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Restoration or Destruction? Independent Film Productions and the Ghanaian Video-Film Industry

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Abstract

Independent Ghanaian cineastes, who are often classified as "amateurs," have come under a barrage of criticism from film critics, scholars, and audiences for stunting the growth of the Ghana film industry with their productions. These critiques are mainly directed at the dominant thematic concerns such as witchcraft and occultism, as well as their technicalities and expressions, which also include poor storylines, issues of misrepresentation, and others. This article interrogates how independent filmmakers and their respective productions have shaped the video-film industry in Ghana. Though there have been a considerable number of scholarly works on independent film productions in Ghana, the literatue in this area has commonly overlooked or dismissed the contributions of individual film production to the Ghana film industry. Relevant historical documents and critical conversations with industry stakeholders and scholars have engaged with significant secondary literature in this area. Whilst this paper does not lay claim to any exhaustive treatment of the subject of individual film productions and the Ghanaian film industry, it offers critical and initial inroads into that unexplored field. Within this framework, this scholarship elicits critical reflections, debates, and new interests rather than uncritical conclusions within the field of individual

film productions in Ghana. Despite the narrative and technical deficits of video-films, independent film producers may have sustained the Ghana film industry from a near collapse since the 1980s. It is crucial to recommend that effective cultural policies and professional training are significant in guiding and shaping the production of films in Ghana.

Keywords: *Ghana, film industry, individual filmmakers, productions, video-film.*

Introduction

This study attempts to offer in-depth historical readings on Ghanaian cinema with a specific focus on video-film production. The contexts within which video-film productions emerged in Ghana will be critically analysed. In this research, the terms individual or independent filmmakers are used interchangeably. Specifically, the individuals or independent filmmakers are mostly ordinary Ghanaians with no attachments to cultural institutions. Their productions or artistic works are mostly outside the purview of the state. These individuals often churn out popular commercial films for African and non-African audiences. This study does not pretend to acknowledge that a considerable number of contemporary films in Ghana lack good quality and have often been peripheral to state interests in terms of propagating the Ghanaian culture and traditions among others. From this perspective, a few relevant film texts with secondary sources will be analysed to explore this contention. Therefore, the question of interest is: *What informs the dominant Ghanaian filmic expressions*? This scholarship sets the stage for further research and debates on the nexus between the video-film industry and independent film productions in Ghana.

In this scholarly work, a qualitative research method is used. This approach will be characterized by relevant primary and secondary sources. These sources include newspapers with critical accounts from eyewitnesses, including critics and stakeholders, who witnessed specific eras of film production that are relevant to this study. These historical documents contain information on filmmaking in Ghana from the 1960s to the 1990s. For precision, the contents cut across the ideological underpinnings of colonial films, early post-colonial films, and the emergence and contextual basis of video-film production in Ghana. Additionally, interviews with four key industry players, including veteran actors, an actress, and a film critic or scholar, were analysed for this study's context. These interviewees are household names in the Ghana film

industry and have played crucial roles in shaping the production of video-films. These were structured face-to-face and telephone interviews. Questions about early post-colonial films, video-films and their expressions, individual filmmakers, and the state of the contemporary film industry in Ghana were asked. A critical analysis of a few film texts was engaged to investigate some of the dominant thematic concerns, filmic expressions, and technicalities. Lastly, this study analysed critical secondary literature, which includes journal articles on Ghanaian films, to establish the key missing contexts, clarify the relevance of this subject, and further situate its analysis in relevant postcolonial film or media-systematic research contexts.

There has been a lack of consciousness or insufficient knowledge on the nexus between independent filmmakers and the Ghanaian film industry. As mentioned before, most of the major and interesting scholarly works, such as Vitus Nanbigne's "*Counter Hegemony in Ghanaian Video-Film Practice*," Carmela Garritano's "*Contesting Authenticities: The Emergence of Local Video Production in Ghana,* Birgit Meyer's "*Sensational Movies: Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana,*" and others, often criticize or disregard the role of individual films towards the Ghanaian film industry. In this context, it is imperative to explore the complex field of video-film production and individual filmmakers, which has garnered growing interest in recent times in Africa.

The Ghanaian movie industry has been inundated with unprofessional filmmakers, whose productions have dominated cinematic practices in Ghana. Nanbigne (n.d.) argues that "most video-film producers lack formal training in filmmaking and cared little about taking time to develop film scripts and evolve complex narratives" (p. 118). He contends that these filmmakers from Ghana, for some time now, pay little to no attention to the conventional style of film production. With the exception of a few major film companies such as Farmhouse Productions, Hacky Productions, and others that work hand-in-hand with trained film producers, most of the film firms in Ghana are replete with untrained filmmakers. It is often rare to see productions by trained and experienced film producers in Ghana. The assumption is that the dominance of untrained film producers in the industry instigates disinterest amongst professionals or trained film producers. Aveh (n.d.) has similarly observed the disenchantment of trained Ghanaian filmmakers who have, over the years, often distanced themselves from the production of video-films due to the mass influx of untrained individuals who serve as film producers in Ghana.

In his attempt to juxtapose individual filmmakers with state-funded film production in Ghana, Adjei (2014) indicates that whereas parastatal institutions such as the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) and the Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC) aimed to consolidate and propagate the visions of Dr. Nkrumah in terms of using films as a "decolonial tool," contemporary Ghanaian filmmakers, who have often been influenced by the commercial benefits of film production, constantly churn out productions that either negate the early visions of cinema production or misrepresent Ghanaian culture. This is to say that the expressions in cinema after the first three decades of independence in Ghana have been dictated by the forces of commercialization and popular tastes among film consumers. Whilst there ia a considerable validity in the contention that the Ghanaian film industry is replete with 'amateur' productions, there are still a few professionals or trained producers, including Shirley Frimpong Manso, who churn out technically sophisticated and intriguing films in Ghana.

The production of video-films in Ghana has been characterized by a counter-hegemonic practice between Ghanaian and Nigerian filmmakers. Mohammed (2022, as cited in Aveh, n.d.) argues that as the "Ghanaian video-film industry grew with the influx of untrained filmmakers into the industry, it was not long before Nigerian video-films began to flood into the industry, which ultimately affected the growth of the Ghanaian film industry unfavorably" (p. 4). For the most part, the Nigerian films that flooded the Ghanaian market were not only technically advanced but also resonated deeply with audiences in Ghana. Examples of these video-films are Philip Uzo Amayo's film, *Aki na Ukwa* (2002), *Issakaba* (2002) by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, and others.

According to Meyer (2015), initially, the harsh criticisms from critics of Ghanaian films, which film producers either rejected or internalized became a major worry to filmmakers. After 1996, the desire to appeal to commercial audiences became a strong bandwagon that influenced film production in Ghana. Whilst this shaped film production, this new development coincided with the influx of Nigerian films in Ghana, which resonated widely with Ghanaian audiences and became a major culturally expressive art form in the Ghanaian market (Meyer, 2015). This paradigm did not only compel Ghanaian filmmakers to develop their technical skills in terms of film productions but also culminated in the appropriation of foreign themes such as martial arts, gangsterism, and others to pander to popular consumer interests in Ghana.

This review has attempted to set the discursive framework that underpins this study's analysis. The major scholarly works on Ghanaian video-films have often criticized or dismissed the impacts of individual film production on the growth of the Ghanaian film industry. These criticisms touch on the peripheral narratives and technically poor qualities of these video-films. It is glaring, particularly within the context of this review, that these scholarly works make little to no references or counter-arguments to the contributions of individual film productions to the Ghanaian film industry. There is often the general impression that individual film productions have failed or impeded the growth of the Ghanaian film industry, which this study considers contentious and problematic. This study establishes a proper orientation of the paradigm shift in Ghanaian film production so as to appreciate the emergence of video-films.

Colonial Cinema

Cinematic activities in Ghana date back to the era of colonialism in Ghana. According to Bloom and Kate (2009), the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) was established in 1939 by the Ministry of Information (MOI) to make films mainly about the war effort for audiences in the colonies. The CFU, which was located in London, was characterized by different visions. That is, whereas the CFU was mainly concerned with the production of instructional and educational films that would shape the economic and social interests of the British colonialists, the MOI focused primarily on producing propaganda films that incited Africans to join the war effort, as well as strengthening the British military following the mass voluntary commitments of Africans. (Bloom and Kate, 2009).

In Africa, early films by the colonialists became a critical adjunct to other visual expressions of Africa. For precision, these visual representations sought to provide evidence and justification of the Eurocentric ideas of Africa as a 'dark continent' that needed crucial and urgent western civilization to survive. Nanbigne (n.d.) has observed that these cinematic representations and other documentary evidence, which were interpreted from the colonizers' perspective of Africa, served broader socio-cultural and economic benefits to the British colonialists in Africa. Cinematic practices during the colonial epoch laid the basis for indigenous film productions in Ghana. Nanbigne (n.d.) has similarly argued that the socio-cultural and political concerns that initially underpinned colonial cinema turned into an impetus that strategically shaped the production of indigenous films, purposely for the redefinition of the distorted image of

Africa. The subsequent part of this paper will expound better on this argument.

Ghana has gone through successive phases of cultural colonization within the domain of cinema. Between 1939 and 1947, it was characterized by the Colonial Film Unit (CFU). British filmmakers dominated the industry with subjects that were mainly propaganda. This was aimed at amassing support for the colonial government's agenda (Ohene-Asah, 2018). The CFU's productions were mainly for the colonized in the various British colonies. This phase, according to Ohene-Asah (2018), also superseded the involvement and training of the colonized in the production of films.

Film production in Ghana started under the control of a foreign power (British colonialists), with no grounds for indigenous film production at the time. British colonialism was strongly characterized by cultural domination, and one of the mediums that was used to champion this cause was cinema. Through documentaries, newsreels, and feature films, the colonialists were able to consolidate not only political power but also social and economic gains such as the payment of taxes, agricultural activities, and others through cinematic production and expression.

Early Post-Colonial Cinema

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (the first president of Ghana), after the country's independence in 1957, indigenized filmmaking by regulating both the Ghanaian broadcasting sector and state film under the influence, control, and culture of Ghanaian society (Bekoe, 1964). The production, exhibition and distribution of films were solely controlled by the new nation state. Cinematic expressions during this transitional period were aimed at redefining the African image, elevating solidarity, and liberating Ghanaians and broadly Africans from the remnants of colonialism. Against this backdrop, the Gold Coast Film Unit (GCFU) was renamed the State Film Industry Corporation (SFIC) and subsequently the Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC) by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah in the year 1964 in Accra. The GFIC was directly involved in executing film projects as well as owning filmmaking equipment, which included pre- and post-production facilities.

The censorship board activities and movie theatres were specifically supervised by the GFIC. Dr. Nkrumah sent some individuals from Ghana to learn filmmaking in Eastern Europe, India, and others. The intention

was to facilitate, stimulate and churn out quality films of national interest (Awusi, 1973). These individuals included luminaries such as Rev. Chris Hesse, who was a managing director of GFIC, Mr. Ernest Abbeyquaye, who graduated from the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, and an executive producer at the GFIC (Awusi, 1973). Dr. Kwame Nkrumah additionally implemented a three-national arts plan to improve Ghanaian and pan-African identities. It is critical to acknowledge that the sources at hand contain no particular details of Dr. Nkrumah's three-national arts plans. This approach, as argued by Awusi (1973), "was geared towards reconstructing the 'distorted' picture of Africa by the British colonialists as well as promoting African culture, heritage, and traditions through visual representations" (p. 11). Under the administration of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, cinema was reoriented to construct a decolonial African identity, which was earlier misrepresented by the British colonialists. By extension, films assumed a revolutionary role as opposed to entertainment. The GFIC's productions included the popular feature films *Dede, I Told You So, No Tears for Ananse, Genesis Chapter X,* and others. These cinematic representations reflected popular urban legends, folk stories, traditions, cultures, and their relevance in Ghanaian society (G. Omaboe, personal communication, November 28, 2018).

Ghana's film industry started to experience a major decline due to economic and political challenges such as inflation, coup d'état and others in the 1960s that consequently crippled the production of films. Between 1960 and 1970, there was an era of art experimentation and development in Ghana. By the turn of 1960, setbacks had occurred within the political and socio-economic maps of Ghana, which caused the first republic to crumble in 1966. By the end of that year, the world price of cocoa had plummeted to under $500 a ton (Gocking, 2005). The country was forced to draw on its rapidly diminishing reserves. The collapsing economy also inspired an economic shift. In 1961, the second development plan, which was to run until 1964, was publicly abandoned. After Dr. Nkrumah had been overthrown in a military coup in 1966, subsequent administrations in Ghana considerably gave no attention or allocated funds towards the administrative processes of the GFIC (Owusu, 1982). The decade 1971-1980, according to Owusu (1982), "was a period of stagnation in Ghana" (p. 8). He further argues that a tottering economy, political instability, and pure ignorance conspired to relegate art and culture to the background. An otherwise promising ministry of culture was either consciously or unconsciously made to become an appendix to other ministries, which were heavily pregnant with their peculiar problems (Owusu, 1982) .

The Structural Adjustment Program, which required the privatization of certain state institutions, including the GFIC, during the administration of Jerry John Rawlings, a former president of Ghana, and his Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) in 1979, considerably affected the operations of this cultural institution in terms of film production and consequently, its collapse in the 1980s (D. Dontoh, personal communication, December 21, 2018). The GFIC from this period only made ten feature films, from the late 1960s to 1979. Film exhibition and distribution requiring substantial financial investment were largely organized through privately owned film theatres that relied on out-of-date imported films to satisfy the demands of audiences (Garritano, 2008).

To sum up, it was essentially for the interest of reconstructing and disseminating local content and a conscious effort towards exalting the African identity that led to indigenizing films in Ghana, which was under the supervision of the state. Contrary to colonial cinema, films during the era of independence in Ghana were used for self-examination, a tool for redefining the 'lost identities' of Ghanaians. Additionally, films were used to foster national unity towards socio-economic development in Ghana.

The 'Video Wonder' in Ghana

This part is of critical relevance, as it forms the basis of the article's central arguments and context. Individual filmmaking essentially took off in the 1980s in Ghana. The critical narratives in this section will attempt to interrogate the context within which individual film production emerged, their nature, approach, conventions, and their interaction with the Ghanaian film industry.

As already indicated, after Ghana's independence and the overthrow of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, cinematic activities declined considerably, as successive administrations paid little attention to this sector. Yanney (1991) has argued that "sixty years after the advent of cinema in then-Gold Coast, Ghana had little over fifty prehistoric structures that were used as cinema theatres for a population of over fifteen million Ghanaians" (p. 2). After the denationalization and privatization of state institutions, which included the Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC) in the 1980s, the 'video wonder' turned into a third major transformation in Ghanaian film practices. This period experienced new artistic forms of representation. This phase has been characterized by freedom of expression, which comprises no collective or stringent national censorship codes. Among

other artists, film producers had the latitude to make, envision, and disseminate different cultural expressions, which also involved the rights of Ghanaians to access these artistic expressions.

In the 1980s, media in Ghana operated in a more decentralized environment. Garritano (2008) has indicated that since "the 1970s in the third world, the denationalization and privatization of state industries set beside trade liberalization and the global availability of new media technologies such as VHS standards and satellite television resulted in a dramatic transformation in local media cultural ecologies" (p. 24). With telejectors, which contributed to the lucrativeness of video productions, movies also became easily accessible in cinema theatres in Ghana (Yanney, 1991). Shoestring charges were placed on showing video-films in these cinema houses.

The emergence of VHS technology transformed the practice of media, particularly film and television in Ghana. Video cassette recorders (VCRs), and cassette tapes were mostly brought by Ghanaian expatriates and were used to record social events such as outdoor activities, funerals, weddings, and parties. (Awudzi, 1981). The collapse of the GFIC created a gap in terms of film production. Against this background, popular Ghanaian independent filmmakers, including Kwaw Ansah with bank loans, King Ampaw with international collaboration with Germany, and Ivan Annan, produced films with the VHS camera, and later on recorded them on VCRs and video cassettes. Acting groups such as 'Obra, Osofo Dadzie' took hold of this technological development to record staged performances and drama on cassette tapes (Awudzi, 1981).

Performing, entertaining and concert groups like as Edinkanfo Super Band and Edinkafo Super Dancers led by Osei Tutu and performances from musicians such as Koo Nimo were recorded and sold in the video markets ("Faisal Helwani Productions," 1981) . Rental markets for video cassettes grew substantially in the urban communities of Koforidua, Kumasi, and Accra. Films from America, Nigeria, India, and China were discharged on tapes and shown in various Ghanaian cinema houses, which included Globe Cinema, Princess Cinema, and Reo Cinema (Penni, 1981). During this period, as most households were incapable of affording a television set, a large number of Ghanaians frequented these theatres to see video-films (Yanney, 1991).

Deteriorating structures were converted into video centres, and any Ghanaian who happened to own a television with a video recording device could make a business out of this development ("Video Centers Everywhere," 1984). Around the same time, a number of portable units began to operate. These units conveyed screening sets to various schools

and other public places. These practices stimulated the film business, and the government of Ghana was compelled to initiate authorizing charges to widen the tax net of the state (Penni, 1981). Reggae music was also recorded with staged performances from groups such as "The Wailers and the Rasters" on video cassettes. These musical concert films revealed the roots of Reggae music and the Raster Farian cult. In addition to independently produced Ghanaian feature films, which included Kwaw Ansah's *Love Brewed in the African Pot* and *The Road to Accra-Kukurantumi* by King Ampaw, among others, reggae performances were shown in different cinema houses in Ghana. This development was dubbed *"A New Concept in Film Distribution"* ("Film 81," 1981).

Furthermore, Nii Atua, a Ghanaian who operated a small restaurant in Accra, was given a video projector by an American friend. He converted his restaurant into "Coconut Grove Video Centre," one of the first Ghanaian video centres to project video onto a large screen in a theatre-like setting (Garritano, 2008). Video clubs such as Education Entertainment, Sports, and News (ESSN) offered their individual members videos of CNN news, American movies, and sports events. Churches arranged for Christian video ministries and special exhibitions of American religious programmes such as "Battle of Armageddon or All of Satan's Apples Have Worms" (Garritano, 2008).

In the mid-eighties, the phenomenon of truancy on the part of school pupils became prevalent following the expansion of video centres in Ghana. Schoolchildren often spent school hours entirely in these centres rather than in the classrooms. The government of Ghana called for an end to the operation of various video centres in Ghana (Deletsa, 1991). According to Deletsa (1991), "during the government of Jerry John Rawlings in 1988, Kofi Totobi-Quakyi, the then-minister of information, stated that Accra had approximately three hundred video centres that screened both domestic and foreign video-films. The majority of these video centres functioned outside the state's control" (p. 7), as almost all of the locations of these video centres were unknown to state authorities in Ghana. The phenomenon of political, social, and economic instabilities hampered Ghana's development. These instabilities comprised a coup d'etat, inflation, drug trafficking, robberies, murder, and prostitution, among others. As stated by Nanbigne, "this period considerably held no strong grounds for nationalistic sentiments, and Ghanaians to a great extent lost trust in the institutional structures of the state" (personal communication, January 15, 2019).

There were stories of ritual murders committed for the sake of money. The most popular among these narratives was the killing of a boy called Kofi Kyinto by his uncle, which later influenced the video-film *Nkrabea* (1992) by Baffoe Bonnie (Nanbigne, 2013). This video-film featured prominent Ghanaian actors and actresses such as Fred Amugi, Grace Nortey, and others. The character Nana Addai is constantly depicted performing rituals with human skulls for wealth. He contracts Boakye and other assailants to get him a human head in order to undertake his rituals. As the storyline unfolds, Boakye, together with his accomplices, are unluckily caught with human parts, which compels a court to sentence them to death. Another major human ritual phenomenon was the popular Dr. Ram Beckley narrative, who was rumored to be an occultist. He was said to abduct younger students and offer them as sacrifices to his gods. When he was apprehended, different types of school uniforms, human skulls, and decomposed human bodies were alleged to have been found at his residence (Yanney, 1991). A substantial number of Ghanaian video-films during this period culled their reflections from the socio-economic and political phenomena in Ghana.

Film consumers in Ghana and abroad were thrilled to see their surroundings and society on the screens. According to Penni (1981), "these diverse socio-economic and political themes in video-films attracted a large local audience from Ghana and abroad as their contents either offered broader explanations of certain societal occurrences or proposed solutions to social issues through their reflections" (pp. 6-7). Independent Ghanaian film producers, including Ivan Annan, were invited to participate in the Milan Film Festival in 1981, which was held on October 19. Mr. Ivan, who was sponsored by the United Nations' "Child of the Year" Programme, showcased some of his video-films, such as *The Child in Our Time and In Search for Life*. ("Ghana Film for Milan," 1981). The video-film (*In Search for Life*, 1981) dramatized the story of a ten-year-old hole-in-the-heart patient who died whilst receiving treatment at the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital in Ghana. Kwaw Ansah's *Love Brewed in the African Pot* (1980) was Ghana's first entry in the Villach International Film Festival of India ("Film Award," 1981). Competing with 31 other entries from the USA, France, Russia, Germany, Poland, Italy, and others, Kwaw Ansah's video-film, which was in the feature film category, won the Peacock Award Silver. This award honored the video-film for a talented and genuine attempt to project a national identity ("Ghana Film for Milan," 1981).

Figure 1. A Map Showing Various Cinema Houses in Ghana from the 1980s to Recent Times
Map: Source [retrieved from Google. https://bit.ly/2PHAxLh [1st May 2019]

As shown on the map, urban areas such as Koforidua, Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi, and others were strategically chosen for the establishment of cinema houses. Situating cinema theatres in these specific urban spatial cultures was commercially driven, as it is a source of profit or benefit to film producers in Ghana.

The National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI)[1], which was established in 1978, has been playing a crucial role in developing and shaping talents for film practices in Ghana. It is crucial to point out that the contemporary post-colonial Ghanaian video-film industry thrives on private and individual financial support. For instance, a Ghanaian private company in 2018 called Zylofon Media supported the Ghanaian film industry with one million US dollars towards its development.

Regulatory structures, including the Film Producers Association of Ghana (FIPAG), the Film Director Guild (FDGG), the Ghana Actors Guild (GAG), and the Film Regulatory Council of Ghana (FRCG), play key roles in stimulating the industry's growth. These structures supervise

[1] The National Film and Television Institute has now been consolidated into a single institution with the Ghana Institute of Languages as the University of Media Arts and Communication, UniMAC, since 2022.

the well-being and welfare of industry players, as well as the production and distribution mediums of the Ghanaian video-film industry. Conversely, this industry's structures have been censured for their underperformance. Adjetey Annan, a Ghanaian veteran actor and an academic, stated that these governing institutions should be recreated since, over time, they have shown a lack of commitment to the development of the Ghanaian film industry. These regulatory frameworks' poor effectiveness has resulted in a problematic phenomenon where individual filmmakers churn out irrelevant and bland motifs in Ghanaian cinema (personal communication, January 8, 2019). In a related argument, Vitus Nanbigne, who is a film scholar contends that contemporary video-film production in Ghana has moved from a more passionately motivated source to a commercially motivated one, that is, a growth in production but not necessarily in the quality of content and execution (personal communication, January 15, 2019). The strong desire to commercialize video-films in Ghana has often precluded critical attention to issues of representation and expression in films on the part of filmmakers. The result, often, is the production of substandard films, which are considered problematic by film critics.

Figure 2. A line chart showing the number of video-films produced from the 1980s to 2018 in Ghana

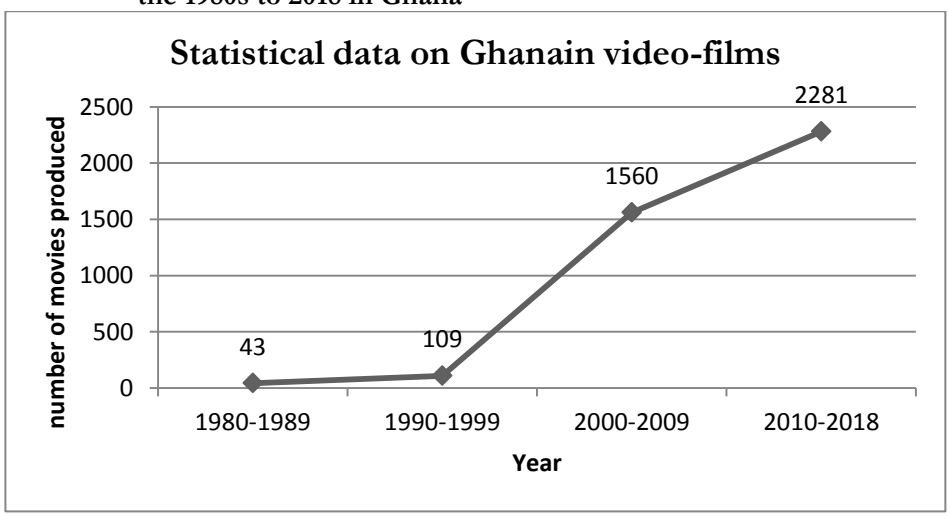

Chart: Source [film data from the Information Service Department and Commercial Service, GFIC, Ghana.]

This chart indicates that video-film production started increasing in the 1990s. This period characterized the emergence of Pentecostal genres, which received huge audiences in Ghana. Their thematic concerns mainly

featured occultism, witchcraft, and others. The early 2000s -2009 saw a considerable increase in the production of video-films in Ghana due to the competition for cultural dominance between film producers in Ghana and Nigeria. Moreover, 2010 -2018 shows that video-film production significantly increased due to the emergence of broad-based thematic concerns in films and the growth in the production of local contents in Ghana.

The early 2000s marked a critical transition and development in Ghana's cinematic practices. Specifically, this period witnessed the proliferation of Nigerian movies and soap operas from Latin America to Ghana. During this period, films from Nigeria almost dominated and stunted the growth of the video-film industry in Ghana following the high consumption of Nigerian movies by Ghanaian audiences. Garritano (n.d.) contends that, "faced with the relentless onslaught of Nigerian videos in Ghana, some Ghanaian filmmakers have come to regard Nollywood as a far more pressing threat to their survival than Hollywood" (p. 3). She further argues that Nollywood looks a lot like an invader, a regional cultural power whose success has endangered local production in Ghana. This development subsequently elicited a counter-hegemonic response from independent Ghanaian filmmakers. Samuel Nyamekye of Miracle Films, Shirley Frimpong Manso of Sparrow Productions, Abdul Salem Mumuni of Venus Film Production, and others are key individual Ghanaian filmmakers who led the effort. In various attempts to restore the fortunes of the Ghana video-film industry, individual Ghanaian filmmakers innovatively resolved to produce films in the local Akan language. This step considerably reduced the consumption of Nigerian films in the Ghanaian cultural market and shaped the mass production of local films that resonated widely with Ghanaian audiences. Aveh (2010) argues that Nollywood production began its penetration into Akan-speaking areas with mainly heavy-dose visual effects, movies with melodramatic situations involving magical charms, and the display of African electronics. At around the same time, a fresh genre of Akan-language movies began to emerge in Ghana.

Groundbreaking individual films such as *Kyeiwaa* (2007), *Perfect Picture* (2009*),* and *Asoreba* (2006) revived consumer interest in Ghanaian films. The video-film *(Kyeiwaa, 2007)* reflects the belief in witchcraft and supernatural beings in Ghanaian society. The movie is about the merciless witch, Kyeiwaa, who takes pleasure in destroying anything with the potential of becoming viable in society. Though technically flawed with

poor production values such as continuity lapses and poor jump cuts, this movie, with no reflections on national issues, received a mass audience, which inspired the director to extend the movie to more than ten sequels. The movie *(The Perfect Picture, 2009)* is one of the popular Ghanaian video-films that competed with the dominance of Nigerian films in Ghana. The film chronicles the harsh experiences of three women who aspired to achieve perfection in their relationships and lives. This film is characterized by considerably impressive production values, which include good picture quality and interesting storylines. Similarly, (*Asoreba, 2006)* was a popular Ghanaian video-film that attracted a mass audience, particularly within the Kumasi enclave in Ghana. I vividly remember seeing this video-film in 2006 with an enthusiastic and larger audience during a Pentecostal crusade at the '*007 Park*' in Kumasi, Ghana. As the scenes of this film unfolded, the Pentecostal pastor ran commentary whilst the larger audience vehemently criticized the bad characters in this movie. The video-film portrays Asaabea's (the main character) hypocritical lifestyle, who happens to be a leader of a women's fellowship in her church. In the movie, she is portrayed as a duplicitous Christian who preaches good virtues and acts contrary to these values. The film integrates subtitles in English to engage a broader film audience that does not know and understand the Twi language in Ghana. Despite the film's poor camera quality, it reflects the daily challenges and tussles of living in a compound house and the hypocritical lives of Christians in Ghana. Films produced in contemporary post-colonial Ghana often eschew censorship due to the absence of effective regulatory structures within the film industry. Consequently, these films, which are regularly churned out on tapes and hardly shown in cinema houses, are often characterized by recursive themes such as sex, love, witchcraft, violence, and others in considerably blunt expressions.

Conclusion

The emergence of the popular phenomenon of video-films is what has defined and characterized the Ghanaian film industry since the 1980s. This study has attempted to establish a diachronic analysis of film production, film expressions or representations, and the film industry of Ghana and how diverse factors have played out and shaped the industry over the years. The production of film has shifted from a medium that consolidated the British imperial project to a decolonization tool and, subsequently, to a complex and popular expressive art form that is controlled mostly by untrained independent film producers in Ghana.

This paper has established that through independent film production and the emergence of video technologies, the film industry of Ghana thrived at a time when the state was no longer able to control, sustain, and manage the industry due to logistical deficits. Since the near collapse of the Ghana film industry, independent or individual film producers have engaged in innovative strategies by using video technology to keep up with changing trends in terms of aesthetics and technology. Despite their considerable technical and narrative flaws, such as poor storylines, distortions, continuity lapses, banal jump cuts, overdramatic acting, and others, video-films have formed a critical aspect of the literary and creative works in Ghana. The study elevates consciousness of the exigencies to provide stringent and effective cultural policies on films and the need to establish critical structures that will align individual film production to national development and goals. The overarching objective of this research is to assume a particular urgency and generate further critical debates and interest regarding individual film production, especially at a time when the movie industry of Ghana has experienced considerable downturns in terms of sales, low patronage, lack of financial support, predictable, mundane, and often repetitive filmic expressions, which have elicited controversies, debates, and criticisms from audiences and critics.

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