

THE CULTURAL VALUE OF EVERYDAY IDENTITY IN GHANAIAN POPULAR VIDEO MOVIES

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Abstract: Discourses on Ghanaian video movies have predominantly been described as representing everyday life. Conversely, the approach to which the everydayness of the video movies has been viewed diminishes the cultural value of the narratives. This article examines how movie narratives capture daily life experiences and how they respond to the anxieties that characterise everyday life. Using qualitative research methods, a contextual analysis of six movies was employed in analysing the narratives. Representations of daily life are embodied in marriage, religion, family, social relations and economic conditions. Anxiety is expressed over family disintegration, consumer culture intersecting with religious beliefs and the interplay between individual aspirations and social expectations in contemporary living. This study broadens the conversation on the relevance and contribution of video films to both cinema and cultural studies.

Key words: *Ghanaian popular movies, African cinema, culture, Ghanaian videos, everyday culture*

Introduction

From the overemphasis on the non-specialist of the filmmaking personnel to cultural misrepresentations of their contents, Ghanaian popular video movies have received considerable attention in the literature (Meyer 1999; Wendl 2001; Garritano 2013). However, much of the literature appears repetitive of the idea that while Africa, particularly Ghana and Nigeria, have developed a flourishing local film industry, the films are culturally misrepresentative and denunciative of African culture. Meyer's (1999) article, *Popular Ghanaian Cinema and the "African Heritage"* marks one of the earliest of such works, focusing on cultural representations which informed most

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subsequent studies. In her article, Meyer (1999) analysed Kwaw Ansah's film, *Heritage Africa*. In the analyses, the call for the return to indigenous cultural values as depicted in the film is associated with the adinkra symbol of *Sankofa* which means "Go back and take it." Meyer referred to it as the "key symbol for the promotion of national culture" (Meyer 1999: 103). From the film's dominant theme of anti-colonialism, Meyer nationalises the cultural representation of the film through the association with national cultural revitalisation efforts and projects its cultural value by relating it to the cultural policies of the government of Ghana. Redirecting attention to the prevalence of Pentecostal movies in which the theme of "good vs evil" predominated, at the time of her writings, Meyer posited the view that due to the considerable influence of Pentecostalism on popular culture, Pentecostal views defined the parameters of cultural activities. And with the Pentecostal perception that African traditions and "roots are rather seen as the source of problems encountered in the present" (Meyer 1999: 105), they were represented with negative visual grammar. Thus Meyer's (1999a; 2002b; 2003c) analysis of Ghanaian popular cinema has focused on narratives that share the Pentecostal point of view on African cultural traditions, which have been mostly presented as maleficence in the ever-present theme of the duality between good and evil. However, while Pentecostalism does enliven many Ghanaian popular movies, it is only one of the many approaches or points of view of the assorted themes characteristic of such popular movies. Yet some works such as (Wendl 2001; Green-Simms 2012) have centred their arguments on a supposed understanding that videos are the sole means of visualising the supernatural, thus creating the false impression that the Pentecostal view defines the entire video producing and consumption culture.

Building on Meyer's (1999) perspectives, Garritano saw duality in cultural representation as a contestation of the authenticity of personnel "who are not trained producers of movies and had not been initiated into the cultural-nationalist, artistic or pedagogical discourses that defined and maintained the work of trained filmmakers" (Garritano 2008: 33); video technology as opposed to the celluloid film that "allowed individuals situated outside the state-controlled realm of cultural production to produce video features" (ibid. 28) and a narrative that "appealed to audiences who looked a lot like them and the characters of their films: those who were not among the elite" (ibid. 27). While Meyer (2002) placed her cultural arguments between "good" and "evil" as perceived by a Pentecostalist point of view,

Garritano similarly compartmentalises her discussions in a comparative way between the notion of elitist professionals with a mindset for national cinema and the amateur with a commercial interest to please the popular masses. Perceiving Ghanaian filmmaking and its audience from the sole perspective of Pentecostal views presents a one-dimensional view that limits discourses on the panoply of various cultural representations that popular movies have on offer while it at the same time narrows the diversity that characterises the Ghanaian public. According to a recent census, people of Pentecostal faith make up 28 percent of the Ghanaian public, which comprises people of various religious and cultural backgrounds (Ghana Statistical Service 2021). Thus, views from this segment of society can only be an aspect of Ghana as a whole. Again, framing ideas and groups in binaries as posited by Garritano (2013) also oversimplifies the complex world of popular cinema into tradition vs modernity, with a framed discussion that shifts towards modernity, capitalism and economic liberalism.

Questioning the authenticity of popular video movies, both in culture and aesthetics, is one of the most regular features in literature (Garritano 2013). With the connotation of being “popular,” video movies were viewed as cheap, of poor technical and aesthetic quality, and poor storylines. For example, Haynes (2003: 23) remarked that, “the cultural horizon” of popular video movies “is formed more by American action films, Indian romances and Mexican soap operas, than by exposure to English literature.” Misgivings about its authenticity have been implied with contemptuous statements such as “brazenly amateurish and profit driven” (Gugler 2003: 78) and “devoid of authenticity” (Ukadike 2003: 126) --to mention only a few without necessarily providing reference to any of the many of the video films being talked about. Central in this body of work is Kquofi and Croffie’s (2017) analysis of Akan culture as represented in the so-called Kumawood movies. Kumawood is the local brand name of popular movies made in the Akan language of Ghana. In their analysis they identify what they describe as distortions of some of the Akan cultural practices as presented in selected movies. The misrepresentations were identified through costume, language use and traditional court practices. For example, they noted situations in which ordinary persons would budge in unceremoniously in palace council meetings; priests and other members of the public speaking to kings without a linguist, whose role in the traditional king’s court is to speak to and for the king; elders and kingmakers tying their clothes over their shoulders

instead of wrapping the cloth around their bodies and leaving the right shoulder and hand uncovered; and a king being enstooled publicly, whereas in actuality kings are enstooled in secrecy and later out-doored to the public. Kquofi and Croffie (2017: 14) assert the view that films based on particular traditions and cultures “are expected to show authenticity and originality of these cultures, but rather misrepresent the symbolism and cultural values of the people.”

Kquofi and Croffie’s (2017) findings of cultural misrepresentations are much more directed towards some cultural specifics than the misrepresentation of the main idea or underlying meaning explored in the movies. Their approach draws attention to the fact that, for a mass audience, cultural specificities in movies can be an obstacle to connecting with a mass audience outside the culture. This is not to downplay their probable suggestion that makers of popular video movies may lack an awareness for authenticity. The need for authenticity in cinema is especially important for viewers knowledgeable about the culture or the people being represented on screen as exemplified by Kquofi and Croffie (2017). Yet, authenticity in cinema still remains an elusive ideal that is difficult to attain because there are so many competing factors at play in the making of a film, least of all that it is also a business. However, it is important to note that, until African films in general grow in significant numbers in their global availability, the ones produced, both elitist and popular, will always carry the burden of representation, for accurate information and representation.

Problem Statement

Popular video movies continue to enjoy immense patronage from its audience, at the same time evolving, both in content and form. Critics have suggested that the disparity between amateur and professional film products has considerably closed (Dovey 2009; Haynes 2010; Nanbigne 2012; Garritano 2013). This, they argue, is a result of the significant improvement of expertise, born out of experience, more formalised production structures and advanced digital technology. However, one of the main characteristics of popular video movies that has continued to remain, through the process of growth, is their representation of the daily lives of everyday people and their lived experiences (Meyer 1999; Becker 2014) and their maintaining the ascribed identity of “everydayness.” Everyday life, as described by Zaitseva (2014: 295), is the usual ordinary and “natural environment,” the indi-

cation of the “here and now” with the “familiar sounds, images, behaviour motivations, values of behaviour and social roles.” The notion of everyday life also involves the definition of the self and how people conceptualise relationships to the world and others and how people generate, establish and interpret meaning (Highmore 2002). Noteworthy studies, such as Meyer’s account of the supernatural aspects of Ghanaian video movies (1999a: 93–114. 2002b: 82–110) and Garritano’s (2013) analysis of the local with a global desire, all defined within the notion of everydayness have provided a broad understanding of the popular video movies from Ghana particularly. However, this dominant description ascribed to popular movies in the literature, as the representation of everyday life, is given cursory attention without much interrogation of the concept and its meaning within the context of popular movie narratives. Recent and emerging studies on Ghanaian popular cinema have revolved around the chronological development of the film industry with an occasional delving into its cultural effects (Aveh 2010; Green-Simms 2012; Adjei 2014). These are normally pegged against notions of African cinema which centres on nationalistic, anti-colonial and cultural emancipation ethos. Perhaps, the notion of being ordinary and mundane, as associated with Ghanaian popular video films, is far removed from the exciting task of cultural redemption and emancipation of African cinema. Nevertheless, few writers have attempted to examine the everydayness of Ghanaian popular cinema and its relevance in the production of culture. The cursory attention paid to the depiction of everyday life, even though acknowledging its presence in popular movies, projects the erroneous impression that it is common and unexceptional. The objective of the present article is to explore the notion of the concept of everyday life as depicted in the movies from Ghana and how the narratives capture daily life experiences. The article will further examine how the narratives respond to the anxieties that characterise everyday life as presented in the movies. For the purposes of this study, the term “everyday” connotes the recurrence of the mechanisms of social order on meeting social needs as themes that feature in the movies. The present study expands the debate on the relevance of Ghanaian popular cinema as a body of works that preserves the often taken-for granted heritage of living in continuous social, cultural and political changes. It also provides a fresh and constructive perspective on how Ghanaian popular cinema has been viewed and studied over the years by broadening the conversation on its relevance and its contribution to both cinema and cultural studies.

Methodology

Approaching the study with qualitative research methods, a contextual analysis of the movies was employed in analysing the narratives. The analysis was framed within the broader context of culture, time and place in the creation of the movies, in order to understand the meaning of everyday life as depicted in the films and how daily life is captured. This approach enabled the ethnographic interpretation of the social and cultural representations of the movies. Most films analysed for early research on Ghanaian popular movies were those made between 1989 and 2009. As it is suggested that popular movies have improved, both in content and form since the early productions, this study sampled movies produced between 2012 and 2019. This provided fresh perspectives to the analysis. Films made in the Akan language were sampled because they are the most predominant and widely available. Moreover, according to Kramsch (1993), languages express, embody and symbolise cultural realities. Through thematic coding, mechanisms of social order (marriage, family, religion, economic and communal relations) were identified while a descriptive analysis was used to capture responses to daily life anxieties. Primary data was collected from the sampled videos through an observation guide for obtaining the necessary data. Data was collected from six feature-length popular movies based on their popularity in viewership and on wide distribution through cinema screens, television and online video portals. The six films analysed in this study were: *Teacher Agya Koo* (2012), *Enye Mania (Not in my Conscious State)* (2017), *Wogye Den? (To What Extent)* (2017), *Eii Pinaman* (2018), *Afunu no Adane (The Corpse Has Changed)* (2015) and *Enti Onyame Su Nie (Is this the Nature of God?)* (2017). The present article first describes the movies used for the analysis and then discusses the concept of everyday life and its relevance from an ethnographic and cultural studies perspective. This is followed by the findings of how daily life is exemplified in the movies through the mechanisms of the social order of marriage, family relations, religion and economic well-being and how popular movies express the responses to the anxieties of daily life.

Six Ghanaian Popular Movies of Everyday Life

Teacher Agya Koo (2012). This movie revolves around a woman, Maame Kunadu, with three daughters, Rose, Stella, Flozzy and a son, Fred. In the story, the grown-up children live with their mother. The story begins when

the mother introduces an elderly man to her oldest daughter, Rose, to get married to. She vehemently rejects the offer, which ends up in a confrontation with the mother. Soon after, she brings in another man, a nursery school teacher, and introduces him to her mother as her preferred choice. Upon meeting him, the mother ridicules the man mainly because of his profession, which she considers lowly paid, and therefore a poor man. Teacher Appiah (the name of the teacher) endures constant harassment from his mother-in-law at any given opportunity. She extends this harassing attitude towards any other man she considers poor who seems interested in any of her daughters. While Rose insists on keeping her teacher husband, the younger sister, Stella, lets go of her boyfriend on the insistence of her mother. Soon after, a man called Atobra, claiming to be a businessman and dressed in a suit and polished black shoes with car keys dangling in his hands comes proposing to her. With the encouragement from her mother, Stella agrees to date the businessman. They eventually get married. Some years after marriage, the couple experiences a downturn in their business affairs, which renders them bankrupt. After losing much of their properties in the city, they move back to live in Stella's mother's house. The couple are under constant harassment and treated with utmost disdain and disrespect, which they, however, endure patiently. Sometime later, the couple gradually recover their businesses and finances. They move out of the house back to the city. Soon after, Maame Kunadu finds herself in trouble. She has borrowed a huge amount of money from the bank. The business fails and, as she cannot recover the money, she has to pay back her lenders. She seeks help from Atobra and Stella, but they refuse to help her in any way. The lenders come to repossess the house. The owner of the bank, Desmond, recognises Appiah as the teacher who sponsored him in school when he was in need. And after finding out that Maame Kunadu is his mother-in-law, he returns the favour by forgiving her the debt she owes his bank.

Enye Mania (Not in my Conscious State) (2017). This story begins when a young man, Agyemang, expresses his interest in marrying Premang. While her father is happy with the news, her mother demands a hefty bride price from the groom and his family. The father is strongly in disagreement but gives in to the demands of the wife due to her overbearing nature. The marriage comes off and Premang moves to live with her husband in the city. After a while, her mother insists on leaving her old husband in the village to live with her daughter Premang in the city. While there, she encourages her

daughter to nag and frustrate her husband. In an envious spat, the mother demands the very piece of cloth Agyemang has bought to send to someone abroad. Without asking his permission, Premang gives the cloth to her mother upon her readiness to return to the village. Agyemang is not happy about this turn of events when he returns from work to find out the cloth is gone. He demands that Premang go back to the village to collect the cloth and should remain in the village until she does so. Premang goes to the village and her mother supports her to remain in the village and not go back to the husband against the vehement disagreement of her father. One day the mother dresses up and goes to the city and the home of Agyemang in an effort to seduce him. Through the use of supernatural magic, she succeeds in seducing him. After being ridiculed in the village as a failure, Premang takes her father's advice and goes back to her husband in the city only to find her mother there as the new mistress to her husband. Weeping uncontrollably, she goes to her elder sister who is also married in the city. Surviving a similar experience like that with her mother, she joins hands with Premang to dedicate their problems to prayer. Upon several prayer sessions and interventions, the hexed Agyemang recovers and comes running back to his wife, to their amazement. The mother returns to the village and is suddenly struck with a strange illness. She eventually dies after confessing all bad things she has done to her family and friends.

Wogyé Den (To What Extent) (2017). The story opens to a heated confrontation between two brothers who are fighting over a piece of land. After inheriting the land from their parents and sharing it equally among them, Osei, the elder brother, prefers to be given that of his younger brother, Kusi, because it is more fertile. In giving in to his covetousness, Osei seeks the help of an errant fetish priest and murders his brother's son, Afrifa. After spreading false information accusing Kusi of killing his son, Afrifa, he murders him. He also rapes Aboagyewaa, the wife of his late brother. She reports the incident to the elders of the village and in order to ascertain her truth as customs demands, she is made to swear an oath. However, she ends up being afflicted with illness with the help of the errant priest. They do so through an oath swearing ritual in which Osei colludes with the fetish priest to corrupt the process and implicate Aboagyewaa. In due course, the village fetish priest, having lost his supernatural powers when offending the gods, is exposed through confessing his wrongdoings publicly and dies. The moment of retribution begins when he loses his two children to

mysterious deaths. He becomes bedridden with a mysterious illness while he, at the same time, is being haunted by the ghost of Afrifa. He publicly confesses and dies.

Eii Pinaman (2018) is a story about a very rich couple with their two children. The story revolves around the mother who is a prosperous business woman with several flourishing businesses. The husband has lost his job and stays at home without work. Pinaman, the name of the wife, takes over the financial care of the home as well as the payment of school fees of the two children they have. Pinaman disrespects her husband in all ways and does anything she wishes to do, such as leaving home without telling her husband, sleeps around with any man she wishes and refuses to cook for the family; she also insults her husband anytime he complains of her behaviour. Pinaman brings her only sister's daughter to the city to live with them and go to school. After bringing the child, she maltreats her till the girl falls ill and dies. Pinaman continues her bad ways to such an extent that she seduces her daughter's new husband when the daughter is put to bed. She eventually gets pregnant by her daughter's husband; her old husband gets to know and he finally divorces her. As it is believed to be a curse to sleep with an in-law, Pinaman suffers a strange illness and dies at her home in the village after asking for forgiveness from all those she has offended.

Afunu no Adane (The Corpse Has Changed) (2015) is a story about three brothers, one poor, one rich and the other a priest/pastor. They also have a sister. Out of greed and covetousness, the poor man, Boateng, demands that his rich brother should at all cost take care of his (Boateng's) daughter and take her abroad. His rich brother, Tuffour, refuses on the grounds that he is not financially able to add that responsibility as he also has children and other nephews he is taking care of. Unhappy with the response, Boateng begins the process of destroying his brother and other family members through any means possible, in spite of warnings from his priest brother. Paying no heed, Boateng destroys the family through poverty and deaths. In the end, Boateng gets mysteriously ill as a payback for all bad things he has done to the family. He confesses to the family and begs for forgiveness from them.

Enti Onyanme Su Nie (Is this the Nature of God?) (2017). Members of an extended family go through several mishaps. The family members include a brother and his sister, who has two daughters and a son. The brother loses his job in the city and returns to the village where his sister lives with her

daughters and son. The sister left her husband after beating him up and came back to the family home. One of the daughters, a grown-up adult, is stricken with wetting her bed to the extent that she withdraws from the boarding school in which she was enrolled out of shame. Her older sister suffers epilepsy. The crisis of epilepsy only comes about when she meets a man who shows interest in her for marriage. This means that, should this continue, her chances of being married are limited. On the other hand, their brother is disabled, physically and mentally. Martha, married to the uncle of the children, has not been able to bear a child after so many years of marriage. Martha consults her Christian pastor. The pastor declares that the family problems are as a result of a pact their ancestors have made with a deity. While the deity may have granted them their wish to have more females in the family in order to ensure family expansion, he takes away from them what is important to them. Prayers are offered in order to appease and cancel the spiritual contact that has existed for a very long time. The story ends with the family regaining all they have previously lost.

The Concept of Everyday Life

Due to its fundamental importance in ethnography and cultural studies, the concept of the everyday has interested researchers extensively in these two academic disciplines. Though this concept has been approached differently, they are all directed towards the effort at unravelling its value and quality in determining historical changes in the process. In describing what makes up everyday life, Zaitseva (2014: 926) states that,

In the everyday-life, actions and practices are simply carried out; a lot is taken in stride; it is a particular experience of understanding reality, an order of life with not only the process of cognition but also significant experiences, desires and habits that make everyday life alive.

This description is agreeable to the understanding that the everyday is considered the “common ground or a common tissue of all conceivable human thoughts and activities” (Gardiner 2000:2).

Due to its ambivalent nature, at best, the everyday is described and not defined. Gardiner (2000: 2) aptly explains that the everyday is “a largely taken

for granted world that remains clandestine.” Similarly, Chaney (2002) sees everyday life as that part of our daily activities that is so widely shared that it becomes unremarkable. From these two descriptions of the everyday, one deduces that the routine nature of everyday makes it so unremarkable, it remains clandestine, to wit, hiding in broad daylight. Nevertheless, Zaitseva (2014) is of the view that everyday life is not just routine and monotony, but also an objective and subjective experience suggesting universalism and the individuality of practices and experiences. Thus, the everyday is not specific to anything yet employs itself in all aspects of society. It is through the everyday that one can experience and understand reality. However, the ambivalence of the concept projects a false sense of duality of concealment and openness, unique and ordinary. However, Zaitseva (2014) opines that despite the fact that everyday life is opposed to anything unique, it acquires a sense of uniqueness through the process of accumulating slow history, transforming fleeting events to immutable permanence. Thus, the question of how the clandestine of everyday life is embedded in the content and form of popular videos is of interest to the present article.

Garritano’s (2013) view of everyday culture in Ghanaian video movies is situated within the spaces of production and distribution. She describes the everyday as activities governed by informality, where “transactions are conducted without documentation ... very little in the system is codified ... artists and crew negotiate their fees with producers, directly and privately ... payment for equipment or services rendered are often made in an ad hoc manner” (Garritano 2013: 16). This description of everyday culture in the production and distribution spaces of the video movie industry is measured against the “elite domains of production and consumption of state regulated film industries and corporate capitalist commercialism of Hollywood” (Haynes 2007: 69). I find such a comparison problematic because the two different domains are either constrained or unfettered by different material conditions of production, distribution and exhibition. Again, Garritano’s notion of the everyday implies a disorganized assembly of activities fumbling on, in spite of themselves. Similarly, Meyer’s (1999) notion of the everyday emerges when it is contrasted with the institutionalised notion of national culture and identity construction. In this view, the everyday is seen as the depiction of an unplanned and spontaneous series of events. This is compared to African cinema, in which its narrative is seen to be a deliberate construct of national identity and culture, in which situations are planned and structured.

The Everyday and the Responses to Daily Life Anxieties

In exploring the identity of everydayness as ascribed to Ghanaian popular movies, the thematic analyses of the contents of the movies sampled for this study revealed the recurrence of four main systems of social order. They are marriage, religion, family and social relations, and economic conditions. These systems recurred in all movies analysed and served as the themes driving the plots of the narratives. These two themes represent everydayness because of their recurrence as well as the depiction of contemporary real-life conditions that define the activities of daily living in Ghanaian societies. Religious activity was identified in all six movies, but it was employed as a supporting mechanism and not as the driving force.

With marriage, family and social relations, economic conditions and religion, forming the bedrock of these narratives, this article further analysed their negotiations and responses to the daily life anxieties as represented in the movies. The analysis reveals the anxiety over family disintegration in contemporary living. The anxiety of extended families falling apart is framed in various human conditions. In *Afuno no Adane* this anxiety is demonstrated through Boateng, who is characterised as poor. Within the extended family, Boateng kills off his niece, renders his rich brother poor by striking him with misfortunes through supernatural powers which can only be detected by their brother, who happens to be a priest. He declares,

My brother, be careful! You think no one has seen you but God has. What you are doing to the family, please stop. I can't be a priest in the family and look on while you disintegrate the family. If I can't hold the family together, how can I hold other families together...

The family breaks up: the sister who lost her daughter leaves the family home and never returns, the rich brother loses his wife through mysterious illness and his daughter becomes a prostitute in the big city. When she leaves to make money in order to take care of her ailing father, the nephews who were sponsored to travel abroad refuse to contact any family member back home in fear of being hexed. The story also reveals the authority priests and pastors have in contemporary Ghanaian societies. In this instance, although the family head was established in the story, it was the pastor/priest in the family who took charge of affairs. As also reflected in

the above quote, families without a member being a pastor or priest rely on other priests to intercede in family matters. They are highly regarded. In *Wogye Den*, this anxiety is demonstrated through a conflict between two brothers over land inherited from their mother. This conflict leads to the demise of the brothers, the next generation of nephews and nieces, to divorces and other deaths in the family. The family is eventually decimated.

Similarly in *Enti Onyame Su Nie*, the anxiety of family disintegration is expressed through the act of an ancestral pact which, in the absence of the practice of appeasing the gods by the current generation of family members, suffer the consequence of disintegration through mishaps such as one well to do brother who loses his job in the city and returns to the village; another sister is sacked from her marital home after physically abusing her husband; one of her two grown up daughters wets her bed and is unable to complete the boarding school she was enrolled in, while the other sister suffers epilepsy and remains unmarried. An uncle is also left childless after several years of marriage. The lack of progress in education, economic and social status and the diminished value of members of the family are explained through the disassociation from traditional forms of worship by the family members. The response to the anxiety over family dispersion in *Enti Onyame Su Nie* is resolved through the acknowledgement of a greater power beyond human understanding and the ability for one to think thoroughly before taking action. Within the same narrative, the anxiety of the influence of commercialisation and consumer culture intersecting with religious beliefs is made evident through a conversation between a sister and her brother.

Brother: In the past, which church did advertisement? Nowadays, all churches are doing advertisements. In the past, churches were represented with the symbol of Christ on the cross. But these days, pastors put their pictures on large billboards advertising themselves. The older churches like Methodist, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presby, Zion, etc. did not advertise. Nowadays, it is an advertisement for miracles, a chance to travel abroad. And for what?

Sister: Why are you saying this? The bible has already warned us that when the end time is near, there will be an abundance of prophesying. We are in the end times so that should not surprise you.

Brother: It is also the same bible that says when the end time is near, a lot of people will claim their miracles are from Christ. They are all lying.

Sister: But some may have the power of healing which is true. Because the bible says we should try all the spirits and choose the right one. If we don't try, how can we know the right one?

Brother: The same bible says, we have to be wise and remain vigilant like the serpent (extract from the movie *Enti se On-yame so nie?*)

Such points of view were hardly expressed in earlier popular video movies. This suggests that while movies still have elements of religiosity in them, they contest practices that previously would have been taken as absolute truths or for granted. The conversation above directs our mind to how commercialisation is affecting the concept of faith in contemporary times.

Our study also reveals the anxiety over the interplay between individual aspirations and social expectations as explored in the movie narratives. In *Eii Pinaman*, the anxiety is expressed through the interplay of the woman, her economic empowerment and her marriage. In the story, it is inferred that Pinaman's economic empowerment results in the maltreatment of her husband and the dishonouring of her marriage. For example, in one of the scenes, Pinaman's husband and son are sitting on the porch of their house. On her way out of the house, they remind her of the meal for the day. Pinaman retorts by telling them,

Is it poverty that is making you become talkative like this? Is it not the responsibility of the man to feed his family? You are supposed to go out and find money while I stay home to do the cooking. But now that I am going out, do the cooking and feed the children and yourself.

The fear expressed that independent women have the tendency to disrespect the institution of marriage and their husbands is exemplified through the character of Pinaman. On the other hand, Pinaman's life style and attitude is a way of expressing freedom from the constrictions of marriage. She relies on her wealth to achieve this freedom and is motivated by it. Her expressions are seen from the perspective of the movie as anti-social and as

the movie stands for society, Pinaman suffers from expressing her sense of freedom. A similar sense of anxiety is demonstrated in *Enye Menia*, when the idea of an independent and strong-minded woman is presented as a bad ingredient for marriage and motherhood. In this story, Akosua takes over the decision making regarding the marriage of her daughter, Premang. She overrides any idea her husband proposes and does what she wishes to do. Acting against the dictates of traditional marriage and husband-wife relations, where the wife is supposed to be subservient to her husband, the character of Akosua is seen as an example of a family wrecker in the community. As commented by the in-law,

This is serious because I was expecting that perhaps it is your father who, by tradition, or custom, sets the cost of the dowry. It is not customary for a mother to demand the dowry for her daughter, particularly when your father is alive.

To resolve the anxieties raised in the narratives, the movies respond by subjecting both women to a dehumanising agony and public shame within their societies. This serves as a warning to those who will perpetuate such behaviour in their daily lives.

Finally, in *Teacher Agya Koo* anxiety is exemplified through the fear that marriage will be determined by money and wealth and not by love. For example, the individual aspirations of Maame to allow only rich people to marry her daughters are challenged by her eldest daughter who decides to marry a poor man. The poor are symbolised by a nursery school teacher and a car mechanic. This suggests that people with such professions are considered poor. The rich man, whom the mother agrees to marry her second daughter to, is symbolised by dressing in a grey suit and is a businessman by profession. However, this social injustice that causes such anxiety as perceived by the movie narrative is resolved when Maame finds herself in financial trouble. Kwaapih, the nursery school teacher, comes to her rescue not with money, but through a long-forgotten act of benevolence he has shown towards an orphaned former pupil of his named Desmond. Desmond has become successful and returns the favour by forgiving Maame's offence and indebtedness to honour his nursery teacher. The response to the depressed anxiety resolution is captured in Maame's monologue. Looking into the camera, she addresses the audience thus,

For all my children, I thought it's only money that matters but all that glitter is not gold. I forced them to marry rich men, but when I found myself in trouble, none of them helped me out. Rather the one that I despise because he is poor, he is the one who has come to my rescue.

Discussion

While marriage, family and community relations, economic conditions and religion form the everyday themes employed by popular movies in their narratives, an understanding of day-to-day contemporary living experiences in Ghanaian societies is embodied within these themes. The stories explain the experiences of marriage, family and social relations, and economic situations as they affect relationships and personal beings. Therefore, these stories are the cumulative interpretation of cognitive and emotional connections that have shaped perceptions of contemporary living in Ghana. The present study has revealed an underlying fear of the economic and the social rise of women in Ghanaian society. Women who appear as strong minded are characterised in a way that demonises them, which allows their character to be the catalyst in the destruction of the family circle. Unlike Garritano's (2013) description of the infinitely patient wife who resorts to prayer in order to support her husband as portrayed in earlier movies, current depictions are of the independent and strong-headed wife who does what she wishes, wishes that go against the grain of societal norms. Generally, though, the movies present conditions which suggest that any person who goes against the prevailing social norm or disrupts the natural flow of things either dies or suffers grievous consequences.

One of the key features that other writers have identified in popular movies is the ambivalence displayed when confronted with the issue of wealth. The early films that were the unit of analysis for these studies approached wealth as something the poor can only imagine and, in the same breath, the disdain for ill-gotten wealth (Adesokan 2004). However, as revealed by the present study, popular movies have taken a different perspective on the subject matter of wealth. In these movies, the gaining of wealth is measured against maintaining or destroying relationships. The maintenance of good social relationships, according to Gyekye (2003), is of paramount importance to any African society. The emphasis on upholding human dignity with re-

spect, in spite of any person's circumstances, is also a recurrent feature of the everydayness of popular movies. While these narratives recognise the inevitable need for money in contemporary times, they project the value that keeping good relations and respecting human dignity trump financial gains. In *Teacher Agya Koo*, Kwaapiah suffers abuse from his mother-in-law because, to her, he is a primary school teacher and not rich enough to care for her and her daughter, whom he is married to. Her other daughter gets married to a richer man at the insistence of the mother. However, when she finds herself in financial trouble, Kwaapiah comes to her rescue not with money, but through a long-forgotten act of benevolence he showed towards an orphaned former pupil of his. Earlier studies presented the notion that the key defining features of popular movie narratives are the visualisation and thematisation of religion in a contest between Christianity and traditional religions. However, as the present study has revealed, religion does form the basis for social action that is used as a support mechanism in achieving any particular goal, either good or evil.

Conclusion

The present study set out to explore the notion of the concept of everyday life as depicted in Ghanaian movies and how the narratives capture daily life experiences. The study discussed the concept of the everyday and examined how the narratives respond to the anxieties that characterise everyday life as presented in these movies. The findings revealed four key instruments for social order: marriage, religion, family and social relations, and economic conditions. In examining the anxieties of daily life within these four instruments for social order, as expressed through these movies, the article finds that anxiety over family disintegration in contemporary living, anxiety over the influence of commercialisation and consumer culture intersecting with religious beliefs, and anxiety over the interplay between individual aspirations and social expectations were expressed through the movies. Responses to the anxieties raised in the narratives involve subjecting offenders to public disgrace as determined by the societies as well as the personal resolution to not repeat the act and the public denunciation of any bad acts. Everyday life as expressed in these movies is underpinned by prevailing social and cultural values pertinent to Ghanaian contemporary life. Thus, the narratives of the movies speak to how members of society negotiate, understand and communicate their shared anxieties of contem-

porary living. Through the movies, a fancied resolution is proffered to the anxieties of contemporary living. Perhaps, the sharing of such desirous resolutions to everyday life anxieties is the probable reason for the immense popularity of these movies. Moreover, through the depictions of day-to-day living, popular movies capture contemporary Ghanaian culture in concrete terms. In other words, the cultural values inherent in Ghanaian popular movies lie in the process of signifying the everydayness of life in Ghanaian contemporary times. Through this process, they preserve an accumulated intangible cultural heritage for today and for posterity.

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