticisms against it. As a result, modifications have been suggested to improve the ways in which it helps analysts to study audiences' reactions and

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<sup>96</sup> Kellner notes that the system of production often dictates what films will be produced, what limitations will manifest as to what stories will be told and how they will be told in the films, and what kind of audience interpretations and effects the films will generate (2009, p. 10).

interpretations of media texts (Corner 1999; Dyer 1977; Morley 1992; Wren-Lewis 1983). Morley has suggested that there is a recurrent difficulty in determining the concept of “preferred reading” especially when it is applied in the study of audiences’ perceptions of fictional or feature films (1992, p. 114). Wren-Lewis (1983, p. 186) suggests that the concept of preferred reading disregards “the level at which decoding operates” with fictional genres. The difficulty is that unlike factual programs, which overtly claim to make statements of facts about the world, a preferred reading in a fictional text is ambiguous particularly because as Morley indicates:

Is the preferred reading a property *of* the text *per se*? Or is it something that can be generated *from* the text (by a ‘skilled reading’?) via certain specifiable procedures? Or is the preferred reading that reading which the analyst is predicting that most of the members of the audience will produce from the text? In short, is the preferred reading a property of the text, the analyst or the audience? (Emphasis in the original) (1992, p. 114).

Whereas these questions demonstrate the complexity in deducing the (actual) preferred reading in fictional texts, it is more so difficult since it is understood that meaning as previously suggested is not determined solely from the text, but also with the reader depending on several factors. It is generated through the interaction of the codes inscribed in the text with the codes inhabited by the audience (Morley 1992, p. 110). The idea here as pointed out previously is that there is a range of potential meanings in a text, rather than a single fixed meaning (Morley 1992, p. 114). Because of the dynamics at play in certifying the preferred denotative meaning to which a preferred reading will correspond, Rojek has raised the importance of clarifying and defining the nature of the ‘preference’ in the audience research (2009, p. 57). Wren-Lewis’ solution is for the analyst to treat the various readings by the audience as “a series of ‘preferred readings’” (1983, p. 195). For him, this will enable the analyst to ascertain the scope of possible interpretations the text allows and the array of meanings audiences create (though limited by the assemblage of decoders). He contends that after that point textual analysis is necessary to identify the textual

aspects or forms that shape certain meanings at certain points in the text's narrative (Wren-Lewis 1983, p. 195).

Contrary to seeing all readings as preferred and later understanding aspects of the textual forms through textual analysis, Jordin and Brunt maintain that preferred reading(s) can be determined through textual analysis prior to the empirical investigation, after which the range of interpretations by the audience can be established in relation to the possible preferred reading identified in the textual analysis (1988, pp. 243-245). This study ascribes to this approach and uses the textual and thematic analyses of the films in Chapter Six as some of the possible preferred readings to determine the range of interpretations by the focus group participants. For the purposes of this study, the likely preferred readings established in the textual and thematic analyses of the films are seen to be *privileged readings* because they are based on my own interpretation in relation to the African feminist theory, postcolonial feminist theory, transnational film theory, my cultural knowledge of the Ghanaian experience as well as the information I gathered particularly from the filmmakers on their concerns and interests in the films. In this study, this implies that the audience's "preferred readings" are not only viewed as corresponding to the '*privileged reading*' in the textual and thematic analyses, but also both readings could be taken to be *likely readings*, which in a sense means that they concur.

Richard Dyer's (1977) modification of the encoding and decoding model is also useful in this study. With particular interest in fictional genres such as the selected Ghanaian women's feature films studied here, Dyer's alteration provides more possibilities to determine and understand the array of readings the participants in this study bring to the fore. Dyer contends that while readers of a text may be influenced by social positions, how they inhabit that is feel and think about living those situations is also important (1977, p. 19). Moreover, for Dyer, it is necessary to determine whether the viewers reject the text (dislike it, are bored by it, disagree with it) or accept it (enjoy it, agree with it, feel involved with it) (Dyer 1977, p. 20). Thus, determining the positive or negative responses to a text could indicate the viewers' pleasure or displeasure and how they view what they perceive to be the ideological message in the text. For Dyer, "whether the reading is negative or positive, the

preferred/negotiated/radical distinction holds” (1977, p. 20). In other words, six parameters of decoding could be determined with each of Hall’s broad decoding categories. Kellner suggests that the distinctions are able to show “whether the resistance, oppositional reading, or pleasure in a given [reading] experience is progressive or reactionary, emancipatory, or destructive” (2009, p. 17).

For this study, ascertaining how participants feel and think, and determining positive or negative responses within preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings from the focus group data will offer interesting insights into the interpretations the male and female participants bring to the representations of women and issues in the selected films. Thus, the different versions of responses will help ascertain the range of heterogeneous cultural expressions and interpretations the male and female participants bring to the films and also tell us about the relation between the participants and the films. Using pseudonyms, the profiles of members of each group are presented in Appendix C.

In the following sections, the findings from the male and female focus group discussions on the representation of women and women’s issues in each of the selected films are reported and discussed. The findings are in no way exhaustive or considered to be representative of the larger Ghanaian audiences who consume Ghanaian movies in general and in particular Ghanaian women’s movies. Even though several themes emerged from the data, for the purposes of this study the findings of two predominant themes obtained from each group’s discussion of each film are reported and analysed. In some instances, the emerging themes from male and female groups are alike whereas in others they are different. Because the themes are centred on individual characters, in some instances, under each theme the findings on relevant characters are discussed. It is worth mentioning that in order to show not only the similarities, but also the contrasting interpretations on the representations of female characters in the films, the findings are reported and discussed together.

## ***The Forbidden Fruit: Findings and Discussion***

To discuss Veronica Quarshie's *The Forbidden Fruit*, there were eight participants in the female group and eight in the male group. The ages of the women ranged between twenty one and forty and the men ranged from twenty to forty four years. Both groups were made up of students and workers such as administrators, lecturers, librarians, and teaching assistants. Whereas all the participants were Ghanaians and hailed from various Ghanaian ethnic groups, one male participant had both Ghanaian and Nigerian parentage. A few of the participants had travelled outside the country previously, but they all schooled and lived in Ghana for most of their lives. Two members of the female group and three members of the male group were married.

The data from both groups revealed several themes. One of the overarching themes that emerged from both groups was, "revenge and infidelity." Much as the groups viewed "revenge and infidelity" to be a significant theme, the readings in both groups were nuanced. For instance, whereas for the female group, the reading of "revenge and infidelity" revolved around – "revenge and infidelity are bad for a woman", for the male group, the emphasis was directed to "revenge and infidelity should not be blamed solely on the woman". The second predominant themes emerging from the female and male groups respectively were, "the significant roles mothers, wives and mothers-in-law play" and "submissive, not quite submissive and rebellious women". Generally, the perspectives from the groups differed, however, because of the similarities the findings and discussions are done together.

### **Revenge and Infidelity are Not Good for a Woman / Infidelity and Revenge Should Not be Blamed Solely on the Woman**

The sub-themes, "revenge and infidelity are not good for a woman" and "revenge and infidelity should not be blamed solely on the woman", focused on the character of Joan. The findings from various interpretations by the respective groups reveal a

range of commonalities and differences in the manner in which the female and male participants decoded the lead female character, Joan.

### **Joan**

The similarities are that both groups somewhat did not derive pleasure from the representation of Joan. Dyer suggests that when audiences do not gain pleasure from a film, it is a sign that they reject it – they dislike it or they disagree with it (1977, p. 20). The participants rejected the representation of Joan because of the way she behaved and approached her marital problems. The following views expressed by both female and male participants support this:

From my interpretation, maybe the filmmaker wants her audience to understand that women are not supposed to be treated like that in marriages. And that a woman in such a marriage has the power to fight back. But the way Joan went about fighting back didn't get my sympathy. Yes, she was fighting for her right, but it shouldn't have been the way she went about it. (Christie)

Allowing the supposed boyfriend [Ato] to go over to her husband's house to make love to her was dangerous and too daring. What kind of woman is she? (Eric)

By suggesting that they hardly made any connection with Joan and by questioning the kind of woman she is, participants from both groups drew on the values they inhabit and what Bobo (1988) describes as cultural competency, which includes their knowledge of the culture and values, to directly and indirectly register their dislike for the representation of Joan's character. As indicated in Chapters Six and Seven, in Quarshie's desire to educate society on correct social and moral values, she criticises and commends where necessary. But it is worth pointing out that in my interview with her, she also revealed that some of the plot incidents like Ato sleeping with Joan in her marital home are to incite excitement in viewers (2013, 19 March). It

is ironic that this scene incorporated to appeal to viewers is read as negative because for the participants, culturally, it characterises Joan as immoral. What this means is that while filmmakers incorporate scenes, which are supposed to appeal to viewers, if what is projected does not align with the values they inhabit those elements will elicit negative responses.

While the participants showed their dissatisfaction, they recognised and appreciated that the movie exposes gender inequality in terms of men exercising dominant power and control over women in society. Most of the respondents from both groups agreed that gender inequality exists (in marriages) and often women find themselves in disadvantaged positions. In the male group, the participants largely thought the men in the movie behaved as though they had the inherent right to be in control over women, but the female participants acknowledged that Joan received poor treatment in her marriage. The following quotations are illustrative:

We can see that the men there [referring to the movie] think that women should be submissive and accept whatever comes their way because they are superior and the women should be inferior as it were ... And that's what they want, to exert power over the women and that's what we see some of the women submit to. (Agyeman)

As I said from the beginning, women in especially our traditional marriages are not treated well and the men get away with it. The way Joan was treated was bad. (Dzidzor)

Interestingly, these readings bear out the filmmaker's view noted in Chapter Seven that "women are wronged everyday". Significantly, the readings show the participants' disappointment of men's dominance over women, and are indicative that perhaps they believe in the course of social justice and reject inequality among men and women, as African feminism advocates (Kolawole 2004).

Despite the similar decodings, the findings further indicate disparities in the way the respective groups responded to Joan's character. Most of the female respondents had high expectations that Joan conforms to society's defined role and identity of the typical Ghanaian/African woman who adheres to social values, submits to her husband's lead, and appropriates her struggle for equality and justice through acceptable social means. For them, they believed the fight against inequality or men's disloyalty does not justify committing adultery and using brutal revenge tactics as Joan does. They preferred she adopted an approach that rather made Joe's inconsiderate behaviour more pronounced. The following are a few of the issues they raised:

You see, I think Joan lost our sympathy because of the way she approached her problem because everyone will feel sorry for you if your husband treated you that way, but then the way she reacted is a worry. I don't know why she ended up making herself look bad. Let the punishment be on him. Even if you [Joan] want to fight, do something that will make him [Joe] look bad and not you. She gave too much. She had to sleep with someone and kill to get documents to hurt her husband, who at the end didn't even know what she had done. (Pam)

I think she was pushing the boundaries too much. A typical Ghanaian woman in kaba and slit<sup>97</sup> wouldn't have had the confidence to do that. From the beginning the way she was drinking and dressed with long chains and anklets, I knew she was up to no good and there was going to be commotion. And Pascaline Edwards, I don't know if that's what she does, but when you look at her role in *Ripples* it was the same.<sup>98</sup> (Gina)

I mean, how do you [Joan] go and sleep with a twenty four year old as a mother and a wife? He could be your younger brother? How do you do

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<sup>97</sup> Kaba and slit are traditional clothing worn by women.

<sup>98</sup> Pascaline Edwards is the actress that played the role of Joan in the movie and she also played Effe, the protagonist in Veronica Quarshie's *A Stab in the Dark* series. *Ripples* is the third instalment of the series.

that - your dignity? And then you don't kill someone. It's illegal no matter what. (Christie)

This degree of criticism against Joan stems from the participants' "intertextual cultural knowledge" (Bobo 1988, p. 103), their disposition, prejudice, and preference to side with and follow cultural and religious moral norms, which celebrate women who are loyal, submissive and virtuous. The findings suggest that the female participants thought that if Joan was virtuous she would take in her stride what Dogbe calls "the vicissitudes of married life" (2003, p. 107). Moreover, they believed that culturally it is inappropriate for a wife to engage in an extra marital affair (with a younger man), and unlawful to kill another person. In addition, much as they were aware that in Ghana "a woman has no direct rights to her husband's property" (Salm & Falola 2002, p. 132), and recognised that as unfortunate, they also felt Joan should not have challenged her husband through revenge, infidelity and murder.

This finding concurs with the filmmaker's concern that women have good reasons to fight against inequality and social injustice, but the way they express themselves in such situations and the approach they sometimes use defeat their efforts (see Chapter Seven). Also, the finding maps onto the privileged reading in the textual and thematic analysis, which is that Joan's behaviour does not conform to social expectations and supports the argument that the film situates her in a position for criticism (Chapter Seven). It further supports Garritano's suggestion that even though movie viewers in Ghana may identify with a character's struggles, they may reject the immoral behaviour that the same character engages in to overcome her struggles (2013a, p. 11).

As part of their "repertoire of discursive strategies" (Bobo 1988, p. 102), which include "prejudices" (Morley 1992, p. 80), and knowledge of what Ghanaian culture and society expects from women, the female participants expected Joan to be the average Ghanaian woman who is represented in the woman in 'kaba' and 'slit' and not a woman in long chains and anklets. This is because, culturally the connotations associated with a woman in long chains and anklets are negative. Meanwhile, as

Dogbe suggests, in Ghanaian society 'kaba' and 'slit' denote dignity, conservatism, and docility (2003, p. 108). It is in the absence of these perceived positive qualities that the female participants saw Joan's behaviour as a threat to acceptable "virtues of womanhood" (Dogbe 2003, p. 107).

In reference to patriarchy, the female participants reported that in traditional patriarchal societies such as some of the ones that still remain in Ghana, the man is allowed to marry more than one wife if he desires. Hence, Joe's decision to sleep around and father a child in the process is not offensive compared to Joan who becomes unfaithful and wicked.

If we are going by what is culturally accepted, the woman is supposed to be obedient, quiet and respectful. Our mothers have brought us up to understand that ... Honestly, from where I come from Joan will not go and do what she did because the culture doesn't permit that. She can't. Over there in our traditional society a man has total control. But one thing is that a married man will not commit adultery because he will legalise his relationship with the woman. (Nina)

Similar to previous quotations, this view, which a few more participants shared, emphasises that the interpretations by the female participants were shaped by internalised socio-ethnic values which they upheld. However, it also reveals that they did not criticise Joan only because she behaved immorally, but also because they saw male dominance as the norm, which must be accepted. This further appears to imply that they did not categorise male infidelity as an "aspect of socialisation that puts [women] at a disadvantage" (Kolawole 1997, p. 30).

It is worth pointing out that even though the majority of the female participants accepted male dominance as the norm, a couple of them thought two things influenced Joan's conduct. Firstly, they thought Joe's behaviour of infidelity and lack of remorse instigated Joan to exact revenge. Secondly, they felt that as a mother of a girl, Joan was at a disadvantage and needed to fight in the interest of her daughter

because social norms do not make it possible for female children to inherit from their fathers. The following are extracts from comments participants made:

I thought the underlying force that was driving her to do all that was insecurity because she had a [female] child with him and he had gone out to have another from outside who is a male child, and so what becomes of her? In a way the man was dubious, so then she [Joan] had to fight for her and what the child too can get out of the marriage. (Sarah)

He tried to get a divorce with plans to leave for her only one house even though he had several. (Akosua)

Rünger has suggested that in Ghana women and girls are unable to inherit property because of hierarchical structures of responsibilities and gender based roles that favour men and boys (2006, p. 8). The quotations above suggest that based on their cultural knowledge and disposition (Bobo 1988), the two respondents sympathised with Joan not because they endorsed the particular approach she employs in her struggle, but primarily because they felt Joe shows little concern and the social structures are discriminatory.

In the male group, while they generally failed to appreciate Joan's ambition for property, her vengeful tactics and misuse of sex and violence, the majority of them interpreted Joan's character in similar ways the two female participants (just cited above) did. They also felt Joan had limited options. Their decodings were influenced by the fact that they situated a chunk of their interpretations in the broader discourse on women's struggle for emancipation. Dyer's view that readers' ability to decode a text in a particular way depends on their knowledge of the codes and the way they inhabit them is relevant here (1977, p. 19). The male participants explained that when a woman is dominated or suppressed she resists, she finds the space to redefine and assert herself. Extracts from what they said are: "she used what she has to try and get what she wants ... That's all she had" (Eric), and "after long

suppression women want to assert their freedom. As they say, women have to move forward after post-Beijing ... We have conquered, so they are trying to make up” (Agyeman). Even though the male participants disapproved of Joan’s behaviour, these interpretations actually signify a degree of understanding and demonstrate that they recognised the existence of gender inequality and its impact on women’s lives.

Consequently, they criticised Ato for using his relationship with Joan as a means to get money and criticised Joe for being inconsiderate.

The revenge was too outrageous, but you realise that she was dealing with a guy [Ato], who also was aggressive for money. The film is making a statement that this generation likes quick money and will do anything for money. (Tetteh)

That whole thing with the man having an affair to me was a tool he tried to use to be able to divorce the woman. So if we were to put the whole blame somewhat on the woman, we wouldn’t have been completely fair. The man did something and the woman replied. Something happened. Se kukukuku no gyae, kekekeke nso be gyae<sup>99</sup> (Kwame).

Joe wanted his wife to leave the marriage on her own and he wanted evidence to paint her black, so that he wouldn’t have to pay much in alimony (Paul).

The various readings signal that the male participants strongly believed that Joe and Ato are equally guilty. While they framed their responses around aspects of social experiences to criticise Joe and Joan, they were also affected by the way they perceived issues on gender inequality in the Ghanaian society. The findings seem to suggest that they felt a sense of responsibility to denounce inequalities between men

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<sup>99</sup> The literal translation for the expression is, “if the action from the other end stops, the response from this end will also stop.”

and women based on their cultural knowledge and inhabited discourses (Morley 1992). It also probably suggests that because of the long social campaigns and criticism against men for discriminating against women, the male participants did not want to be seen as biased. Despite this speculation, because of their consistent criticism against Joe, it appears they actually inhabited those discourses and codes to arrive at those interpretations. Morley (1992, p. 80) has suggested that meaning can be constructed according to the discourses brought to bear on the text by readers.

On their interpretations of Joan's struggles, the male participants felt that society has done little to address the issue of men cheating on their wives. They felt the film also failed to address it.

Exactly, it looks like when men cheat it is okay, but as soon as a woman does the same thing it becomes an abomination. I think that is one of the issues that women are facing nowadays. I think society hasn't done much to deal with it because in the movie I believe the pastor was aware that the man had had a son from somewhere, but then he was in to advise the lady [Joan]. The pastor wasn't shown in the movie advising the man. They didn't show that so I think that is one important thing to point out that society has not done much (Nana).

While the male participants criticised society and the film for not addressing issues of gender inequality the way they would have liked, the female participants accused the filmmaker for projecting stereotypical images of women.

In this one [the movie] you could see the man is at fault, but the director was a bit biased because we are made to feel Joan is the bad one (Kate).

She [filmmaker] should have presented Joan in a different way rather than this aggressive and disrespectful person. If the film projected adultery as

wrong then that was strongly tackled, but if she was trying to empower women then she didn't come across to me. (Dzidzor)

... property, property, property, conforming to the general perception in our society that women are property and money conscious. (Gina)

The criticisms expressed in the last quotation are informed by the participant's intertextual cultural knowledge of popular representations of women and their love for money and property often perpetuated through popular culture and particularly many of the videos as pointed out in Chapters Four and Five. This intertextual knowledge of persistent stereotypical representations of women in popular culture concurs with several scholarly readings of women's representations in many of the videos (Garritano 2013a; Okome 2000; Sutherland-Addy 2000a; Ukata 2010).

Based on their dispositions and socialisation, the female participants felt they would not compromise and adopt the approach Joan employed if they found themselves in a similar situation. Hence, they distanced themselves from Joan's behaviour. A comment from one of the two participants who suggested that Joe's actions instigated Joan to exact revenge emphasises this: "I want to stress that I don't have any strong ties with what Joan and her friend did" (Sarah). The findings seem to suggest that the female participants held onto acceptable social values, which they inhabited and/or they did not want to be seen affirming what society condemns because as women they have been socialised to uphold virtue. Hence, despite being cultural readers, their own values, attitudes and morals were at stake. The interpretation given here is not to suggest that the female participants were more willing to comply with social expectations, even when those expectations limit women's freedom, but rather they shared in the view that social injustices must be challenged in a just manner.

Unlike the female group, who distanced themselves from the actions of Joan, and despite the majority view in the male focus group that both Joe and Joan should share in the blame for what happened in their marriage, most of the male

participants disclosed that they identified with the qualities they ascribed to Joe – ‘cunning’, ‘greedy’, ‘a womaniser’, and ‘a schemer’. Several of them explained that they could be greedy or cunning for different reasons, though one jokingly denied being a womaniser and said: “I control my front tyre. My sausage is more controlled” (Agyeman).

Based on the overall findings on the way the female and male participants interpreted Joan’s character, it can be argued that the readings by the female participants resonate with the privileged reading offered in Chapter Seven. Even though they criticised the filmmaker for perpetuating stereotypical images of women, their rejection of Joan’s behaviour concurs with the filmmaker’s intention of appropriating social morals (see Chapters Six and Seven). Thus, they fully understood and accepted the encoded message and shared in the filmmaker’s images of acceptable behaviour, particularly by women. The findings on their rejection of Joan’s character support earlier studies by Azeez (2010; 2013) and Okunna (1996), which discovered that female audiences in Nigeria rejected similar representations of women in Nollywood films.

With respect to the readings from the male group it can be argued that they read both within the grain and “against the grain of the film” (Bobo 1988, p. 96). Thus, their readings comprise “a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements” (Hall 2006, p. 172). While the adaptive and oppositional readings they presented are negative, they fall within the preferred reading and negotiated reading modes (Dyer 1977, p. 20). Their criticism against Joan is similar to what was presented in the privileged reading (see Chapter Seven), the film’s coded message, and also the readings presented largely by the female group. However, their criticism against particularly Joe can be seen to resist the “social order embedded” in the film (Hall 2006, p. 169). Thus, they did not share in the filmmaker’s images of appropriate behaviour by men. As argued in the analysis (Chapter Seven), “the film reinforces socio-cultural tolerance of male sexual mobility and presents it as the status quo that must be left untouched,” a representation the majority of the female participants seemed not to have questioned.

## **The Significant Roles of Mothers, Wives and Mothers-in-Law / Submissive, Not Quite Submissive and Rebellious Women**

With respect to the sub-themes, “the significant roles mothers, wives and mothers-in-law play” and “submissive, not quite submissive and rebellious women”, the findings suggest that both groups focused on the roles women play. The female participants believed *The Forbidden Fruit* portrays women in significant roles as mothers, wives and mothers-in-law. Meanwhile, the male respondents identified submissive, partially submissive and rebellious women as the various roles women play in the movie. The suggestion that there are several possible ways of reading a text is applicable here (Hall 2006). Even though both male and female groups focused on women’s roles, the readings were nuanced because of how each group saw and thought of the characters. It has been argued that social positions “distribute different forms of cultural decoding strategies” (Bobo 1988, p. 103). The findings reflect that in their readings, the male and female groups were influenced by their gender positions. While the female group significantly focused on the women’s roles in relation to children, husbands and daughters-in-law, the male group solely focused on women’s roles in relation to husbands and partners.

### **Ato’s Mother**

The data from the female group suggest that many of the participants interpreted Ato’s mother’s role as a wife and a mother to be significant not just because for them she epitomises a responsible mother, but because she adequately cares for her child’s welfare, and allows her husband to play his leadership role as a father. As women from similar social backgrounds, through their knowledge of common roles associated with women and through Ato’s mother’s role, they felt mothers are the first point of contact in addressing the problems of their children, and every virtuous woman accepts her husband as the head of the family. The following quotes are illustrative:

I could pick out that Ato’s mother is that kind of mother, caring and genuinely concerned about the welfare of her child. (Dzidzor)

Ato's mother acted like the typical mother. You know, she served the father [Ato's father and her husband] all his medicine and she told him to take his time when he [Ato] comes ... After the father finished with him [Ato], she came back on the veranda to speak to her son. But you realised that the father was overreacting and she didn't say anything. She just sat down only to come outside and talk to her son. (Pam)

Okay Ato's mother was caring and should I say she over pampered Ato or something like that. I like the way she spoke to him and told him he was doing something bad. Some parents wouldn't have called him, "come home for a chat". (Kate)

The findings suggest that while they discussed Ato's mother's roles as wife and mother, they found the way she submits to her husband, the manner in which she assumes her responsibilities – serves her husband, respects his leadership, and cares for her son, as progressive and ideal. Considering Kellner's (2009, p. 17) suggestion to identify the specific pleasure audiences derive in a given reading, the interpretations reveal that the female participants experienced cheery pleasure as they endorsed Ato's mother's actions.

While the female participants felt the qualities found in Ato's mother are virtuous, based on the same virtues, the male participants felt the representation is typical of women of an older generation who uphold social values by serving and submitting to their husbands, qualities they rather perceive to be missing in contemporary Ghanaian women. They felt society has evolved and wives no longer serve their husbands in that way:

When you look at Ato's parents especially the mother, that image created there is like somebody who is using the old system approach where the women are there for their husbands and they listen to them. They confer with the husbands. When there is any problem they talk to the husbands

and if the husbands are the short circuited kind of people like the one in the film, they will always be there to calm things down. She even went to the extent of getting him his drugs, served him water and all that, which is in sharp contrast to the situation these days. (Tetteh)

What is interesting to note here is that while the female participants seemed to appreciate the qualities Ato's mother has imbibed, the male group seemed to suggest that women in society, which the female participants are part of do not exhibit those qualities. In other words they no longer serve diligently as Ato's mother does. While this could have several connotations, the respective responses throw light on the reason the female participants condemned Joan's perceived aberrant behaviour and the male participants saw her behaviour as a product of the times. For the female group the findings do not only reveal what they accepted as virtues, but also the reason they did not identify Joan as virtuous.

### **Joan**

The findings suggest the female participants felt Joan does not fulfil her roles as a mother and a wife. They shared in the view that she "didn't play any role as a wife and a mother. She was just there scheming" (Gina). For the male participants, they predominantly described her as rebellious and unorthodox. They agreed she represents the new independent woman who is not submissive. These findings suggest that while the male participants thought the way Joe treated Joan accounted for her unconventional behaviour, they also recognised that the evolution of gender relations, cultural values and socio-cultural trends taking place in society have significant impact on people including Joan:

I know certainly that the woman [Joan] was not rebellious, but a loving person because if not the man [Joe] wouldn't have married her, so this shows a woman scorned (Nii).

What I want to emphasise is that the Ghanaian society is changing, so perceptions that we have concerning gender shouldn't be missed. If we

see people trying to move from their traditional roles as men and women, we shouldn't be surprised because society is changing and people are becoming aware of themselves. (Phil)

The interpretations that Joan is a woman scorned, rebellious and unconventional, suggest that the male participants are less critical of Joan's character basically because of the extent to which they understand her situation, and also that when changes take place old values are disrupted.

### **Ivy**

Contrary to the admirable virtues the female participants identified with Ato's mother and her role as a wife, they criticised Ivy, Ato's girlfriend because she declared herself as an aspiring wife and started settling in the role, even though she had not received any marriage proposal.

And then if you take Ato's girlfriend, he [Ato] had not even married her, but she [Ivy] was cooking and carrying it in a basket to him and she gave herself the name, "an aspiring wife". That means that was her focus and the guy didn't even like her doing that. I didn't get her why she was forcing to be married. (Pam)

Talk about Ato's girlfriend. I don't know why women want to become someone's wife as soon as they become girlfriends. Because with this in mind she started cooking for him and started making demands to sleep over. I don't know, but I didn't like it. (Sarah)

The findings indicate that while the female group were unhappy with Ato's girlfriend Ivy for the fact that she aspired to be wife and diligently worked toward an opportunity to get married, the male participants rather admired her character and wished Ato had married her.

Ato's fiancé has that vociferous nature of the new woman. Because Ato was not treating her well, she was vocal. She called on the phone and threatened him, yet she brought him food something that used to happen in the past. Women used to cook and put it in a basket and carry all the way to their husbands' or boyfriends' place. (Kwame)

We didn't have the opportunity to see their relationship blossom, but she [Ivy] was a loving person because if Ato had stayed home with her as she was insisting he wouldn't have gone ahead to be killed. I would have loved to see Ato apologise to her and marry her. They would have been happy, but he dies off and you realise that that issue is left hanging. (Eric)

The way the whole thing ended you can see the writer wanted to solve the issue in a way to tell us that if you have somebody who is readily available you might as well consider that person and get married to save yourself from any prying eyes. (Phil)

The male participants seemed to have accepted Ivy's character because for them she embodied both old and new virtues where they saw her to be dutiful and at the same time active, independent and outspoken – traits that liberal African feminism would consider as progressive because traditionally as Arndt suggests, “women [had] many duties but few rights” (2002, p. 29). There was a general consensus that she embodies both qualities of what they saw as a traditional woman who accepts her domestic role and contemporary woman who seemed to express her independence by being vocal and by fighting for what she wants. They admired her for exhibiting what they saw as marriageable qualities. Even though their expectations were subverted because Ato did not marry her, they decoded Ivy's character in the preferred code because in my interview with the filmmaker, Ivy's role is to teach young men “to cut their coats according to their sizes” and to learn not to “ignore women's intuitions” because they are naturally gifted (2013, 17 January).

It is worth pointing out that much as the male participants seem to have accepted particularly Ivy's character for possessing both traditional and modern virtues, a few also wondered why as a young contemporary woman, the female filmmaker (Veronica Quarshie) instilled in her what they described as outdated values.

It is a bit strange because you know most of the up and coming women are nowadays complaining that we have relegated the African woman to the kitchen and therefore you will expect that a person like Veronica Quarshie would want to go against that but here you are she is portraying what took place in the past where the woman cooked from somewhere and carried it to the man in another place. I find that a bit outdated though that is our Ghanaian culture, the proper Ghanaian culture. (Tetteh)

The criticism against the filmmaker is as a result of the fact that the participants were not aware of Quarshie's interest to uphold what she sees as correct social values (see Chapter One). The criticism notwithstanding, the findings so far suggest that the male respondents readily accepted the evolution of women's role and identity in the contemporary society. For the female group, the data suggests that they maintained that a woman adheres to standard cultural practice where she remains in her parents' house until she is properly married before she moves into her husband's house. One may wonder why there are such opposing readings between the male and female groups. It could be a matter of male and female preference or the way men and women are socialised.

### **Joe's Mother**

With regard to Joe's mother, the findings suggest that while the male group did not discuss her primarily because their interests and focus in relation to the theme were framed in the context of women's relationships with their husbands/partners, the female group duly discussed her role as a mother and a mother-in-law. They interpreted her character in both preferred and negotiated ways (Hall 2006). It is evident that they were disappointed and at the same time delighted with her representation. They were displeased with the fact that she disliked Joan and did not

attempt to help her. This notwithstanding, they were contented that she rebuked Joe for fathering a child outside wedlock.

I was happy about the fact that she [Joe's mother] expressed her discontent with her son's indiscretion. With mothers when your children do something wrong, you tell them, "it's wrong, don't do it". Joe's mother told him, "it's wrong", but that was it. (Sarah)

She saw the woman [Joan] to be too much interested in the property so she wasn't bothered so much. Her attitude was like she wasn't happy with his wife [Joan], so she was in support to get rid of her. (Gina)

Despite reading the same character in preferred and negotiated modes, participants further thought Joe's mother represented the newly evolved mother-in-law who does not physically abuse her daughter-in-law as it is commonly known. Thus, through intertextual cultural knowledge, they were pleased that she did not indulge in the usual direct chastisement and abuse often extended to the daughter-in-law as seen in many West African video films (Agbese 2010).

With Joe's mother, I don't know if that's how all mothers-in-law are. I am not married, but most mothers-in-law are painted black and they always don't like their daughters-in-law. I'm thinking they always seem like that because of the relationship they have with their sons. Some mothers-in-laws wouldn't have taken the issue so lightly like the way she [Joe's mother] did. She takes it that it had already happened. With her you can see things are changing. Gone are the days when mothers-in-law were so wicked and so harsh. Right now mothers-in-law are sweet. I mean some, most. (Kate)

The reading is preferred and it maps directly onto the analysis (privileged reading) of motherhood in *The Forbidden Fruit* presented in Chapter Seven (see page 197).

There, it is argued that the character of Joe's mother subverts the common portrayal of mothers-in-law as wicked and troublesome, which Agbese (2010) found in several Nollywood films.

Overall, much as the male participants were disappointed that Ivy and Ato did not get married and surprised by the filmmaker's representation of traditional values in a young contemporary woman, they largely responded positively to the representations. They produced preferred readings that correspond to the privileged reading presented in the thematic and textual analysis and align with "the reference code in which [the film] has been coded" (Hall 2006, p. 171)). Dyer argues that positive reading of a film in the preferred mode, is a sign of endorsement of the encoded message (1977, p. 21). The findings suggest that even though the male participants questioned the filmmaker's representations of the two characters, they did not criticise or reject the characters per se. Moreover, their interpretation of Joan's character was less critical compared to the interpretations offered by the female participants. The findings suggest that the female participants offered preferred and negotiated readings. Apart from the fact that they disliked and criticised women who did not conform to social roles and values (Joan and Ivy), they accepted the images of the dutiful wife, the genuinely concerned mothers and the new mother-in-law.

### ***The Perfect Picture: Findings and Discussion***

For Shirley Frimpong-Manso's *The Perfect Picture*, there were seven female and seven male focus group participants. The women were all in their twenties (from twenty to twenty nine) and the men were from twenty three to forty six years of age. Both groups were made up of students and workers such as administrators and national service persons. They were all Ghanaians and lived most of their lives in the country, even though the youngest female participant had lived in the US for some time.

Similar themes could be traced from both the male and female focus groups that discussed the movie. The predominant themes emerging from both groups include the understanding that the film normalises women's independence as they negotiate their identities. As the discussion will show, sub-themes also emerged within this theme. The second overriding theme that emerged from both groups concerned women's sexual desires and challenges. While the male and female groups in different instances interpreted the themes in varying ways, because the dominant themes cut across the groups, the findings from both groups are discussed side by side. Again, because sub-themes emerge within the theme of normalising women's independence, and women's sexual desires focus on individual characters, they will be discussed as such.

### **Normalising Women's Independence as They Negotiate Other Identities**

The findings demonstrate that whereas the same theme emerged from the two groups and there were samples of similar readings, there were also subtle different interpretations within and across the male and female groups. As far as the theme of "normalising women's independence as they negotiate other identities" is concerned, the participants from both groups expressed meaning within the frameworks of preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings (Hall 2006).

When the male and female participants produced preferred readings, they understood that *The Perfect Picture* projects and promotes elite Ghanaian women who are educated, high class and economically self-sufficient. The findings suggest they appeared gratified by the movie's representation of independent women and suggested it is inspirational (Kellner 2009). As suggested in Chapter Six, the filmmaker in her interest to tell progressive African stories uses her films to celebrate and encourage women's independence and growth (see page 148).

While the findings from the female group suggest that all the participants recognised that the female characters express their independence in unique ways, the male group thought that the absence of female characters depending on men is positive

because the men do not place unnecessary pressure on them and the women are not made vulnerable. The following quotes illustrate this:

I think the women are independent, which is quite refreshing and different. They are educated – at least graduates. I think in all it [the movie] promotes higher education for women. They are their own persons, rich and also beautiful. When we look at Akaysie, we could see that she is a career woman, who is a corporate executive and she lives without the support of any man ... Dede worked as a secretary in the hotel. We know Aseye worked as a banker before she quit her work for marriage, and even in the marriage it is not like she is dominated. You see, she is the masculine female and her husband is the feminine male ... I am going to come to that later. Frank's wife owned the hotel Frank worked in, but when she realised he cheated, she did not point a toy gun at him, but she had her own ideas of how to deal with him ... When you compare this with our very local movies, the women are not as assertive as these ones. So I see this as this is how we should be and not like this is how we are. (Anita)

For me, the kind of representation she [the filmmaker] gave is that the women are high class independent women. I think in dealing with their independence, they [the women] do not depend on men for them to become vulnerable. So I think that especially is good because then the men are also free. They [the women] are empowered. They are put at the forefront and they do something for themselves this time round. (Carl)

For both male and female participants to suggest that the movie's representation of independent female characters is refreshing and positive demonstrates that they enjoyed it (Dyer 1977). As far as they understood, the movie's overall representation of contemporary independent Ghanaian women normalises images of female independence on the screen because such projections have been rare in Ghanaian films. Moreover, the findings suggest that the female respondents framed female

independence in terms of what women can do for themselves while the male participants shaped their understanding in terms of female autonomy, but most of all what it means for men and their release from providing for women.

From the interpretations, one can argue that the participants decoded the female representations within the preferred mode proposed in the film. It fits within the privileged reading and the filmmaker's framework of using the film to redefine day-to-day conceptions of Ghanaian womanhood and allowing her characters to aspire and inspire (see page 148). Since the respondents appreciated the film's encoded message, it is not surprising that they were inspired by the characters and the experiences projected in the film. Consequently, it can be argued that in their readings of aspirational independent women the male and female participants derived cheery pleasure (Kellner 2009, p. 17).

### **Independent Women and Social Values**

With regard to how self-sufficiency impacts on the lives of the individual female characters, the male and female respondents differed in their interpretations and that was true of how they felt and saw the self-sufficient positions the women occupy (Dyer 1977). On Aseye, the findings from the female participants suggested that independence did not change women from their social roles such as doing house chores because Aseye as a married woman maintained her independent identity and still engaged in cooking for her husband contrary to the general assumption that successful independent and highly educated women are arrogant, busy and unwilling to serve their husbands (also see Kwansah-Aidoo & Osei Owusu 2012). This is despite the fact that one participant revealed that when she gets married she will not over burden her busy schedule with cooking for her husband.<sup>100</sup>

Mrs Stevens, Aseye at a point became housewife and she was still cooking for her husband, but then in recent times the professional women

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<sup>100</sup> Even though the reader's attitude reflects an action she will take in the future, it appears to validate what the male participants read in *The Forbidden Fruit* when they said that contemporary Ghanaian women do not serve their husband as the older generation of women do.

in-the-making like me have this perception that if the man comes home first before me he should fix something for himself. He shouldn't wait for me. (Aba)

Meanwhile, the participants from the male group failed to recognise that Aseye cooked for her husband because they felt the sausages she cooked did not require cooking skills. Generally, they believed because Aseye, Akaysie, and Dede were self-reliant they did not display the values embodied in the average woman who knew how to take care of her home and a man. They felt the female characters often bought already prepared food, which they considered unfortunate and culturally inappropriate. Moreover, Akaysie's independence was thought to have gotten in the way of her relationship with her mother. They felt the way she related to her mother was flawed and disrespectful because of her independence. It is clear the male respondents expected more from the female characters. They somewhat expected the women to conform more to the social order and cultural values and norms:

I think there were hitches there in the sense that there was too much female independence. You realised that they portrayed too much independence at the detriment of our values. That is learning home chores, how to cook and take care of a man and that kind of things were not too much there. That food she [Aseye] cooked sausages is not cooking. How much did she put in? If you take a critical look at it too it wasn't covered. All of them were always buying take-away. That lady [Akaysie] her mother was always bringing her food. And then even at a point the independence affected the relationship between the lady [Akaysie] and her mother. In a typical Ghanaian society, you can't have a situation whereby she can talk to her mother in that manner irrespective of independence. I mean who born dog? Here you can't do it. (Kofi)

Dyer's (1977, p. 19) view that how cultural readers inhabit and feel about social situations is relevant here because it can be seen that this male reader upholds what can be called prescribed social values and order. The reading on the

mother/daughter relationship counters the interpretation offered in the privileged reading, where it is argued that the relationship between Akaysie and her mother allows them to freely express themselves (see pages 194-195). It is worth noting that other respondents in the male group rather described the relationship as atypical. Meanwhile, in the female group, participants identified with the conventional and unconventional mother/daughter relationships described by the male reader.

### **Independent Women and Relationships with Men**

In relation to how the independent female characters negotiate their identities, the female participants felt that despite their independence all the female characters pursued relationships with men. Thus, they all wanted to be loved and have companions. Furthermore, based on observations, personal experience and desires, some participants also shared the view that from the film's resolution, modern independent African women may want men, but they can also live and succeed without them.

From what you are saying, we can make the inference that the women were independent, but deep inside they still wanted relationships with men. All the three [main] characters were modern and liberated and all, but the bottom line was that they all wanted to be loved. (Linda)

I mean let's be serious. No matter one's education, the honest truth to me is that everybody wants a relationship. Honestly, in terms of the saying that we don't need a man is just a saying that we say to make ourselves happy and you could see from them [the female characters]. (Ama)

It is nice and all that looking for a man to call your own, but it is not the ultimate. I think many Ghanaian women have this notion that they need men to actually make it. I think we need men, but we should know that without them we can also make it. The modern African woman can make something for herself without depending on a man. ... I agree with you that they were all financially sound and Dede adopted a kid. I feel it is love

they wanted just like the men, but not because they were women so they needed to be strapped to a man. Yes, that's what I think. (Aba)

These readings resonate with Frimpong-Manso's interest. She has said that, "progressive does not mean leave what you love and move to something else ..." (interview 2013, 23 March). This seems to suggest that for her if women want relationships with men their independence should not be an obstacle. Despite the women's desire to be in relationships with men, it is also true as the privileged reading and Garritano's (2013a, p. 181) analysis suggest that the film subverts gender conventions when the women find personal fulfilment without men.

### **Independent Women and Motherhood**

The majority of the female participants noted that in spite of the women's independent status in the film they were all interested in becoming mothers – a societal value some participants felt cannot change with the Ghanaian woman.

The thing is that at the end Aseye was pregnant, Dede has adopted a kid and throughout the film Akaysie's mother was pushing her to have a child. In the end when she got married at least she was expecting to have a child. It goes to show that, that cannot change. I mean the fact is that an African woman whether modern, independent or traditional wants to be a mother so the theme of motherhood is strong. (Fafali)

While this finding can be explained with Frimpong-Manso's view on women fulfilling themselves with what they love, it reiterates the significance of motherhood in African societies as explained by Steady (1981) and Oyewùmí (2003).

Even though the men did not discuss women wanting male companions, wanting to be loved or wanting to become mothers, there was a suggestion that representations of women seeking attention for love and wanting to become mothers are over represented in Ghanaian movies. In view of this intertextual cultural knowledge

(Bobo 1988), some participants shared in the view that “we are too parochial in the stories we tell about Ghanaian women. Enough of the love and motherhood subjects they are frequently seen looking for or suffering for. There are other things we can do” (Jerry). Here, it is interesting that while Frimpong-Manso aims to show Africa, its people and issues “totally from a different angle” (interview 2013, 23 March), the male readers did not concentrate on *how* she deals with the issue of motherhood. The analysis of the film presented in the privileged reading, for instance, suggests that *The Perfect Picture* deals with the notion that women should have options like adoption to curtail the pressures that come with society’s expectations on obligatory motherhood.

### **Representations of Independent Women are Foreign**

Again, with regard to independent women negotiating their identities, participants in both male and female groups spent a significant amount of time running criticisms and questioning whether the women portrayed in the movie are representative of typical Ghanaian/African women. The readings were very much rendered in the negotiated mode as indicated by Hall where participants fairly understood the encoded message, but reserved “the right to make a more negotiated application to ‘local conditions’” (2006, p. 172). The responses from the groups were significantly similar because of shared awareness of the Ghanaian cultural worldview and knowledge of different cultural practices. The findings revealed that there are aspects of the movie and representations that participants saw as implausible and aspects that they saw as foreign.

The representations of middle and upper class independent women were read as not representative of the average Ghanaian woman. The male participants felt that women receiving university education is in ascendancy, however, they saw the highly educated female characters as westernised Ghanaian women.

You see, I think the movie is somewhat idealistic. You can’t say it is a true reflection of typical Ghanaian women. I even have to put it this way that they are an emerging class in this particular country because so many

women are now getting university education. The women leading that life are still in the minority because we don't see them often, but they are there. They're kind of educated urban women who are trying to put themselves in a picture that is mostly found in the Western countries. (Safo)

I would watch *Perfect Picture* for fun, but then the first question I asked myself was this is about the upper class of society. It's only a small section. It deals with women up there – middle class, upper class. What about the others? It doesn't really project the normal African women. (Maggie)

Significantly, it could be argued that these interpretations stem from the fact that the representations do not reflect the realities the participants know, despite the fact that they are studying and working at a university. The findings suggest they do not have insight into the experiences and life styles presented in the film. Hence, they are not “experientially proximate” (Adejunmobi 2010, p. 111) to the experiences presented. The participants' interpretations could also be attributed to the fact that women in society have been marginalised for so long and that independent Ghanaian women have not been projected in many Ghanaian films. The interpretations can further be explained through Aidoo's idea that independent educated professional women are considered “the exception rather than the rule” (1998, p. 45). These findings throw light on some of the reasons why critics, as Garritano suggests, criticise Frimpong-Manso's films as recreations of Hollywood (2013a, p. 175).

Another aspect of the movie they considered un-Ghanaian was the choice of words used by some of the characters. For instance, they considered words such as ‘fuck’, ‘shit’, ‘motherfucker’ and ‘bitch’ as vulgar and not used by self-respecting Ghanaian women or men for that matter. Furthermore, they felt the way the women dressed was un-Ghanaian because they were not in the typical traditional kaba and slit. This implies that the participants questioned the new trends of fashion Frimpong-Manso's productions have helped enhanced (see page 144). In addition, they thought

Akaysie's mother is atypical of the ordinary Ghanaian woman because of some of the things she says in her conversation with Akaysie.

I do admit those women are in the minority. They are the westernised Ghanaian women. I mean what they are projecting looks more westernised in the way they speak, the language, the costume and everything. Kaba and slit is Ghanaian. The conservative Ghanaian women wear kaba and slit. (Paa White)

There were so many instances when they used certain words and I was quite surprised – bitch, shit, fuck, motherfucker. It was uncalled for. What kind of women are they? Are they not from Ghana? Even in the contemporary life style we don't use that kind of vulgar words. It's not acceptable. (Carl)

Look at Akaysie's mother, she is so chic. She talks about Tom Cruise. I know there are mothers like that but how many are they? The everyday women like the market women were just extras. There were no characters built for her. (Fafali)

Another aspect members from both groups criticised as foreign was the absence of the representation of the extended family in relation to Aseye's character. They criticised the lack of reference to family and the fact that Aseye and Larry, for instance, do not consult "any family member" during the marriage crisis.

In Africa we have strong family ties. The ideal situation in Africa, we would have gone to pastor even before doctor. But it never happened. She just went to doctor and straight she went out of the house. After the pastor family members will come and they will do the advice thing before maybe extremely she will leave, but it was just too soon. (Anita)

There were no parents when Larry and the wife [Aseye] had their issue. We didn't see any family member when they were having a problem. They just consulted the doctor. That is a westernised idea. You can't just go to the doctor and then that is it because here we have our traditions and they say, "If you have problems you come home and sort it out". (Emmanuel)

These interpretations are informed by the participants' knowledge of Ghanaian cultural practice. Culturally, as Salm and Falola suggest, marriages in Ghana extend kinship ties and establish alliances between families and communities (2002, p. 130). Hence, family members cannot be ignored totally during family crises or celebrations. Despite those criticisms, some members in the female group pointed out that in modern urban Ghanaian societies the extended family does not feature as much as they do in the traditional and rural communities.

In Africa that's how it will go, but then in the modern world that's how it's going to be. She wouldn't go and tell her family head that my man cannot get it up and these are people who maybe are not so into church, so she going to the doctor I think makes perfect sense. (Afua)

Much as there were polysemic readings (Hall 2006) in the female group on the absence of the family, all the females agreed that they will not share information on their husbands' impotence with their mothers nor sisters.

Aspects of the movie they considered implausible concerned the fairy tale love between Akaysie and Fela where suddenly it was revealed the air-conditioned repairer is also a professional lawyer. Both groups saw the confrontation between Dede and Frank where the former pulled a gun on the latter as unlikely in Ghana because they believed most Ghanaian women do not own those kinds of guns. They also felt it was improbable because the Ghanaian man will not remain passive and endure the woman's threats without reacting, as Frank does in the film. On this point, through observations participants from both groups felt the representation suggested that men are weak:

... pointing the gun at the man [Frank] was funny. Which man will just stand there and do nothing? And even it is not something our women do here, not even men. Even the rich people here, how many of them own that type of gun? (Emmanuel)

Generally, since questions were raised and the majority of participants negotiated their readings, the findings suggest that there were mixed feelings within the groups. That notwithstanding, one participant from the female group read the representations of independent women as progressive because even though such women are in the minority, they exist. Based on their familiarity with other women's images in the media, some members of the male group felt the representations are positive because many images of society and women presented in films are not progressive.

For me, there is nothing wrong with her trying to portray us in a good sense. You have to come to the realisation that it exists. I have people like that in my family. Whether it might seem small, it exists and it's nice to finally see somebody who is trying to portray it. The African woman can be on her own. A woman is doing this. A woman is doing that. I think we should embrace it and understand that it is happening. It's not bad. (Anita)

If we can get our own people depicting our traditional settings in a lackadaisical way and this one is representing our modern way of life then why don't we rather go with that? I think we should accept it because it is there. These women are there. (Jerry)

In view of these interpretations, some participants in the male group suggested that the film's representation of independent women is an encouragement for young people to pursue higher achievement, though they thought the movie does not offer viewers the real processes of becoming independent. Similarly, there were suggestions in the female group that the film's independent female characters inspire

female viewers to aspire to higher education and self-sufficiency. What follows are extracts from what they said:

I have been thinking but this has just given me more encouragement. We should be fair in appreciating Shirley's movies because they encourage young people that if they work hard they can get certain things. But they gave the solution and they didn't give us the prescription. (Safo)

In a sense, the fact that she portrays the middle class and the upper class to me makes me feel like I can also get there. She portrays it so beautifully that I feel like this is what I want to get because when you see the way they dress, and the make-up they use, you get to see the sense of eloquence and they have this air about them. It makes it seem like this is an attractive way. (Aba)

Overall, despite the mixed interpretations within and across the male and female groups, it is apparent that interpretations from both groups were shaped by various factors, including participants' knowledge of Ghanaian culture and society, their personal convictions and experiences, observations, media culture, and social affiliations among others. Bobo has argued that understandings of media texts are shaped by an individual's history, experiences, media and culture, and by the individual's social affiliations such as class, race and gender and so on (1988, p. 103). In spite of queries participants raised against the representations of independent women, they recognised that *The Perfect Picture* normalises Ghanaian women's independence on the local film screen, and saw the images as progressive and inspirational. The general reading can be seen to be positive because they "endorse[d] the reformist platform of the ... message" Dyer (1977, p. 21).

### **Women's Sexual Desires and Challenges**

"Women's sexual desires and challenges" is another predominant theme derived from both the male and female groups that watched and discussed *The Perfect Picture*. With regard to this theme, the male and female participants were inclined to

produce preferred and negotiated readings (Hall 2006). To them the movie depicts sexually liberated women who are challenged in diverse ways as they assert themselves to realise their sexual pleasure. One of the challenges they suggested is society's suppression of female sexual expression:

The film was trying to tell us that women like sex. We want it, but the Ghanaian society kind of makes us behave differently. It always seems the men are the ones who like it and we try to satisfy them. (Anita)

The interesting thing is that we should give women a bit of a credit. They can go to a huge extent to get love and the something. I mean sex. (Carl)

These readings concur with the privileged reading offered in the thematic and textual analysis particularly on the character of Aseye (see page 182), and support McFadden's (2003) argument on the muting of "feminist sexual memory and instinct" as women are valued only for reproduction. By recognising that like men, women also have sexual desires, the male and female participants' responses can be said to have aligned with the preferred readings. This is because Frimpong-Manso recognises that "sex is part of our [women's] lives" (interview 2013, 23 March). Even though, the participants recognised this fact and also accepted the idea of female sexual liberation as a progressive sign, they made negotiated readings when they disliked some aspects of the representation of female sexual expression.

### **Aseye**

On the representation of Aseye's sexual expression and challenges, there were mixed interpretations on the reason she and Larry were unable to have sex. Both groups speculated on different factors that could have caused Aseye and her husband's inability to have sex. The differences notwithstanding, the findings suggest both groups directly blamed the couple for the problem. While in the female group Larry was criticised, Aseye received more criticism for not doing enough. In the male group, Aseye was criticised but Larry was largely blamed. This pattern of reading appears similar to audiences' reading in *The Forbidden Fruit* where the

women blamed the female character and the men decided to go to her rescue. A couple of the female participants thought that even though Aseye desired to have sex with her husband from the beginning of the movie, she was somewhat inexperienced and therefore did not do enough to get her husband aroused. The majority of the participants in the male group felt Larry was not innovative.

For a woman who really wanted to see whether her husband is a potent African man, she [Aseye] couldn't even give him a blowjob. How hard did she try? I know some people find it hard to listen to some of these things, but we are just being real. We don't know what Dede did to get the man [Larry] aroused, but maybe she [Aseye] learned after going to live with Dede that's why she could get him on after they [Aseye and Larry] got together again. At first she just went into the marriage thinking it was all going to be easy and she was prudish. (Falali)

There was no creativity on the part of the man [Larry]. I mean should a doctor tell you to be creative in bed? In lovemaking, you should have ideas. You shouldn't use the same old pattern all the time. (Carl)

Morley has pointed out that arriving at a 'meaning' in a text "depends upon the interpretative code which the audience brings to the decoding situation" (2003, p. 104). It would appear on one level, the criticisms are influenced by the participants' insights into sexual techniques. On another level, one could argue that the participants identified with their respective gender group (male and female) and therefore felt they have been let down by the characters.

Despite the criticisms, in the female group, the majority of participants voiced in their submissions that the movie attempted to encourage the Ghanaian woman to relearn how to express herself sexually with her husband because often a lot of women feel unease when it comes to expressing themselves sexually.

For me I think it is true as you said that they [the filmmakers] are trying to say something to the Ghanaian woman because sometimes we don't explore because why it is that Dede was able to do something to the man and she [Aseye] couldn't do anything? (Ama)

This reading supports the privileged reading because as has been noted in Chapter Seven, in the movie Aseye is characterised as a woman, who is situated on a new level of awareness (Kolawole 2004, 253). In concurrence with the privileged interpretation, some female and male participants also pointed out that Aseye was portrayed to be the one, who made all the efforts to solve the sexual problem, which necessarily signifies her as sexually liberated while Larry showed less interest in getting the problem solved.

Even though there is the popular belief among Ghanaians that women sit back while men try to do all the work when it comes to sex in marriages, ironically Aseye is the one who takes the lead to finding a cure. So she [the filmmaker] makes her [Aseye] strong in that sense. (Maggie)

Larry wasn't bothered about it because men have this ego. Let me say he was trying to protect his ego. (Afua)

He [Larry] was unconcerned. He disgraced us. (Benny)

The findings here show that while the female participants were delighted that the representation defused the popular notion that women are reserved when it comes to sex, the male participants were disappointed that Larry's character did not live up to their expectations. It can be argued that the social positions of the male and female participants in terms of their gender shaped the pleasure they derived in the reading.

## **Dede**

In relation to Dede, some participants in the female group indicated their dislike for the fact that Dede slept with Aseye's husband even though they were pleased with her sexual liberation. Others admired what they saw as "positive human qualities" in her and not the promiscuous practice she engaged in. Extracts from some of the responses were: "I didn't like the idea that Dede agreed to seduce her friend's [Aseye] husband" (Ama), and "What I love about her is her loyalty to her friend. Even though her friend brought the most freakish whatever plan, she just went along with it because of how loyal she is to her" (Linda). Participants who admired Dede focused on her devotion and sense of friendship to help Aseye, overlooking the fact that she had sex with Larry. It is worth pointing out that all the female participants indicated that they would not do what Aseye and Dede did. Thus, if they found themselves in similar situations, they would neither invite their friends to sleep with their husbands nor agree to sleep with a friend's husband. These responses stem from the participants' social and moral disposition, where they see the act of sleeping with a friend's husband or inviting a friend to sleep with one's husband as wrong and a recipe for disaster. The reactions match the encoded message because as noted in the privileged reading, the filmmaker is circumspect when Dede ends her relationship with married men (see page 181). The reactions can also be seen to run counter to the earlier suggestion that Frimpong-Manso's films inspire female patrons. The findings here appear to suggest that while some aspects of the representations are inspirational, others are not.

Unlike the female participants who disliked aspects of the representation of Dede's sexual expression, but admired her loyalty, most of the male participants' readings focused on the sexual and sensual qualities she possessed in her dealings with men:

Dede is the hot type and her appearance alone excites men. Her language is quite seductive, body and everything. Actually, she is bootylicious and so I wasn't surprised that she was the one consulted by Aseye to seduce the husband. If you look at her experience she could be described as a husband snatcher and has all the looks of somebody who

knows what she is about in terms of sex and how to engage a man to enjoy a fulfilling sexual exchange. So she knows what turns a man on. She knows what makes her thick with a man. And in all she displayed it – her relationship with Frank and her response to Frank's gestures were quite leading unlike Aseye, who had to postpone sex before marriage. Dede is the one who says you must taste the fruit before actually you marry him, and she argued that in the film. (Carl)

One has to wonder why the male and female participants read Dede's sexual expression differently. Did the male participants focus on her sexual appeal because as Dede suggests in the film, men like women who are sexually expressive and appealing? Did the female participants criticise her promiscuity based on moral grounds or is it because as Osakue & Martin-Hibler (1998, p. 193) mentions, women are socialised to be reserved, modest and discrete in their sexual behaviour? The answers to these questions perhaps will require further investigation.

### **Akaysie**

Primarily, the female and male focus groups saw Akaysie as sexually liberated almost like Dede because she also had sex with both Taylor and Fela, but identified her inability to have a fulfilling stable sexual relationship to be related to issues of class division and male dominance.

Akaysie was quite choosy in her preference. To begin with she had sexual experience and she knew what she wanted. She didn't like what she had in the past and was looking for a particular person that will fulfil her sexual desires that made her delay in choosing someone. What she was looking for was readily available in the air-con guy [Fela], who was below her, and what she had was not what she wanted. If you look at the dialogue between herself and her Mum where she said the type of men that were available were either rich and married or single and broke, you could see that what was available let me say didn't suit her criteria – must be

available and not poor, rich and not married or at least somebody who is available and suits her stature. (Safo)

Similar to the above reading, the female group also thought Akaysie faced challenges with the two men because of who they were. The majority of them felt, “Taylor was rich but too arrogant” and Fela was at first the “poor air-conditioner guy” but “caring”. Most of the women in discussing the challenges Akaysie faced rather focused on their personal preference between the two men, thus drawing from an assumed experiential interest. They talked about why they would have chosen a relationship with either of the men. Those who preferred a partner below their status like Fela thought class should not prevent them from pursuing love and also they thought a man with a low economic background can have his circumstance changed if he works hard:

With me, love and having a sexual relationship knows no class. I don’t have to belong to the same social class to be able to have that kind of relationship with a man. (Maggie)

I will go for debidebi ebeyeyie.<sup>101</sup> Look at Osei Kwame Despite.<sup>102</sup> I mean he started as a cassette seller, but now look at where he is. No condition is permanent. (Linda)

Through these expressions, one gets the sense that while some participants were focused on the ‘romantic’ aspect of the relationship; others were more interested in popular inspirational stories about real life people who braved the odds.

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<sup>101</sup> “Debidebi ebeyeyie” is an Akan saying which means, “it will be well in the future”. In the context in which it is used, it refers to a woman who is ready to begin life with a man who is not rich but the whole idea is that with the help of the woman he will be rich in the future. In the Ghanaian society and in popular culture women are rather believed to prefer men who are well established and rich.

<sup>102</sup> Osei Kwame Despite is a well-known Ghanaian entrepreneur who began as a cassette seller but through hard work he is presently the CEO of Despite Group of Companies which includes three commercial radio stations in Accra, a digital television station, and food companies.

The female participants who preferred a partner above their status like Taylor were concerned with having economic security in their relationships: “I will marry a man at the same level with me or above. I prefer to have security. I prefer to know that tomorrow we will be okay” (Anita), and “personally, I like a guy like Taylor, who is rich. I don’t like a guy who is too feminine or soft. I like it when he is hard but not too hard. Taylor was too extreme” (Afua). These readings were based on individual preferences. Despite the divided preferences, by personalising Akaysie’s experiences and accepting her sexual expression, the female participants responded positively to the film’s message (Dyer 1977). The interpretations tie in with the privileged reading because as mentioned, like her friends her sexual liberation is an integral part of her wellbeing (see pages 182-184). Despite the different responses within the female group, from the manner in which they decoded Akaysie’s sexual challenges, one gets the sense that the female participants found the issue relevant to their own experiences just as Dyer (1977) suggests.

Generally, much as there were similar as well as varying responses from the male and female participants who discussed *The Perfect Picture*, a common view was that the filmmaker redefines female sexual expression as a right women must claim. The interpretation tallies with radical African feminist suggestion that women’s personhood and integrity lies at the core of their sexual rights (Horn 2006; Machera 2004; McFadden 2003, 2001; Tamale 2011a). The male and female groups appear to have been pleased with the representation of female sexual liberation, even though like the filmmaker the female participants were circumspect, particularly, in the way the liberation is appropriated.

### ***Ties that Bind: Findings and Discussion***

The focus groups for Leila Djansi’s *Ties that Bind* consisted of seven female participants and seven male participants. The women ranged in age from twenty to fifty six years while the men ranged from twenty to fifty four years. While the female group was made up of students, lecturers/researchers, the male group included students, lecturers/researchers, and national service persons. A few participants had

travelled, lived and schooled outside though they all come from Ghana and have lived largely in the country for most of their lives.

The overarching themes emerging from both focus group discussions on *Ties that Bind* are: 'Challenges women face through motherhood and childlessness', and 'The importance of women supporting each other'. Much as Djansi's film, as I have previously indicated, is transnational in terms of its production context (Hjort 2010), it clearly displays an ethnic consciousness by way of tackling issues relevant to Ghanaian women in the homeland as Naficy has revealed of diasporic films (2001). Accordingly, the male and female participants' general responses show that they perceived the film to be dealing with issues and female representations as they pertain to the Ghanaian environment.

### **Challenges Women Face through Motherhood and Childlessness**

Across both groups, participants acknowledged that women who are able to have children and those who are unable to bear children face distinct challenges; challenges which are externally imposed and others which are self-imposed. Even though there were few negotiated readings, the findings suggest that they largely produced preferred (Hall 2006), and positive readings (Dyer 1977), which align with the filmmaker's concerns. As already noted, she has said her interest is to expose the challenges her mother went through as a result of childlessness in early marriage (see page 187). By recognising the challenges associated with motherhood, the interpretations also concur with the privileged decoding of the theme of motherhood in *Ties that Bind* as discussed in Chapter Seven (see pages 187-194).

Per their interpretations, the Ghanaian woman is expected to have children to prove her worth, and whenever she is unable to bear her own child(ren) society treats her differently. This decoding suggests the idea that childlessness and motherhood could be sources of oppression and liberation for African women (Nnaemeka 1997; Nfah-Abbenyi 1997). The findings suggest that much as the female and male groups read that the movie exposes the difficulties women face, each group paid attention to different aspects of the film and identified various factors that lead women to suffer

pain related to childlessness and motherhood. In the following sub-sections, the various factors they identified are presented as sub-themes.

### **Motherhood and Social Expectations**

The findings suggest that the male and female groups identified the value society attaches to children to be one of the factors that put women under pressure. The male participants understood the movie portrayed the idea that “women are vulnerable when they don’t have children, and when they have too, there are problems” (Sly). Furthermore, they emphasised that social and cultural expectations put pressure particularly on childless women in the Ghanaian society. On their part, the female participants felt that through Adobea’s character and what is known of the society, a woman who is unable to have children or sustain the lives of her children is considered worthless and stigmatised because like the land she is expected to be fruitful.

It showed that society puts so much pressure on us and that we also put pressure on ourselves to have children. But one area of the movie that I really liked was when Adobea tried to relate the fertility of the land to the fertility of her womb. I did a course in Gender Studies last semester and we actually read an article that in the African setting the fertility of women is compared to that of the land. So if the land is not fertile then it is seen as not very useful and that is what women mostly in Africa are portrayed to be. You are just seen as a child producing machine, so it’s like as women we should be able to bring forth children. That’s what we see and the movie was just trying to depict that. (Agyeiwa)

For this female participant, despite her appreciation that the film presents a topic she had learned in a course in respect of the relation between women’s fertility and the fertility of the land, the findings suggest she understood that the comparison between women and the land does not only put pressure on women, but also emphasises why like the land, women are obliged to bear children and sustain their lives.

Morley suggests that particular discourses inhabited by readers position them to produce specific readings (1999, p. 266). In relation to the decodings, because the interpretations are situated within the male and female participants' understanding of what pertains in the Ghanaian society, it can be said that they inhabited a discourse (Morley 2003) directed by observation, knowledge of socio-cultural belief and practices. In other words, the manner in which they related to the issue is inflected by their awareness of the social context.

### **Motherhood and Personal Desires**

In relation to the social obligation that women bear children, the female and male participants also acknowledged that even though women are socialised to have children, women personally also desire to have children. Based on this understanding, both groups felt Buki's fears emerge not only as a consequence of social obligation but also personal desires. To emphasise this point, the female participants who were yet to get married revealed they are also conditioned in similar ways, thus, they desire to have children of their own after getting married in the future:

I saw Buki in that situation. She was insecure with all her book knowledge because of fears of how her [to be] husband's family will treat her if she could not have children. So even as educated as we are, we still see it that way that we must get married and have children. Education doesn't seem to erase in us that need of society's expectation that we get married and have children. (Akua)

Let me chip in this. Most women within our society know that if you don't have children it is a problem because of the labelling and all that and so there is an inner desire to bear children. (Bob)

These interpretations and personalisation are indicative of the standardised need for women to bear children. Essentially, from the quotations, one gets the impression that women desire to have children in order to avoid stigmatisation, and to avoid

threats from families. Both groups further suggested that the emotional pressure women experience is sometimes connected to women's desire to fulfil social expectations and to attain social prestige associated with motherhood. These interpretations map onto the analysis offered in Chapter Seven (see pages 187-192) on the difficulties women face with regard to motherhood presented in the film, but it is important to point out that intertextual cultural knowledge (Bobo 1988), including participants' own personal desires correlate with the interpretations.

### **Motherhood, Health Concerns and Health Facilities**

The participants from the male group focused on lack of health facilities and child mortality as other constraints that are shown in the movie to compound women's problems and force them to become childless:

A typical problem is child mortality, which is even a national issue. The women lived in a place where there is no clinic. They were using the church as a place where they will go and give birth and there is no trained midwife or medical staff. I know as a pregnant woman you should go for pre and post-natal care and that sort of stuff, but you saw the woman [Adobea] take in herbs when she was pregnant and she was sick too. You see, they were superstitious and so the fetish could put something under her for the child to live. Under these conditions why won't she lose her child? There was no doctor to advise them. The children she lost I believe could have been saved if they were seeing a doctor. (Peter).

With respect to the female group, they focused on motherhood pain. It is interesting to mention that while the privileged reading in Chapter Seven analysed motherhood pain in relation to Maa Dede and the pain she goes through after her daughter is raped (see page 193), the female participants focused on Theresa and the pain she suffers after she abandoned her daughter.

With Theresa it is not only the fact that her daughter is sick and does not know her, but also what she is going through, the sleepless nights and the hallucinations. Those ones are also problems. (Helena)

In both male and female groups what stood out as motherhood pain concerned postpartum depression and its effects on women. The findings suggest that some members in the female group thought postpartum depression and childhood trauma made Theresa abandon her daughter to avoid harming her in the US. Also, they felt these health-related issues did not make her instinctively maternal. One participant strongly identified with Theresa's character and suggested that there are women in Ghanaian societies who go through similar situations and there are women who are not instinctively maternal. The following quotation is illustrative:

Obviously, there are different perspectives that are being presented in the film on motherhood. This is because I think the African American [Theresa], for example, is a mother but has run away from that motherhood role and from her child. So she has voluntarily chosen to be childless, but then she explains that it is because of her background and her postnatal depression. So it's almost like having a child is not really the answer and not necessarily the end of everything because here is a woman who is not instinctively maternal; ... sometimes personally I am not instinctively maternal. I mean I have children and I love them, no doubt about that, but I am not one of those women who want children around me all the time. I want space. When I say this, my children get worried, but there were times that I would lock my door and they don't come in. I mean that also should be acceptable. We are all not the same. (Adjoa)

In this decoding, personal lived experience inflects the interpretation in a way that does not only place it within the preferred mode of reading since it maps onto the privileged reading (see page 189), but also highlights that postpartum depression

and lack of maternal instinct are real experiences of some Ghanaian mothers, making it an issue that transcends national boundaries.

The findings from the male group reveal that participants focused on the fact that there is little education on the subject of postpartum depression in Ghana. Considering the male participants' understanding of postpartum depression (examples are anxiety, feeling of resentment etc.), and the way women are easily stigmatised and punished depending on various situations, they felt because of lack of education a woman who suffers postpartum depression might easily be seen as abnormal or branded a witch.

I think to some extent women down here experience postpartum depression. We have not given much attention to it. A woman may be going through so much stress where she may want to kill her child, but if you don't understand it, it will be very easy to call her a witch. When someone sees a woman attempting to kill her child with a pillow [like it is shown in the movie] he will say he caught her red handed. Meanwhile, it is depression. If they put her out there they will stone her to death. So I can say the film reveals a lot of things that affect women that we don't know.  
(Peter)

It is interesting mentioning that even though the interpretations by male and female participants on postpartum depression and the challenges it poses for women are shaped through different tangents – experiential and observational – a pattern of “consistency and similarity of perspectives” (Morley 1999, p. 270), can be identified. In both readings, one gets the sense that the interest of the participants is that society transforms in the way it treats particularly mothers – a concern which is at the heart of the filmmaker's interest (see Chapters Six and Seven).

### **Motherhood, Woman-to-Woman Abuse and Gender Complementarity**

The participants in both groups agreed that the representation of mothers-in-law who put pressure on their daughters-in-law to have children mirrors the realities of

society. Focusing on Adobea's plight as a mother, who had lost seven children and suffered from lung cancer, the findings suggest the majority of members from both groups felt the attack from the mother-in-law worsened Adobea's condition. This decoding indicates that the participants did not approve of mothers-in-law abusing their daughters-in-law, however, they were pleased that the film made attempts to criticise it through gender complementarity.

But I think she [the filmmaker] was criticising it because in the end the man stood up against his mother. If she had let the man keep quiet then we would have thought she is saying this is okay. But she certainly wasn't saying it was okay for the mother-in-law to come in. (Adjoa)

For him [Adobea's husband] to have gone against his mother to defend his wife was an act of him being just and reasonable in the sense that in her [Adobea] condition she didn't merit such a treatment. (Kojo)

So I think this movie thoroughly dealt with that issue, which is quite positive. (Bob)

Much as the overall response towards the attack was one of resentment, the reading is "positive" (Dyer 1977, p. 20) and "emancipatory" because the resistance is "directed at forces of oppression" (Kellner 2009, p. 17). Furthermore, the interpretation by both groups is decoded in the preferred mode since the participants agree with the filmmaker's appropriation of social injustice against women. It also supports the privileged reading. In Chapter Seven, it has been argued that the film criticises the abuse of motherhood privileges that work to the detriment of other women and subverts the so-called status quo by reinventing male roles that challenge the structures that oppress women (see pages 190-191).

Overall, both the male and female groups per their interpretations showed that the female characters in *Ties that Bind* and by extension women in Ghanaian societies confront various challenges associated with childlessness and motherhood. The

findings suggest the film articulates and represents issues that participants are not just familiar with, but positions them to “readily accept the framework of meanings” (Morley 1999, p. 270) encoded in the film.

### **The Importance of Women Supporting each Other**

The second recurring theme from both male and female focus groups concerned the importance of women supporting each other. With this theme, the decodings by participants from both groups were similar. The male participants produced interpretations similar to the female participants in that they recognised that the female characters in the movie share a significant bond where they voluntarily support one another:

There was this sense of support for each other and every woman was very hard working where even at the church when the woman was giving birth, another woman volunteered to help not because she was a nurse, but because she had had four children and thought she was experienced enough to give support. When Buki went to the village at first the neighbour [Maa Dede] went to help her to clean up her place. Adobea also went to help ... You know Buki cared for Adobea and even the American woman [Theresa] went to the hospital to support Buki and Adobea ... At the village she [Theresa] also advised Buki and they helped the neighbour when her daughter was raped ... Buki and the American lady [Theresa] risked their lives when they followed the neighbour [Maa Dede] to where her husband was being lynched and Adobea did the most important thing. She called the police. (Terry)

Yes, there is the issue of sisterhood and you see that image right clearly when the three friends came together and they were lying side-by-side and they started singing, “This Little Light of Mine”, and they saw the light of the ghost ... Throughout they worked together sort of and it was almost like a relay. Theresa was in a vulnerable state and she was comforted by

the detective and then Buki went to help Adobea and then she herself was in need and Theresa came to help her. So it's like they all helped each other. (Adjoa)

Dyer's (1977, p. 21) idea that positive reading of films in the preferred mode means readers endorse and accept the message can be applied here. The participants accepted the representation, hence, they responded positively to the fact that the female characters show concern about each other's welfare. Much as the interpretations expressed by the groups are decoded through the interpretative framework inscribed in the film and approved, the reading is evidence that participants derived cheery pleasure in the reading (Kellner 2009).

Most of the participants from both groups positively recognised that all the female characters had their individual challenges, but their difficulties did not stop them from helping each other. Consequently, they felt the women made significant sacrifices. Moreover, they believed the female characters learned from each other's experiences to make them better people. Thus, the understanding was that the characters drew strength from one another to overcome their individual challenges. The quotations that follow are illustrative:

They were altruistic and selfless in the sense that when you look at Theresa and Buki nothing mandated them to go to the village and help. They just went there on their own and did something to help. Adobea became strong through Buki. She told Buki to have faith and Theresa told her [Buki] my favourite line in the film that "it's okay not to be in control all the time." So Buki learned from Theresa and then Theresa and Buki learned to be strong from Maa Dede and Adobea. At the end of the day they learned how to master courage, which is something you can't buy. (Gabriel)

I saw the portrayal of women being multitasking. You see, no matter the problems Adobea or Theresa or Buki was going through they each got out and carried themselves strong to encourage one another. I wasn't really putting Maa Dede in that whole picture, but she was the catalyst because it was her situation that forced all of them together to have courage. In a nutshell the film was trying to show that even though as women we see ourselves to be weak, we are very strong when we assist others and allow our lives to become exemplary for them as well. So it preaches hope for us. (Agyeiwa)

As a result of the fact that the male and female participants appreciated the benefit the women derived when they supported each other, it is not surprising that they criticised Adobea's mother-in-law for failing to support Adobea, and condemned the women at the village's public tap area, who chastised Maa Dede for failing to announce that her husband had raped their daughter. Based on their inhabited discourses (Morley 1999), and the value they place on woman-to-woman bonding, the participants encouraged both men and women to support one another – a call they thought must be promoted:

I must say it is encouraging that the video criticised the antagonism among women. When the lady [Maa Dede] went to fetch water at the borehole there was a little scuffle with the women there and Adobea's mother-in-law antagonised her. (Bob)

I think what I want to say is that as women we should try and understand each other. If you take a look at Adobea's mother-in-law, she was a woman and she knew the kind of pain Adobea was going through after losing seven children, but she still went ahead and treated her badly. If she was in her shoes how would she have felt? Let's take Maa Dede at the water pump. The women who accused her, which one of them would have gone out to publicly declare that their HIV sickling husband had raped their daughter? None of them would do that so I think as women we

should understand each other. I was watching a film the other day and it was talking about the fact that women understand each other better. We think all men are the same, but some of them are supportive. Even Adobea's husband, who wouldn't open his mouth at a point sacked his mother and supported his wife, so women should support each other. (Akua)

What is interesting here is the way the reading from the female group is framed; it is as if the decoding is interpreted in an experiential framework. The reading is inflected through the participants' gender identity.

Generally, the findings from the Ghanaian male and female focus groups that discussed Leila Djansi's *Ties that Bind*, suggest that the participants drew on different experiences and knowledge to make meaning and largely decoded the representations of women and women's issues as progressive. While both groups held similar attitudes in terms of their satisfaction that the movie promoted support among women, the female participants were delighted that despite all the difficult situations the women went through they were able to succeed. The female characters were seen as heroines and the female participants identified with their heroic qualities:

They were still able to stand and forge their way through. It [the movie] just depicts us as super heroes. Someway somehow we can deal with it no matter how hard it is. It can be losing seven children, it can be not seeing my daughter for 12 years, it can be me knowing that I love the man and I'm still saying I am staying away from him because I am not too sure. Whatever it is we know that in the end, we are just going to stand strong and come out of it one way or the other. (Helena)

This reading suggests that the movie is more or less inspirational for the female participants who drew energy and encouragement from the female characters. Overall, both male and female participants decoded the representations in the

preferred framework encoded in the movie since they fit within the filmmaker's intention to educate and address human rights issues. The participants seemed to identify with and accept the movie's message to recognise that women face challenges as they relate to childlessness and motherhood and that it is important that women support each other as advocated by African feminist thought (Nffah-Abbenyi 1997).

## Summary

This chapter has examined how a selected group of Ghanaian male and female focus group participants interpreted representations of women and women's issues in the three selected films by the Ghanaian female filmmakers. Using Hall's (2006) framework of encoding and decoding theory and its modifications, the findings and discussions presented here reveal that the male and female participants were influenced by various repertoires of codes they inhabited such as intertextual cultural knowledge, personal experiences and dispositions, gender discourses, preferences, social positions, up-bringing, observations, and prejudices as they decoded the images of women depicted in the movies.

The findings suggest that while there were marked differences in the way male and female participants interpreted the representations of women and women's issues, there were also instances where similar interpretations were made. The male participants that watched *The Forbidden Fruit* showed their interest in discourses on gender inequality and read the text in the preferred and negotiated modes. They reacted negatively to both the protagonist and her husband because for them both characters behave inhumanely. Meanwhile, the female participants largely read in the preferred mode and rejected the female protagonist, who did not conform to prescribed social, cultural and religious norms. The preferred readings concurred with the privileged reading because in the analysis the protagonist was criticised for her aberrant behaviour and the argument made was that the film's encoded message reinforced social morality. While the male participants took a liking to female characters that embody traditional as well as modern values, the female

participants were displeased because they saw the representations to be stereotypical.

It is clear through the findings that male and female participants received the representations of women in *The Perfect Picture* with mixed feeling, despite the fact that they were gratified by them because they were not stereotypical. Even though participants from male and female groups felt aspects of the representations were westernised, they saw them as inspirational. Through preferred readings, male and female participants for *Ties that Bind* were pleased that the film condemned female suppression and were encouraged by the representation of female support. Having said that, while the men were educated through the film's depiction of women's life experiences, the women were encouraged by the strength the female characters displayed.

Overall, the various interpretations demonstrate that both male and female participants were not just influenced in various ways as they actively made sense of female representations in the films, but also they were affected in different ways by the images.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter (Eight) was devoted to examining the data, presenting the findings and a discussion on how a selected group of Ghanaian male and female focus group participants interpreted representations of women and women's issues in the three selected films by the Ghanaian female filmmakers. This chapter revisits the research questions raised in Chapter One by way of providing answers to them. The chapter also discusses the implications of the study for theory – postcolonial feminist theory, African feminist theory, transnational film theory and encoding and decoding theory. It also deals with implications for the Critical Media/Cultural Studies approach, and for policy and practice. Some of the major lessons learned from the study are also listed. It further presents the limitations of the study and suggests possible areas for further research. The chapter ends with a short summary of the entire study and provides a brief conclusion.

#### **Research Questions and Answers**

**Question 1:** In what ways have the biographical backgrounds, interests, production and distribution (political economy) practices of the three selected Ghanaian women film directors, influenced their films and filmmaking?

This study began with the premise that female filmmakers come from various backgrounds, work under different conditions and are preoccupied with different concerns. The study has revealed that the three Ghanaian female film directors

entered filmmaking as women, who had interest in the craft and as women who discovered their interest by chance. It was further discovered that they deal with similar themes, however, their distinct interests, their personal and family experiences, their individual sensibilities and dispositions, the forces of production and the political economic conditions under which they work shape the content they create. For instance, even when they consider their films to be artistic expressions, they are geared toward commercialisation because of their individual political economic conditions and also the dictates of the commercial film industry in which they practice.

### **Veronica Quarshie**

For Veronica Quarshie, the study revealed that her interest in drama and theatre, her determination to study creative arts, and her aim to make a contribution to social change influenced her career choice in filmmaking. As a pioneer Ghanaian female director, her goal has been to use her films as social commentaries. It is clear that her up-bringing and socialisation, as well as her intention to instil her viewers with social moral values have had great influence on her work and the way she projects women. In dealing with social issues, she criticises and/or affirms social values that she personally believes and has interest in. To achieve this she focuses on everyday topical matters in society. In particular, her films revolve around quotidian human relational and emotional conflicts and widely-known social and domestic issues on medical misfits, cultural practices that suppress women, corruption, parenting, infidelity/sexual exploitation, betrayal and revenge, forced marriage, female friendship and solidarity, family conflicts, and marriage and property rights among others.

The study found that the social critique approach she favours in her films and her objective “to see that society moves forward, [that] society is educated with the correct values”<sup>103</sup> means that she commends and condemns where necessary.

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<sup>103</sup> Quarshie mentioned this in an interview I had with her in March 2013. The quotation is part of the quotation used in Chapter One.

Consequently, she prioritises didacticism, even though some of her films avoid sending direct instructional or prescriptive messages.

Quarshie's aim to educate society on social moral values also influences the ways she portrays gender relations and issues. Women are often at the centre of her narratives. However, she provides a balanced representation of gender where she often pays attention to attitudes of both men and women to highlight how one's actions can affect the other person, and how such actions can affect either social development or retrogression. It is worth pointing out that while Quarshie's films display a sensibility toward social morality, because of the cultural belief in male dominance entrenched in Ghanaian social lives, her films sometimes overlook the dominant social positions of men. This is evident, for instance, in her film *The Forbidden Fruit* where the film reinforces socio-cultural tolerance of male sexual mobility (see page 185).

This notwithstanding, in view of her desire to educate society, the study also found that her films largely resist gender stereotypes. This finding affirms Garritano's assertion that Quarshie has used her films to challenge "gender stereotypes common in Ghanaian movies" (2013a, p. 18). The study further discovered that Quarshie's films directly and/or indirectly orient toward liberal African feminist perspectives where women are socialised to seek liberation/power "not in the absolute" but in relative terms of power-sharing (Nnaemeka 1998, p. 11). She has said that the way she was brought up and issues that happen around her influence her films (interview 2013, 17 January). Quarshie's belief in representations that align with liberal African feminist perspectives is informed by the fact that African cultures and societies largely live and believe in collective consciousness and a "harmonious social organisation" (Sofola 1998, p. 53; also see Nnaemeka 2005). In view of these lived experiences, Quarshie through films appears to advocate for the need for women to adopt "humanist approach[es]" (Steady 2011, p. 241) to enable them to effectively achieve progressive results as they fight gender inequality and oppression in society. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that Quarshie has challenged stereotypical images of women and her messages align with African feminist views, she does not self-identify as a feminist.

Examining the forces of production, the study discovered that Quarshie has worked mainly with male producers, and it is her long working relationship with the producer Moro Yaro that appears to have significantly contributed to the sustenance of her filmmaking career. It is not clear whether Quarshie's background as a trained film director informed the control she exercises over her productions because in some instances she exercises total control when working with independent producers, and in some others she has limited control. What is clear though is that her training and expertise as well as her collaboration with her professional co-writer, editor, production consultant and husband, Samuel Nai, allow her control over her stories and sustain production values. Garritano has argued that Quarshie's films released in the late 1990s and early 2000s maintained higher "production values than most features released" at the time (2013a, p. 117).

In terms of political economic influences, Quarshie has mainly worked within the commercial video film industry and with producers who are also businessmen, and this warrants that she makes her films in a way to ensure box office success. To captivate the audience's imagination, she and her husband write and make 'crowd-pleasing films'. They consciously leave most of their narratives without neat closures. This presents their audiences with the platform to make comments and discuss possible plot outcomes and resolutions. With the focus on examining social issues, the director/writer and her writer/husband incorporate audiences' comments and suggestions into their stories and screenplays. Consequently, depending on what audiences want to see, she sometimes compromises on the content of her films to satisfy commercial appeal, thereby guaranteeing socio-political and economic success. Ensuring that what they create is what audiences want to see has led to the serialisation of some of her films such as *A Stab in the Dark* and its serials, *A Call at Midnight* and its serials and *Shadows from the Past I* and 2. Serialisation as argued by Adejunmobi also leads to more profit making (2003, p. 284). In a sense, this implies that whether she works under producers who interfere or producers who allow her total control, similar to other video filmmakers commercial appeal informs the way she constructs her content and visualises women and social issues.

## **Shirley Frimpong-Manso**

For Shirley Frimpong-Manso, the study found that her assertiveness at a young age and her interest in secondary school drama and entertainment activities led her to realise her potential in acting and overseeing behind the scenes activities. These shaped her interest to become an event organiser and a film director. Understanding that one's economic power is a factor in how a filmmaker exercises control over her films, Frimpong-Manso's entrepreneurial skills, which she acquired early in her career, have influenced the politics and economics of her filmmaking practices in several ways. Her entrepreneurial skills have not only allowed her to set up her own independent production company, which enables her to exercise maximum control over her productions, but also have facilitated her access to corporate support for her films. Receiving corporate backing is not to suggest that funding has been a given, but as a consequence, her films incorporate product and service placements to reward her sponsors.

The study revealed that sponsors do not determine the messages in Frimpong-Manso's films. However, it found that she sometimes makes adjustments to incorporate product and service placements in her narratives, which sometimes take away or add to her creativity. Given the corporate support Frimpong-Manso receives, the study has argued that it has enabled her to maintain high production values and helped to glamourise her movies. For example, her characters use Kasapa telecom services in *The Perfect Picture* (2009) and *A Sting in a Tale* (2009); they drive KIA cars in *6 Hours to Christmas* (2010); and they are seen airborne in a Virgin Atlantic First Class deck in *Adams Apples Chapter 9* (2012).

Furthermore, Frimpong-Manso's personal and professional relationships influence her end product. In addition to her expertise as a writer/producer/director/editor, her use of advanced technology, and her close engagements with her partner and professional visual effect artist and creative director Ken Attoh, adds to the professional and glamourised image of her films. Her working engagements with other professionals including musicians, make-up artists and fashion designers add similar effects. Considering that Frimpong-Manso operates within the Ghanaian

commercial video industry, I have suggested that the high-end films she produces are designed to appeal to audiences and ensure box office success.

Still on the subject of political economic influences, Frimpong-Manso's filmmaking practices have also been shaped by the Opera Square oligopoly. Since the film distribution market in Ghana is shared by a small group of distributors, who often sabotage the distribution of films by filmmakers outside the group, Frimpong-Manso employs a transnational cast to enhance international appeal. She also uses electronic distribution methods to facilitate the circulation of her films in continental and international markets. It is as a result of professional expertise, big budgets, and interest in gaining transnational appeal that her films have achieved a style closer to Hollywood (see Garritano 2013a).

Further, the study has found that as a result of Frimpong-Manso's interest in projecting progressive African stories and promoting the cause of African women, the main focus of her films tends to be female subjectivity as she seeks to redefine women's everyday lives on the big screen. By reason of her desire to rewrite gender stereotypes and to tell stories that reflect real experiences that happen around her, which includes personal and family experiences, her films such as *The Perfect Picture*, *Adams Apples* *10 Chapters* and *Devil in the Detail*, clearly focus on strong independent female characters. In terms of personal biographic influences, Frimpong-Manso's own achievements as a successful independent entrepreneur and filmmaker, and her mother's assertiveness and position as a health service administrator have been some of the sources of influence for the type of women she projects in her films.

Moreover, it is due to her dual interests in progressive stories and female subjectivity that female characters in her films participate in the social growth and transformation she envisages. Again, it is because of the control she has over her productions and her interest in progressive stories that she is able to tackle unconventional subject matters in unusual ways. Her female characters challenge the status quo (also see Kwansah-Aidoo & Osei Owusu 2012) and negotiate social barriers to refashion

alternative identities for personal and collective growth – an interest that is at the heart of African feminism (Kolawole 2004). Buoyed by her desire to celebrate and encourage women, Frimpong-Manso's female characters aspire and inspire, to show her audiences alternative ways of seeing and experiencing African women on the big screen. Much as Frimpong-Manso consciously and progressively projects women whose identities and experiences tie in with ideologies advocated by African feminism, similar to Quarshie, she does not openly identify as a feminist.

### **Leila Djansi**

While Leila Djansi entered filmmaking by chance, her passion for telling stories stems from a family tradition. As an independent diaspora woman film director, the study discovered that Djansi founded her own production company Turning Point Pictures to specifically make films that educate and create awareness on social and human rights issues. It is as a result of her interest in using her films for these purposes that she predominantly focuses on social and human rights issues that affect women. Djansi's films have tackled socio-cultural practices that suppress women such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation, physical and emotional violence against women (and men), and obligatory motherhood among others. In dealing with some of these issues, her films have been influenced by personal and familial experiences – a personal domestic accident and her relationship with her sister (*Sinking Sands*), her mother's experiences of delayed childbirth in marriage (*Ties that Bind*), and her interest in ethnic and continental history (*I Sing of a Well*). While Djansi through her films demonstrates her interest in tackling female-centred issues with the vision to transform and promote human rights, like Quarshie and Frimpong-Manso, she also does not self-identify as a feminist.

As a transnational filmmaker, who began her career in Ghana, Djansi's position enables her to effortlessly interconnect with the homeland and maintain a level of "ethnic consciousness" (Naficy 2001, p. 14; Ellerson 2000). Due to her interest and location in the diaspora, her films are critical of social structures and strictures that affect living conditions of everyday women and men in Ghana and in the diaspora. Moreover, her position as a member of the Ghanaian diaspora influences her to make films transnationally in Ghana and in the USA. Besides, due to the

international nature of her engagements, Djansi's films are transnationally funded through "peculiar mixed economies" (Naficy 2001, p. 43) where she receives financial support from investors, independent studios, private and personal sources, individuals, and philanthropists who are located in different places.

In terms of political economic influences, this study found that source of funding determines where Djansi's films are made. These same political economic factors warrant that her film projects oscillate between imaging the homeland and the diaspora. For instance, while Djansi's films funded by herself, individual investors and philanthropies have often been shot in Ghana, her films produced by the USA based independent studio RLG Entertainment have been shot in the USA. For marketing and distribution purposes, the studio producers interfere with casting where her USA productions are concerned. Also, transnational casting is prevalent in her films shot in Ghana. Even though it makes financial sense to use local artists anywhere, Djansi uses transnational cast and crew not only because of her position as a transnational diaspora filmmaker (see Naficy 2001), but like Frimpong-Manso she employs a transnational cast to enhance appeal to an international audience. By so doing, it also helps her to overcome the Opera Square oligopoly, which interferes with film distribution in the country. While her films made in Ghana predominantly include Ghanaians and Nigerians and a few Hollywood actors, her films made in the USA are dominated by Hollywood actors, and sprinkled with a few Africans. What this means is that at each point in time her casting is aimed at securing distribution territories, bringing to the fore how political economy ultimately influences not just the final film product, but also how the product is created.

Ellerson has suggested that in order to understand women's films we need to appreciate influences from the industry, the targeted audience and the politics of representation as well as how filmmakers are allowed to tell their stories and to whom (2012a, p. 227). In all, the study has discovered that the three female directors' individual sensibilities, personal and family experiences, interests, social, cultural and historical events, political economy, which includes forces of production and distribution, the industry and the targeted markets have variously impacted on the way they represent women and women's issues.

**Question 2:** How are women and women's issues represented in the selected films by the chosen women filmmakers?

The study has argued that because the filmmakers focus on context-specific issues relevant to Ghana and by extension Africa, the selected films are in dialogic relationship with Ghanaian/African culture and most of all women's role in society. Much as the study discovered that similar thematic concerns recur across their films, the recurring themes can be understood to be a result of the fact that society often defines women by their gender; hence, they share similar experiences even though in different ways.

As already suggested, a major finding of the study is that despite working in a system that demands commercial appeal and in an environment where films are populated with misogynistic and stereotypical images of women, through direct and indirect approaches the three female film directors manage to insert messages that align with African feminist perspectives in their works (also see Kwansah-Aidoo & Osei Owusu 2012). As postcolonial subjects, they strategically focus on "*speaking up against/for issues*" that affect women in the postcolonial environment (Nnaemeka 1997, p. 4). They question culturally mediated and self-imposed practices that obstruct women's agency and assess various forms of practices that support their sovereignty. Davies has explained the need to maintain institutions that are of value to African women and challenge those that oppress and draw them back (1990, p. 9). The study revealed that the filmmakers criticise socio-cultural structures and strictures that oppress women such as the traditional belief in the muting of African women's voices while reclaiming and transforming gender relations. This is, for instance, illustrative in *Ties that Bind* where Adobea is transformed from a voiceless woman to one whose new found agency allows her to defend herself and others.

Bisschoff has argued that in recent times, there has been increased visibility and vocal power of postcolonial African subaltern women (2009, p. 239). The filmmakers studied here demonstrate this in their films, showing that the subaltern woman can

speak when she is encouraged to do so. They show that she can take herself seriously, be heard and be taken seriously and that she is empowered to the point where she does not only speak, but wants to be useful to herself and her community (see pages 176-177). In addition, the three films demonstrate that education and redefinition of women's position in the domestic sphere as well as having access to the public sphere are ways to release women from suppression. This aligns with McFadden's (2001) idea that rights, entitlements and justices reside in the public sphere.

In speaking against practices that suppress women, the films analysed in this study show that the filmmakers criticise self-restraint and self-imposed fears. Through criticisms they also offer alternative ways of overcoming self-imposed fears and suppression, while revealing that self-confidence can help women to address other forms of oppression in their lives and in the lives of others. The study also found that the female directors advocate the need for women to react objectively to situations after overcoming self-imposed restrictions because without circumspection, particularly, in dealing with other forms of oppression, the consequences could be self-defeating. In a way, while they show that self-imposed restraint should not prevent women from realising their potential, they also suggest women need to exercise control to help them strategise to advance justice and equity. This is particularly exemplified in *The Forbidden Fruit*, where social justice and gender equality evade the female protagonist because of the aggression and immoral approach she employs in her fight against inequality (see Chapter Seven, pages 184-186).

Furthermore, in dealing with issues that line up with aspects of both liberal and radical African feminist perspectives, the films present motherhood in terms of its importance to the African woman and society, and also show how motherhood affirms, privileges and oppresses women in various ways. Thus, they support Rich (1986) and Nnaemeka's (1997) argument that motherhood can be oppressive and empowering for women. There is evidence of how women's problems associated with motherhood are compounded because of lack of health facilities and services to help deliver their children, and revelations of health related conditions that can pose

challenges for women. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the female directors question society's view on obligatory motherhood while providing women with alternative options like non-biological mothering and child adoption as a means to overcome social pressure. This is especially highlighted in *Ties that Bind* when Theresa adopts the refugee child, Fauzia and *The Perfect Picture* when Dede adopts a baby boy (see discussion on pages 195-196). Meanwhile, they also demonstrate how motherhood can be abused, for example, as is shown in the treatment of Adobea by her mother-in-law in *Ties that Bind*.

How women experience their sexuality is also explored in the films. Arnfred (2004) and Tamale (2011a) have suggested that African women's sexual and erotic propensity have been consistently suppressed through patriarchal and religious conceptions of female sexuality. In line with radical African feminist perspectives on women's rights to their sexuality, the filmmakers portray strong positions on the possibility of reclaiming African women's sexual desire, sexual drive, and sexual pleasure and control of their bodies (see discussion on pages 180-184). While women's sexual rights and autonomy are understood to be fundamental human rights (Horn 2006; McFadden 2003), the filmmakers show their importance to women's wellbeing.

Furthermore, the Ghanaian female directors through their works contest male power and domination when those subjugate women's freedom. In doing so, they appropriate gender complementarity as espoused by liberal African feminism (Nnaemeka 1998, 2003). This is demonstrated, for example, in *The Perfect Picture* where cooperation and joint participation in sexual intercourse are appropriated to ensure sexual pleasure for both husband and wife.

Contrary to popular conceptions of relationships that develop among women, the female directors in various ways construct and privilege female bonding and highlight how self-support among women can be progressively rewarding and retrogressively subduing when misused. While this is evident in all three films analysed, it is best

captured in *Ties that Bind* in the way the women work together to ultimately support each other and resolve the issues that affect each one of them (see pages 214-217).

In all, the films analysed in this study provide platforms for women not only to reclaim agency that enables them to rise above self-imposed and mediated suppression, but also to encourage women and men to embrace new alternative identities. The findings of the study support Garritano's assertion that the female filmmakers "speak from within dominant narratives of gender and open possibilities for the emergence of alternative ways of being men and women" (2013a, p. 18).

**Question 3:** How do Ghanaian male and female audiences interpret female representations in the films?

The study found that while there were marked differences in the way male and female participants interpreted the representations of women and women's issues, there were also instances where similar interpretations were made. Hammer and Kellner (2009) have suggested that various factors influence diverse audiences to respond to texts in conflicting or similar ways (also see Bobo 1988; Kellner 2009; Morley 1992) and this study bears testimony to that. The study discovered that sex/gender, intertextual cultural knowledge, socialisation/up-bringing, class, gender discourses, courses of study, experiential proximity, observation, personal experiences, dispositions and prejudices were all factors that influenced the participants' readings of the images. While some of the readings mapped onto the privileged readings, others were either negotiated or oppositional readings as explained by Hall (2006).

The study found that for *The Forbidden Fruit* while the reactions were often negative by both male and female respondents, the decodings were rendered within the preferred and negotiated modes. The female participants' readings fitted within the privileged reading since they understood the movie to be criticising inappropriate behaviour of the film's female protagonist, even though they criticised the filmmaker for projecting the woman negatively. They believed in gender equality, but they did

not sanction the immoral approach the protagonist used to address her issues. By rejecting the immoral approach employed by the protagonist, the female participants are not suggesting that she willingly complies with social expectations, even when those expectations limit her freedom, but rather that she challenges social injustices rightly. Basically, they rejected the portrayals of the insubordinate wife and the aspiring wife, but liked the subordinate wife, the caring mother as well as the non-abusive mother-in-law. In a sense, the participants either accepted or rejected the representations because they tallied or did not tally with their own experiences and the social values they “inhabite[d]” (Dyer 1977, p. 19). Their interpretations align with liberal African feminist thoughts on maintaining institutions that are of benefit to women (Davies 1990; Nnaemeka 1998, 2003), which the filmmaker also shares. By implication, we can conclude that the female participants shared the filmmaker’s vision of appropriate behaviour for women.

The male participants like the female respondents felt there was the need for gender equality between the husband and wife. However, they strongly disapproved of the behaviour of the unfaithful and greedy husband and the rebellious wife though they appeared to understand her situation. While they identified submissive, not quite submissive and rebellious women in the movie, they were more accepting of the not quite submissive woman because for them she embodied dual values (dutiful yet vocal), which they admired. By implication, the male participants largely seemed to be ahead of the filmmaker and did not share in her images of allowable standard behaviour for men, in particular.

The female representations in *The Perfect Picture* were received with mixed feelings by the male and female respondents. Both groups were happy with the movie’s portrayal of independent women. Moreover, they felt the images are progressive and not stereotypical, and that the movie normalises women’s independence on the Ghanaian film screen (see Chapter Eight, pages 249-251). Nevertheless, they criticised and wondered whether the representations are Ghanaian. It was clear that both groups felt the representations are westernised. There was a general agreement that the independent middle and upper class women represent a minority group of women in Ghana and by extension Africa. As noted in the female group,

“[those] women exist, but they are only a small number” (Aba). Despite this, the findings generally suggested that participants from both groups identified aspects of the film they thought were un-Ghanaian and aspects they felt were implausible.

While it has been argued that through Frimpong-Manso’s desire to reach an international audience, her films follow a routine popularised by Hollywood (also see Garritano 2013a), the study found that the criticisms against her films are not only based on style, but also representations of unfamiliar lived realities. Accordingly, I have argued that viewing aspects of these representations as un-Ghanaian could be seen as signs of “resistance” (Kellner 2009, p. 17) because for participants the images did not reflect their lived realities. Despite their resistance, participants agreed that the representations are inspirational for young men and women “because it motivates” (Safo) them to want to aspire to be successful. In a sense, they accepted the filmmaker’s encoded message and were inspired by the images as she intended.

*Ties that Bind* generally received positive reactions and the participants produced preferred readings although there were a few instances where they produced minimal negotiated decodings (Hall 2006). A major trend identified was that the male and female participants were happy that the film exposes the challenges women go through as they fulfil or fail to fulfil the role of motherhood. In addition, they were pleased that the movie criticised woman-to-woman antagonism and delighted that it encouraged woman-to-woman support as exemplified in the following quote: “I think the film condemns women being against each other. It portrays a positive quality, which must be encouraged in terms of support and being there for each other” (Gabriel). Meanwhile, whereas the male respondents appreciated the female characters and the difficulties they faced, and were educated on some aspects of women’s lives, the female participants identified with the experiences of the women and felt inspired by their courage and strength (see page 278). Largely, this implies that the filmmaker provided a vision of women’s life that the participants shared.

Overall, it was evident from the findings that across the six groups, most of the male participants studied here read in the preferred, negotiated and oppositional modes as espoused by Hall (2006). They were welcoming of progressive change in women's situations, particularly where women's freedom is suppressed. In other words, they supported women's progress even when it was at the expense of male privilege. In addition, since the male participants largely believed in gender equality, they felt women and men need to adhere to moral and social values to enhance harmonious gender relations. For the female participants, while some were more approving of women sticking to standard social values and behaviour and a few looked beyond what is socially acceptable, particularly, when women are discriminated against, they all agreed that the call for women's independence must be achieved honourably. While the readings demonstrate that the male and female participants actively produced meanings that reinforced their values and beliefs, the findings suggest that they were aware of the changing social environment that Ghanaian women now live in.

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings from this study have implications for theory, methodological approach, policy and practice. While the implications presented here are by no means comprehensive, they are useful for enhancing and advancing knowledge.

#### **Implications for Theory**

On postcolonial feminist theory, as already noted, it has been argued that there is significant proof that the subaltern female subject now has agency because there is increased visibility and vocal power of African women such as filmmakers, festival organisers, academics, actors, and writers (Bisschoff 2009, p. 239). This implies that African women filmmakers offer the subaltern an opportunity to speak and negotiate her identity. This study has advanced this knowledge of the postcolonial subaltern female subject. It discovered that the films by the Ghanaian female directors studied here give the subaltern the right not only to speak, but also to take herself seriously, be seen, be listened to, be heard, and be taken seriously.

In regard to African feminist theory, the study shows that even though the three women studied here do not self-identify as feminists, their representations of women and women's issues are often consistent with the tenets of African feminism and enhance perspectives delineated within the theory. In a sense, the study reinforces the idea that feminism can independently be attributed to film texts on the basis of literary interpretation (also see Bisschoff 2009; Ellerson 2004; Kwansah-Aidoo & Osei Owusu 2012). The study also affirms that ideologies and proposed strategies within the theory cannot just enhance understanding of African women's lived experiences, but can also be used to successfully appropriate gender equality, social justice, women's liberation and empowerment.

In the case of transnational film theory, while the female diaspora filmmaking practice studied here largely corresponds to the theorisation offered in the transnational filmmaking routines, the study points to the fact that contrary to what Naficy (2012) suggests, transnational diaspora filmmakers cannot always demonstrate long term ethnic consciousness in their works. This is mainly because in certain instances they are forced to make compromises when they receive funding from institutions that have particular interests, which are far removed from the filmmaker's ethnic concerns.

The study has generated two inter-related implications for the encoding and decoding theory. In reference to Morley (1992) as discussed earlier in Chapter Eight, there is a recurring difficulty in determining the concept of "preferred reading", particularly, when dealing with audiences' decodings of fictional or feature films because it is understood that meaning resides between the cultural producer or the text and the reader. Meaning, according to Morley, is generated through the interaction of codes inscribed in the text with the codes the audience inhabits (2003, p. 114). Beside recommendations made to remodel the theory (see Corner 1999; Dyer 1977; Jordin & Brunt 1988; Morley 1992; Wren-Lewis 1983), this study also adds one intervening modification.

This study has proved that learning from filmmakers is a good way to overcome the longstanding challenge with the concept of “preferred reading”. The study shows that learning about filmmaker’s interests and intentions through direct interviews with them is a good way to determine the possible intended meanings or preferred reading and consequently where audiences’ interpretations fit. Thus, in this case, the interpretations that the director offers can be seen to enhance understanding of the likely encoded message. The study also introduced a new reading position called ‘privileged reading’, which is established by the media analyst through textual analysis of the text drawing on theory, cultural knowledge of the setting in which the text is situated as well as interview with the filmmaker(s). With this, audience interpretations that correlate with the privileged reading will still be called ‘preferred readings’ because they map onto the privileged reading. The concepts of negotiated and oppositional readings remain the same.

#### **Implication for Critical Media and Cultural Studies approach**

The methodological approach of Critical Media and Cultural Studies is a comprehensive, yet flexible approach that makes possible contextualising and analysing media culture within the fields of production and audience reception. While this study used the approach, a few modifications were made in order to achieve the research aims. Kellner suggests that the approach can be modified to suit different projects, even though in his delineations he notes that in order to understand text and reception, it is important to study the political economic context of cultural production (2009, pp. 7-12). Much as this study focused on the political economic context, it also explored the historical and biographical contexts in which the Ghanaian women make their films to provide a broader understanding of the films and issues they deal with. By using these additional contextual paradigmatic frameworks as nexuses of interpretation, the study enhanced understanding of several aspects of Ghanaian women’s cultural production, text and reception, which might otherwise not have been understood.

#### **Implication for Policy and Practice**

This study has shown that when female filmmakers have sustained funding support and control they can engage in more progressive representations of women and

women's experiences on the screen. What this means is that on a practical level, it will be good if the draft National Film Policy for Ghana, which was prepared in 1995, is revisited and passed into law to help regulate the industry and enable filmmakers not just to access financial support or equal opportunities to produce and distribute their films, but also help particularly female filmmakers to sustain the representations of progressive images of women.

Another implication for practice is that even though the female filmmakers make and distribute their films under conditions fraught with challenges, their practices can be seen as models for other filmmakers. The filmmakers studied here have proved that working consistently with the same committed producer and partners, partly accessing financial support from corporate bodies, and sourcing funding from mixed economies can enable female filmmakers to be prolific. These filmmaking models offer pathways to other female filmmakers to understand that they can maintain commercial appeal and still stay true to their interests and vision to reconfigure representations of women: that it is possible to consciously or unconsciously incorporate feminist messages into commercial forms (Kwansah-Aidoo & Osei Owusu 2012).

### **Lessons Learned from the Study**

A number of lessons can be learned from this study. These include:

- (1) While female filmmakers work against several odds, there are various methods they can employ to overcome challenges.
- (2) Women can achieve progress for their personal and collective development when they work together with other women and men, and through self-reliance.
- (3) It is apparent that audiences share in African feminist ideas on gender equality and rights.
- (4) While filmmakers may construct their films in ways that they believe will appeal to audiences, there are possibilities that not all audiences will find such constructions appealing.

- (5) Even though audiences can read a text in preferred modes, their readings do not always imply that they accept or agree with the encoded message. Also, though they may offer oppositional readings they can still be inspired by aspects of the text/film that they oppose.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The first limitation of the study is the sample units that were selected. Despite the general overview of Ghanaian women's filmmaking endeavours provided, the study focused specifically on only three women and three films. A focus on more women and more films would have provided a much broader understanding of Ghanaian women's filmic practices and representations. The fact that the study could not focus on most of the Ghanaian women making films in Ghana and in the diaspora greatly reduces the generalisability of the findings. The study is also limited in that the small size of the sample group, which also excludes sample from male filmmakers, does not allow understanding of whether only Ghanaian female filmmakers or all Ghanaian female filmmakers are pro-female equality and representation.

Some scholarship has suggested that female representations in many of the video films made by men are often shaped by "the imperatives of traditional phallocentrism" (Okome 2000a, p. 45) and sexism (Garritano 2013a, 17), and reinforce patriarchal structures inherent in society (Ukata 2010, p. 210). In relation to such claims, two limitations of this study are that, it does not provide a corollary understanding of male representations in films made by women, nor does it show the imperatives that influence such portrayals.

Another limitation of the study concerns the fact that the study used particular theoretical frameworks to examine Ghanaian women's filmmaking routines and practices, the representations of women and women's issues in their films as well as audiences' decodings of those images. The processes of employing specific conceptual frameworks and theories and excluding other theories limit what can be

discovered. This is despite the fact that the theories used enabled the study to answer the research questions it focused on.

Two more limitations of the study have to do with the sample population selected for the audience study, and the use of focus group discussions. In terms of the selected sample population, the study is limited because even though the characters in the chosen films have intergenerational cultural orientations and beliefs, the selected western educated sample population, which was not completely demographically diverse, did not allow us to draw categorical conclusions about how a cross-generational readership would interpret the representation of their peers in the selected films. With regard to the use of focus group discussions, the analysis of male and female audiences' interpretations of female representations in the women's films yielded common and collective responses in an interactive context. A one-on-one interview with individual participants would have enhanced understanding of actual independent decodings of the images. In relation to audience interpretations, the study is also limited because of the small sample of social settings and participants used. This calls into question how generalisable the findings can be.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Much as the findings of this study make contributions to the understanding of Ghanaian women's filmmaking, female representations and audience interpretations of women's films, as already noted the study is limited by the small number of women filmmakers and films that was focused on. To build on this, further research could explore individual careers of the growing number of Ghanaian women who are making films in Ghana and in the diaspora to learn about their personal journeys and works. Also, analysis of women's films that do not necessarily focus on women but on men could bring interesting perspectives to the discourse on representations in women's films and enhance knowledge on the portrayals of men by women.

On audience reception of Ghanaian women's films, research could also focus on a much larger number of interviewees and instead of using focus groups with

emphasis on collective group interactions and interpretations, individual men and women could be interviewed to discover individual understanding and reaction to the films and the issues they deal with. It would also be interesting if future studies also focused on diaspora and transnational audiences who consume films produced and/or directed by Ghanaian and Ghanaian diaspora women filmmakers.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

This study sought to examine the filmmaking activities of three local and diaspora Ghanaian female film directors: Veronica Quarshie, Shirley Frimpong-Manso, and Leila Djansi and their contributions to culture and filmmaking in Ghana. The study's aim was to interrogate the representational strategies the filmmakers employ to highlight women and women's issues in three selected films from their individual body of work. Furthermore, it sought to understand the ways in which Ghanaian male and female focus group participants interpret the representations in the selected films. In order to provide a model of Ghanaian women's filmmaking, the selected filmmakers were chosen from women who began their careers right at the dawn of women's filmmaking in the country to women whose careers have evolved in the last eight years when women's visibility increasingly became apparent. Both local and diaspora filmmakers were included to reflect the heterogeneity of Ghanaian women's film practice.

In order to achieve the research aims, the study adopted the Critical Media and Cultural Studies tripartite approach. Consequently, it moved from a consideration of *contexts* (historical, cultural, biographical, and political economic contexts), to *text* (analysis of female representation in three selected films), and to *reception* (how focus group participants decoded the representations in the films). To understand the filmmaking practices, representations and audience reception, the conceptual frameworks of postcolonial feminist theory, African feminist theory, transnational film theory, and encoding and decoding theory were considered useful because they enhance understanding of the filmmakers and their own individual experiences and interests, as well as the context-specifics from which they make their films and

represent women/issues. Ultimately, the theoretical models helped establish and explain the realities and experiences specific to the female characters encountered in the films as well as the discourses audiences carried with them to interpret the texts.

Overall, the study is significant not only because it provides insights into Ghanaian women's film activities, but also because it contributes to our understanding of individual female directors, their filmmaking routines, their film-texts and representations of women, and audiences' interpretations of the representations. The study is also significant because by combining analysis of female representations by both Ghanaian and Ghanaian diaspora women filmmakers, it extends the growing discourses around women's representations by women in Anglophone West African films. Again, the study enhances understanding of actual male and female interpretations of women's visual representations by women in the West African/diaspora video/digital films.

In drawing attention to these contributions, the study concludes that the women directors studied are charting a worthy course for Ghanaian, and by extension West African women video/digital filmmakers and also championing the course of women in their fight against societal structures and strictures that constrain them. It also suggests that continuing on such a path of depicting women's life experiences and providing positive female images on screen, will help challenge the status quo while encouraging women in their struggles for social justice, emancipation and equality.

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## Appendix A: Filmography and Awards Won by the Three Women Filmmakers

### Veronica Quarshie – Filmography

FILM	YEAR OF RELEASE	DIRECTOR	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	PRODUCER	PRODUCTION COMPANY
<i>Action plan</i>	1992	x		NAFTI	NAFTI
<i>Twisted fate</i>	1993		x	Pius Famiye	Piro Film Production
<i>Twin lovers</i>	1995	x		Pius Famiye	Piro Film Production
<i>Tears of joy</i>	1996	x		Pius Famiye	Piro Film Production
<i>Come back Lucy</i>	1996	x		Kwesi Fletcher	Continental Pictures Inc.
<i>When the heart decides</i>	1997	x		Pius Famiye	Piro Film Production
<i>Victim of love</i>	1998	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>Taxi driver</i>	1998-2000		x		Village Communications Ltd.
<i>A stab in the dark 1</i>	1999	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>A stab in the dark 2</i>	2000	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>Ripples 1</i>	2000	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>Ripples 2</i>	2000	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions

<i>Shadows from the past 1</i>	2000	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>Shadows from the past 2</i>	2000	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>A call at midnight 1</i>	2001	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>A call at midnight 2</i>	2001	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>No easy target</i>	2001	x		Apostle Kwadwo Safo	Great Kosa Vision
<i>The third night</i>	2002	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>Rage</i>	2003	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>The forbidden fruit</i>	2003	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>Heal my heart 1 &amp; 2</i>	2008	x		Kingsley Okereke	Divine Touch Productions
<i>Remnants (TV series)</i>	2009	x		Francis Adamitey	
<i>Otilia</i>	2011	x		Moro Yaro	Princess Film Productions
<i>Papa Lasisi good bicycle</i>	2011		x	Kwaw Ansah	Film Africa Production
<i>Praising the lord plus one</i>	2013		x	Kwaw Ansah	Film Africa Production

### Veronica Quarshie – Awards

At the turn of the new millennium, Quarshie's films were considered among the best of the best in the industry. This was not only because of the quality of the films she directed but also the intriguing composite plots of her narratives. In 1999, an award system was instituted to recognise and to encourage the production of quality video films in the Ghanaian independent video industry. Quarshie's film *A Stab in the Dark* received the Best Story Award at that first ever Ghana Film Awards held in December 1999. In the following year 2000, *Ripples* won Best Story, Best Directing, Best Sound, and Best Photography Awards at the second Ghana Film Awards. In the same year and at the same awards, *Shadows from the Past* received Best Screenplay and Best Editing Awards. In the following year 2001, at the third Ghana Film Awards ceremony and for the third consecutive time, the director and her co-author husband received the Best Story and the Best Screenplay Awards for *A Call at Midnight*. Quarshie received in addition for the second time, the Best Director Award and her husband received the Best Editor Award.

### Shirley Frimpong-Manso – Filmography

FILM/TV	YEAR OF RELEASE/ BROADCAST	DIRECTOR	PRODUCER	WRITER	PRODUCTION COMPANY
<i>Personality's Kitchen</i> (TV)	2006	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>Different shades of blue</i>	2006	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>Life and</i>	2007	x	x	x	Sparrow

<i>living It</i>					Productions
<i>Scorned</i>	2008	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>The perfect picture</i>	2009	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>A sting in a tale</i>	2009	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>6 hours to christmas</i>	2010	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>Adams apples</i> (10 Chapters)	2011-2012	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>Contract</i>	2012	x	Co-producer	Co-writer	Sparrow Productions
<i>Adams apples</i> (TV series)	2013	x	x	Writer/Co-writer	Sparrow Productions
<i>Tenants</i> (TV series)	2013	x	x	x	AfricaMagic Entertainment
<i>Peep</i> (TV series)	2012	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>Potomanto</i>	2013	x	Co-producer	Co-writer	Sparrow Productions
<i>Big for nothing</i>	2013	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>Stranger in my bed</i>	2013	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>Devil in the detail</i>	2014	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions
<i>V republic</i>	2014	x	Co-producer	Co-writer	Sparrow Productions
<i>Love or something</i>	2014	x	x	x	Sparrow

<i>like that</i>					Productions
<i>Grey dawn</i>	2015	x	x	x	Sparrow Productions

### **Shirley Frimpong-Manso – Awards**

Throughout her career, Frimpong-Manso's achievements have been acknowledged both locally and internationally. In 2009 she was awarded by the Ghana Women's Award Association as the Promising Female Star of the year. She was also an honouree at the 2010 TNJ (The Network Journal) 40 under Forty Achievement Awards recognising her excellent entrepreneurial disposition in the field of filmmaking. The 18<sup>th</sup> Pan African Film and Arts Festival (PAFF) in Los Angeles saw *A Sting in a Tale* receive the Audience Favourite Narrative Award alongside Joseph A. Elmore Jr.'s *Speed-Dating* (2010), and Odera Ozoka's *Soul Diaspora* (2009) which also won Best Film by African in the Diaspora at the 2010 African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA). Furthering her achievements, *A Sting in a Tale* also received Best Sound Track and Frimpong-Manso was awarded the Best Director for her film, *The Perfect Picture* at the 2010 AMAA. Her exceptional achievements in film were further acknowledged at the 2012 maiden edition of the National Youth Achievers Awards (NYAA) in Ghana instituted by the government. Indeed, her films have been screened at various film festivals such as the Dubai Film Festival and her film, *Contract* opened the 2013 ReelWorld Film Festival held in Canada. At the 2014 edition of the Africa Magic Viewer's Choice Awards (AMVCA) held in Lagos, *Contract* also won Frimpong-Manso Best Movie, Best Director, Best Video Editor and she shared the Best Writer in Drama Award with her co-writer, Herty Owusu. Whilst her films have received several awards locally, in December 2013 at the

Ghana Movie Awards ceremony she co-received the Best Director Award with the US based Leila Djansi for their films *Contract* (2012) and *A Northern Affair* (2013) respectively.

### Leila Djansi – Filmography

FILM	YEAR OF RELEASE	DIRECTOR	PRODUCER	WRITER	PRODUCTION COMPANY
<i>Grass between my lips</i>	2007		x	x	Neverending Light Productions
<i>I sing of a well</i>	2009	x	Co-producer	x	Turning Point Pictures
<i>Sinking sands</i>	2010	x	Co-producer	x	Turning Point Pictures
<i>Ties that Bind</i>	2011	x	Co-producer	x	Turning Point Pictures
<i>Ebbe</i>	2012	x		x	Turning Point Pictures
<i>A northern affair</i>	2013	x		x	IrokoTV/I Factory
<i>And then there was you</i>	2013	x		x	RLG Entertainment & Turning Point Pictures
<i>Poisoned Bait</i>	2014	x		x	Rokstudios/Turning Point Pictures
<i>Where children play</i>	2015	x		x	RLG Entertainment, Shiloh Films Group & Turning Point Pictures

### Leila Djansi – Awards

Djansi is among a group of few Ghanaian (diaspora) women who have had every single one of their films shown in film festivals and won numerous awards. Her debut film, *I Sing of a Well* in 2011 was awarded the Festival Choice Award at the Pan African Film Festival-British Academy of Film and British Academy of Film and Television Arts/LA (BAFTA/LA). A year before, it also won Best Screenplay,

Achievement in Sound and Costume Awards at the prestigious African Motion Academy Awards (AMAA). *Sinking Sands* in 2010 went on to win Best Screenplay, Best Actress and Best Make-Up at AMAA. It also won several awards at the maiden 2010 Ghana Movie Awards (GMA). In the following year and at the same GMA, *Ties that Bind* won in various categories including Best Picture at the same Awards and also received the Best Diaspora Film at the 2013 San Diego Black Reel Awards. A Northern Affair won Achievement in Production Design at the 2014 AMAA. It is important to note that while Djansi's films shot in Ghana at film festivals are recognised as African films, her US production, *And Then There was You* was recognised as a US film at the 2014 Pan African Film Festival Los Angeles.

## **Appendix B: Interviewees**

Veronica Quarshie

Shirley Frimpong-Manso

Leila Djansi

Moro Yaro

Kenny McCauley

Dzifa Glikpoi

Pascaline Edwards

Mawuli Semavor

Edinam Atatsi

Ken Attah

Grant Godfre

Senanu Gbedawo

Anima Misa Amoah

Jane Awoonor Williams

Ekow Smith Asante

Adjetey Anang

Joselyn Dumas

Ama K. Abebrese

Mabel Germain

Keli Avril

Tony Prince Tometi

John Dumelo

Chris Hesse

Kwaw Ansah

Ernest Abbeyqueye

Kofi Middleton-Mends

Mark Coleman

Teye Botwey  
Mary Yirenkyi  
Naana Nketia  
Amowi Philips  
Esi Sutherland-Addy  
Socrate Sarfo  
Veronica Cudjoe  
Yaba Badoe  
Anita Afonu  
Akofa Edjeani Asiedu  
Akua Ofosuhene  
Doris Kuwornu  
Ohema Nana Adjoa Awindor  
Gyasiwah Ansah  
Sarah Kunto  
Hadjia Hawa Meizongo  
Vera Mensah Bediako  
Afi Yakubu  
Anastasia Korsah Brown  
Yao Ladzekpo  
Juliet Asante  
Kafui Danku  
Florence Addy

## **Appendix C: Profiles of Focus Groups' Participants (The names used are pseudonyms)**

### ***The Forbidden Fruit – Male Participants***

**Eric** – a thirty two year old postgraduate student, Ghanaian and Nigerian parentage, travelled outside the country before, married.

**Agyeman** – a forty four year old administrator, married.

**Nana** – a twenty three year old undergraduate student, not married.

**Phil** – a twenty five year old teaching assistant, not married.

**Tetteh** – a lecturer in his forties, travelled outside the country before, not married.

**Paul** – a twenty year old undergraduate student, not married.

**Kwame** – a twenty five year old national service person, not married.

**Nii** – a thirty seven year old librarian, travelled outside the country before, married.

### ***The Forbidden Fruit – Female Participants***

**Christie** – a forty year old postgraduate female student, grew up in a traditional patriarchal home in Ghana, married.

**Dzidzor** – a twenty eight year old female postgraduate student, not married.

**Pam** – a twenty six year old female teaching assistant, not married.

**Gina** – a twenty one year old undergraduate female student, not married.

**Kate** – a twenty three year old national service woman, not married.

**Sarah** – a twenty five year old national service woman, not married.

**Akosua** – a twenty year old undergraduate student, not married.

**Nina** – A twenty eight year old postgraduate student, freshly married.

### ***The Perfect Picture – Male Participants***

**Benny** – a twenty three year old undergraduate student, not married.

**Kofi** – a twenty four year old undergraduate student, not married.

**Jerry** – a twenty six year old national service person, a film student, not married.

**Safo** – a twenty five year old recent graduate, not married.

**Emmanuel** – a twenty six year old master's student, not married.

**Carl** – a twenty three year old political science student, not married.

**Paa White** – a forty six year old administrator, married.

### ***The Perfect Picture – Female Participants***

**Anita** – a twenty year old second year undergraduate student, lived outside the country before, not married.

**Aba** – a twenty five year old national service person, not married.

**Linda** – a twenty seven year old postgraduate student, not married.

**Fafali** – a twenty nine year old national service person, not married.

**Ama** – a twenty year old third year student, not married.

**Maggie** – a twenty four year old undergraduate student, not married.

**Afua** – a twenty three year old final year student with Ghanaian and Nigerian background, not married.

### ***Ties that Bind – Male Participants***

**Sly** – a twenty year old undergraduate student, not married.

**Peter** – a twenty four year film student, not married.

**Terry** – a twenty two year old student, not married.

**Bob** – fifty four year old lecturer/researcher, married.

**Gabriel** – a twenty five year old national service person, former film student, not married.

**Kojo** – a twenty four year old law student, not married.

**Kwadjo** – a twenty two year undergraduate student, not married.

***Ties that Bind – Female Participants***

**Agyeiwa** – a twenty two year old undergraduate student, not married.

**Lucy** – a fifty six year old lecturer/researcher, married with children.

**Akua** – a twenty three year old final year student, not married.

**Adjoa** – a forty nine year old lecturer/researcher, married with children.

**Samantha** – a twenty three year old student, not married.

**Helena** – a twenty four year old undergraduate student, not married.

**Fatima** – a twenty year old second year student, not married.

## **Appendix D: Ethics Clearance (Email)**

To: Associate Professor Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo/Ms Joyce Osei Owusu; FHEL

Dear Kwamena and Joyce

### **SUHREC Project 2012/271 Ghanaian Women and Film: An Examination of Gender Representation and Audience Reception**

A/Prof Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo, Ms Joyce Osei Owusu, Dr Jason Bainbridge; FHEL

Approved Duration: 02/01/2013 To 09/05/2015

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol undertaken by a SUHREC Subcommittee (SHESC3). Your responses to the review, as e-mailed on 27 November and 29 November 2012 (the latter with revised appendices), were put to a SHESC3 delegate for consideration.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project may proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions here outlined. However, please note that care will still be needed to ensure that any requirements must be met concerning conducting research as proposed in Ghana. To the extent this involves obtaining Government or other permission(s) prior to conducting the research in Ghana, a copy of the authority issued should be forwarded as soon as practicable to this office for noting and inclusion in the record.

- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the current *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.
- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.
- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/ clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project.
- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance. The SUHREC project number should be quoted in communication. Chief Investigators/Supervisors and Student Researchers should retain a copy of this email as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for project.

Yours sincerely,

Sheila Hamilton-Brown  
Secretary, SHESC3

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*Sheila Hamilton-Brown*

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