



Vol. 10, No. 2, 2018

DOI: 10.14746/jgp.2018.10.007

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Feminine Voyeurism in Ghana Films: Unmasking Frank Raja Arase's Chauvinist Directorial Techniques

ABSTRACT. There has been constant resonance of feminine image misrepresentation in most narratives since the (re)invention of video films across African continent. In spite of the binary struggle between the (presumed) chauvinist filmmakers and their feminists counterparts, muscularity always (re)emerge in new trends to dominate femininity. Consequently, there seems a paradigm shift on the (mis)representation of women which (re)enforces Laura Mulvey's sexual voyeuristic objectification of feminine gender as reflected in near-nude costumes as well as sexual scenes that adorn most Ghana screens. This paper examines Frank Raja Arase's selected films that are randomly sampled to foreground these voyeuristic imprints.

KEYWORDS: Ghallywood, voyeurism, feminism, Arase's films.

Introduction

In most African societies, patriarchy is so much instituted that there are various parts of meats reserved only for male gender. One of such parts is the gizzard of a chicken which is exclusively reserved for the male folk and women who dare to eat it are adequately punished by the existing patriarchal laws. The arrival of Christianity seems to further entrench this patriarchal contraption in Africa as many chauvinists convert have thus (mis)interpreted the bible to suit their patriarchal intents. An African chauvinist school of thought in analysing the biblical creation account believes that God's creation of woman was not in His original plan and as such, a creation error. According to this school of thought, God had created all the animals in binary opposite of male and female except man (Adam) whom God created alone in the paradise. However, seeing that He had created all the animals in binary opposites of male and female and Adam in a single gender of male, God thought

that Adam needed a companion. Therefore, as an afterthought God created Eve. These types of notions which propagate patriarchy in African societies are equally reflected in our films.

This paper examines the replication of such patriarchal school of thought in Frank Raja Arase's selected films which are randomly sampled to foreground the application of voyeuristic imprints to objectify women as sex symbols. The writer's choice of Frank Raja Arase is purposive having (un)consciously observed voyeuristic imprint in most of his films. It queries this excessive application of voyeurism which is hitherto not part of African culture.

Frank Raja Arase

Frank Raja Arase is one of the leading directors in Ghana film industry. Contrary to popular opinion that Arase hails from Ghana, he is a Nigerian, from Edo state. However his earlier contract with a Ghanaian production company; Venus films owned by Abdul Salam Mumuni gave birth to a number of Ghana blockbuster films. Among these films, Arase's film, *Heart of Men* (2009) signaled the quagmire of voyeurism in Ghana screens and by extension, other African films. Some of his notable films include: *The maid I Hired* (2006), *Why Did I Get Married* (2007), *Princess Tyra* (2007), *Agony of the Christ* (2008), *Beyonce: The President Daughter* (2006), *Mummy's Daughter* (2000), *Crime to Christ* (2007), *4 play* (2010), *The Game* (2010), *Somewhere in Africa* (2011), *To Love a Prince* (2014), *Iyore* (2015), *Ghana Must Go* (2016), and so many others. He is famous to have created most Ghana stars like Nadia Buar, Van Vicker, Kalsom Sina-re, Kofi Adjorolo, Majid Michael, Yvonne Nelson, Jakie Appiah and so many others.

His films' genre which seemingly intertwines glamour with crime is often replete with good narrative techniques which involve high suspense, good story lines, good plot structure and exotic locales. Though his films are screen played by different writers notable among them is Pascal Amanfo, the concept of a feminine voyeurism reoccurs in these films. These narratives mostly center on the challenges of family situation; especially, the question of infidelity between husband and wife. Like Alfred Hitchcock, Arase intertwines the serious and the unserious, comic and serious actions, a technique that makes his narratives very entertaining as it is replete with high emotional charge.

Breaking Patriarchal Structures through Feminist Concepts

Patriarchy is a masculine effort to impose male ideology which seeks to dominate the feminine gender in a particular society. On the contrast, feminism is feminine effort to liberate female gender from patriarchal construct in a particular society. Feminism purportedly to have started in women's moment of the 1960s has a millennial root that stretches to antiquity. Shaka and Uchendu, trace feminism "back to mythical figures like Liliath, to the legendary fighting Amazons of Greece and ancient Dahomey, and to classical plays like Aristophanes' *Lysistala*" (Barry, 2012, p. 10). Similarly, Umukoro and Okwuowulu, citing Okoh, equally trace the evolution of feminine suppression to Paleolithic era when goddesses were highly venerated. According to them, "Female goddesses as Athena, Aphrodite, Hera, Hestia and Artemis were highly venerated and assumed great Significance in hierarchy" (Okoh, 2010, p. 226). Okoh however, attributes the lowering of the statues of the goddesses in the Greek pantheon to Zeus' impertinence, inferring that Zeus instituted patriarchy in Olympian by killing king Cronus his father and subduing his mother Rhea. Thereafter he usurped the women reproduction power and gave birth to Athena and Dionysus through his head and thigh respectively. This mythology changed the emphases of female and male divinities (Umukoro & Okwuowulu, 2010, p. 226–227). Having seemingly traced the origin of patriarchal domination and feminist struggle, it is therefore necessary to underscore the difference between gender and sex as such delineations will aid in the analysing the key texts in this paper. In view of this, Umukoro and Okwuowulu, citing Agbo, draw a sharp distinction between both concepts, according to them:

Gender is defined as cultural, behavioural, psychological, social traits typically associated with sex that is male or female. Sex is directly linked to the biological reproductive organ of both male and female. This is the obvious difference between sex and gender (Agbo, 2010, p. 227).

The obvious difference and relationship in both concepts infers that the biological trait of an individual determines his/her societal gender construct. Based on this stereotype, the feminine gender has, over the years, been subjected to a second class role irrespective of her capacity; hence the evolution of feminist movements.

The inception of feminist movement emerged in the western world due to the long deprivation women faced from economic activities.

Based on their sexology, most of them were forced to channel their energy to domestic chores, edifying their bodies and becoming objects of sexual satisfaction to the male gender. Consequently, several women who found this subjugation abnormal championed the feminist trends. Shaka and Uchendu affirm the notion that:

It was in attempt to expose this cultural mindset in men and women as a mechanism of gender inequality that the feminist projects of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s emerged. Since these decades, feminist theory and criticism have undergone several processes and changes in focus and intentions (Shaka & Uchendu, 2012, p. 3–4).

Since the emergence of feminist struggle, different societies and cultures have evolved their peculiar concerns as pointed out by Shaka and Uchendu.

In Africa for instance, the concept of womanist struggle is pivotal and takes precedence over feminist struggle. In the womanist struggle, women endear themselves to be brought into men's affairs, especially the decision making process. It accentuates that women have specific duties at home which are not in any small measure a second fiddle which should be disregarded by men. Womanist concept unlike feminist ideals does not seek equality with men, rather, complementarities of both sexes. Umukoro and Okwuowulu complement this notion stating that:

African feminism, with recourse to their peculiar social condition and cultural exigencies, has developed an African variant which, though runs counter to the antagonistic disposition of its western variants, articulates no less the feminist vision. Its thrust however, is the complementary of the sexes. Obinna Nnaemeka reveals that the African model of feminism, often tagged womanism, has repudiated the western feminist abandonment of motherhood in their quest for egalitarianism (Umukoro & Okwuowulu, 2010, p. 227).

This womanist struggle in Africa permeates in African society because the African gender construct favours the male gender to ambitiously pursue his dream whereas the female gender is being flattered by old men at the tender age and harassed sexually. The society rather than encourage the female gender places premium on her physical appearance as object for male sexual satisfaction. Thus, female genders unconsciously channel their energies towards beautifying their body in preparation of a ready-made husband, forgetting to pursue their dreams and aspiration (Shaka & Uchendu, 2012, p. 4–5). Thus, while acknowled-

ging the African gender construct on the both sexes, womanist movement seeks to demystify the premium placed on women's body and project the role of women in the family. Thus womanist struggle is subtle but it still resonates in most African culture because of the inequality placed on different sexes due to the social gender construct.

Having given the background of feminist and womanist movements, it is pertinent to note therefore that the binary struggle between chauvinist and feminist/womanist ideologies has always been mirrored in the films of various cultures where the struggle is domiciled. In Africa, the concept of the chauvinism has been captured in various films especially that of Frank Raja Arase earlier mentioned. Following the womanist African ideal which enthrones motherhood, and a conscious effort by feminist critics and the emergent feminist filmmakers who have produced films that have attempted a role reversal of the chauvinist portrayal of feminine image in Africa, the paradigm of these bizarre feminist portrayal which seemed to have stopped has only taken a new form as chronic chauvinist filmmakers now employ voyeurism as an alternative means of expression.

The concept of voyeurism involves the sexual derivation which a human being achieves by watching naked individuals. The concept of voyeurism in Ghana films is traced to European screens. Laurel Mulvey had articulated Voyeuristic motifs and the image construct for the Hollywood cinema as scopophilia (pleasure in looking). She associated that scopophilia "with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 60). Mulvey observes that cinema satisfies the primordial wish of pleasurable looking, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect. Thus, cinema audience derives pleasure in using another person as object of sexual stimulation through sight. According to her, pleasure of looking has been between active (male) and passive (female). The image of the passive is encoded with erotic imprints which connotes to-be-looked-at-ness. Therefore the female gender is portrayed in leitmotif of sexual object carrying erotic spectacle and traditionally displayed as sexual objects in two levels: one, as erotic objects within the characters in the screen and secondly as erotic objects for the viewers that are watching the film. Comparing male and female sexual objectification, Mulvey observes that male gender derives no pleasure in gazing at the sexual advance of his fellow man. Thus this justifies male's role as active pleasure "seeker" where the female is passive pleasure "seeker" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 63-65).

This concept promotes nudity and demeans the feminine gender in African society as portrayed in most Ghana films. God's presence corroborates this notion that women are variously represented in films as "object of male gaze, sex objects, and self-sacrifices to gratify the man's desire (Smith, 2014, p. 98). Correspondingly Smith observes that:

The role of a woman in a film almost always revolves around her physical attraction and the mating games she plays with the male characters... Women provide trouble or sexual interludes for male characters, or are not present at all. Even when a woman is the central character she is generally shown as confused or helpless and in danger, or passive, or as a purely sexual being (Smith, 2006, p. 14-15).

Adjei supposes that voyeuristic scene seen in Ghana films presently could be traced to Andre Bazin's development of deep-focus photography as a neorealist concept which brought the eyes closer to reality. He infers that this in turn encourages soft phonographic scenes in films. According to him, these voyeuristic imprints seen today in Ghana films are western narrative techniques which, do not conform to the orature narrative techniques in Ghana films. He submits that "independent European or Neorealist Cinema, rather than Hollywood, has influenced Ghallywood in expression of sex and sexuality" (Adjei, 2014, p. 14-15). Continuing, he presumes that many Mexican and Venezuelan romantic soap operas that now dominate Ghanaian TV screens such as *Esmeralda*, *Aespuleo Bay*, *Second chance*, *Hidden Passion*, *Storm over Paradise* and so on, which explicitly depict extended sexuality have been popular in Ghana screen and thus blindly mimicked by indigenous filmmakers.

The trending Feminine nudity and obscene costumes in most Ghallywood films complement this notion. Citing M. S. Tili, God's presence observes that the near- nude and obscene costume filmic motifs of Socrates Sarfo, one of the pioneer producers in Ghana video film industry greatly influences the voyeurism seen today in Ghana films (Tili, 2013, p. 222). Thus, directors who employ voyeurism technique promote nudity and demean the feminine gender in African society.

A Critical Reading of *The maid I Hired* by Frank Raja Arase

In the narrative *The maid I Hired*, Frank Raja Arase seemingly brings women to the centre of marital problems. The narrative starts with party scenes where ladies (un)consciously flaunt their skimpy cloths.

This scene accentuates the argument of this paper on the voyeuristic imprints in Arase's films. Thereafter the narrative centres on the family of Desmond (Mike Ezuronye) and Melody (Yvonne Okoro) who are husband and wife. Desmond, being a movie star is very rich and would want his wife to rather keep his home than build her own career. We recall that this notion held by the filmic character Desmond preempted the feminist struggle. Though Melody is extremely comfortable in their exquisite and magnificent abode, she is very lonely and desires to work and build a career. Thus against her husband's consent, she engages in a work. Again, her attitude conforms to the concerns of the women who originated feminist struggle. Consequently, both couple becomes extremely busy that Melody employs the services of Juliet (Yvonne Nelson), a village girl and her childhood friend, transforms her through buying her some skimpy cloths in order to look good and subsequently take care of her baby.

As Melody's excessive busy schedule entrenches problem in their family, Desmond claims that his premarital agreement with Melody is that while he, Desmond, provides for the family, Melody keeps the home. Consequent upon the friction in the house, Desmond lusts after Juliet as Juliet wears these skimpy cloths bought for her by Melody. Thus, the concept of Mulvey scopophilia is highly valorised in these scenes. This lustful scenario heightens the tension in the narrative as both partners feel the absence of each other. Once more, the emotional depth by both couple is portrayed by the director with a composite shot of both partners rendered in a montage sequence where they react to their respective emotions in diverse ways. While Desmond soliloquizes as he drives, Melody goes to God in prayers: thus a moment of self realization which is akin with Arase's films.

Arase's chauvinist ideology is equally portrayed in these emotional states. Though both couple battle emotionally, Melody's emotions are magnified as her best friend ,Juliet, whom she brought to the house as maid is presumed to have taken in for her husband. With this, Arase takes a stand in the chauvinist and feminist binary struggle which implies that women should not pursue their careers to the detriment of their family. Arase's stand goes to affirm Shaka and Uchendu's earlier reviewed position that African society encourages female gender to channel their energies towards beautifying their body in preparation for a ready-made husband, forgetting to pursue their dreams and aspiration (Shaka & Uchendu, 2012, p. 4-5). The film finally ends in the moment of

truth where the viewers discover that Desmond is not responsible for Juliet's pregnancy. Thus, Desmond's family supposedly makes—up.

Arase's films have similar motifs that could endear him to be adjudged as an auteur director. This is seen in his frequent characterization of feminine characters as seductress, as seen in Juliet's skimpy cloths as well as the ladies wearing pants at the swimming pool. This conforms to the position of this paper on Arase's Voyeuristic imprints in his narrative. Thus Arase's notion of seductress characters conform with Mulvey's conception of female gender being portrayed in leitmotif of sexual object carrying erotic spectacle in two levels: one, as erotic objects within the characters in the screen and secondly as erotic objects for the viewers that are watching the film (Mulvey, 2006, p. 65).

Furthermore he characterizes them as career women who lacks affection for their family and who could scarcely keep a home as seen in Melody's character. This portrayal which contradicts the notion of motherhood in womanist concept of African feminist ideology is an indictment of feminine image in his films. In addition, he characterizes them as betrayals as seen in the betraying tendencies of Melody's friends who in order to win Desmond's love tell various lies to Desmond that Melody cheats on him.

A Critical Reading of *Why Did I Get Married?* by Frank Raja Arase

The narrative, *Why Did I Get Married?* is driven by just two characters: Williams (Magid Michael) and Janet (Yvonne Okoro). The two character-driven technique of the narrative is perhaps its most fascinating aspect. The film chronicles the family of Williams, a medical doctor, who, following his wife's advice abandons his medical profession to enjoy a blissful marriage with his wife Janet. Afraid of having contact with other lady's private part, Janet had advised Williams to abandon his medical profession. Against this background, she tries to get contract jobs for Williams. However, William's decision to go back to his profession was borne out of financial bankruptcy as well as a failed contract which he believes he lost as a result of his problems with his wife Janet at the period of the contract.

The inception of the narrative presents Williams' family in lovely mood with a conscious attempt by Arase to delineate the two characters

which are both portrayed as deceptive personalities. Their deceptive nature is seen during a self imposed fasting which both opted to do. During the fasting, both characters secretly eat something while still pretending to the other spouse that the fasting is still going on. Beyond this scenario which portrays both partners as deceptive, they are both portrayed as serious minded characters, though playful in nature. Their serious and unserious nature makes their characters flexible and this character flexibility sustains the narrative which revolves around the activities of both partners in their house. Just like most Arase's films, Janet (Female) is at the receiving end of most encountered marital problem in the narrative.

On one occasion, both couple had come home after celebrating their marriage anniversary, Williams not only accuses Janet of making him spend money, but prevents Janet from going to the toilet when she is pressed. His reason been that she was to go and defecate his money which she just squandered. In addition, Williams' harsh behaviours towards Janet, translated into physical abuse immediately Williams starts working in the hospital. On several occasions, Janet will take alcoholic drinks due to boredom at home whenever Williams goes to work. However, on returning from work on several occasions and seeing his wife in such drunken condition, Williams forces more drinks on her in such a ruthless way.

In the portrayal of both characters, while Janet is portrayed as a no-do-well woman, who does not have any career and who often tries to seduce her husband whenever he is at home and feels frustrated whenever her husband goes to work, Williams on the other hand is portrayed as a medical doctor, a serious character who does not want his mother in-law to take care of his financial responsibility; a reason why he went back to his medical profession. Janet's seductive movement which conforms to Murvey's voyeurism is seen in various scenes which she played with her husband Williams. This is highlighted in the family's troubled situations where rather than using alternative means of making up, Janet uses futile seductive enticement on Williams. The unsuccessful seductive attempts on Williams are a strong incitement on the feminine gender presupposing that men could develop strong self control even when they lust after feminine body. Conversely, William though ruthless in certain periods, is portrayed as a man who does not joke with his job, loving and caring. His seriousness with his medical profession is seen in his response to distress calls when he is relaxing with his wife. Thus the

juxtaposition of his relaxation scenes with his wife and his reception of distressed calls portrays his wife as a big distraction which he must always subdue to be focused. However, typical of Arase's films, the narrative swerves to a swift twist at its tail end as all the filmic actions are perceived to have happened in a dream; both couple are presumably yet to be married.

A Critical Reading of *To Love a Prince* by Frank Raja Arase

The narrative revolves on the desperate character of Solange (Yvonne Nelson) a beauty Queen who will do anything possible to win Akila's (John Domelo) love. Akila is a prince and a gentle man greatly desired by all feminine characters in the narrative. First, Solange fakes an accident scene where she pretentiously runs into Akila's car. Though not badly hurt by Akila, she is taken to the hospital by him. This accident situation thus provides an opportunity for Solange to meet the prince as well as the opportunity for her to tell the prince about her beauty contest. Secondly, during the beauty context, the audience's favours Bernice (Jakie Appiah) over Solange. Bernice is Solange's best friend. Following this, Solange secretly organises a kidnap of Bernice's sister, using her as bait to entrap Bernice to step down from the beauty contest. Her stepping down gives Solange an opportunity to win the contest and subsequently invited to be hosted by the prince, Akila. Conversely, At Akila's house in the company of Bernice, Akila openly confesses love for Bernice and thereafter makes outward love gestures and marriage proposals.

Subsequently, both Akila and Bernice agree to marry themselves. As Akila and Bernice are organising their wedding, Solange arranges for Bernice to be blinded and crippled by some bad boys. Unfortunately Bernice dies in the process. After her burial, Solange makes futile efforts to seduce Akila. However, being greatly troubled in the spiritual realm, Bernice's spirit possesses a dead body, Vanessa and falls in love with Akila. Shortly before Akila proposes marriage with Bernice's spirit, he discovers that Vanessa is a dead body being possessed by Bernice. Consequently, he vows not to remarry in his life.

Just like most of Arase's films, the portrayal of the character of Solange as an evil genius, seductress, murderer and desperado portrays the woman folk in a bad light, while Akila, the prince, a male gender, is portrayed as a focused young man who would not fall for Solange's

seductive action. Emphases are laid on Solange's body and beauty which she (Solange) premiums at the point of her purported accident. At the beauty pageant, her character as a desperado as well as an evil genius is highlighted. Seeing that Bernice is the choice candidate, she arranges for the adoption of her sister and thereafter prevails on her to withdraw from the beauty race. In addition, even though Solange supposedly takes hummer jeep as a price from the prince to give up on him, she keeps trying to seduce him. Again, her seductive attributes is akin to Arase's films which foregrounds the voyeuristic imprints in them. Finally, in trying to maim Bernice, she murders her best friend. Thus, her character portrayal as a murderer is perhaps the height of feminine character stereotype in Arase's films. Having murdered Bernice, Solange's quest for the prince continues through different scenarios where she tries to seduce him. Her unremorseful nature as well as her focus on marrying the prince overtly reduces feminine characters as mere charlatans whose means of survival merely depends on men. This equally conforms to Shaka and Uchendu's earlier reviewed position that African chauvinist construct supposes that women's energy should be channeled towards their body and subsequently marrying good husband rather than building a career.

Comparative Analysis of the Selected Films by Frank Raja Arase

The feminine portrayals in the three films are seemingly stereotyped to achieve voyeuristic imports. First, they are portrayed as women whose source of livelihood depends on men. In *Why Did I Get Married?* and *To love a Prince*, Janet and Solange, the key feminine characters in both films rather than channel their energies towards building a career for themselves, focus on beautifying their bodies as bait for the key masculine characters in the narrative. In *The maid I Hired*, Arase though presents Melody, the key feminine character as ambitions towards building a career; he equally takes a serious position on the evil effect of a woman building a career to the detriment of her family. This is portrayed in the emotional battle which Melody undergoes as she presumes that her maid Juliet has taken in for her husband.

Furthermore, voyeuristic scenarios are replete in these three films as Arase always constructs a feminine sex symbol in his narratives. Through Melody is the key character in *The maid I Hired*, Arase con-

structs Juliet as sex symbol for voyeuristic impact in the narrative. Juliet, a presumed village girl and childhood friend of Melody, is hired by Melody, to take care of her baby. Juliet's presence in the house serves as voyeuristic imprints to Desmond, by extension to the viewers who presumably start lusting after her. In *Why Did I Get Married?* Janet was characterized as the sex symbol to achieve voyeuristic imprints. Janet on several occasions would systematically make sexual overtures on Williams her husband. On the other hand, Solenge in *To Love a Prince* makes countless futile sexual advances to prince Akila. Most times, in as much as the male gender will resist the sexual intents made to them by this seductress, Arase elongates the voyeuristic scenes to presumably achieve his scopophilia imprints. Apart from these key characters, characterised as sex symbols by Arase, he often intermittently brings in party scenes, swimming pool scenes, beauty pageant scenes, beach scenes where woman who are merely on their nude forms flaunt their bodies.

Conclusion

Frank Raja Arase's narratives are captivating with stories neatly woven around various complicating events. These conflicts often centre on unfaithful feminine partner in the family. He always makes use of exquisite and bogus locations to add glamour to his narratives. His films often chronicle marital challenges which are seemingly caused by the wife of the family through her excessive career pursuit to the detriment of her family or her overbearing placement of premium on her body. Thus, feminine characters in Arase's films are often seen as temptress, betrayals, seductress, insatiable and inability to be good mothers. These films are often replete with conscious seductive movements by the feminine characters who often wear skimpy cloths. This bizarre portrayal of feminine characters often creates voyeurism motifs in his narratives.

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