POPULAR MUSIC IN GHANA: WOMEN AND THE CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND SEXUALITY

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By
Samuel Boateng

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Thesis written by

Samuel Boateng

B.F.A., University of Ghana, Legon, 2013

M.A., Kent State University, 2016

Approved by

________________________________________________________
Kazadi wa Mukuna, Ph.D., Advisor

________________________________________________________
Ralph Lorenz, Ph.D., Interim Director, School of Music

________________________________________________________
John Crawford-Spinelli, Ed. D., Dean, College of the Arts
The traditional concepts of gender and sexuality permeate several socio-cultural spheres in Ghana that include religion, education, and popular music. This study shows that female popular musicians in Ghana are challenging these culturally accepted perspectives of gender roles and sexuality in the country, and that they are also presenting a different narrative about women and womanhood that go contrary to those presented by their male counterparts. The study demonstrates that some selected female musicians accomplish this challenge through their song lyrics and music videos.

Chapter one contains an introduction to the study and a general overview of the history of popular music in Ghana. Chapter two focuses on the implications of gender and sexuality in Ghana and concludes with a brief analysis of songs to show the images of women presented by male musicians. Chapter three deals with the social and musical roles of women, the gradual rise of women in the popular music scene of Ghana, and it concludes with discussions on some of the challenges faced by women musicians in the country. Chapter four presents an analysis of selected songs and music videos of female popular musicians in Ghana. Chapter five concludes the study and also offers brief remarks and speculations about the future of women musicians and popular music in Ghana.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION: STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Based on the socio-cultural\(^1\) notions of gender and sexuality in traditional Ghanaian societies, several male musicians in the popular music scene of Ghana have presented various opinions about women in their songs and music videos.\(^2\) For example, women have been portrayed as lacking appropriate behavior—a manifestation of which is their challenge of male authority, their extreme love for money, their destruction of men’s destinies, and their loose morals, just to name a few.\(^3\) Furthermore, in parallel with the hyper-sexualized images of women found in many hip-hop songs and music videos, women’s bodies and sexuality are commonly used as signs and instruments that serve the interests of men.\(^4\)

With this claim in mind, the current study argues that, women musicians—particularly the new generation of popular musicians—are perpetuating images of women that challenge the traditional perceptions of gender and sexuality in Ghana.\(^5\) Also, I argue that, often, these images differ from what has been portrayed by their male counterparts. In the process of sustaining my claims, I will also illuminate the

\(^1\) By socio-cultural I am referring to the social and cultural factors that affect the ideas and perceptions of gender in Ghana. See Chapter Two, pp. 1-2 for definitions of sex, sexuality, and gender.

\(^2\) By popular music (used interchangeably with contemporary and urban music in this work), I am referring to the new trends of music that emerged in Ghana by the end of the twentieth century. See also Asante Darkwa. “The New Musical Traditions in Ghana.” Ph.D. Diss., Wesleyan University, Connecticut, 1974, p. 203.

\(^3\) Women are also presented as fickle-minded, unfaithful, troublesome, gossips, competitive, exploitative and submissive.


\(^5\) This is in reference to the late 1990s to 2015.
situation of women in Ghanaian music by discussing their social and musical roles as well as some of the challenges they encounter.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GHANAIAN POPULAR MUSIC: FROM COLONIAL BRASS BANDS TO POST-INDEPENDENT HIGHLIFE BANDS

By the late 1880s, the Gold Coast had officially become a colony of Britain—a situation that was catalyzed by the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. Between 1873 and 1900, however, several wars ensued between the Ashanti Kingdom and the British colonizers, which led to the final defeat of the former in 1901. Following this, Britain strengthened its hold in southern Gold Coast throughout the areas known today as Central, Western, Ashanti, and Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The British colonial army was comprised of Africans, West Indians as well as British soldiers, and music played a central role in the activities of these military factions.

For example, fife and brass band units of the army provided drill and regimental music for military purposes. Additionally, smaller castle bands

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6 The conference, which was called by King Leopold of Belgium, was as a result of many factors, one of which was to curb the multiple claims exerted by different European powers on certain African regions. See also, H.L. Wesseling. “The Netherlands and the partition of Africa.” The Journal of African History 22, 4 (1981): 503 and Saadia Touval. “Borders, and the partition of Africa.” The Journal of African History 7, 2(1996): 279.


8 The Central region is the home to the city of Cape-Coast and Elmina, both served as port cities for many incoming European vessels. The Portuguese for example built the first European settlement in Elmina (the Elmina Castle) in 1482, and the Denmark-Norway also built the Osu castle (Fort Christianborg) in the Greater Accra Region.

consisting of military and civilian personnel were set up to entertain superior officers and the Ghanaian elite community\textsuperscript{11} with European styles such as waltzes, polkas, and quadrilles. Robert Charles Rumbolz provides an account of the instrumental repertory of these bands. He notes:

Military ensembles [in Ghana] initially included fife and [drum-corps] and then a full range of keyed bugles, early piston valve trumpets and [cornets], French horns, trombones, flageolets, clarinets, euphonium, serpent, and Sax horns.\textsuperscript{12}

By the late nineteenth century, the bulk of Ghana’s armed forces also served as musicians in the military bands, and they learned to play a variety of European music styles by ear.\textsuperscript{13} Military brass band music became one of the many factors that influenced the nature of contemporary Ghanaian music.

In addition to military brass bands, visiting Liberian Kru (or Kroo) sailors also contributed to the course of Ghanaian popular music. Originating from the coastal regions of southeastern Liberia, Kru people established ‘Kru Town’ settlements in the coastal and port towns of several western, central and southern African towns


\textsuperscript{11} The Ghanaian elites at the time were the native counterparts of British officials. See also Owusu Brempong. “Akan Highlife Songs in Ghana: Songs of Cultural Transition.” Ph.D. Diss., Indiana University, Bloomington, 1986, p. 82.


\textsuperscript{13} Nate Plageman. op. cit., p. 45.
where they worked as stevedores, laborers, and surfboat operators. Kru people were known for their maritime skills, and it fostered their employment on European merchant ships even as far back as the sixteenth century. Onboard these ships, they learned to play portable instruments including the guitar, for which they developed a distinct ‘two-finger’ style for plucking its strings. Generally speaking, Kru musicians are also credited for ‘mainline,’ ‘dagomba,’ and ‘fireman,’ all of which are distinct guitar ‘riffs’ they taught to music enthusiasts as well as indigenous peoples they encountered in their coastal settlements.

Aside from Kru sailors, Ghanaian arrivals from neighboring African countries also impacted the country’s musical trajectory. These returnees had traveled to Nigeria, Cameroon, Togo, and Sierra Leone as economic immigrants, and by the early 1980s, over one million of them had returned for several reasons. In 1983, for example, the Nigerian government deported close to two million immigrants (mostly of African origins) in an attempt to safeguard the economic security of its people, as well as to curb the rise of crime, which was mostly attributed to foreigners. The

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15 In the two-finger method of plucking the guitar, the thumb plays the bass notes and the first finger plays the top or high strings. The oppositional movement of the thumb and finger is such that it creates a cyclically repeated passage or riff. See also John Collins. Ibid., p. 175.

16 Dagomba is named after the Liberian song “Dagomba Waye Tangebu,” and fireman after the native Africans who worked as coal stokers on European ships. Mainline was a common term that referred to the initial accompanying riff that novice guitar players had to master. See also John Collins. op. cit., pp. 174-177.

17 The pioneer of palmwine guitar music in Ghana, Kwame Asare, was a student of a Kru guitarist.


arrival of Ghanaians from these countries contributed to the spread of both foreign music styles as well as instruments. Owusu tells as that:

These migrants developed a type of [singing style] in pidgin English called *gombe* [that] featured only voices and African musical instruments, and its rhythm reportedly replicated the beat of a hammer on an anvil.²⁰

The proliferation of foreign music instruments, in addition to the spread of African and non-African music styles—coupled with the emergence of European trained Ghanaian musicians—led to decades of musical experiments in several urban areas. In Cape-Coast, for example, guitars, trumpets, mandolins, accordions, and harmonicas became commonplace, and eventually, they became fundamental to the establishment of local bands. The styles of music played by the new bands were hybrid products that combined indigenous recreational music with European and American styles such as jazz and ballroom music.²¹

The fusion of these diverse musical elements resulted in the creation of the earliest versions (or prototypes) of highlife music including *adaha*, *osibisaaba*, and palmwine guitar, just to name a few.²² *Adaha* bands played local tunes with brass

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²⁰ Owusu Brempong. op. cit., p. 83.

²¹ The process of (musical) hybridization can be explained in terms of Nestor Canclini’s concept of hybridization. He defines hybridization as a socio-cultural process in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate forms, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices. Keeping his definition in mind, these proto-highlife styles and those that developed after them may also be described as hybrid products since they developed from the combination of several discrete [musical] practices (i.e., Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian musical elements) see also Nestor Garcia Canclini. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies to Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Twin Cities: University of Minnesota, 2005, p. xxv.

²² E. J. Collins. op. cit., p. 62.
band instruments and local percussion instruments. In terms of rhythm, they adopted the 6/8 and 12/8 meters that characterized indigenous styles, particularly, osibi and adenkum. By 1900, Cape Coast and Elmina had several adaha bands, including Edu Magicians and Lion Soldiers, which performed European and local musics for festivals, private celebrations, and holidays.24


23 Osibi is a recreational music of Fante fishermen and adenkum is a style of vocal music typically performed by women who accompany themselves by stamping gourds on the ground or on their bodies.

24 Nate Plageman. op. cit., p. 46.
Osibisaaba, like adaha, drew largely from brass band music, local instruments, and the 12/8-meter of osibi. However, unlike adaha, it incorporated other instruments such as the accordion and guitar. The realization of local melodies and rhythms on these new instruments coupled with the unabated youthful energy associated with osibisaaba musicians brought large crowds to their performances. Eventually, the style and its associated instruments became very popular among the youth, who associated it with merrymaking, social drinking of alcohol, and couple dancing. In the Central Region, for instance, osibisaaba became synonymous with the nightlife of Cape Coast and its surrounding towns. As Plageman notes:
The evening’s merriment usually included conversation and social drinking, but its most central activity was a style of dance performed by men and women organized into a large circle that moved in a counterclockwise direction. As dancers maintained this circular pattern, especially eager performers took turns entering its center and offering flashy improvised movements.25

Generally speaking, *osibisaaba* bands differed from *adaha* bands in two main ways. One, they “abandoned the military air of brass band music and replaced it with a less regimented environment that accorded participants considerable [opportunities] for creative self-expression [including dancing, singing, improvisation, etc.].”26 Additionally, they abandoned the use of costly brass band instruments in favor of less expensive and more readily available alternatives—while making use of other instruments such as the accordion, harmonica, bugle, and guitar. By the 1910s, guitars had gained popularity in urban and rural communities (particularly in Cape Coast, Elmina, Accra, and Kumasi) due to the establishment of several proto-highlife bands, rural urban migration, and the efforts of Liberian Kru sailors.

Upon reaching inland Ghana, the guitar eventually replaced indigenous string instruments, which were mostly used to accompany stories, folk songs, and praise singing. Among Akan27 musicians of the Eastern and Ashanti Regions, guitars became

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25 Nate Plageman. op. cit., p. 49.
26 Ibid., p. 48.
27 Akan is a generic term denoting the largest ethnic group in Ghana. They include the Ashanti, Akyim, Fanti, Guan, and Akwamu people, and they speak different dialects of the Twi language.
second to, and slowly replaced the seperewa, a harp-lute with eight to twelve strings, previously reserved for royal court music. Oral accounts tell us that these musicians combined the playing techniques of some Kru guitarists with the musical practices that accompanied seperewa performances. That is, they converted the guitar riffs of Kru musicians into extended chord progressions based on the traditional harmonies of the seperewa; creating styles such as odonson, which became popular among local guitar bands. In addition to the guitar, the bands also utilized local instruments including “a large, box-shaped sansa or hand-plucked idiophone called prempensua. They also used rattles, atoke (boat-shaped bell), dawuronnta (double bell), fikyiriwa (a metal castanet), and other hand drums.

The history of guitar bands in Ghana is usually accompanied with tales of alcoholism that point to the origin of the term “palmwine guitar.” Like osibisaaba, guitar bands also became popular among the general public, and they were often employed to entertain customers in palmwine bars. Consequently, most of these musicians became habitual drinkers, and as a result, their communities branded them as lazy, good-for-nothing individuals who had refused to work actual jobs. They were considered as irresponsible men because most of them spent their wages

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28 The seperewa may be tuned to a pentatonic or hexatonic scale, and it generates harmonic structures (or textures) based on thirds, fourths and fifths. Generally speaking, seperewa music makes use of parallel harmonies (in fourths or fifths) or modal sequences based 5 or 6-note scales (or modes).
29 Owusu Brempong, op. cit. p. 84.
30 Palmwine is a locally brewed alcoholic beverage made from the distilled sap of a fallen palm tree.
in drinking bars; and by extension, the guitar was also associated with immorality, decadence, and irresponsibility. By the 1920s, young men who played the guitar were regarded as ruffians, womanizers, and flirts, who lived outside the moral status quo of traditional Ghanaian communities.\textsuperscript{32}

In fact, musicians in general were considered as no-good individuals because their songs promoted social drinking, sexual immorality, and rebellion among the youth. There was, of course, some truth to these perceptions. Proto-highlife styles did not just provide a space for young men and women to convene and make merry, it also encouraged sensuous display of affection through couple dancing. Therefore, performances became occasions at which young men and women freely intermixed, identified prospective partners, and initiated romantic relationships.\textsuperscript{33} Additionally, they also encouraged alcohol consumption as well as cigarette smoking by presenting them as symbols of manhood, independence, and virility.

Many popular songs from the period also extolled behaviors that were considered to be inappropriate, especially in the domains of courtship, family relationships, marriage, love, and sex. That is, instead of encouraging an adherence to traditional values (as is done in many indigenous traditional Ghanaian music), musicians often praised the prospects of casual affairs, extra-marital relationships, and modernized (or 'high-time') lifestyles. In Kumasi Trio’s guitar highlife song “\textit{Yaa Amponsah}” for example, the singer encourages a woman named Yaa\textsuperscript{34} to seek divorce in order for them to carry out an illicit affair. Further, he strengthens his

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[33] Nate Plageman. op. cit., pp. 52-53.
\item[34] Among the Akans, Yaa is the day name of a woman born on a Thursday.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
request by showering the woman with praises, while speaking about her physical appeal:

Yaa Amponsah, stop your marriage; woman Amponsah, stop your marriage. My love unto death, I love you so much. I will wed you with all my money. Nothing can stop my love for you, not even if your mother threatens to douche me with pepper and your father with an enema of boiling water. You are so sweet. If I were a millionaire I would give all my wealth to you, your silky hair, your graceful neck like an adenkum gourd, your blackberry eyes.35

The liberal behavior of musicians led to several individual, communal, and governmental sanctions. Parents were known to have prohibited their daughters from marrying musicians, and unlike today, a lot of parents believed that the music profession could not provide the economic assurance required to sustain a family. In other cases, too, there were official laws banning the performance of the early highlife styles. The Missions36 and traditional chiefs were among the first social bodies to express concern about the promulgation of immoral behaviors in the proto-highlife styles. The colonial government in turn passed laws that made it


36 Before its independence in 1957, several European countries had occupied Ghana, including Portugal, Denmark, and the Dutch, who were accompanied by Christian missionary groups including the Swiss-German Basel Mission. Their main aim, among other things was to convert indigenous Ghanaians from their “pagan gods” unto Christianity, and they used European hymns and the Bible to convey their messages. See also, Kofi Asimpi. European Christian Missions and Race Relations in Ghana, 1828-1970. Ph.D. Diss., 1996, pp. 28-55.
illegal to perform *adaha* in some communities; also, they systematically dissolved several *adaha, osibisaaba*, and palmwine guitar bands. In extreme cases, too, some members of these bands were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment.  

By the 1960s, the advent of recording technology, coupled with the continuous mutation of proto-highlife styles had fostered the creation of three principal musical expressions that were grouped under the umbrella term ‘highlife.’ They are Brass Band, Guitar Band, and Dance Band Highlife. Brass bands played *adaha* music, the purely instrumental genre that reflected the musical practices of colonial military bands. By the 1930s several of these bands had been established in the local provinces of Central, Ashanti and Greater Accra Region.

Guitar bands developed from the palmwine guitar groups of the 1910s. By the late 1930s, the initial acoustic groups had expanded to include electric guitars, trap drums, synthesizers and electric bass guitars. The 1940s was met with a flourishing demand for guitar band music, and this need was met by groups such as Yamoah’s Guitar Band, E.K. Nyame, and Kwaa Mensah’s Guitar Band. Additionally, guitar bands were fundamental to the concert parties of the time. Concert parties were theatrical performances (or cantatas) that employed the services of bands for live music accompaniments. These musical plays were well received by local audiences of all

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37 Two men were arrested for playing *osibisaaba* music, being intoxicated, and for assaulting a police officer in 1909. They were both jailed for six months each. See also Nate Plageman. op. cit., pp. 57-58.

38 The first Ghanaian band known to have recorded a highlife album was Kumasi Trio in the late 1920s. They recorded for Zonophone Records in London. That recording also houses the afore mentioned song, “*Yaa Amponsah.*”

39 Mutation as used here refers to a change in the characteristics of a musical style, which may be caused by borrowing new elements from other musical expressions or by changing old elements in the style.
ages, especially because the actors used Ghanaian languages in their dialogues and songs. E. K. Nyame’s ‘Akan Trio Concert Group’ and Bampoe’s Jaguar Jokers are considered to be two of the earliest concert party groups in Ghana.\(^\text{40}\)

Dance bands emerged in the 1950s after the Second World War, and they entered the Ghanaian environment through the efforts of American and Commonwealth troops who were stationed in the country at the time.\(^\text{41}\) According to Collins, “Jack Leopard, a Scottish sergeant and saxophone player in the British army, formed the first of these, which he called the Black and White Spots, [comprising of] white army musicians and local musicians.”\(^\text{42}\) Dance bands were fashioned after American jazz ensembles; they made use of trap drums, double bass, guitars, saxophones, trumpets, and trombones, and they played jazz and swing tunes. Dance bands replaced larger dance orchestras that were in vogue prior to the Second World War.\(^\text{43}\)


\(^{41}\) Britain’s colonies in West Africa, including Ghana (Gambia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone) served as staging posts and military bases during World War Two. For instance, aircrafts destined for the Middle East and the North African fronts had to fly via West Africa, and were serviced there, too. See also Marika Sherwood. “Colonies, Colonials, and World War Two,” Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo /colonies_colonials_01.shtml. Accessed May 3, 2016.

\(^{42}\) E. J. Collins. “Ghanaian Highlife.” op. cit., p. 64.

\(^{43}\) Dance orchestras made use of a string section, woodwinds, guitar, side drums, and they played foxtrot, quickstep and other ballroom dances for upper class Ghanaians and their European counterparts. Oral tradition has it that the name highlife itself emerged from the period of the dance orchestras. The term 'highlife' was associated with the music played by the dance orchestras because they played for high-class patrons at expensive venues. The poor in the society therefore considered their music as a style for the upper class, or for people living a life higher or better than theirs.
Generally speaking, dance bands usually played at drinking bars and clubs that were set up to cater to the foreign nationals, and as a result, their main patrons were Europeans and their elite Ghanaian acquaintances. Among them was E.T. Mensah’s Tempos Band, which became popular throughout West Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. The band started as an all-male group in the 1950s, but by 1953, it included two women, Agnes Ayitey and Julie Okine, who played maracas and sang at public performances respectively. Although Tempos was fashioned after American swing bands, it played songs that were in English and Ghanaian languages, in addition to jazz and swing tunes. Examples of dance bands that became popular from the mid-twentieth century include the Blackbeats, Uhuru, Ramblers, and Rhythm Aces, who also employed one female singer named Cathy in the 1950s.44

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These highlife bands were influential in the nation’s struggle for independence from Britain; they composed and popularized several pro-independence songs that were used as politically charged narratives of rebellion, courage, and morale.45 The celebration of these political ideologies in music influenced several non-Ghanaian musicians, including Trinidad’s Lord Kitchener, who also composed songs that supported Ghana’s move towards independence.46 After Ghana’s independence in 1957, President Kwame Nkrumah endorsed several state highlife and concert party groups. These state bands were

45 These include E.T. Mensah’s “General Elections,” “Kwame Nkrumah,” and “Ghana Freedom Highlife.”
associated with government institutions such as the Cocoa Marketing Board, the Ghana Armed Forces, and the Ghana Worker’s Brigade.47

**GHANA POPULAR MUSIC: LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

The charismatic churches48 that spread throughout Ghana in the twentieth century were crucial to the country’s music industry, particularly between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. The period was a particularly challenging era for musicians because: (1) economic mismanagements by government officials, following the military overthrow and exile of Kwame Nkrumah, had led to a nationwide economic downfall; (2) over two years of military-imposed night curfews curtailed the activities of night clubs and bars who utilized the services of live bands and concert groups; (3) there was a closure of several recording studios and live music centers due to the lack of capital and curfews, and (4) a rise in business taxes, caused by the IMF/World Bank ‘Structural Adjustment Plan’49 made it difficult for music entities to import band equipment, including music instruments.50

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48 Charismatic churches include Pentecostal, Methodists and Baptist churches, and they differ from orthodox churches such as the Catholic Church in their preference for danceable music, clapping, and their believe in possession and divination.
49 These are policies developed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which are generally imposed on countries, mostly those in the ‘third world’ category as a means of stabilizing their economic situations. See also, John Kraus. “The Struggle over Structural Adjustment in Ghana,” in *Africa Today*, 38, 4, (1991): 19-37.
In their quest for greener pastures, many musicians left Ghana for European countries, and Germany in particular—where burgher highlife emerged.\textsuperscript{51} This style of highlife developed in the 1980s from the fusion of Ghanaian highlife with disco and funk instrumentation. Burgher highlife bands replaced the live horn sections that were typical of dance bands with synthesizers and they also adopted the ‘drumbeats’ common in disco music. The development of this trend is attributed to George Darko and Lee Douodu—other artists with this stylistic persuasion include Charles Amoah, Daddy Lumba, and Rex Gyamfi.

In the mid-1990s, too, new musical expressions emerged in the popular music scene of Ghana including gospel highlife and hiplife. The former will be discussed at an appropriate time. The latter, hiplife, is commonly attributed to two men, Gyedu-Blay Ambolley and Reggie Rockstone; although popular media often suggests that Reggie is the originator. The politics of hiplife’s origins is out of the context of this study, unlike its description, and evolution. This rap genre developed from the combination of Pidgin English as well as Twi\textsuperscript{52} rap with hip-hop and R n B instrumentations. Additionally, in contrast to highlife musicians who relied on live instrumental accompaniment when they recorded their songs, early hiplife musicians utilized computerized sounds, vocal samples, and backing MIDI tracks.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51}The name ‘Burgher’ is said to be derived from the city Hamburg, which was home to many Ghanaian immigrants in Germany. Some also describe the genre as music for the returnees, who are generally referred to as “borgas.”

\textsuperscript{52}Twi is one of the common languages in Southern Ghana, and it is spoken particularly by the Akan people.

\textsuperscript{53}These computer-generated accompaniments are generated from recording programs such as Cubase and Fruity-Loops.
Although their messages reflected the socio-economic situation of the youth at the time, there were stylistic differences among hiplife musicians that impacted the delivery of such lyrics. Many of the early hiplife musicians adopted the mannerisms, fashion, and rap styles of American hip-hop musicians, but there were those whose songs were clearly influenced by Ghanaian traditional practices such as proverbial sayings. Examples of musicians who fall into the former category include Reggie Rockstone, Ex Doe, and TicTac; and the latter, Obrafuor (The Executioner) and Okomfo Kwade (Kwade The Traditional Priest). By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, hiplife had evolved into various streams of musical (and sometimes dance) expressions that were characteristically Ghanaian. The creative peculiarities of emerging recording engineers, songwriters, and musicians—coupled with the spread of diverse musical styles such as RnB, dancehall, and reggae in Ghana—catalyzed the development of several stylistic renditions of the hiplife including Azonto and GH Rap.

Like its highlife antecedents, hiplife is a predominantly male affair. As a matter of fact, men dominate the popular music scene of Ghana, and generations of male musicians have shaped the nature and trajectory of popular music since its emergence in the twentieth century. By implication, I maintain that, the opinions about gender expressed in popular songs, particularly those that regard women,

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54 Some of the early hiplife musicians include Reggie Rockstone, Ex Doe, Chicago, Nana King, and Praye.

55 Azonto is a genre of hiplife that is based on a dance movement usually done as a mime. GH Rap is predominated by musicians who rap mostly in Pidgin English, and they also incorporate distinct local rhythms such as the Akan Adowa and the Ewe Agbedza in their beats. Popular hiplife artistes in the Ghana now (2016) include E.L, Guru, MzVee, and Sarkodie.
have been based largely on the male experience and point of view, and that these opinions have also been shaped by the perceptions of gender held in Ghanaian communities. To buttress this claim, the following chapter will focus on two main objectives: (1) the socio-cultural implications of gender and sexuality in traditional Ghanaian communities, and (2) the images of women presented by male musicians, which will be discussed vis-à-vis suitable theoretical concepts such as post-modernism.
Figure 4: Political map of Africa showing the location of Ghana
CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUALIZING THE STUDY: SEX, SEXUALITY, AND GENDER

In order to define gender as it pertains to the current study, it is necessary to describe what is meant by ‘sex’ and ‘sexuality’ also. In everyday discussions, both sex and gender are used synonymously as though they are inextricably bound, but studies have shown that while sex is biologically and physiologically determined, gender on the other hand is socially and culturally constructed.¹ Therefore, sex as used in this work will refer to the two main biological entities associated with reproduction namely, male and female; “plus [the] occasional third-hermaphrodite, born with both male and female genitalia.”²

Sexuality is undeniably connected to the critical biological process of reproduction, and this preoccupation with biology seems to be central to most definitions of the term. But while sexuality may imply different meanings, it is used here as an encompassing term for sexual knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors, procreation, sexual orientation, as well as personal and interpersonal sexual relations.³ Sexuality, in other words, is not dependent on one’s biological qualities only, but it is “heavily influenced by, and implicated within, [the] social,

cultural, political, and economic forces [of a given community].”

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman or a man. “No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female [or male] takes on in society; it is [society itself] that [creates, differentiates, and adjusts the definitions of ‘man’ as well as ‘woman’].” In other words, gender can be seen as a socio-cultural construct determined by the social norms, expectations, roles, attitudes, and beliefs regarding the notions of manhood and womanhood (i.e., the state or condition of being a man or woman) in a given culture. As Coltrane rightly puts it, “gender describes how, in a particular culture, the typical man is supposed to [behave] (as masculine) and how the typical woman is supposed to present herself (as feminine).”

**SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER IN GHANA**

In Ghana, stratification of roles is often determined by gender perceptions. Traditionally speaking, for example, women are perceived as potential mothers, caregivers, helpers, and potential wives while men are considered as breadwinners, potential heads of families, financial providers, potential husbands, and figures of authority. Similarly, behaviors that are considered appropriate for women include sexual control or sexual restraint, nurturing, respectfulness and obedience.

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6 Something (i.e., a concept, product, or practice) that is created/invented from the social and cultural environment, and whose characteristics are determined by the members in that environment.
7 Scott Coltrane. op. cit. p. 7.
(especially towards men), calmness and humility (especially in public matters), and a knack for domestic upkeeping. Men, on the other hand must demonstrate courage, independence, a degree of forcefulness, commendable physical strength, a knack for challenging authority (even in public), a high tolerance for physical and emotional pain, and virility.

As regards gender roles, traditionally, many of the roles played by women are centered on the domestic realm. These are marked by activities such as cooking, raising children, laundering clothes, catering for family guests, and performing other household chores.⁸ On the other hand, men’s roles are predicated on their responsibilities as heads of the household, security providers, and primary economic sources of the family. Their roles are therefore centered on activities that require them to engage with institutions in the formal and informal sectors of employment,⁹ and with their income, they are able to provide financial security for their families. Additionally, both men and women share the responsibility of bringing up children, but in most Ghanaian homes men wield the rod of discipline.

Generally, these expected behaviors are reinforced through cultural manifestations such as proverbs, stories, and music. Among the Akan, for instance, there exist a myriad of adages that stress the authority, strength, and valor of manhood. Likewise, these cultural expressions highlight the status as well as the

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⁹ The formal sector of employment encompasses all government-monitored jobs with regular working hours and regular wages, which are considered as income sources liable to taxation. The informal sector of employment encompasses all jobs not recognized as formal income sources or not monitored by any form of government. Members in this sector are usually self-employed and rarely subject their income to taxation.
appropriate and recommended social behavior of women in the community. With sayings such as “barima ensu” or men do not cry, men are taught to express little emotion in the event of a sad or painful situation such as death, divorce, or injury. Other examples of proverbs that reinforce gender perceptions and stratification of gender roles include: when a gun is fired, it is the man who receives the bullet in his chest; when a woman buys a gun (or a drum) it is kept in a man’s hut; the hen knows that it is dawn, but it allows the cock to announce it.¹⁰

As children, girls are taught to regard men and boys as stronger, wiser, and more responsible, while boys are accordingly taught to lead, exert control, and be assertive in their social encounters. Similarly, boys are advised against fighting girls, because the average girl is considered to be physically weaker than the average boy; however, a boy who loses a fight to a girl is considered to be less of a man, or a “weak” boy. Any deviation from these gender perceptions is met with varying degrees of confrontation from the community such as name-calling, stigmatization, and physical violence. A boy whose lifestyle deviates from these expectations is given derogatory names such as “kojo-basia,” meaning ‘man-woman,’ and a “weak” boy is often called “oba-a-ba” meaning ‘a woman’s child’. Similarly, a woman who veers from the expected feminine roles into domains prescribed for men is branded “oba-a-kokonin,” (a female cock), “oba-a-barima” (tom boy) or “oba-a gengen” (a wild woman).¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 5-6.
The implications of gender can also be seen in the socio-economic domain. The majority of Ghana’s workforce is concentrated in the informal sector, and primarily, the sector is comprised of self-employed women who work as market vendors and hawkers, or in some form of trade. Generally, parents in this line of work count on the assistance of their children, especially their daughters, to run their businesses because in Ghana, as in several African countries, it is traditionally accepted of ‘youngsters’ to assist their parents with domestic chores as well as vocational activities. In effect, several girls face the possibility of dropping out of school to enter these forms of trade. As noted by Lebo and Takyiwaa:

You find that girls have to go to the market to help their mothers sell before and after school…If the mother is not coping well, the girl might be asked to stop going to school altogether to help with chores [and to look after siblings].

The report of the Ghana Statistical Service concerning the 2012 Population and Housing Census of Ghana supports Lebo and Tchiwaa’s observations. It points out that although women and girls make up more than 51 percent of the country’s population, only 47 percent of girls are enrolled in primary schools, 35 percent in secondary schools, and 24 percent in tertiary institutions. Additionally, it also shows that more girls drop out of school than boys, and there is a significant

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12 See p. 3 for description of formal and informal sectors.
14 Lebo Moletsane and Takyiwa Manuh. op. cit., pp. 88-89.
difference between the number of males and females who have never attended school.

The concept of gender can be described as a metanarrative. This is a concept in post-modernism\textsuperscript{16} that describes stories and social opinions that are central to the lives of social actors—primarily because they offer a collective identity and history.\textsuperscript{17} Usually, metanarratives also form the basis for other ideologies in different spheres of the social environment. (The Bible, for instance may be described as a metanarrative).\textsuperscript{18} Gender, like all metanarratives, also creates a collective identity,\textsuperscript{19} it is central to the lives of social actors, and it permeates several socio-cultural domains including race, religion, politics, and music.

**SONG TEXT IN GHANAIAN POPULAR MUSIC**

To adequately access and investigate the representations of women in popular music, one must pay close attention to the song lyrics. Although this does

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\textsuperscript{17} Identity is used here in its popular sense to mean the way a person or a collective perceive themselves vis-à-vis their social situations.

\textsuperscript{18} In post modernistic thought, the Bible, for instance, may be described as a metanarrative because, social actors can identify with its opinions, and they also identify with, and share in its collective history (i.e., accounts of the creation story, the life of Abraham, and the life of Jesus, etc.). Also, historically speaking, the teachings of the Bible have been employed to sustain several social opinions including forced servitude (or slavery), the condemnation of polygamy, same-sex marriages, and the subordination of women.

\textsuperscript{19} Reference is made here to collective descriptions, perceptions, and stereotypes that exist in relation to gender (i.e., black ‘men,’ independent ‘women.’)
not dismiss similar investigative opportunities offered by music videos as well as artist’s performance behaviors, the impact of language and song text in African music in general cannot be ignored. Kazadi points out that, “language [is] a vehicle par excellence for the conveyance of the African philosophy of existence, “I am because you are,” [and it is] crucial to the understanding of the creative process of vocal music.”

In Ghanaian popular music, this creative process entails the use of allegories, metaphors, proverbs, and vocables, just to name a few.

In Gyedu-Blay Ambolley’s “Simi Rapp” for example, he resorts to vocables and intentionally leaves his listeners to their own imagination when he says:

_Besia na yaadzi, bribi shē hō_
A woman’s groin, there is something there

_Besia nē kyiri ho, bribi shē hō_
A woman’s behind, there is something there

_Besia na yaadzi, bribi shē hō_
A woman’s groin, there is something there

_Besia nē kyiri ho, bribi shē hō_
A woman’s behind, there is something there

Ēbaa dzi na ṣ̄ōshē hō?
What is there?

Radum! Radum! Zo!
(Radum! Radum! Zo!)

Mese ēbaa dzi na ṣ̄ōshē hō?
I say, what is there?

Radum! Radum! Zo!
(Radum! Radum! Zo!)²²

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²¹ Gyedu-Blay Ambolley is a musician from the Western Region of Ghana whose music is influenced by rap, jazz, soul and traditional Ghanaian musics. His debut album “Simigwa” became a household name in Ghana when it was released in 1975. See also http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/people/person.php?ID=154. See also http://voodoofunk.blogspot.com/2012/12/simigwa.html. Both Accessed April 9, 2016.
In the above song, Ambolley clearly makes reference to the physical features of women. To answer his own question (i.e., wey tin dey there?), he employs the use of vocables, *radum radum zo*, which denotes the sexual appeal and fascination of a woman's hips, buttocks, and genitalia. Several Ghanaian musicians use similar kinds of disguises, especially when referring to the male and female genitalia, since such words are deemed harsh, too direct, and rude to use in public. In other words, songs offer a special kind of license and freedom of speech that permits musicians to boldly express their thoughts, ideas and feelings on sensitive social issues. This is what Hugh Tracy means when he says you can say publicly in songs what you cannot say privately to a man’s face.\(^{23}\)

In addition to vocables, the use of metaphors abound in both highlife and hiplife songs, including Nana Kwame Ampadu’s “*Ebi Te Yie,*” (Some Are Well Placed In Society), a late 1960s song that speaks of social inequalities. In the song Ampadu speaks of *ōtwe*, the antelope, which complains to the chiefs of the animal kingdom about the abusive manner in which *ōsibō*, the tiger, treats him. A common interpretation of the song considers the tiger as the powerful and well-to-do in society, and the antelope as symbolizing the underdogs of society who are constantly held down by people with power. Similar personifications of human


behavior exist in songs that speak about gender and sexuality; one can make mention of Obuor’s “Konkontibaa,” (or Tadpole).24

In the song, Obuor speaks about the rise of romantic and sexual relationships between adolescent girls and adult men in Ghana. To convey his message, he personifies adolescent girls as tadpoles who would mature to become toads, or adult women, as it were. However, Obuor’s position on the matter is ambivalent because, while he seems be condemning those who practice this, he says elsewhere in the song:

Wei dië osua
This one, she is small

Me nim së osua, na ênso ônuaa na me pê
I know she is small, but she is the one I want

Wê bue bribi so akyerê me
She has opened up something (and showed) to me

Ama me ka shê a ênshê
And so I cannot hide it (i.e., my love, and feelings), even when I try

After which the song’s main chorus follows:

Aboa konkotibaa, aboa konkontibaa
The tadpole, the tadpole

Obe nyini ayê kêsì, na wa dani aponkyerêni
It will grow and become big, and it will turn into a toad25

24 Obuor, real name Bice Osei Kuffour, is the current (2016) president of the Musicians’ Union of Ghana or MUSIGA.

SIGNS, ICONS, AND SYMBOLS

From the foregoing musical examples, it is observed that popular musicians in Ghana use assorted linguistic devices to communicate their messages; the language of song text in Ghanaian popular music therefore takes special forms and implies special significance. But while these elements function in a musical context, they are at the same time bound by the parameters of language and speech, and their functions “differ from that of ordinary discourse.”

Therefore, in order to ascertain the full import of the lyrical (and visual) symbols encountered in the present study, I will adopt descriptive parameters from the field of semiotics. In brief, semiotics (or semiology) describes the communication of messages as well as the making of meaning from these messages, and the system of signs that make this possible. In other words, semiotics concerns itself with how messages are successively generated, encoded, transmitted, decoded, and interpreted in a given context.

Although it is more popular in linguistics, semiotics has been used to understand the meanings arising from diverse phenomena in the medical sciences, dance, advertisement, film, and music. Semiotics therefore includes visual and verbal “as well as tactile and olfactory signs (i.e., all signs or signals accessible and perceivable by our senses) as they...communicate information in literally every field of human behavior.” Although there are numerous semiotic parameters, two in

28 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
particular—icon and symbol—will be occasionally referred to in the analysis of lyrics (and music video, where necessarily).

In order to communicate, two things must be present: first, the idea or message that has to be communicated (i.e., the signified), and second, the form through which the idea is communicated (i.e., the signifier). Keeping this in mind, a sign may be described as anything that can be used to communicate messages—it is a signifier, and it denotes a particular concept or message. Further, a sign is said to be an icon if the signifier resembles or imitates the signified. A picture, for instance, is an icon because it resembles what it is intended to signify. Contrary to iconic signs, a symbolic sign (or symbol) bears no resemblance to the signified. Symbols are therefore purely conventional, cultural specific, and as such their meanings must be learnt prior to the fact. Words are examples of symbols. The remainder of the chapter will be dedicated to highlighting the common images of women presented by male musicians—beginning with songs that conform to and enforce the socio-cultural perceptions of gender, followed by songs that sexualize women’s bodies to express power, and those that use women’s bodies and sexualities as signs of moral decay.

**IMAGES OF WOMEN PRESENTED BY MALE MUSICIANS**

Specifically, ‘good,’ ‘desirable,’ ‘virtuous,’ or ‘marriageable’ women are depicted primarily as those who are acquiescent to men, those who are skilled at domestic chores (per the standards of their husbands), those who can satisfy men’s

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sexual pleasures, and those who are not as outspoken as men. In contrast, “bad” or “troublesome” women are depicted as individuals who refuse to serve the interests of men (i.e., cook for their husbands, etc.), those who challenge men’s authority, those who are outspoken in public (especially against men), and those who choose rich husbands over poor ones, just to mention a few. For example, Daddy Lumba’s 1998 song “Nyame Nhyira Mmaa” (God Bless Women) speaks about good women, focusing especially on their role as mothers. He sings of the fundamental roles mothers play in our daily lives, and he highlights the challenges women face during pregnancy, delivery, child rearing as well as marriage. He sings:

Me hu sê barima bi teetee ôbaa bi a, na ĕyê me awurêhuô
I see a woman being stressed by a man, I get really sad

Me hu sê barima wo mbu mmaa, ĕyê me sê na wo nnim nia wo yê
If I see that a man doesn’t respect a woman, I think he is ignorant

Nyame Nhyira mo, Ghana mmaa
God bless you, Ghanaian women

Similarly, Obrafuor’s 2002 song, “Maame” (Mother) also speaks to the nature and commendable efforts of mothers. He emphasizes that, “a good heart and security, all of these are from my mother. She thinks of me every time, and when I am sick, she doesn’t even eat. She does everything in her power to make me feel better, then and only then does she find peace.” Ofori Amponsah’s 2007 hit song “Ôdjwo” (She Is Calm) speaks about the nature of a ‘good’ woman, but unlike Lumba and Obrafuor, he praises women for their meekness, and like the traditional

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Ghanaian perceptions about gender, he extolls submissiveness as a proud virtue for women. The following excerpts highlight the main theme of the song.

\[\text{Ôdō ne me toffee}, \text{Ôdō ne me toffee, me feefe ho}
\]
Love is my toffee; my love is the toffee I enjoy

\[\text{Onbue nano na wa kasa}
\]
She does not open her mouth, let alone speak

\[\text{Ôdō yēwu me nfa no endi agrō kraa}
\]
My love unto death, I do not take her lightly at all

\[\text{Menka na wayē, Menka na wayē}
\]
I don’t have to say it before she does my bidding

\[\text{Barima akēsiē dō no, Ōdō yē wu se mia na Ōdō me}
\]
Great men like her, but my love says she loves me instead

\[\text{Ôdjwo te sē ensuo nyunu,}
\]
She is as calm (or as agreeable) as cold water

\[\text{Ôdō diē ōmpē ne ho asēm}
\]
Love does not concern herself with trouble

\[\text{Ôdō diē ōdjwo, Ōdō diē ōdjwo}
\]
Love is calm, love is calm

\[\text{Ôdō ōmpē asēm kraa, Ōdō diē ōdjwo}
\]
Love doesn’t like trouble, love is calm

\[\text{Onse ēfi sēm ēnhata}
\]
She does not wash and dry our dirty linens in public

\[\text{Ôdō bufu kraa ōnkasa}
\]
Even when she is angry she still doesn’t say anything

\[\text{Saa yēkaa yē, awhini pa ēnkasa}
\]
It is true what they said: precious beads do not speak\(^{32}\)

The central theme in Ofori Amponsah’s song is the man’s preference for the submissive and calm (or agreeable) woman. She is presented as a good and compliant lover who fulfills her man’s wishes even before he commands. The silent

and dutiful lover is depicted as the ideal “marriageable” material desired by all men; even great men want her. Additionally, it is also clear that the man takes pride in his lover’s silent nature; after all, a submissive (or subservient) woman does not pose any challenge to his power, he is free to express his manly authority without opposition.

Another song that praises the good and submissive women is Yamoah’s “Serwaa Akoto.” After its release four decades ago, the lyrics of this highlife song became a popular reference that was called upon to describe the “perfect” Ghanaian woman. Agyaaku, the male lead singer of Yamoah’s International Band, informs his listeners that:

\[
\begin{align*}
Sē mmaa nyinaa tisē me nua baa Serwaa Akoto \\
If all women were like my sister Serwaa Akoto
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Anka ênyê sê yêre brê yi \\
We will not be suffering like this
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Na no ne kasa, ôbaa Akoto tesê nsuo nyunu \\
When she speaks, she is as calm as cold water
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Ne nan ne garantee, sê wohoa wo a wo bê fa no la \\
Her legs in heels, you will be amazed when you see her heels
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Suban papa, Serwaa Akoto obu ne ho \\
Good character, Serwaa Akoto respects herself
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Meyi wano wô bégywam dië önyëë bi da \\
As for speaking up in public (engaging in verbal exchanges and disagreements in public), she has never ever done so.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{align*}
\]

Here, we clearly observe how calmness and meekness is central to Agyaaku’s definition of the good or perfect woman. Like the woman described in Ofori

\textsuperscript{33} Yamoah’s (Guitar) Band. \textit{Serwaa Akoto}. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MY7FL8SAzE. Accessed April 15, 2016.
Amponsah’s “Ōdjwo,” the woman presented here also conforms to the traditional perceptions about good women; she respects herself, and she is praised for her silence. In contrast to the musical examples above, Akwasi Ampofo Adjei’s “Woo Teetee Me” (You Are Stressing Me), speaks of a ‘bad’ or ‘troublesome’ woman. In this highlife song, the woman is portrayed as a defiant and problematic individual whose actions deviate from those expected by his lover. Ampofo Adjei sings:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Énfa nto hō, na ōde ato} \\
&\quad \text{Do not put it there, but she puts it there} \\
&\text{Énfa nbō hō, na ōde abō} \\
&\quad \text{Do not hit it there, but she hits it there} \\
&\text{Ōteetee me} \\
&\quad \text{She is stressing me out} \\
&\text{Énfa nto hō, na ōde ato} \\
&\quad \text{Do not put it there, but she puts it there} \\
&\text{Énfa nbō hō, na ōde abō} \\
&\quad \text{Do not hit it there, but she hits it there} \\
&\text{Ōteete me} \\
&\quad \text{She is stressing me out} \\
&\text{Ōdō ama me kra yirē aho} \\
&\quad \text{Love has grieved my soul} \\
&\text{Tankas, wo teetee me, wo teetee me} \\
&\quad \text{Tankas you are stressing me, you are stressing me} \\
&\text{Ōdō sa a, sē diē ētiē ni} \\
&\quad \text{This is how it is when love runs out} \\
&\text{Ōdō ama me kra yirē aho} \\
&\quad \text{Love has grieved my soul}^{34}
\end{align*}
\]

---

The song speaks about the male lover’s disapproval of, and disappointment in the defiant woman. In the process of examining why her actions challenge and go contrary to his expectations, he refers to the woman as “tankas.”³⁵ (This term is used in reference to government agents who sanction homeowners and communities members for defaulting on sanitation and environmental laws. Generally, Ghanaians consider the tankas as an inconvenience, and the term is also used occasionally in a derogatory manner).

Primarily, the term conveys how inconvenient and problematic it is for the male lover to accommodate the disobedient woman. In Ghana, women are advised to desist from such display of defiance and boldness, especially if they want male suitors. Secondly, the woman-tankas is seen as an inconvenience to, and a problem for the male authority; she is a disturbance to the accepted socio-cultural hierarchy of power,³⁶ and her actions deviate from the expected gender norms.

Ampofo Adjei concludes that the woman’s behavior is an indication of her lack of love for him, and by extension the absence of love between them. The direct association of love and infidelity with gender expectations in romantic relationships is a recurring theme in many Ghanaian popular songs. To several male musicians, a woman’s love must be demonstrated through her obedience to, acceptance of, and submission to the man’s authority. Therefore, as far as Ghanaian communities are concerned, (and in the domain of romantic relationships), it is often said that a

³⁵Tankas is a ‘Ghanaianized’ version of Town Council, a collective of government agents whose work focused on ensuring environmental and sanitation decency.

³⁶In general, power may be described as the degree of influence or authority an individual has among their peers or in their community at large. In Ghana communities, men occupy the upper level of the power hierarchy, followed by women and children.
woman does not 'know love' or does not know 'how to love' if her actions deviate from these gender expectations.

Aside from portraying women's behavior in the context of romantic relationships, male musicians also speak about women's behavior towards money. Generally, women are portrayed as gold-diggers and money-loving individuals who often leave their lovers for richer men. It is also common for a woman to be presented as a financially dependent individual who uses her feminine charms to improve her economic situation. D-Black's "Vera" comes to mind. In this 2012 hiplife song, the singer complains about his lover. He presents the woman as a financially dependent girl, while maintaining that despite his financial support for her and her family, the girl remains ungrateful and unfaithful to him. In addition to "Vera," Amakye Dede's highlife song "Akwadaa Wesoa" can also be mentioned. Here, the singer proclaims women's love for rich men and glamorous (or fancy) things:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Mmaa pē sokoo, sokoo na mmaa pē}
\textit{Women like fancy things, fancy things are what women like}
\textit{sokoo na mmaa pē, yēn ara yēn maa yi}
\textit{Fancy things are what women like, our own women}
\textit{Mmaa pē sika wate, sokoo na mmaa pē}
\textit{Women like money, fancy things are what women like}
\textit{Barima a y aba sē wo mni sika a yēm pē wo}
\textit{Young men, if you don't have money they don't like you}
\textit{Mmaa pē sokoo, sokoo na mmaa pē}
\textit{Women like fancy things, fancy things are what women like}^{38}
\end{quote}


In several songs, too, women’s bodies and their sexualities are used to reinforce masculine power. Generally speaking, popular musicians express the concept (or idea) of power in two principal ways: through the display of wealth (influence, connection, skill, etc.) and by referring to their sexual behaviors (i.e., sexual stamina, abilities, and sexual exploits). The direct correlation of power with sexuality derives from the social environment of Ghanaian communities. Generally, as is common among young men, having sex, usually with multiple women, or keeping an erection, is easily translated into tokens of power that reinforce manliness (or masculinity). In Ghana, one only has to look at the numerous herbal concoctions and alcoholic beverages on the local market that claim to provide “man power,” “triple-action,” and “ability.” This sex-power dynamics is a common theme in popular music.

In “Waist and Power,” members of the all-male hiplife group, 4x4, take turns to inform us about their power and its effects on women: Sylvanus, one of the group members notes:

I get (have) supernatural power, Power!
Power ooo Power, Power!
Power African Black Power!
Power! Power! Waist and Power!
Power Speedometer, long hour!
A really good power, I don’t need lawyer!
Heat condition, hotter than fire
9-millimeter gun, ēyē [it is] very longer
XXL thick and stronger

39 Different musicians interpret the idea of power differently, but in general, it is usually in reference to their authority, influence and control.
Minyē barima a aban agye me tuo
I am not a man whose gun has been seized by the government

Minyē barima a me dō Benada
I am not a man who farms on Tuesdays

Meyē Akuapim abridiabrada, dēdēdē sē meko shraga
I am a proud Akuapim man, so sweet like hot pepper

They love me; they love me because of something

The name of my something they call Papa Long thing
And this Papa Long Thing is what the girls wanting

The singer emphasizes that he has all the power he needs, hence does not require the services of a lawyer, which is in reference to the numerous alcoholic and medicinal aphrodisiacs that enhance male performance. In fact, among boys, sex is sometimes jokingly referred to as a match (or game); by implication, a man can emerge as a winner or a loser depending on his natural power or his ‘lawyer.’ “I am not a man whose gun has been seized by the government... I am not a man who farms on Tuesdays.” These sayings are common Ghanaian maxims, especially among the Akan and Ga people. In brief, they both speak to the fact that, Sylvanus is a ‘complete’ man; he has control of his own sexual power, and this is symbolized by the possession of a gun that has not been “seized by the government.”

Additionally, in VVIP's 2015 song, “Dogo Yaro” (commonly interpreted as ‘tall boy,’ ‘long boy’ or ‘big boy’), women are depicted as court subjects who serve the

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40 The Akuapim people belong to the Akan ethnic group of Ghana
42 There are several movies and advertisements on radio and TV that sustain the correlation between a man's power and his sexual behavior. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNOxIfB6-RM. Accessed April 15, 2016.
43 In Ghana, an impotent man is said to have had his gun taken from him by the government.
bidding of different men. We see the sexualization of the female body, coupled with the expression of male authority—both of which are made abundantly clear in the lyrics and accompanying music video. In the latter, the women—who are partially nude and wearing facial veils—sequentially and submissively present different meals to a man who is portrayed as a figure of authority. The man sends each woman away after he has dipped his hand into her bowl, while he waits for a different woman to bring him a different meal. At certain moments, too, the women bow to him, acknowledging his authority.

**Figure 6:** One of the women serving the man. Retrieved from music video.  

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The lyrical accompaniment below is heard during the scene described:

Maame Galagala, me di bi. Me di bi.
Maame Galagala, I will eat some of that. I will eat.

Tuo Memuna, me di bi. Me di bi.
Tuo Memuna, I will eat some of that. I will eat.

Shenkafa, Sakina, me di bi. Me di bi.
Shenkafa, Sekina, I will eat some of that. I will eat.

Well, Nana Ama, mese me di bi. Me di bi
Well, Nana Ama, I say I will eat some of that. I will eat.

Girl, Hm! Me di bi.
Girl, Hm! I will eat some of that.

She say I be long oo, Dogo yaro, Dogo yaro
She says I am long, Dogo yaro, Dogo yaro

Thick and tall, Dogo yaro, Dogo yaro

She dey like am strong, Dogo yaro, Dogo yaro
She likes it strong, Dogo yaro, Dogo yaro^45^5

Like 4x4's “Waist and Power,” “Dogo Yaro” also presents an interplay between power and sexuality. This is manifested in the lyrics, the symbolic

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representation of women (and sex) as food, and the man’s power to summon different female subjects for his purposes. One does not need to be a film critic to discern that the function of the women in the music video, essentially, is to play the role of acquiescent servants who use their feminine charms to please their male masters. In fact, there is a total disregard for the women’s faces—an essential part of their identities—that is achieved through the use of facial veils, while the video often focuses on their semi-nude backsides instead.

Figure 8: Veiled women being used as footstools for the man.

To paraphrase the film critic Laura Mulvey, one could say that in “Dogo Yaro,” “woman then [becomes] a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his [own] fantasies and obsession.”

Here, the fantasy is that of power and authority, and the woman’s body (and sexuality) is used to propel that fantasy.

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Women’s bodies and their sexualities have also been used as signs to demonstrate social ills and moral decay. In those instances, the woman is usually presented as the principal cause of some form of misfortune such as poverty or disease, in which case men are warned to resist her feminine charms. Reference can be made here to the “apuskeleke” phenomenon. After Sydney released “Apuskeleke” in 2002, the term quickly became a catchphrase that was shouted at women who wore revealing clothes. The song warns young men about the distractive nature of women, and it points to women’s fashion, physique, and their sexual behaviors as principal causes of men’s ruin. The central theme of the song is highlighted in the chorus, which repeatedly cautions young men about the vagina:

\[
\begin{align*}
    \text{Apuskeleke, ébê sa, na ēnso na ēbō hō} \\
    \text{Apuskeleke, it will finish, but it will still be there} \\
    \text{Apuskeleke, wo sika bê sa, na ēnso na ēbō hō} \\
    \text{Apuskeleke, your money will finish, but it will still be there} \\
    \text{Ooo! ébê sa. Ooo! ébê sa.} \\
    \text{Ooo! It will finish. Ooo! It will finish.} \\
    \text{Wo yē diēn a ébê sa, na ēnso na ēbō hō} \\
    \text{No matter what you do your money will finish, but it (the vagina) will still be there.}
\end{align*}
\]

The foregoing musical examples are not meant to be exhaustive of the various ways in which women have been portrayed by male musicians, vis-à-vis the socio-cultural perceptions of gender in Ghana, but, to provide a general overview of the matter. Keeping these examples (and earlier discussions about the history of

Ghanaian popular music) in mind, the following chapter will provide an overview of women’s musical roles in traditional Ghanaian communities, and it will also focus on the gradual rise of women in the popular music scene of Ghana.
CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN’S ROLES AND STATUS IN GHANAIAN POPULAR MUSIC: CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

The publication and proliferation of historical works such as Cheik Anta Diop’s *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, has illuminated aspects of the life of African peoples that was once marred by generalizations and speculations.¹ Among these aspects are the conditions of women on the continent and their impact on the organization and development of African societies. Historically speaking, women in Africa have known independence and continue to exercise some degree of political and economic power. Oral accounts and archeological sources from the earliest periods of organized societies on the African continent confirm that, women were as important in their roles as men. For instance, among the Askum and Kush kingdoms of present day East Africa, there is evidence to suggest that women wielded significant political power as far back as the first century.² Even though they face challenges, often brought on by socio-cultural gender perceptions, African women continue to occupy important social, political, and economic positions, and their roles significantly impact the general fabric of African societies.

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In Ghana, queen mothers,\(^3\) for example, play instrumental roles in the traditional society. Outside their role as mouthpieces for women's affairs, they also select candidates for vacant chieftaincy positions—thereby ensuring the purity and continuity of the royal heritage—and they advise the royal company on matters of kinship, just to name a few.\(^4\) Aside the queen, adult women in Ghanaian communities also play important roles in the education and training of girls during initiation ceremonies such as bragoro.\(^5\) The institution of Bragoro is a highly respected and celebrated occasion in traditional Akan communities, and it encompasses girls' initiation rituals, education as well as music making. Primarily, during this occasion, elderly women teach young initiates about work, family life, and social responsibility. They also instruct the girls on social behaviors and domestic skills that are deemed acceptable and appropriate for women.

In music, women's roles in traditional Ghanaian communities are generally centered on singing, hand clapping, dancing, and playing small instruments.\(^6\) Nonetheless, during special events such as the bragoro ceremony, music making is the sole responsibility of adult women. The musical practices that accompany the celebration involve singing as well as instrumental music, which is provided by gourd rattles, clap sticks, double bells (dawuronnta) and hand clapping. The music of Bragoro is also accompanied by dancing, and the lyrics of the songs convey

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\(^3\) A queen mother as used here does not denote only the mother of a king. It denotes female political leaders, usually the sister, cousin, and in some cases mother of the king, and their roles complement that of the king.


\(^5\) Bragoro celebrates girls' transition from childhood to adulthood, and it is characterized by the learning of social and domestic skills.

\(^6\) These include the rattle and the bell.
lessons about family, patience, morality, and womanhood. Similarly, there exist several neo-traditional music and dance styles that are typically reserved for women; they include the Fanti *adenkum*, and *apatampa*, the Ashanti (and Akyim) *nnwomkoro* and *sikyi*, as well as the Ewe *gbolo*, just to name a few.

Furthermore, among the Ga-Adamgbe people of southern Ghana, both men and women participate in the *kpanlogo* recreational dance, which is typically accompanied by instrumental music, singing, and drama. Although *kpanlogo* instrumentalists are predominantly male, female musicians also play supporting instruments such as gourd rattles, bells, and hand-held drums. A similar situation persists in the *adzewa* of the Fanti-Akans. In this style of music, women accompany male instrumentalists with *mfoba* (gourd rattles), *dawur* (bells), *nsambo* (hand-clapping), dancing, and *nnwomto* (chorus singing). Additionally, *Adzewa* songs are typically composed by women and their lyrics draw from social situations, historical events, and personal experiences.

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8 Neo-traditional music styles emerge from revised and recycled traditional music practices, and they are typically used for recreational and entertainment purposes. Some developed alongside the contemporary music styles of the 20th century, and so were influenced by them. They are usually cultural specific, and so they exhibit the behaviors of specific cultural or ethnic groups (i.e., linguistically, thematically, and through the types of instrumental resources employed).
9 The Ewe people of Ghana are located in the Volta Region.
11 Several neo-traditional (or recreational) styles use drama as well as dancing and singing to convey their messages. This is typically seen in Ga recreational dances such as *kolomashie*, and *gome*. See also, Asante Darkwa. “The New Musical Traditions in Ghana.” Ph.D. Diss., Wesleyan University, Connecticut, 1974.
12 Kingsley Amponsah. op. cit., p. 48.
13 Ibid., pp. 49-51.
It is observed from the foregoing examples that in traditional Ghanaian communities, women play active roles in music making, not just as singers but also as composers, instrumentalists, and dancers. Despite women’s inclusion in these traditional\textsuperscript{14} and recreational music circles, their entrance and participation in the contemporary music scene has been met with several challenges.

For example, until the late 1960s, only a handful of women had been actively involved in the contemporary music scene of Ghana. The social stigma attached to musicians in addition to several cultural barriers had made it difficult for women to be accepted into the profession.\textsuperscript{15} It was inappropriate for any respectable lady to be associated with popular bands, and the few who dared to do so were considered to be sexually loose, and were often labeled as cheap girls who had no morals.

Aside from that, women could not perform on stage because the general inclination among male musicians was that menstruating women could bring misfortune simply by touching band equipment. The use of menstruation as a reason for limiting women’s inclusion in popular music performances has some cultural backing. Among the Akans, for instance, menstruation is considered to be one of the most revolting, dreadful, polluting, and messy scatological substances,
and [so], the less said about it the better. 16 This is why direct reference to menstruation is generally avoided in conversations.

Also, in many other African societies, menstruation is considered as a polluting discharge that weakens the woman and since it is unique to women, it is used in support of many patriarchal notions that consider women as the weaker sex. 17 In the Nigerian-based Church of the Lord (Aladura), for example, a woman is considered to be “impure” 18 during her menses and she must remain outside the church building during services. Similarly, a woman may be appointed as a full-time pastor, but she is prohibited from performing Holy Communion, marriage, baptism, or burial services until she reaches the age of 60 or menopause. 19

Regardless of these barriers, we can make mention of a few Ghanaian women who were known in the early and mid-twentieth centuries as professional stage performers. Yaa Amponsah, for example, worked with his brother’s band, Kumasi Trio, and she toured with the band occasionally as a dancer. As a matter of fact, the band’s 1928 song, “Yaa Amponsah” is named after her. 20 Additionally, Akosua Bonsu also worked with male musicians in the 1920s. The 1929 Zonophone West African Catalogue mentions that she was a singer on George Aingo’s Fanti guitar and accordion recordings. Other women who emerged as popular entertainers include

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17 Idem.
19 Ibid., pp. 584-587.
20 See Chapter One, pp. 10-11.
Aku Tawia “who had a voice like a nightingale,” Julie Okine, who sang with the E.T. Mensah’s Tempos band, and Vida Oparebea.\textsuperscript{21}

The rise of women in the Ghanaian popular music scene was influenced by several factors including: the rise of foreign female solo artistes in the 1940s and 1950s, Ghanaian government policies, and the development of Ghanaian gospel highlife in the 1980s. The emergence of female solo artists on the African continent, including the Zimbabwean singer, Dorothy Nazuka as well as Zenzile Miriam Makeba—arguably the most famous female popular musician to come out of Africa—acted as a stimulus to Ghanaian show business.\textsuperscript{22} The efforts and popularity of these foreign singers converted them into images of musical and social authorities that have influenced several women musicians; in Becca’s “Africa Woman” she mentions Merriam Makeba as an influence.\textsuperscript{23}

It was previously mentioned that, in the late 1950s, Ghanaian president Dr. Kwame Nkrumah endorsed the creation of several highlife bands and concert party groups that were subsequently associated with state institutions.\textsuperscript{24} These groups—which employed women—influenced the rise of similar popular bands and concert party troupes that also hired women as musicians, dancers, and actors. This led to the rise of more women in the entertainment scene, such as Beatrice Kissi and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{22} Other African women who became influential musicians at the time include Maude Mayor a Nigerian Senegalese vocalist, and Peggy Umanah from Nigeria.
\textsuperscript{24} See Chapter One, p. 18. See also John Collins. “Nkrumah and Highlife,” op. cit. pp. 5-7.
\end{flushright}
Florence Mensah, who starred in the Ōsōfo Dadzie television series of the 1970s, Esi Kom, Grace Omaboe, and Cecilia Adjei who became famous for their roles in the Ōbra concert party (and later television series) of the 1980s and ’90s.

Until the late 1980s, both the guitar bands and concert party groups were reluctant to hire women. Managers and bandleaders were unwilling to put women on stage because most women did not support the idea of other women on stage; they feared their husbands would be enticed by them. Collins points out that Mr. Bampoe, the leader of the Jaguar Jokers concert group, told him that he had refused to hire over 40 women because he knew the women members of the audiences would disapprove.\(^\text{25}\) For this reason, men performed practically all female roles and voices in these musical plays.\(^\text{26}\)

The economic downfall of the 1970s and 1980s, too, pushed many popular musicians under church patronage as choir directors, instrumentalists, and singers, and the churches also begun to use Christianized popular music styles as part of their outreach programs. Consequently, this change led to the development of several local gospel choirs and gospel-highlife bands that were fashioned after the guitar bands of the 1940s and 1950s. But, unlike the guitar bands of that period, the highlife-influenced gospel groups and church choirs of the 1980s were open to both male and female performers, and because of their association with churches, families were less reluctant in permitting their daughters to join.

Therefore, from the 1980s, a new generation of women rose to fame as gospel singers, and their association with churches allowed them to negotiate the social

\(^{25}\) John Collins. op. cit., p. 47.
\(^{26}\) Idem.
stigma that was linked to popular music. In other words, because they were seen as preachers of the gospel, they received the admiration of the public instead of the negative labels that usually came with the music profession. Female groups including ‘Daughters of Glorious Jesus,’ ‘Suzy and Matt,’ and ‘Tagoe Sisters’ became household names in the 1990s, and by the early 2000s their efforts had encouraged the rise of several solo and group acts including Bernice Offei, Cindy Thompson, and Jane & Bernice.

The growing hiplife movement that was occurring in the early 2000 also reflects the gradual rise of women in Ghanaian popular music. Women entered the hiplife scene as dancers and extras for music videos—a role they still play. Additionally, prior to their rise to mainstream musician status, women played the role of chorus singers (or backing vocalists), and occasionally some were featured to sing solo verses on records. However, the first decade of the twenty-first century was characterized by the rise of female musicians to national recognition, and several of them were hiplife (or rap) musicians. In 2001, for example, Abrewa Nana won the Ghana Music Award for ‘Best Hiplife Song,’ and a year later, she was named as the ‘Best Female Vocalist.’ Similarly, other female artists have gained national recognition: they include Efya, Becca, Raquel, Kaaki, Mzbel, and Wiyaala, who received the 2015 Ghana Music Awards for ‘Songwriter of the Year’ and ‘Best Female Vocal Performance.’

Despite the commendable strides made by the women mentioned above, one could argue that with the exception of the gospel music, which is dominated by

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women, men dominate the popular music scene of Ghana. In fact, the majority of women outside the gospel music scene are perceived to be ‘immoral’ women, and compared to their male counterparts they face greater pressure from the society to conform their songs to the socio-cultural opinions of morality and the accepted gender ideologies. That is, they face diverse repercussions when their songs, music videos, and opinions project behaviors that are considered to be inappropriate or unacceptable of women. For example, women musicians who convey their messages through the use of sexually suggestive imagery and lyrics are generally stigmatized as loose women and musicians without morals. Some of them also face physical violence.28

**FEMINISM, SEXUALITY AND WOMEN’S BODIES**

The display of women’s sexualities in music (and other contemporary media) has been associated with feminism and feminist opinions. Feminism emerged in France and the Netherlands in the late 1800s, and it encompasses a range of political ideologies and social movements that are aimed at achieving equal economic, personal, political, and social rights for women. By the 1990s, a wave of feminism emerged—commonly referred to as the third-wave of feminism29—and central to this wave is the questioning of, and deviation from the accepted notions of social constructs such as gender, body, sexuality, and beauty. Additionally, the

pioneers of this kind of feminism portray the “very lipstick, high-heels, and cleavage-proudly-exposed” girl as an independent and assertive woman, thereby diverging sharply from the first two waves of feminism who identified such behaviour with male oppression. In general, those who subscribe to these feminist ideologies argue that, “it is possible to have a push-up bra and a brain at the same time.”

Some female musicians, especially those in the Hip-Hop, R n B, and Pop scenes of the Western world have adopted the opinions of third-wave feminism, and they perpetuate them through lyrical and visual representation of power, sexuality, authority, and freedom. For example, Beyoncé’s 2011 song, “Run The World,” which is described by many as a pro feminist pop tune concludes, “Who are we? What do we run? We run the world! Who run the world? Girls!” Similarly, Nicki Minaj, (one of North America’s most popular rap artists) has also expressed certain ideologies that conform to this new kind of feminism. In her 2014 song “Get on Your Knees,” she inverts conventional sexual behaviour by adopting a dominant position over the male figure:

Get on your knees, get on your knees, get on your knees
Baby, just get on your knees
Say pretty please, say pretty please, say pretty please
Baby, just say pretty please
I’ll be back at 11, you just act like a peasant
Got a bow on my panties because my ass is a present
Yeah, it’s gooder than Meagan, you look good when you’re beggin’

31 Idem.
I be laughing when you begging me to just put the head in
Let me sit on your face, it’s ok you could play with it\(^{33}\)

The music, lifestyles as well as the ideologies of these foreign musicians have influenced some musicians in Ghana, and in particular, aspects of the feminist charged ideologies they preach (about sexuality and gender) have also penetrated the popular music scene. Thus, in the music of the new generation\(^ {34}\) of female musicians including Becca, Sister Deborah, Wiyaala, MzVee, Eazzy Baby, and Mzbel, one can readily identify themes that can be paralleled to such feminist ideologies. Particularly, Mzbel, for instance, expressed her likeness with and admiration for Nicki Minaj on social media when she posted the picture below.


\(^{34}\) In reference to some of the female popular musicians who emerged from the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Commenting on the sexually suggestive songs and images she perpetuates, she said:

I am not a porn star, but a Ghanaian artist. I am very comfortable and confident in my body and I am known for my sex appeal...People say what example [am I] setting for kids, but people respect Beyoncé, Kim Kardashian and the rest. They are both mothers! Kim Kardashian went completely naked on the cover of a magazine but nobody ever tagged her as a prostitute or a porn star. People respect her for who she is, but why can’t we do the same here?”

Here, we see clearly how the singer’s ideologies about sexuality and women’s bodies deviate from the socio-cultural opinions about gender and sexuality in Ghanaian communities. Also, she covertly challenges the perceptions about the acceptable behaviors of Ghanaian women by presenting the “porn star” as a very

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37 This is quoted from an interview conducted by Pluzz FM on Monday November 9, 2015 during Mzbel was asked to comment about a nude picture she released. See source above.
comfortable and confident woman who knows her “sex appeal.” In addition to her photos, Mzbel affirms her opinions about sexuality and women’s bodies through her songs. Her rise to international acclaim started with her 2006 song, “16 Years,” in which she condemns the sexual abuse of adolescent girls; although, many have missed this message due to the sexually suggestive imagery employed in the song and accompanying video. In “16 Years,” Mzbel maintains that, whether a girl dresses decently or not, her fashion sense and physique is not an open invitation to sexual predators. The following excerpts highlight the main theme of the song:

I be 16 years, I go dey be like this ooo
I am 16 years, even though I look like this

If you touch my thing, I go tell mommy
If you touch my thing, I will report you to my mother

Wôn yê kom, wôn yê din
All of you be quiet, be silent

Keep the pace, but not the race
Check me out, but don’t be silly

Êdiën na ëyê fê sê 16, mëgyi më ni na mayê sweet things?
What is beautiful like a 16 year old, enjoying myself and doing sweet things?

Wei nnyê bôni, e no be big deal
This is not a sin; it’s not a big deal

Mē shē me jeans, ne me skirt, I’m aware
I’ll wear my jeans and skirt, I’m aware

Wo bê whē a whê, anaasê yi wē ni
You can look, or take your eyes off me

Gigi me enpini, I be innocent
I will not be forced; I am innocent

Bro. Laryea, make you no do me so
Bro. Laryea, don’t do this to me

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Here, Mzbel challenges the cultural demand on women (and girls) to dress modestly by maintaining that, “I will wear my jeans and skirt, I’m aware.” The ‘I’m aware’ phenomenon arose in Ghana alongside apuskeleke. The former started as a response that was often given by those who dressed immorally, according to Ghanaian standards, and it implied that they were ‘aware’ of their exposed breasts, thighs and other body parts. The term later became associated with clothing that exposed women’s bodies such as mini skirts, cleavage-showing blouses, and even tight pants. The singer also dares judging onlookers when she says, “you can look, or take your eyes off me.”

Although she is recognized as the second successful hiplife songstress after Abrewa Nana, Mzbel’s songs are usually met with public remarks that condemn her personality. Her use of sexual innuendos, her sexually suggestive music videos, as well as her liberal fashion sense, have received numerous criticisms, and many Ghanaians consider her behavior as a deviation from traditional values. Aside being tagged as a porn star, Mzbel has also faced physical abuse for her deviation from cultural norms. After her performance on October 1, 2005, at the annual College of Arts celebrations organized by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Mzbel was attacked and sexually assaulted by a mob of students.39 Speaking about the incident, she mentioned that:

When my crew and I were leaving the auditorium, some of the students came up to me, saying they wanted to take pictures with me. While we were at it, others came from nowhere to

shake my hands. Unfortunately, [the] exit was like a big window through which I had to jump. Just when I was about to jump, someone grabbed hold of my legs and within a twinkle of an eye, there [was] a whole mob of students pulling my legs.40

The incident provoked diverging opinions about morality, decency, discipline, and fashion. Some public sentiments claimed that the artist provoked her attackers with her sexualized performance and provocative costume. Additionally, a KNUST fact-finding committee also supported that claim by noting that, “Mzbel and her three dancers made lewd gestures that may have inspired the students’ bad behavior.”41 Also, some Ghanaians were of the view that she did not behave like a proper African woman, and that her misfortune was a lesson aimed at correcting her inappropriate behavior.42 In her defense Mzbel claimed that, her attack had nothing to do with the way she was dressed. “Even on that night when I performed,” she said, “I was not wearing any extraordinary clothes. I was in a pair of trousers and a jacket.”43 There were others too who empathized with her, stressing that it could have happened to any woman.

Mzbel’s situation and the sentiments that followed in the aftermath present an interesting example of how gender ideologies impact the public’s attitude
towards female popular musicians in Ghana. That is to say, while women in the popular music scene are constantly ‘policed’ to conform their music to proper moral values—and are also expected to exhibit behaviors deemed appropriate for Ghanaian women—male musicians are usually exempt from such social expectations. In fact, compared to men, women enjoy much less freedom from public criticism when they employ sexualized images in their videos and use sexually suggestive lyrics. I argue that there are some social antecedents to this behavior.

While both boys and girls are regularly cautioned against early parenthood, generally speaking, most Ghanaian (and African) families hold their daughters more accountable for their sexual ‘excursions’. In traditional Ghanaian communities, there is a great demand on girls to remain ‘pure’ until marriage, and so virginity and sexual restraint are both celebrated as fundamental moral values for respectable young women. Furthermore, it is considered as a sign of moral decay when a girl often expresses sexual desires for boys, but among boys the behavior may be regarded as audacious or even manly. Similarly, it is seen as a sign of moral decay for a female musician to regularly employ sexualized imagery and sexual innuendos in her videos and lyrics respectively. In contrast, when male musicians express similar sexual desires and use sexually suggestive lyrics, generally, audiences tend to regard it as mere displays of musicianship, innovativeness, and creativity, but not necessarily a result of their broken moral compasses.

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44 Sexual relations (or curiosity) and its effects, including pregnancy, etc.
This notwithstanding, the use of overtly sexualized lyrics in Ghanaian popular music has become a prime concern to the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA). In an open letter to its members, the president of the union, Bice Osei Kuffuor cautioned musicians about the matter and noted that, “the musicians union of Ghana (MUSIGA) has noted with concern, the rising incidence of profane lyrics in songs. This current trend is particularly disturbing considering the fact that these [sexually suggestive songs] are played on radio without any edits [...] and given wide currency on social media.”

Mzbel’s sentiments, including her rejection of the ‘porn star’ label, and her conviction about her sexual appeal as well as her confidence in her body may be described as a collective ideology held by other female popular musicians in Ghana. For example, Kaakie, Wiyaala, Tiffany, and Sister Deborah—whose “Uncle Obama” caught international attention—also make use of sexually charged lyrics and imagery, and like Mzbel (and Nicki Minaj) they too suggest that women’s bodies and sexuality could be used as signs of confidence, sexual freedom, and independence.

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The foregoing chapters have called upon cultural, historical, contemporary, and theoretical perspectives to discuss the roles and gradual rise of women in the Ghanaian popular music scene. It has been suggested that in consonance with the ideologies of gender and sexuality in Ghana, ‘good’ women are presented as submissive, acquiescent individuals who fulfill their lover’s every need, while ‘bad’ and ‘troublesome’ women are depicted as defiant and assertive people who disregard cultural norms and challenge male (and social) authority. Additionally, it has been argued that while women face harsher repercussions for their use of

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sexually charged elements in their songs, male musicians have used women’s bodies and sexualities as currencies of power and as signs of moral decay.

Through lyrical and video analysis where necessary, the following chapter will be focused on showing how women musicians in Ghana are changing the narrative about gender and sexuality in popular music. The analysis will reveal that several female musicians, like Mzbel, covertly and sometimes openly challenge the accepted notions about gender and sexuality, and that, often, the images of women they project deviate from the silent, dependent, and money-loving woman usually presented by male musicians.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SONGS AND MUSIC VIDEOS

It was pointed out elsewhere\(^1\) that men dominate the popular music scene of Ghana, and it has also been argued that gender is a metanarrative that permeates many social circles. Additionally, it has been suggested that based on socio-cultural ideologies of gender held in Ghana, some male popular musicians have presented distinct images of women that stem from the male experience and point of view, and they have sexualized the female body in order to demonstrate their authority. Therefore, to investigate how female popular musicians in Ghana choose to represent women, their music will be approached from three broad aspects. Songs about: (1) motherhood, social expectations of women, and women's roles; (2) romantic relationships and women empowerment (or authority), and (3) songs about sexuality and women's bodies. Further, the songs examined were selected based on language and periodic style. That is, they are either in Twi, Ga, Pidgin-English or English,\(^2\) and they also reflect one or more of the following styles and periods: gospel and burgher highlife era of the 1980s to 1990s, and the hiplife (i.e., azonto\(^3\), ragga, hip-hop, etc.) and R n B era of the 1990s to the present.\(^4\)

\(^1\) See Chapter Two.
\(^2\) Generally speaking, these are the principal languages that most popular musicians use in Ghana. The Akans speak Twi, Ga by the Ga-Ademgbe.
\(^3\) Azonto is a genre of hiplife that is based on a dance movement usually done as a mime.
\(^4\) Ragga (or ragamuffin music) is a subgenre of reggae and Jamaican dancehall, which, like hip-hop, has influenced the music of several popular artists in Ghana.
SONGS ABOUT: MOTHERHOOD, SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS OF WOMEN, AND WOMEN’S ROLES

Obaatan Refre Ne Mba

Ewura Ama Badu rose to fame as a highlife musician in the early 1990s. It was her song “Medofo Adaada Me” (My Lover Has Lied to Me) that brought her into the public’s attention, and she is also praised as one of the pacesetters for women’s participation in the contemporary music scene of Ghana. In her song, “Obaatan Refre Ne Mba” (The Nurturing Mother is Calling Her Children), she speaks about herself and describes her motherly duties.

Obaatan refrē ne mba.
The nurturing mother is calling her children!

Emilia! Kate! Papa Kwame frē Caesar sē aunty aba
Emilia! Kate! Papa Kwame, call Caesar. Tell them aunty has returned.

Ma ba na mo nyinaa mbra mbē gyi mo akwan so adiē
I have returned, so all of you come for your gifts.

Obaatan refrē ne mba.
The nurturing mother is calling her children!

Gyae su, wo maame bētō ama wo
Child stop crying, your mother will buy whatever you need for you.

Gyae su, wo papa bētō ama wo
Stop crying, your father will buy whatever you need for you.

The singer goes on to ask, “where is Kofi Owusu, call David and Mabel. Call Jemima. Where are they? I have returned! All of you come for your presents. I have returned so all of you come for your gifts."

In “Obaatan Refre Ne Mma,” Ewura Ama demonstrates the motherly nature of Ghanaian women by emphasizing their benevolence as well as their impact on

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Ghanaian communities in general. In the song, she presents herself as a mother to everyone, a situation that is affirmed in the lyrics “Emilia! Kate! Papa Kwame, call Caesar and inform them aunty has returned...where is Kofi Owusu, call David and Mabel. Call Jemima. Where are they? I have returned!” This behavior has a social antecedent. In Ghana, generally speaking, adult women are considered to be mothers and therefore they are accorded the due respect; by reciprocity (and tradition), they also consider children outside their immediate family as their own.6

It is therefore not uncommon for a woman to buy presents for children in her community, as is the case presented by Awura Ama. As a matter of fact, vendors, especially those who sell at bus stations, have a saying, “maame oo denden” (the closest equivalent being “welcome, mother”), which they utilize as part of their sales strategies for two purposes. First, it is said to remind women about the potential number of children awaiting their arrival, and secondly, it is used to entice women to buy presents for these children—and by extension to further the business of the vendor. We see a fulfillment of this in the lyrics, “the nurturing mother is calling her children...I have returned so all of you come for your gifts.” Ewura Ama, therefore, demonstrates an aspect of the communal nature of Ghanaian communities by emphasizing the social relationship between adult women and children, and consequently, she presents women as social actors who are central to maintaining the survival of this collective communal behavior.

6 In addition to this, girls are also considered to be mothers, and may be called ‘mama’. See Chapter One for a general discussion of gender roles and perceptions in Ghana.
In her 2012 song “Mama Sweet,” Mzbel talks about women’s responsibilities as mothers, and she also emphasizes the importance of motherhood by highlighting aspects of her own life that has been shaped by her mother’s singular efforts:

My mommy ooo! My mommy ooo! Mama, Mama, Mama sweet!
Let me tell you that my mother is number one. Let me tell you that my mom is a fine woman. She doesn’t get angry; she is always smiling. She is the only one who understands me.
When I was a child my mother said she would take me to school so I become a president, but I said I don’t want to be president. Neither did I want to be a teacher, a nurse, doctor, pilot or a driver. I told her I want to be a musician. I will sing for you mama, I will sing about all the things you do.
[Sweet mother, I wont forget you. If you leave me I will go crazy. Mama dress me so I can go, mama bless me before I leave. Mama is good, mama is sweet!]
I remember the times I got sick as a child. My mother couldn’t eat and she couldn’t sleep. My mother couldn’t even work. She would pray to God to heal me. When we didn’t have money, mother would sell her clothes. She would buy me books, pay my fees and buy me clothes. When I’m in trouble my mother will defend me; she never leaves me hanging. There’s nothing sweeter than my mother. There’s mother sweeter than your love. My mommy ooo! My mommy ooo! Mama, Mama, Mama sweet!

In “Mama Sweet,” Mzbel presents her mother as a compassionate woman who is willing to sacrifice her own comfort for her family. Specifically, she highlights her mother’s compassionate nature through the lyrics,” I remember the times I got sick as a child. My mother couldn’t eat and she couldn’t sleep. My mother couldn’t even work. She would pray to God to heal me. When we didn’t have money, mother would sell her clothes. She would buy me books, pay my fees and buy me clothes. When I’m in trouble my mother will defend me; she never leaves me hanging. There’s nothing sweeter than my mother. There’s mother sweeter than your love. My mommy ooo! My mommy ooo! Mama, Mama, Mama sweet!

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sick as a child. My mother couldn’t eat and she couldn’t sleep. My mother couldn’t even work. She would pray to God to heal me.” Some male artists have also stressed this particular quality of mothers. In Obrafuor’s 2002 single “Maame” (Mother) for example, he emphasized that, “a good heart and security, all of these are from my mother. She thinks of me every time, and when I am sick, she doesn’t even eat. She does everything in her power to make me feel better, then and only then does she find peace.”

In addition to being compassion, Mzbel affirms her mother’s sacrificial and benevolent nature when she says, “when we didn’t have money, mother would sell her clothes. She would buy me books, pay my fees and buy me clothes.” Lazzy also affirms Mzbel’s sentiments by saying, “Sweet mother, I won’t forget you. If you leave me I will go crazy. Mama bless me before I leave. Mama is good, mama is sweet!”

It can be suggested that Mzbel’s “Mama Sweet” draws from the collective experiences of single mothers and their children—at least those in Africa—and as such, it evokes a familiar and nostalgic emotion in many listeners. From my own experiences (as one of three children raised by a single mother), I am well aware of the challenges of motherhood—at least from a son’s perspective—and I am familiar with, and grateful for being at the receiving end of the two overarching qualities that the singer highlights in her song: compassion and benevolence. These overarching qualities of (single) motherhood, as used in the song, project an image of a strong and independent woman who traverses social and economic challenges without the

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support of a man. That is, contrary to Sydney’s “Apuskeleke”\(^9\)—in which women are presented as individuals who rely on men for financial security, and also depend on their feminine charms (or sleep around) to improve their economic situations—the woman presented here is a modest woman who creates her own wealth (i.e., selling her clothes).

**Me Ye Obaa**

In the early 1990s, Akosua Agyapong rose to fame as one of the few female highlife icons in the Ghanaian popular music scene. She came to the public’s attention through her work with the highlife trio NAKOREX that featured Akosua, Rex Omar, and Nat Brew, who she later married. In her 1990 song, “Me Ye Obaa” (I Am A Woman), she proudly celebrates womanhood and cautions women about their behaviors. The following excerpt portrays the main theme of the song.

*Me yē ōbaa, Me yē ōbaa, Me yē ōbaa*

I am a woman, I am a woman, I am a woman

*Agya Nyame bō me ōbaa, ōbōō me yiē*

God created me a woman and he made me very well

*Menua nom mmaa, me srē mo, mon tiē ma sēm ēmma me*

My fellow women I plead with you, listen to what I have to say

*Yēn bō môden sē yē bē yē asotiē ama ya wofuō*

Let's make an effort to listen to our parents

*Afei nso, mo ma yēn kra yēn ho yie*

Now, also, let us carry ourselves properly

*Ama yē embarima yi ōde obuo ama yēn*

So that our men will also show us respect.

*Mo ēma yēn sheshē atadiē a ēho da hō, ama embarima yi aka ho asēm*

Let us not wear revealing clothes that men will talk about.

\(^9\) See Chapter Two, pp. 21-22.
In the song, Akosua plays the role of a mature adult woman who advises young women about their familial relationships as well as their romantic relationships. From her perspective, a good woman must dress modestly and not provocatively, she must not be promiscuous since it could get her pregnant, she must introduce her lovers to her family, and she must also be faithful and committed in her relationships. Akosua’s opinions are derived from the traditional Ghanaian point of view, and she insists that women fulfill these expectations not just for themselves but also to gain the respect of men and to help them secure potential suitors.

Akosua presents an image of a woman who is preoccupied with men’s opinions about her behavior. She lays emphasizes on gaining the respect of men by noting that, when a man sees this [bad behavior], he will not respect you

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anymore... when they see this, marrying you will become a problem,” therefore “let us carry ourselves properly... so that our men will also show us respect. By doing so, the singer presents male-approval and marriage as a form of reward for good behavior, and by extension she presents men as the socially sanctioned adjudicators of women’s moral and social behaviors. It can be suggested that despite her praise worthy advice to young women, Akosua “places women in a dependent position: they are to derive their value from their relationship with men, and in order to do so they must be careful to not go outside the norms that society dictates for decent women.”¹¹

¹¹ Akosua Adomako Ampofo. op cit, p. 29.
Kōkōōksō\textsuperscript{12}

Akosua Agyapong’s “Kokooko”\textsuperscript{13} also tells a story about women and their roles as economic providers in the family. She notes:

\textit{Me kunu egyuma asēi nti me kō bōō besia be de yē egyuma}
My husband lost his job so I went for a loan to start a business.

\textit{Me kō fa n’iēma bi bē ton yē}
I went into trade

\textit{N’iēma na sa nanso ma bō ka,}
I’ve sold all the things but I made a loss

\textit{Ka bī nie, me n’tumi n’tua}
What a debt, It’s a debt I cannot pay.

\textit{Nia ēyē me ya ne sē, mede sika ba fie a,}
What pains me the most is this: when I bring money home

\textit{Na me kunu Kofi wa sesa ne nyinaa egu ne bōtō mu.}
Kofi, my husband just takes it all.

\textit{Me de bē ma wo, me de bē ma wo, nso ēmba da}
I will give it back, he always says, but he never does.

\textit{Efie wura ēęgyi, ēnsu ēnso ēęgyi, kania ēęgyi}
The landlord is asking for money, water bill needs to be paid, and the light bill as well.

\textit{Me kunu bē ko agyuma no ēsōre a na wada}
Instead of going to work (or finding work), my husband just sleeps at home.

\textit{Sē me gya ne hō kō a, amanfuō bē ka sē, ōbaar ya ōreko yi ni tri mu yē den}
If I divorce him people will say I am a wicked woman.

\textit{Sē me gya ne hō kō a, amanfuō bē ka sē, ōbaar ya ōreko yi ne kunu egyuma asei nti we gyai no}
If I divorce him people will say I left him because he lost his job.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} The sound \textit{kokooko} is an onomatopoeia that mimics the sound of a door knock.

\textsuperscript{13} Released on her second album titled \textit{Esiwa} in the mid 1990s, following the success of her first album in 1990 titled \textit{Frema}. See also http://www.talkafrique.com/issues/akosua-agyepong-the-woman-known-as-ghanas-janet-jackson. Accessed February 17, 2016.

In “Kokooko,” Akosua presents herself as a good wife who stays by her husband’s side despite his financial misfortunes, but to attenuate the resulting economic struggle, she creates her own wealth by starting a business. With her new job, she takes on the role of the man by becoming the sole financial provider of the family (i.e., paying rent, utilities, and bringing money home). By assuming the man’s role, Akosua reverses the socio-cultural gender perception (among Ghanaians) that recognize men as the primary financial providers of the family, and in addition to that, she portrays women as financially independent individuals. This depiction of women sharply contrasts those presented by D-Black, Sydney, and Amakye Dede just to name a few. While these musicians portray women as individuals who love rich men and pay no attention to poor ones, the woman presented here is indifferent towards her man’s financial standing; in fact, she is inspired by the economic hardship to become a self-sustaining business woman.

Despite her indifference towards her husband’s economic situation, she has contemplated leaving him because he has become what many Ghanaians will call a ‘lazy housewife’ who sleeps at home instead of going out to find work, knowing very well that there are bills to be paid. We see this situation in the lyrics, “instead of going to work (or finding work), my husband just sleeps at home. The landlord is asking for money, water bill needs to be paid, and the light bill as well.” Akosua is also concerned about the social implications of leaving her husband; won’t people say she is a wicked woman if she does, and won’t they also say she left him because he is poor? This dilemma reveals yet another side of this woman; she is very concerned about society’s response to her actions. This behavior is unlike that of the
women presented by Wiyaala, Sister Deborah, Tiffany, and Becca below. That is, in those songs, the women go against popular opinions and accepted practices in order to fulfill their own desires (i.e., announce and fulfill their sexual fantasies, challenge men to sexual bouts, and abandon their duties as mothers to go partying). In short, "Kokooko" projects an image of a faithful, proactive, and entrepreneurial woman who is struggling to avoid public disapproval.
SONGS ABOUT: ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT (OR AUTHORITY)

*Time 4 Me*

Becca—real name Rebecca Akosua Acheampomaa Acheampong—has been described by some Ghanaians as a feminist due to the lyrics of her songs, and in her 2013 song “Time 4 Me,” we see an affirmation of this claim. In the song, Becca presents an image of a woman who has decided to devote her time to her personal needs instead of those of her lover, and consequently, she relinquishes several of her expected duties as a woman and a mother to the man. She notes:

> Its always you! You and you and you!
> Well, well, well, I don’t care no more.
> I’m gonna have myself sometime and you’re gonna babysit this time and I’m gonna be out till the cock crows.
> I can’t stand no more of you coming home at night and saying do this and that
> I left the rubbish, baby you should take it out now
> Don’t wait up for me, I’m gonna have myself a party
> Mr. DJ hit me with the music cos I'm high on myself and there ain’t no stopping me
> Cos its time for me and me! I am someone’s child too.
> Its always you! You and you and you!

In “Time 4 Me,” Becca challenges and deviates from several socio-cultural gender ideologies, especially those that demand submissiveness, obedience, and

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meekness from women. She presents an image of a woman who is frustrated and
tired from putting up with a lover who places his needs above hers, and
consequently she rebels against the traditional ideals of a good Ghanaian woman.
This situation is highlighted in the lyrics “It’s always you! You and you and you! Well,
well, well, I don’t care no more.” From the lyrics, we can also determine that the
woman was once submissive to her lover, but she chose to rebel against the male
authority due to (what Becca later refers to as) “the pains” and “his games.”

Contrary to the image of the good woman presented in Ofori Amponsah’s
“Odjwo”—who remains silent even when provoked to anger—and Yamoah’s Serwaa
Akoto—who is praised for her silence in public matters—the woman presented by
Becca takes measures to change her situation, and she is very vocal about her
concerns. The extent of her outspokenness is clearly demonstrated in the lyrics” I’m
gonna have myself sometime and you’re gonna babysit this time, and I’m gonna be
out till the cock crows.” Traditionally speaking, the woman presented here reverses
and deviates from the accepted behaviors of Ghanaian mothers by leaving her child
with the man and partying all night. In a typical traditional Ghanaian community,
she is likely to be branded as a bad mother, and by extension a bad woman. In
addition to being outspoken and assertive, Becca presents herself as an independent
woman who is finally free from the ‘shackles’ of male domination. That is, she
appears to have just discovered herself outside the shadow of the man, as is
affirmed by the lyrics “I am someone’s child too.” The exhilarating feeling that
accompanied her liberation is translated into the sentiment, “I’m high on myself and
there ain’t no stopping me.”
Becca’s “Time 4 Me” can be considered as a long overdue reaction to Charles Amoah’s 1987 burgher highlife song, “Eye Odo Asem” (It is a Matter of Love). In the song, Charles enthusiastically informs his listeners about his new lover, priding himself in her good qualities especially in the fact that she devotes her time to him. He mentions that “she praises (honors) me in the mornings, she consoles me in the afternoons, she gives me good massages in the evenings, and at night she whispers sweet things into my ears”—the latter being a euphemism for sex.

Becca ends her song by encouraging women in similar situations to take action and remain firm in their rebellion:

To my ladies in the world if you’re feeling this pain
If you’re tired and you want to say no to this game
Hands up, Hands up! Yeah!
If you believe in your worth look him straight in the eye
Say No, and ladies emphasize!
Raise your hands, spread your palm and let him talk to the hand
Hands up. Yeah!
My Time

In 2015, MzVee’s “My Time” helped her win the Ghana Music Award for New Artist of the Year; consequently, many of her fans have used the song to support their claim that she is the ‘Dancehall Queen of Ghana’. This is probably due to the lyrics of the song, in which she proclaims, “watch the bad girl take control...Queen yet, but the throne we are climbing,” signifying her readiness to ascend the dancehall throne. MzVee’s confidence is exemplified in the following:

I’m the face on your clock cos this is my time
I don’t even run the race cos it is mine
I’m the little girl who is gonna run things
Girls gone wild cos we are untamed
And you’re stuck behind cos I’m ahead of my time
[See the way she commot [emerged] from the underground
Whether you like it or not she is conquering
This [she] is trouble!]
I have arrived! I tell you, I have arrived!
Started from the bottom now I’m rising
Queen yet, but the throne we are climbing
Cos I’m a murderer; me I kill them all one by one
In this war I’m a general, and my voice is my loaded gun
Some of them run and run, but never speed up
When the race is done, I am the winner
Take control in their faces. It’s my time!¹⁸

In this song, MzVee presents herself as a confident and assertive woman who does not shy away from public confrontation, as is highlighted in the lyrics “take control in their faces.” Contrary to the image of the ‘good’ woman presented in Yamoah’s “Serwaa Akoto”—who receives praises for her calmness and her silence in public matters—the woman here takes pride in her ability to challenge authority, “conquer,” and “murder” with her words (i.e., in this war I’m a general, and my voice is my loaded gun). Additionally, she is very different from the easy going and acquiescent woman presented by Ofori Amponsah in “Odjwo,” in that, while that woman is considered to be as calm as cold water, the woman presented here is “wild” and “untamed.” This image of the free and independent woman also contrasts with the submissive and meek image presented by Paapa Yankson and His Western Diamonds Band in the highlife medley “Ya Ba” (We have arrived). In the song, Paapa insists, “whatever our women do, they are under us,” thus affirming the position of authority occupied by men in traditional Ghanaian societies.19

Furthermore, “My Time” projects an image of a forceful and determined woman who is set on achieving her goals regardless of the challenges (i.e., but the throne we are climbing). That is, because she “started from the bottom,” she is aware of the roadblocks that women usually encounter in the music business and society in general, still, she confidently maintains that, “I’m the little girl who is gonna run things.” Through these sentiments, MzVee presents herself and other female musicians as strong, independent, and capable women who are also able to hold their own just as their male counterparts.

**African Woman**

Becca’s “African Woman”\(^{20}\) has also gained international acclaim, especially because of its depiction of (African) women’s challenges and their roles in societies. Additionally, the song celebrates womanhood by presenting women as motherly and nurturing individuals, thereby conforming to the traditional idea of womanhood in Ghanaian and other African communities.

Woman, I see a woman  
Everyday in the mirror I see a woman  
Every time I look at mama I see that woman  
A wonderful woman, an African Woman, Mother of nature  
Beautiful woman, Beautiful woman, Yeah! Yeah!  
I’m a woman, an African woman  
When I say water is water, it is not alcohol  
I have character; my beauty is like clean linen  
African woman! Wonderful woman  
Beautiful woman! Beautiful woman! Yeah! Yeah!\(^{21}\)

Here, Becca presents an image of women that is in direct conformity to the one presented in Daddy Lumba’s “Nyame Nhyira Mbaa” (God Bless Women).\(^{22}\) In both songs, women are portrayed as motherly, loving, and nurturing individuals who encounter and overcome several socio-cultural challenges including sexual and domestic abuse, pregnancy, childbirth, and unemployment, just to name a few. In the case of “African Woman,” these challenges and their effects on women’s daily lives are also portrayed in the accompanying music video in which we see a girl

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\(^{20}\) The song won the Ghana Music Award for Best Music Video in 2013.  
\(^{22}\) See Chapter One.
grow to become a successful woman despite her challenges as a child. The video is also used to portray different aspects of African women’s lives, including their dominance in the informal sector of the economy, and it also speaks about how women suffer at the hands of catcallers and sexual predators.  

Additionally, unlike many popular songs, Becca presents women as beautiful individuals by concentrating on their virtues instead of their sexual appeal and physical appearance. By focusing on moral qualities such as honesty and trustworthiness—a virtue that is demonstrated in the saying, "when I say water, it is water, it is not alcohol"—Becca informs her listeners that a woman’s worth is not determined only by her feminine qualities or physical attraction but also by the virtues she demonstrates.

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23 The video also speaks about women’s domestic responsibilities, as well as the emotional and sexual abuse they face at the hands of some men.

24 This statement is derived from a traditional Ghanaian saying typically heard during children’s naming ceremonies, and it is used to reinforce the virtue of honesty into the child. During the event, drops of water and alcohol are given to the child, the master of ceremony then proclaims that the water and alcohol are symbols of truth and dishonesty, and he goes on to say, 'let the child grow to be honest, knowing the difference between truth and lies and may he or she be able to proclaim the truth at all times'.
Onye Ogbeme

Mzbel’s “Onye Ogbemi” (You Can’t Kill Me) was released in 2015, and like most of her songs it has also been called “controversial” because of the sexually suggestive lyrics and imagery it perpetuates. An excerpt is provided below.

You can’t kill me! You can’t kill me!
Back again, Mzbel. If you don’t like me come for a bicycle and ride to hell. Ten years and still strong. You want my downfall but I’ve proven you wrong. Lyrically good, physically sweet. I’ll make you loose, rapping with the beat. Coming with the heat, get up on your feet. The queen is back, I’ve come for my seat.
Is it my fault that whenever I shake my baka on stage all the big men fall? They ask for more just like Pepsi, because I’m sexy. Come suck it. You look thirsty. Bow before the queen and ask for mercy! This is my other side—if you wanna be on the safer side then stop being a parasite before I show you where the power lies.
You can’t kill me! You can’t kill me!
It’s heavy! It’s broad! It’s huge!

In “Onye Ogbemi,” Mzbel presents herself as a confident and assertive woman who is not afraid to confront her ‘haters’ as well as the general public. The singer rejects the socio-cultural gender notion that expects women to be calm and submissive by openly daring those who disagree with her opinion, saying, “If you don’t like me come for a bicycle and ride to hell.” Additionally, she presents herself as a figure of authority (i.e., a queen), and based on her queenly mandate, she directs

her lyrics to those that attempt to judge her behavior by maintaining that “is it my fault that whenever I shake my baka27 on stage all the big men fall?

At the very least, “Onye Ogbemi” presents an image of a determined woman who has overcome her adversary’s efforts to overpower her; as is observed in the lyrics, “ten years and still strong...you want my downfall but I’ve proven you wrong.” Additionally, the woman is presented as a figure of authority, and from the lyrics, “if you wanna be on the safer side then stop being a parasite before I show you where the power lies,” we see that she has the free will and autonomy to exercise her power. Unlike Yamoah’s silent and easygoing woman, Mzbel presents a woman who is firm in her ways and outspoken about her situation, including her challenges as a female musician and her sexuality (i.e., They ask for more just like Pepsi, because I’m sexy).

27 Slang for buttocks.
SONGS ABOUT: SEXUALITY AND WOMEN’S BODIES

*Rock My Body*

In 2014, Noella Wiyaala released a song called “Rock My Body” which helped her win the All Africa Music Award (AFRIMA) for ‘Most Promising Artist in Africa’ and ‘Revelation of the African Continent’.

The song also got her nominated for the AFRIMA award for ‘Best Female Artiste in West Africa’ and it was also nominated for the ‘Best African Reggae, Ragga, and Dancehall’ award. An excerpt is presented below.

I need a man to rock my body. A big strong man to rock my body
He got no money I don’t mind...and if he’s ugly I don’t mind.
He has that thing and I want to grind, I want to grind, I want to grind
I wanna crush his body...
My skin is in terrible state. I want to wind all night. I want to wind till eight. He’s too strong; I don’t mind. He’s too strong; I don’t care
I wanna grind and grind and grind and grind and grind, yeah!
He’s short, he’s tall, he’s slim, so big; extra big. I don’t care
It doesn’t matter if you’re black or white

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In “Rock My Body,” Wiyaala presents herself as an assertive young woman who is not afraid to publicly express her sexual desires. Her confidence is demonstrated in her music video in which she is seen walking through a market, while singing about her desire to “grind and grind.” From what is observed in the video, Wiyaala does not seem to be concerned with the social order that expects women to be meek and modest in public affairs. That is to say, unlike Ofori Amponsah’s easy going and acquiescent woman in “Odjwo”—who is loved for her silence—Wiyaala takes matters into her own hands, confidently dictating what she wants (sexual pleasure) and when she wants it (all night).
In contrast to male musicians who present women as money lovers and gold diggers,\textsuperscript{30} Wiyaala shows little concern for her potential suitor’s financial qualities. In fact, she does not mind if he is poor, black, white or ugly—what matters the most is his “thing.” Her indifference to her lover’s financial worth is clearly observed in her video as she is seen passionately caressing a young man who seems to be a butcher at a small meat shop in the market. Wiyaala’s disregard for money and beauty is not uncommon. In the 1990s, Akosua Agyapong, one of Ghana’s most celebrated highlife songstresses, released a song that placed emphasis on love instead of money or physical attraction.

In “Esiwa,” Akosua rejects certain traditional views that condemn inter-tribal marriages, and she chooses a lover against her parent’s wishes, all the while maintaining that it is not the man’s money or his beauty that she wants.\textsuperscript{31} In addition to Wiyaala and Akosua Agyapong, Eazzy, another Ghanaian hiplife songstress (whose music is discussed below) has also rejected the gold-digging money-loving notion projected by some male musicians, maintaining that, “you [the

\textsuperscript{30} In Amakye Dede’s highlife song “Akwadaa Wesoa” for example, women are presented as money lovers who prefer rich men to poor ones. See p. 17. Additionally, in D-Black’s “Vera,” women are presented as ungrateful individuals who leave their lovers for richer ones. See also p. 17.

\textsuperscript{31} Akosua also claims autonomy on the issue of marriage, asserting her freewill to make a decision based on her own standards and not those set by her society, such as belonging to a similar tribe with one’s partner. Further, she points out the custom of arranged marriages, a practice that once persisted in many Ghanaian societies, and objects to its existence in contemporary Ghana, especially since she found herself in the same situation. See also “Esiwa,” Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9xDZhqTaS8. Accessed February 3, 2016.
man] telling me you want my body, you wanna take me home and start a party. But no! no! no! no! I don’t want your money.”

Wiyaala subverts the socio-cultural gender ideology that project women as weak and men as strong by threatening to “crush” her lover’s body. Whether she speaks in relation to his physical strength or sexual stamina, Wiyaala’s conviction about her own ability to overpower the “big strong man” cannot be ignored. Therefore, I suggest that it would be improper to take “I wanna crush his body” at face value, and I maintain that in addition to the exhaustion of overtaxing sex, Wiyaala’s sentiment in this instance also speaks of the notion of power. In her video, too, she demonstrates this idea of power through several strategically placed choreographed movements.

Specifically, while leading a group of half-naked men in a dance sequence, the singer is lifted up by the men as if she was the ‘flyer’ of a cheerleading team, and the men the bases or spotters of the team. The gesture suggests a symbolic demonstration of Wiyaala’s paramountcy over her male counterparts and by extension her power over the “big strong man” mentioned in her lyrics. At the risk of overstating the point, the “big strong man” can be likened to male-dominated social-cultural systems, such as patriarchy, which have contributed to the marginalization of women in Ghana. Therefore, Wiyaala’s overpowering and crushing of the male body is perhaps not just a sexual innuendo, but also a symbolic statement with

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33 In American cheerleading sports, a flyer is the individual who is lifted atop during a pyramid stunt. The ‘bases’ or ‘spotters’ are those who lift the flyer up. See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cheerleading_stunts. Accessed February 15, 2016.
deep-seated feminist undertones.\textsuperscript{34} (Other implications of the assertion above will be mentioned later).

\textbf{Figure 13:} \textit{The singer lifted by male dancers. Retrieved from Video}

At the very least, the imagery and lyrics employed in “Rock My Body” suggest the sexual objectification of the male body. Wiyaala reverses the usual man-chasing-woman image that is often presented in popular music, thus contrary to such songs, in “Rock My Body” the role of ‘sexual predator’ is played by a woman and not a man. Therefore, unlike the images of women presented in VVIP’s “Dogo Yaro,”\textsuperscript{35} she positions herself outside the realm of sexual objectification and she makes the man the sexual object that functions to serve her personal gains. Additionally, she affirms her sexual freedom by publicly pronouncing it in the market streets (and on rooftops, where several of the dance scenes took place), in the process subverting


\textsuperscript{35} See Chapter Three.
the socio-cultural demand on women to maintain a meek and modest attitude in regards to their sexuality. Wiyaala’s public display of sexual freedom is not unparalleled; Tiffany’s “Last One” also speaks of sexual freedom and women’s confidence in their own sexualities.
Last One

In 2012, Tiffany’s36 “Fake London Boy” brought her into the public's eye and in its aftermath she released the single, “Last One,” featuring hiplife singer Castro de Destroyer. Her participation in the contemporary music scene of Ghana has also brought her international recognition, giving her the opportunity to perform in several African and European countries.37 In “Last One,” Tiffany taunts a guy who perceives himself as a ‘player’ and challenges him to a bout of sex, while maintaining a confident attitude about her body and sexuality. The following excerpt presents a clear image of the song.

Wo diè wa yè wadwen sè embaa na wo bē sesa di așwē wo how far
You have decided to sleep around with women as a hobby

Wa bē hyia lights skin girl
Now you have met a light skin girl

Na me ma wo style afei diè wo nni kappa
Who is giving you different styles, but you don’t have the stamina for it.

Why you dey rush, you dey run?
Why are rushing? Why are you running?

Bē gyi wo last one. Bē gyi wo last one.
Come for your last one! Come for your last one!

Atopa da gya mu, mia wē ne na fa
My waist movements come with fire, try and pick them up.

Bē gyi wo last one. Wo bē te wo kenkenba
Come for your last one! You will feel the pain

E no be you yo say you dey trō?
Didn’t you say you were strong?

36 Real name, Antoinette Tiffany Owusu, and often referred to by her fans as “Queen of Azonto.”
Right now you start dey run
   And now you're running
Women behind, something dey there
Woman front, something dey there
Wey tin dey there? Radum Radum Zo!
I go make you dey popo
I will make you shake! I will make you (...)
[Er Boy! Don't talk too much, come for it
Come for your last one
Don't try because you will wound yourself
My brother, don't go there
She is too much, that girl she is too much
It's not a lie, you will be wounded my brother]
Bë gyi wo last one. Bë gyi wo last one.
   Come for your last one! Come for your last one!
Atopa da gya mu, mia wë ne na fa
   My waist movements come with fire, try and pick them up.38

From the above, we see a resemblance between Tiffany and Wiyaala as regards their confidence and conviction in their sexualities. Tiffany presents herself as a strong and assertive woman who is not afraid to challenge the male authority; she taunts the man in an emasculatory manner saying “now you have met a light skin girl who is giving you different styles, but you don't have the stamina for it. Why are rushing? Why are you running?” Additionally, from the lyrics “come for your last one, come for your last one! My waist movements come with fire, try and pick them up,” we see the singer challenge the man directly, as if to say ‘man-up’ and perform.

Furthermore, Tiffany shows an appreciation for the power inherent in the female body by borrowing Gyedu-Blay Ambolley’s lyrics “Women behind, something dey there; Woman front, something dey there. Wey tin dey there? Radum Radum Zo!” This feminine force is also indicated in the lyrics, “my waist movements come with fire...I will make you shake,” again showing her conviction in her ability to subdue the man, as in the case of Wiyaala’s “Rock My Body.” In fact, other female musicians have also presented themselves as having the ability to overpower men, sexually speaking. We see this in Kaakie’s39 “Ronaldo” in which she maintains that, “I give it to them in their yard (home)...too fast so they ask me to slow down...I ride the boys like Ronaldo and they say I ride like a stallion...when I’m done, I make the boys cry.”40

From Castro’s41 contribution to the song, we see an image of a woman who is known and feared by other men. This claim is highlighted in the lyrics “don’t try because you will wound yourself... Its not a lie.” Castro is the voice of reason in the song. Initially, he urges the man to accept Tiffany’s challenge by telling him to stop talking and just go for the last one. There is a change of heart that prompts Castro to inform the man, “don’t try because you will wound yourself...my brother, don’t go there.” Castro continues to reveal that, “she is too much, that girl she is too much... Its not a lie, you will be wounded my brother.” At the very least, Castro’s strong

39 Real name, Grace Kaki Awo Ocansey, she won the Ghana Music Award for New Artiste of the Year and Best Reggae and Dance Hall song in 2013.
41 Prior to his alleged death in 2014, Castro was a leading male hiplife artist who had won several local and international music awards.
conviction about Tiffany's power to wound the man tells us that perhaps he also has been a victim of Tiffany's feminine force.

The woman presented here does not seem to be concerned with the socio-cultural demand for calmness and meekness from women, and does not appear to show acquiescence and submissiveness towards men. She takes on the man as an equal, dares him to prove his manhood, and makes fun of his inability to perform. Contrary to the majority of popular songs in Ghana that present women as unfaithful lovers, Tiffany reverses this role by presenting the man as the ‘player,’ and she uses her song to caution men about the potential dangers (i.e., you will be wounded) that may arise from such behavior. Additionally, unlike many popular songs that present women like Tiffany as whores and bad women, she paints herself as an independent woman who is not afraid to exercise her sexual freedom. It is evident that Wiyaala and Tiffany use straightforward language in expressing their sexualities, but, there are those women who rely more on ‘coded’ messages to convey such ideas, and we find this in “Uncle Obama.”
Uncle Obama

Described by some as “probably the most suggestively amusing song,” “Uncle Obama” and its accompanying music video made both local and international headlines after its release in 2012. In fact, the singer, Deborah Vanessa Owusu-Bonsu who goes by the stage name Sister Deborah, was interviewed by CNN’s ‘Queen of Quirks’ Jeanne Moos, due to the controversy that arose after the song’s release. In “Uncle Obama,” the singer begins by introducing herself to her listeners; a gesture that is immediately followed by the statement “I love local and foreign bananas.” She begins to narrate her encounter with ‘Uncle Obama,’ a banana seller in an Accra market, specifically underlining how the shape and size of his banana would please her “monkey.” Taking the form of a danceable children’s rhyme, the song is presented as a story in Pidgin English, featuring the Ghanaian rap duo FOKN Bois:

One day I went to the market, I was holding my basket. I was looking for some fruit, so that I could make some juice. Then the weather be very very hot (sizzling!), wey my skirt be very very short.
Ei sister Deborah! How be? Fine!
I see you kyer [its been a while]. Chaley, long time. Who is that handsome fellow? I want go tell him hello.
His name is Uncle Obama; he has sell a groundnut and banana
Oh in that case I for see am; my monkey self there hia some [my monkey needs some].

I reach there, he sell all left one. Luckily it was be biggest one!

Uncle Obama, (Uncle Obama)

I like the size of your banana, (I like the size of your banana)

Can I give it to my monkey? (Can I give it to my monkey?)

It will be so very happy! (It will be so very happy!)

The following next day, I was back. My monkey had not had enough

I went there very early. Nails were pink hair was curly.

I was chewing abele [corn]. Walking sexy, Sha-ing wele.

Kron-chia kron-chia I reached there, Uncle Obama was in his chair.

Said he was expecting me, with a nice banana for my monkey

It had just riped, It was just right, my monkey would be happy all night

He knew just what I was thinking

But he didn’t have a politin to put it in. Dont bother I said, I will hold it

I took the banana and I split!

Uncle Obama, (Uncle Obama)

I like the size of your banana, (I like the size of your banana)

Can I give it to my monkey? (Can I give it to my monkey?)

It will be so very happy! (It will be so very happy!) 44

Like Wiyaala’s “Rock My Body,” Sister Deborah’s “Uncle Obama” also projects an image of a woman who is forthcoming about her sexual desires—all the while relying on symbolic signs to convey those desires. That is, unlike the more straightforward woman presented in the former (who is not ‘afraid’ to plainly say, “I need a big strong man to rock my body…he’s got that thing and I want to grind all night”), the woman in the latter scenario uses suggestive imagery and sexual innuendos to convey her point. There is no doubt that the banana she speaks of is a euphemism for penis, and in several cases the accompanying video is also used to

demonstrate this symbolic relationship. Specifically, to support the impact of the lyrics, “I took the banana and I split,” we are shown an image of a banana tucked between two tightly wrapped ‘balls’ of peanuts—just as one usually buys them [peanuts] in Ghana.

Figure 14: Sister Deborah picking up Uncle Obama’s banana the next morning, right before she ‘split’. Picture Retrieved from music video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9DgElmjdfk. Accessed April 23, 2016.

The woman presented in “Uncle Obama” exhibits similar qualities to that of “Rock My Body” which may be invisible to the passive listener, due to the numerous symbolic disguises in the song. For instance, it can be argued that contrary to the money-loving image of women painted by male musicians, both women are indifferent towards their lover’s financial positions. We see this in Wiyaala’s statement, “he’s got no money I don’t mind”; but in Sister Deborah’s “Uncle Obama,” the claim is symbolically affirmed—it is observed by analyzing the socio-economic situation of Ghanaian communities which is revealed in the lyrics, “his name is Uncle Obama; he has sell a groundnut and banana.”
In Ghana, selling bananas (or any type of food crop) in the market is typically reserved for women and children—as has been pointed out in Chapter One—but when experiencing financial difficulties, men are often pushed into this line of work. Therefore, from the social context of the song, we can determine Uncle Obama’s financial standing as ‘weak’—considering the nature of his job vis-à-vis the gender ideologies that impact the economic situation of Ghanaians. Despite this, the woman presented by Sister Deborah continues to express her affection for Uncle Obama, as expressed in the lyrics, “the following next day, I was back...I went there very early... Nails were pink hair was curly.”

Another parallel that can be drawn between the two women above is that, they both show a keen interest for the man’s “thing” (and their own sexual fulfillment) not necessarily for the man. Wiyaala makes this clear by highlighting her indifference towards the man’s financial standing, color, height, or body-build, while stressing that grinding his “thing” is her concern. In “Uncle Obama,” this is demonstrated in the lyrics “I took the banana and I split,” as well as the accompanying video, which also paints a clear picture of the events that transpired in Uncle Obama’s house:

45 The economic hardship (arising from factors including, the political unrests of post colonial Ghana) and the effects of the structural adjustment program of the IMF/World Bank (created to alleviate some of the financial difficulties in “developing countries”) has put numerous Ghanaians out of work; and most of them, including men, usually turn to the informal sector for economic security. That is, majority of these individuals take up jobs as traders, or other forms of self-sustained occupations; some of which are typically considered to be feminine or reserved for women. Selling food crops in the market is one of such jobs, and men have taken to it over the years. See also Ragnhild Overa. “When Men Do Women’s Work: Structural Adjustment, Unemployment and Changing Gender Relations in the Formal Economy of Accra, Ghana,” in The Journal of Modern African Studies 45, 4, (2007): 539-563.
The following next day, I was back. My monkey had not had enough. I went there very early. Nails were pink hair was curly. I was chewing abele [corn]. Walking sexy, Shaaing wele. Krun-cha krun-cha I reached there, Uncle Obama was in his chair. Said he was expecting me, with a nice banana for my monkey. It had just riped, It was just right, my monkey would be happy all night. He knew just what I was thinking. But he didn’t have a politin to put it in. Don’t bother, I said, I will hold it. I took the banana and I split!

The events that ensued in the house are a neatly disguised euphemism for sexual intercourse, and in its aftermath we are presented with what many have called a ‘hit and run’ situation. From “it had just riped, it was just right,” we see a symbolic representation of an erect and ready penis, which the singer says would make her monkey “happy all night.” Additionally, from the statement, “he didn’t have a ‘politin’ to put it in,” we are informed about the absence of a condom, which is symbolically represented by a polyethene bag, or a “take-away” bag, as is commonly referred to in Ghana. The ‘hit and run’ situation is vividly presented in the lyrics, “I took the banana and I split”; and one does not need to be a linguist to understand that the statement reveals that, the woman left the man after he had fulfilled her sexual desires. In fact, the accompanying video also demonstrates this ‘hit and run’ situation, clearly portraying Uncle Obama as a happy man prior to the sexual act and a dejected man after the woman left:

46 This is a situation in which a man has sex with a woman and leaves her shortly after.
47 Politin is a ‘Ghanianized’ version of the ‘polyethene’ plastic bags used by vendors in Ghana.
Figure 15: Uncle Obama eagerly welcoming the woman into his house. Retrieved from video.

Figure 9: The woman literally runs from the dejected Uncle Obama after she “took the banana.” Retrieved from music video.
Sister Deborah’s song presents an image of a woman who is very forthcoming about her sexual desires; she overlooks the gender ideologies that demand sexual restraint and discretion from women, and pursues the fulfillment of her desires by ‘making the first move’. The woman in the song also abandons the cultural demand on women to dress modestly in public by wearing a “very very short” skirt to the market, thus deviating sharply from the behavior expected of a good and respectable Ghanaian woman. Additionally, we see a reversal of roles that contrasts majority of popular songs in which women are presented as feeble sexual objects for male gratification; here the man is the sexual object whose male member becomes the center of attention and functions to please the woman. In fact, the song ends with a sort of anthem in which the lyrics, “ooo Uncle Obama, Give me banana, Uncle Obama,” is repeated several times while chorus singers chant, “Uncle Obama’s banana,” in the background.
Natural Girl

Jamaican dancehall music has influenced several artists in Ghana; among them is MzVee\(^{48}\) who has received several awards, including the Ghana Music award for Unsung Artiste in 2014. In her “Natural Girl,” which features Stonebwoy\(^{49}\), MzVee advises women to be comfortable with their bodies, stressing that a woman’s worth as well as her beauty is not dependent on anyone’s opinion but the woman’s. The accompanying video is also used to complement the moral of the song: it tells the stories of girls struggling to change their looks and body stature, and it begins with the statement “this song is simply telling all girls to be true to who they are.”

To all my African girls, stay true to who you are
I don’t need any other woman’s hair on me to make me beautiful
I don’t need a man to tell me he wants me to make me beautiful
I’m a natural girl. I’m a natural girl
I can’t be perfect, but I am perfect when I am me
I am like a baby taking her first step; I will be perfect naturally
Keep the body real, no slim slim.
No short cut, me I want the long trip. I am an African queen, just me!
I am the first rate version of me. Nobody else.
Never been the imitation of someone else. Nobody else.\(^{50}\)

In the song, we are presented with a woman who is confident and comfortable about her looks, and she refuses to cater to the opinions of those who fail to see her for who she is—a true African woman. MzVee’s “Natural Girl” can be

\(^{48}\) Real name Vera Hamenoo-Kpeda.
\(^{49}\) Leading male dancehall musician in Ghana. He has also received several awards including the Ghana Music Award for Artiste of the Year 2015.
considered as an anthem for all Ghanaian women, especially those who face social pressures to conform to the standards of beauty depicted in some European and American movies. She also speaks against the use of artificial hair—a phenomenon that has increasingly become commonplace among many African women—pointing out that “I don’t need any other woman’s hair on me to make me beautiful...I’m a natural girl.”

Additionally, it can be suggested that the song is a warning against Ghanaians (or Africans) who blindly copy Western ideologies and replace their traditional views with foreign ones. Thus, MzVee places an emphasis on the importance of maintaining tradition as well as the pride of being true to one’s self when she notes, “Never been the imitation of someone else...I am the first rate version of me.” It can therefore be asserted that “Natural Girl” presents an image of a woman who defines her own standards of beauty and womanhood; she will not kowtow to the standards set by some men, women, or even modern life.
**Kpakposhitor**

In 2009, Eazzy Baby—real name Mildred Ashong—entered the popular music scene with her single “Bo Wonsem Ma Me” (Clap For Me), which received massive airplay on radio and local television stations. Following this, she has released several songs that have also received considerable public admiration; among them is her 2015 song “kpakposhito” (Hot Pepper). An excerpt is presented below.

*Bē sō me ha. Bē sō me ha. Ei! Èyē me ya,*

Come hold me here, come touch me here. Ouch it’s painful

*Me boa, eńō kpakpa. Twi me sē kpakposhitō*

I lied its really sweet. Grind me like hot pepper.

Go down low; let me see you go down low.

The sweat on your body is touching my body, you feeling my bobby [breast].

*Ma time wa kyē mmm Ma time wa kyē*

I’ve been monitoring you for a while. Been monitoring you for a while.

Let us go to the corner and do whatever you wanna.

Forget your girlfriend, oh! Dawg am [ignore her], tonight I’m your lover.

*Bē sō me ha. Bē sō me ha. Agyei! Èyē me ya,*

Come hold me here, come touch me here. Ouch it’s painful.

*Me boa, eńō kpakpa. Twi me sē kpakposhitō*

I lied its really sweet. Grind me like hot pepper.  

Like Wiyaala’s “Rock My Body,” Eazzy’s “Kpakposhito” also presents an image of an assertive woman who is direct about her sexual desires. From the narrative

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presented in the song (and the video discussed below), it appears that Eazzy, having monitored a man for a while, finally gets the opportunity to be with him, despite his standing commitment to another woman. Eazzy proceeds to make her demands known: “let us go to the corner and do whatever you wanna.” To further convince the man (who is half-naked and strategically placed in the accompanying video), she tells him, “Forget your girlfriend, tonight, I’m your lover.” Following this, she begins to direct the man, informing him of exactly how, and what he must do: “Grind me like kpakposhito, go down low. Let me see you go down low!” It would be outside the context of this study to extensively discuss the technique used by women (especially Ga kenkey vendors) to grind kpakposhito, still, it may be summarized as a careful and tactical procedure often requiring notable physical force.

Several parallels exist between the lyrics and the accompanying music video. In the latter, Eazzy is portrayed as a traffic officer who finally has cause to interrogate a road user—as paralleled by the lyrics “I’ve been monitoring you for a while.” She presents herself as the figure of power (i.e., a police officer), and we see this in the direct and firm tone of the lyrics (i.e., Let me see you go down low; Forget your girlfriend...tonight I’m your lover; Grind me like hot pepper. etc.). Additionally, she reverses the roles of men and women in songs such as “Waist and Power”— in which men express power through the control and sexualization of the female body—by presenting the man as the sexual object. The male body is used as a prop

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53 The chorus of Eno and Abrewa Nana’s “Mēgye Wo Boy” [lit: I will take your boy] (a remix of Sarkodie and Shatta Wale’s “Mēgye Wo Girl”) also speaks of some women’s ability to usurp a relationship. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1ul8wVDBSY. Accessed May 30, 2016.
54 Boiled fermented corn dough.
55 See picture below.
that functions at the pleasure of the woman; she is the bearer of power and occupies the dominant position. This is the same power dynamics that persist in Sister Deborah’s “Uncle Obama” and Wiyaala’s “Rock My Body.” In these songs, the lyrical assertiveness of the musicians allows them to “construct themselves as sexual subjects, rather than remaining trapped in the sexual objectification of songs by male musicians.”

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Figure 16: Eazzy in her police costume with handcuffs tied to her pants. Retrieved from video.

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56 Msia Kiboni Clark. op. cit., p. 154.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND OTHER REMARKS

The traditional notions of gender and sexuality permeate several socio-cultural spheres in Ghana including religion, education, and (popular) music. In this study, it was argued that, these notions were used to prohibit women’s inclusion and participation in the popular music realm. It was also shown that these gender notions have influenced the images of women presented by male popular musicians, and additionally these musicians have used women’s bodies and sexualities as signs of moral decay and as tools for demonstrating their authority.

As these forgoing musical examples illustrate, it can be concluded that some female popular musicians in Ghana are revising the narratives about women in the Ghanaian popular music realm. They are presenting different opinions of women that challenge and deviate from the traditional ideologies of gender and sexuality, and they are presenting opinions of women that are based on their own experiences and points of view and not those of their male counterparts. That is, several of these female musicians subvert the idea of the dependent and money-loving woman by presenting themselves as financially independent and entrepreneurial individuals. Similarly, some female musicians challenge the conservative ideologies about sexuality held in Ghana by presenting women as sexually assertive individuals and also by reversing the ‘man-chasing-woman’ theme that abound in Ghanaian popular music.
The present study offers an opportunity to speculate about the future of popular music in Ghana, especially in regards to women musicians, and it can also provide potential research considerations. For example, there is a growing support for female popular musicians in Ghana, and considering the increasing awareness of feminist ideologies across Africa—as well as the growth and spread of women empowerment organizations in Ghana—one could say that female assertiveness and the deviation from traditional gender stereotypes, as shown in the study, is bound to continue. It is in the hopes of this study that the growing number of women in the Ghanaian popular music scene will provide more opportunities for the discussion of other important challenges faced by women such as domestic abuse and the lack of formal education.

The present study does not claim to be exhaustive of the issue at hand, i.e., the dynamics of gender and sexuality in Ghanaian popular music. In light of this, the following questions can be considered as potential inquiries for future research: (1) how is the female assertiveness in music affecting the traditional roles of women in Ghanaian communities? (2) How is this shift in traditional gender ideologies affecting the Ghana music industry? (3) What are the foreseeable effects of this shift in gender perceptions on the cultural fabric of Ghana as a whole?
APPENDIX


The musicians union of Ghana (MUSIGA) has noted with concern, the rising incidence of profane lyrics in songs released by Ghanaian musicians. This current trend is particularly disturbing, considering the fact that these songs are played without any radio edits on primetime radio and given wide currency on social media.

In that regard, the Union is calling on musicians and songwriters in Ghana to desist from writing songs with profane lyrics. As much as the Union appreciates the creative liberties of songwriters to freely express themselves, it is essential that artistes appreciate the impact of their songs on the public, especially in an era where technology has made it relatively easier for songs to be heard.

MUSIGA is therefore urging all musicians to be mindful of the need to provide inspiring and positive lyrics in our songs. In the same breadth, we are also calling on radio and television station operators to be mindful of their roles as gatekeepers of society and be circumspect in what they play on air. We are also calling on the National Media Commission to throw their spotlight on the content of music played on air not only the political content of programs.

As the nation prepares for elections in November, we of the Musicians Union of Ghana would like to urge all Ghanaians to be vigilant in ensuring that the elections are peaceful and credible.

Signed:
Bice Osei Kuffuor
President
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