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On the Demonization and Discrimination of Akan and Yoruba Women in Ghanaian and Nigerian Video Movies

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the religious information inside Ghanaian and Nigerian video movies regarding Akan and Yoruba women. More specifically, it focuses on the indigenous religious, Christian, and Islamic messages inside these movies in relation to women. The article demonstrates that Akan and Yoruba filmmakers, who dominate the Ghanaian and Nigerian video movie industries, are part of networks of religious institutions, predominantly Pentecostal-Charismatic Christian and modest Islamic ones. These organizations sponsor filmmakers to spread religious messages that promote hierarchical gender relations and the suppression of equal rights for women, e.g., economic independence. By providing an overview of Akan and Yoruba belief systems, in respect of indigenous, Christian, and Islamic gender-related positional concepts and ideological communication on what is appropriate behavior for women, the author will show and support the hypothesis that these movies contribute to women's demonization and (economic) discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

In the past twenty-four years, African cinema in anglophone West Africa has radically changed. The independence of most anglophone West African countries had an impact on the engagement of filmmakers in West Africa with the grand project of decolonizing African cinema and to liberate it from the educative but paternalistic diary of colonial filmmakers. Initially, Marxism influenced many

filmmakers in postcolonial West Africa. Since the 1990s, West African filmmakers, and especially those in Ghana and Nigeria, have been involved in the making of thematically postcolonial and self-financed video movies. The younger generation of Ghanaian and Nigerian filmmakers has created a video movie industry that, unlike that of their predecessors, is independent of the financial aid of the former colonies. The filmmakers use relatively inexpensive digital film cameras from Europe and Asia and a simple textual film structure to show the daily life problems of ordinary Africans. Many scholars, including Karin Barber, have perceived these video movies as a form of popular African art and culture, with the presumption that they would reach a heterogeneous audience.

Recent reception studies of these video movies do, however, demonstrate that their audiences are homogeneous and that these filmmakers create video movies for particular religious and ethnic groups within their society and its diaspora (Krings; Meyer; Müller, "Ghanaian Films and Chiefs," "Spirits of Migration"). This article, therefore, explores an alternative categorization of these movies than that of African popular art and culture by investigating the religious and ethnic roots of the video movie industry in Ghana and Nigeria and by increasing understanding of their messages in regard to religion and gender relations. It aims to uncover the archetypal images of women in Nigeria's and Ghana's religious traditions to demonstrate that these images are demonizing and discriminating toward women. Moreover, its objective is to contribute to the development of a female-friendly Akan and Yoruba video movie culture that would not aim to divide women of different ethnic and religious groups in Ghana and Nigeria, but would unite and help them in their fight for empowerment.

After twenty years of academic research on Ghanaian and Nigerian video movies, still a relatively small number of academics devote their studies to these movies' portrayal of women.¹ Unlike many third cinema moviemakers, such as Ousmane Sembène, Djibril Diop Mambetey, and Ola Balogun, few Ghanaian and Nigerian video moviemakers use the film medium to take a critical attitude toward the position of women and/or the impact of Christianity and Islam in their societies. Instead, these moviemakers, who are most often men, use negative stereotypical and archetypal images of women. By providing detailed descriptions and analyses of some of the many Akan and Yoruba video movies that I have watched since 2009, I will demonstrate that these negative portrayals of women are dominant in these movies and in modern Ghanaian and Nigerian societies.² I will show that these images of women confirm the expectation of women's societal roles among Islamic and Christian believers, but that they are not indigenous to the Akan and Yoruba religion. I will, furthermore, describe how Akan and Yoruba indigenous religions saw the role—and power relations—between men and women and how these changed (and still are) under the influence of Christian and Islamic institutional pressures via Ghanaian and Nigerian video movies.

Even though religion is not the central topic of all Akan and Yoruba video movies, they are nonetheless embedded in the religious traditions of Ghana and Nigeria. All Akan and Yoruba video movies are a form of "edutainment," which means that they are both educational and entertaining. But whereas some Asante and Yoruba filmmakers make use of religious language and symbols in their movies for purely commercial reasons and are more commercial than educational, many others consciously add religious elements for educational purposes or

unconsciously do so because religion is embedded in all spheres of African life (Mbiti).

My central focus is on “miracle movies,” which are those video movies that make explicit use of Islamic or Christian religion for mainly educational purposes. Pentecostal-Charismatic pastors or (female) ministers usually create these video movies as part of their religious training, or after they have founded their own church. In November 2013 for instance, Samuel Nyamekye who is the director and producer of all miracle movies in Ghana, was ordained at a Bible training school in Kumasi that is owned by the Assemblies of God, which is a Pentecostal church. Nyamekye’s aim is “to win all entertainers in Ghana for Christ” (Baah). The ordained not only produce miracle movies, but they also appear in them as actors or actresses, such as the Ghanaian Apostle John Pra of the Gospel House Ministry in Kumasi or the Nigerian Christian actress Helen E. Ukpabio. The distribution of these miracle movies, which mainly target young people and women, usually takes place during Pentecostal-Charismatic prayer camps and religious services. The priests use these movies as a substitute for prayers (Ukah; Krings, Matthias; Müller, “Spirits of Migration”).

The majority of these miracle movies promote a male-dominated social order in which women are economically, and in terms of their partner choices, dependent on men. The same is true for those Akan and Yoruba movies that are predominantly commercial. Nevertheless, female directors and filmmakers, such as the Ghanaian feminist Shirley Frimpong Manso and the Nigerian feminist Ngozi Onwurah, produce video movies that challenge the status quo. To gain more understanding of the Akan and Yoruba video movie landscape and to place miracle movies in perspective, I will give examples of four types of Ghanaian and Nigerian video movies: (a) Akan and Yoruba miracle movies, (b) predominantly commercial Akan and Yoruba video movies, (c) Akan and Yoruba feminist video movies, and (d) Akan and Yoruba indigenous religious movies.

The Yoruba miracle movie *Kootu Aye* (2012) by Femi Oyeniyi starts with Asida, a Pentecostal-Charismatic Christian, who receives some Yoruba miracle movies made by a successful friend, who is also a Christian. The friend tells Asida that he can also become successful if he views these miracle movies, which he promotes as an alternative to prayer. Asida goes home to view the video movies by his Christian friend to reflect on his religious life, which creates—what André Gide first called—a “movie within a movie,” or *mise en abyme*, textual structure. When he views *Kootu Aye*, he dreams that he is actually in the video movie. In his dream, an angel tells him that he should stop being a “butter and bread Christian” and that he should not pray to gain material wealth but to enlighten his soul. Asida does what the pastor in the movie requires of him and the miracle movie becomes, for him, a revelation. It serves as an advertisement for other Yoruba miracle movies and for the Pentecostal-Charismatic church, which propagates the religious message that only one’s belief in the Holy Spirit guarantees God’s blessings in the material realm. According to online commentators, this and other Yoruba miracle movies come from God. The filmmakers and the movies’ viewers understand that miracle movies are a religious medium that provides access to the spiritual world and that they can replace the function of religious teachers in the social world, such as traditional priests and priestesses, pastors, and imams.

An example of a predominantly commercial Yoruba video movie is *Street Girls* (2013) by Abbey Larne and Tope Adebayo. This movie tells the story of four female cleaners who are fed up with the unreasonable behavior of men, who block their road to success. While one of the women loses her son in a police fight, another woman finds herself forced to relinquish her son to child protection. After their experience with a gangster, who successfully robbed the restaurant they were cleaning, the women decide that the only way out of their misery is to become thieves themselves, after which they successfully rob a grocery store. Maryan, one of the robbers, is a lesbian. She meets the love of her life and desires to be part of the *nouveau riche*. To this end, Maryan buys a huge car, which is often a symbol of the type of material wealth that comes with a person's engagement with the underworld or criminals in Nigerian video movies. She quickly becomes addicted to her comfortable wealthy life and, while her friends initially prefer to see their criminal activities as a one-time thing, Maryan encourages them to continue their illegal enterprise. The team successfully robs a *bureau de change* (currency exchange), but when the women decide to steal from a professionally secured bank, they get caught. The implicit religious lesson expressed in this video movie is that God punishes those women who turn to a life of crime to escape the male-dominated social order. The portrayal of Maryan as both the lead robber and a lesbian is especially interesting. In this way, the male filmmaker portrays her as a woman who is very eager to escape the male-dominated social order because she does not feel any attraction to men, which implies that heterosexual women will always accept and respect the status quo.

An example of an Akan feminist video movie is *Life and Living It* (2012) by Shirley Frimpong-Manso. This Christian liberal feminist filmmaker strives for gender equality and a society in which men and women share power and responsibilities for the upbringing of their children. In Frimpong-Manso's opinion, women can have it all: children, a harmonious relationship with a partner, and a successful career. The filmmaker uses her movie to portray characters who find balance between their professional and personal lives (Kwansah-Aidoo and Osei Owusu). These images counterbalance those of professional women in the majority of Ghanaian and Nigerian video movies, which portray them as amoral, selfish, and arrogant.⁴

Although some feminist video filmmakers from Ghana and Nigeria challenge their religious traditions, the majority are men who support unequal gender relations in their cinematic expressions. In what follows, I hope to increase understanding of the portrayal of women in these video movies, and primarily in miracle movies, in the context of the religious history of West Africa. A *sina qua non* to this insight is the following short summary of the Akan and Yoruba indigenous religions in Ghana and Nigeria and their implications for the relationship between men and women and of the impact of Islam and Christianity on Ghanaian and Nigerian societies in dealing with gender issues and aesthetic representations in Akan and Yoruba video movies. Examples of Akan and/or Yoruba indigenous religious movies will be provided in the sections "the impact of Islam and Christianity on Akan and Yoruba societies" and "revenge of the spirits."

AKAN AND YORUBA INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF SPIRITS IN VIDEO MOVIES

In what follows, I will discuss the most vital spirits of the Yoruba and the Akan and their implications in regard to gender relations in these societies. In the myth of origin of the Yoruba of southern Nigeria, the creator god, *Olorun*, was the "Owner of the Sky."⁵ The Asante (as part of the Akan) in southern Ghana believed in a creator god (*Onyankopon*) who was born on a Saturday and who lived in the sky like the wind.⁶ The Asante and Yoruba believed that these creator gods were androgynous and abstract, that they were withdrawn from Earth and did not interfere in human affairs (McCaskie; Ellis; Müller, "Religion and Chieftaincy in Ghana"). While the Asante believed that *Onyankopon* had created the Earth, most Yoruba felt that *Olorun* had left the task of the world's creation to the spirit *Oduduwa*, who also established the Yoruba dynasty in Ilé-Ifè, and to the male ancestral spirit *Orisa-nla* (Johnson; Ellis; Sèglà). Linguistically, *Oduduwa*, the first Yoruba ruler and royal ancestor, was androgynous in nature. However, in many of the early narratives, in the Ile-Ife corpus, the Yoruba presented *Oduduwa* as a female ruler (Olomola; Oyewumi, "Making History"). Although *Oduduwa* is, thus, sexless, the majority of Yoruba video filmmakers portray this divine being as a masculine force.

The Yoruba miracle movie *Olodumare* (2000) by Andy Amenechi, for example, begins with the following: "regardless of the many versions of the origin of *Oduduwa*, its central role as a unifying factor among the Yoruba people cannot be denied." In the next scene, it becomes clear that the filmmaker chose to portray *Oduduwa* as the male ruler of the first Yoruba people. In the movie, *Oduduwa* marries two local women, the latter of which gives him a son, whose son becomes the second chief (*oba*) of the Yoruba. Historically, though, the *oba* have always been both male and female. The filmmaker's portrayal of the *oba* as male betrays his bias. Furthermore, it is very unlikely that in reality the king's first wife would have uttered to her husband that "a man must have evidence of his manhood" and "because I am barren, it is time for you to take a second wife, who can bear you a son." Despite the unrealistic woman's voice in this Yoruba movie, generally the female characters live in harmony with men.

A harmonious relationship between the sexes is also characteristic of Akan video movies that have their roots in indigenous religious experiences. In the Akan video movie *My Mother's Heart* (2005), by Ifeanyi Onyeabor, the protagonist, a woman named Nana Yaa, is highly skilled in the craft of bead making. The chief of her host village greatly appreciates her artistic skills, which she learned from her mother and her ancestors. In fact, Nana Yaa's artwork impresses the male ruler so much that he falls in love with her soon after they get married. The traditional priest in the village strongly supports the interests of women in his village and he often calls on the moon spirit in support of the chief. The movie ends with the Akan maxim "the sky is full of stars, but it cannot outshine the moon," which illustrates their faith in the spiritual powers of the moon, which is associated with female energy. As reflected in these movies, power within extended families, therefore, was diffuse and gender was less significant for social differentiation than it was after the introduction of Islam and Christianity (Sudarkasa; Müller, "Religion and Chieftaincy in Ghana").

THE IMPACT OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY ON AKAN AND YORUBA SOCIETIES

The introduction of Islam in Asante (as part of Akan) and Yoruba societies took place in two strands: in the fifteenth century, through contact with the Mande and Soninke All-Hajj Salim Suwari, and in the nineteenth century, with the introduction of the orthodox Islamic tradition of Fulbe reformer Uthman dan Fodio. The situation for women deteriorated in the nineteenth century after the introduction of Uthman dan Fodio's orthodox form of Islam, which was reflected in the newly organized religious hierarchy of gods, placing female deities below the dominant male deity. The introduction of Islam, thus, diminished the significance of female ancestral spirits in Asante and Yoruba indigenous religious pantheons, as a male God received the most significant place.

A Yoruba video movie concerning the veneration of many Yoruba female ancestral spirits and the oppression of women and indigenous religion under Islam is *Igba Sango* (2012) by Oluwole Adedeji. The movie tells the story of Alhaji, the wife of a Muslim clerk. After fifteen years of marriage, Alhaji is desperate to become pregnant because remaining barren in marriage is shameful in Yoruba society because it is believed that children are a gift from God and that women should pray to become pregnant. Alhaji's prayers to Allah, however, remain unanswered, which leads her to look for a different source of divine power and to direct her prayers to the thunder spirit Sango. To save her marriage, she worships Sango in secret. Believing that Sango made her pregnant, she happily delivers a baby boy and names him Sangobunmi.

Alhaji's husband is, however, suspicious and when he finds out that she has been worshipping Sango instead of Allah, he asks for a divorce, unless she agrees to choose Allah. Among Yoruba Muslim men, it is common to ask for a divorce if one's wife worships an indigenous spirit. This custom, however, traps many Yoruba women in marriage because they are willing to turn to a variety of religions in order to avoid remaining childless, since a woman may also be divorced if she is unable to become pregnant. Alhaji does not want to jeopardize her marriage, but, soon after she gives birth, she receives the call of the thunder spirit to become a traditional priestess. To save her marriage, she ignores this call, to no avail. Alhaji has to obey Sango's command and a traditional priest initiates her into the cult. Her son, whose father raised him in the Islamic tradition and who attends Koranic school, insults his mother because she is no longer devout. In the end, Sango kills Alhaji's son. The religious message, thus, is that the veneration of indigenous spirits does not bring any fortune in the long-term and that Islam is the only true religion. It ends with the words, "Glory to the Almighty Allah."

Christianity also decreased the significance of female ancestral spirits and women in Akan and Yoruba societies. The introduction of European missionaries went hand-in-hand with a capitalist economy that transformed the relationship between the sexes by promoting a male-dominated social order (Amadiume; Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women, African Gender Studies*; Stoeltje; Dashú; Müller, "Religion and Chieftaincy in Ghana"). Under colonial rule, Asante chiefs oppressed their female co-rulers and among the Yoruba, the number of female chiefs decreased. Both societies marginalized female rulers and excluded them

from participation in the central colonial government. Despite the initial attraction of Christianity for Asante and Yoruba women, it eventually led to a deterioration of their position in the long-run.

Frank Rajah Arase's Akan miracle movie *Agony of the Christ* (2008) portrays traditional priestesses and indigenous female goddesses as accomplices of the devil. The main character—who calls himself the vessel of God—comes from a little village, whose inhabitants presumably live in darkness. God's vessel converted to Christianity, after which he begins to perform miracles, such as curing a man of his blindness. Soon afterward, he gains a large number of disciples, causing him to become a direct rival of the traditional priestess in the village. The priestess challenges God's vessel to a spiritual battle, but neither wins.

The priestess, who has devilish cat eyes, screams that her three virgin spirits will punish him for disobeying his ancestors, while God's vessel calls her "the princess of darkness" and accuses her of sacrificing humans because of all the evil inside her. God's vessel then invites the traditional priestess to believe in the holy trinity, but she laughs at him and refuses. In front of the royal family, the priestess forces God's vessel to denounce his God, but he refuses and, as a result, lands on the cross to be crucified like Jesus Christ. The crucifixion of God's vessel fails and, as a result of God's divine intervention, the traditional priestess turns blind. When God's vessel prays for the priestess to recover her sight, she opens her eyes and they are no longer devilish and cat-like. Ultimately, the priestess denounces her religion and follows God's vessel in his faith.

In conclusion, Islam and Christianity both introduced a male universal God that was placed above androgynous ancestral spirits in the religious hierarchy. Unlike Akan and Yoruba indigenous religions, which celebrated male and female energies in men and women, Christianity and Islam oppressed this behavior. Furthermore, Christians and Muslims portrayed Akan and Yoruba female ancestral spirits as androgynous or sinful female entities that had to be removed from women's bodies through deliverance.

As shown in the previous discussion, both Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity and Islam utilize film as a medium for proselytization. In addition, Akan and Yoruba royals, who represent the indigenous religions of their cultural group, also produce movies portraying male and female ancestral serpent spirits as beings that stand on an equal footing with one another. Pentecostal-Charismatic and modest Islamic filmmakers, on the other hand, demonize Akan and Yoruba indigenous religions by portraying the female serpent spirit as either androgynous or devilish. An elaboration on the portrayal of women in Akan and Yoruba video movies will be discussed in what follows.

AKAN AND YORUBA VIDEO MOVIES AND THEIR RELIGIOUS CONTENT

The Ghanaian video movie industry is the older twin sister of Nollywood. Given its larger population, it is not surprising that Nigeria has a much larger video movie industry than Ghana. Many of the Ghanaian and Nigerian filmmakers are also active religious leaders in either Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity or Islam (Ukah; Davies, Farrell, and Matthews). A minority are royals and representatives of Akan or Yoruba indigenous religions, such as Nana Ama McBrown, who wrote



Photo 1: The shrine priest Ukadike attacks a pastor and then goes insane in the Yoruba video movie *Kingdom against Kingdom*.

the screenplay for *Dae adae wo no*, which tells the story of a female ruler in the Ashanti region shortly after Ghana gained its independence.

Many Akan and Yoruba filmmakers use film to represent a male-dominated social order and demonize female ancestral serpent spirits. The Yoruba video movie *Kingdom against Kingdom* (2008) by Ugo Ugbor, for example, uses the symbolic imagery of indigenous religions to promote Christianity. Focusing on the conflict between two fictional kingdoms in Nigeria, the Enuala and the Fibo, the two chiefs one day decide to stop fighting and put an end to slavery. The priest Ukadike does not like these changes and he is, therefore, presented as an evil spiritual force. After a struggle with a Pentecostal-Charismatic pastor, Ukadike goes insane and can only be cured by an exorcism by the same pastor (see photo 1). The movie ends with the song “when Jesus says yes, nobody can say no” and Ukadike’s conversion to Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity.

Pentecostal-Charismatic and Islamic filmmakers not only use the medium of film to promote a phallogocentric symbolic order, which includes the oppression of women, but also to promote their own churches and their status. In addition, these filmmakers utilize the symbolic language of Akan and Yoruba indigenous religions to demonize female ancestral spirits, depicting them as solely evil. To improve understanding of religious information in Akan and Yoruba video movies, I will provide a short overview of its main female archetypes, such as the trickster, witchcraft mother, and Mami Wata, and their representations in film.

The Trickster

The trickster is a primitive “cosmic” being of divine-animal nature who displays superior reason in comparison to men. The trickster has the ability to understand the collective unconscious, of which humans remain unaware. In Akan

and Yoruba societies, priests and priestesses are referred to as tricksters who are equal to these spirits (Bartle; Campion; Abarry; Brookins). Female tricksters are unmarried, thus preserving their female power, which provides them with deep insights into the energetic cycles of the universe (Smythies; Haegen; Rapoport). In Akan and Yoruba indigenous religions, the trickster has an important place in the pantheon of spirits, whose actions can be good or evil depending on the context in which they operate (Leroy, Olaleye-Oruene, Koeppen-Schomerus, and Bryan).

Among the Akan and Yoruba, filmmakers are also considered to be tricksters, or beings with an extraordinary gift, who utilize video movies to retell ancient folktales. The Yoruba miracle movie *Imisi Esu* or “inspiration from the spirit Esu” (2013), by Ajoke Mercy Ebosele, for instance, focuses on the trickster god that occupies the mind of a woman. In *Imisi Esu*, a pastor blames a mother for her four daughters’ irresponsible behavior. The eldest daughter steals other women’s husbands, the second is promiscuous, the third is a liar, and the youngest is a kleptomaniac. In the pastor’s view, these children are doing these things because the mother murdered someone before their birth. In her youth, she poisoned a female friend because she was jealous that she had such a handsome boyfriend. After she died, her friend’s mother cursed her and all her future children, which makes clear that the Pentecostal-Charismatic filmmaker portrays the trickster god as an entirely devilish spirit. In the movie, the pastor receives a message from the Holy Spirit that the trickster can be removed from the girls’ bodies if they come to church, but for two of them it is already too late. The promiscuous daughter dies from an illegal abortion and a crowd of angry wives beats the husband-snatcher to death. The pastor baptizes the other two girls to protect them from the wickedness of Esu.

The Witchcraft Mother

Witchcraft mothers in the Akan and Yoruba religions are usually married women who feel empty and are aware that the male-dominated society is using them. Akan and Yoruba video filmmakers often portray these women as witches or sinful serpent spirits. The women, who make an effort to escape from the male-dominated social order, are frequently accused of witchcraft. These women live their own lives through their children, interfering in their lives to the point that these children are unable to establish an adult relationship with a partner. These mothers do not mentally distance themselves from their offspring, thereby challenging norms and values in Christianity and Islam.

One can find this female archetype in the Akan miracle movie *Mogya Apam* (2009) by Samuel Nyamekye. In *Mogya Apam*, the wife of the protagonist, Kofi, accuses his mother of being a witch because he is an alcoholic, which causes him to be a bad husband. He blames his mother for his personal weaknesses because she is still psychologically occupied with his life. In the Akan video movie *Royal Battle* (2007) by Frank Rajah Arase, which focuses on indigenous religion, one can find another example of this type of mother. In *Royal Battle*, Brianne’s mother forces her to marry a rich prince rather than the man she loves. The witchcraft mother abuses her daughter to reach a high status in society, reaching her own goals at the cost of the emotional life of her daughter.

The Siren-Mermaid—Mami Wata

In Ghana and Nigeria, the mermaid archetype is better known as the water spirit Mami Wata. In these countries and their male-dominated societies, Mami Wata provides a spiritual and professional avenue for women to become powerful priestesses and healers of psycho-spiritual and physical ailments and to assert female agency. The archetype of the mermaid in the form of a woman surrounded by serpents is traditional in Ghana and Nigeria among the Akan and Yoruba (Peel).

In the indigenous religious Akan/Yoruba movie *My Mother's Heart* (2005), film director Ifeanyi Onyeabor depicts Mami Wata as an indigenous spirit, comparing her behavior to a double-edged sword. Mami Wata can make or break a person depending on her/his actions. Christian and Islamic Akan and Yoruba filmmakers, though, have demonized Mami Wata, aiming to oppress the "life force" in the female psyche (Gore). For example, in the Akan miracle movie *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness* (1993), Samuel Odon Mensah depicts Mami Wata as a wicked spirit who originates at the bottom of the sea, symbolizing hell. In addition, in the documentary *Lady in the Water* (2012) by Tolu Iteboje, Nigerian filmmaker Tunde Kelani portrays Mami Wata as an entity that often spiritually troubles men. Men fall in love with the water spirit and are afraid that she will take away their wealth after marrying and breaking their vows with her and they believe she is closely related to Satan. Indigenous Yoruba women, instead, venerate Mami Wata as a mother and a protector of their female interests, who can punish male wrongdoers and who can support women in need.

REVENGE OF THE SPIRITS

The Akan and Yoruba royals and their subjects believed that their indigenous spirits could be either good or bad, depending on people's behavior. The traditional authorities and priests and priestesses feared the revenge of the spirits when people misbehaved. They felt that the spirits were superior to human beings and they, therefore, believed that one should never act against the gods' demands because doing so could cause misfortune (Jones).

A typical Akan (Asante) indigenous religious movie about the revenge of the spirits is *Homeda* (2009) by Clement Opam. The inspiration for this movie is an event in Bekwai in the colonial period. In the first scene, Abrefi, who is the daughter of the traditional village priest, Dansk, gets herself into trouble for having children outside of her marriage, which goes against the wills of the deities (*abosom*). To make matters worse, she leaves the community and settles down with the father of her children, who is a lazy and careless man. In a final act of ignoring traditional patterns of behavior, she goes to a farm on a sacred day (*homeda*) with her secret lover, Mosi, who also happens to be her boss. These offensive acts anger the deities (*abosom*), who believe they have given her ample chance to change her behavior, and they ultimately put her to death in a dramatized version of a traditional reprimanding by Asante royals. This and other movies of this type aim to promote the interests of the traditional ruling class in Ghana and Nigeria.

In the Akan movie *Royal Battle* (2007) by Frank Rajah Arase, the royal family believes that calamity will befall their kingdom if their son does not marry the girl that destiny requires and the girl's mother, who also represents traditional

marriage values, wants her daughter to marry the prince. Brianne, her stubborn daughter, refuses to marry the prince because she is in love with an ordinary man. The movie shows the drama behind arranged marriages at a time in which many young urban women prefer to choose their own spouses. It shows the life of the young urban rich, such as Brianne, who embrace a Western lifestyle, including wishing to make their own decisions in regard to love. Brianne is, however, confronted with the morality and values of Akan and Yoruba indigenous religions, as arranged marriages, for women who are part of the extended family or acquaintances of the royal court, are still common (personal interview with an Asante female ruler, Kumasi, 11 Nov. 2005).

The Akan/Yoruba indigenous religious movie *Wedlock of the Gods* (2007) by Frank Rajah Arase demonstrates the fear of the Asante and Yoruba people of the wrath of the deities if one acts against these spirits' will. This Yoruba movie, which features Ghanaian and Nigerian actors and actresses, tells the story of Sapona, who is a beautiful girl born under the spell of a witch, who made her a hunchback. As a result of Sapona's physical impairment, she and her family live as outcasts in the deep forest. The family lives in complete isolation, until one day they receive a visitor from the village. It is a hunter, named Kofi, who was wounded and whose health they help to restore. After his recovery, Kofi falls in love with Sapona and wonders whether he can do something about her condition. Kofi loves Sapona deeply as she is, but he would also like her to be accepted by the community. The shrine priestess tells Kofi that, in order to cure Sapona, he must travel to the evil forest, which is full of temptations such as delicious but poisonous food that is offered by the spirits of the deceased. The Asante and Yoruba believed that malevolent spirits haunted the forest because many people buried their dead there, which, according to several scholars of religion, is also a traditional belief in other West African cultures (see, e.g., Jung, "A Contribution to the History"; Adjei).

Although Kofi struggles in the darkness and chaos of the forest, unlike most people, he survives. As a result, he breaks the witch's spell and his beloved Sapona becomes normal again. Once this spell is broken, the prince of the village also proposes to Sapona, who does not know which man to choose. Sapona loves Kofi, but is afraid of further angering the ancestral spirits if she refuses the prince's proposal. Eventually, Kofi and Sapona decide to leave the village together, vowing never to return.

HAUNTED BY GHOSTS

Many Akan and Yoruba video movies focus on hauntings by ghosts. Hauntings have been a popular topic since the first Igbo Nollywood video movie, *Living in Bondage* (1992) directed by Chris Obi Rapu, which follows a man living under the control of evil powers as a result of his desire for material wealth. *The Prince's Bride* (2009), a predominantly commercial Christian Akan video movie on this topic by Frank Rajah Arase, follows two friends, Solange and Bernice, who are in love with John, the prince of Mazuland. Bernice is so jealous of Solange that she decides to kill her so that she can date the prince. After murdering Solange, Bernice invites Prince John to her house to make love to him. Just when Bernice's attempt to seduce the prince seems successful, he sees Solange in a photo, which paralyzes him. At

that same moment, Solange appears as a spirit that will only rest once the prince discovers the true cause of her death.

These video movies focus on belief in androgynous ancestral spirits, i.e., the “living-dead” (Mbiti 83–91). According to the Akan and Yoruba indigenous religions, ancestral spirits are present in the universe, which consists of cyclical moving energies, particles, and vibrations that comprise the past, present, and future (Lemon; Jung, *Four Archetypes*; Müller, “Religion and Chieftaincy in Ghana”). Unlike Akan or Yoruba indigenous religious video movies, *The Prince’s Bride* does not portray Bernice as someone with both good and evil qualities. In this Christian movie Bernice is, instead, entirely evil.

MONEY RITUALS

A repeated theme in Akan and Yoruba video movies is money rituals (*sika duru* in Twi and *sakawa* in Hausa and Yoruba), which are a form of “inverse sacrifice” (Lambek). In Akan video movies, characters usually bring an offering to a traditional priest or priestess because they believe their occult powers can make them rich. Although the accumulation of wealth for the good of one’s extended family was seen positively in the past, in today’s society, this amassing of material goods is viewed with fear.

The Akan miracle movie *Sika mu sakawa* (2009), meaning “Money Earned Via Money Rituals,” by Samuel Nyamekye, follows Ampong, who has to financially support his two sisters and his mother after his father dies.⁷ Ampong feels a lot of pressure to provide for his family, particularly because he does not have a job. Following the advice of his friend Fred, he consults a shrine priest and becomes involved in a money ritual (*sakawa*). The evil pact requires him to offer his own sister to the priest and to sleep with and kill young women. After committing Internet fraud, which is seen as a modern form of money ritual, his sister begins to vomit dollar bills and Fred’s pregnant wife, gives birth to money. As the movie demonstrates, it is women who pay the ultimate price in this phallogocentric social order (photo 2).

The allegoric meaning of the money ritual is that men must sacrifice their good relationships with women in order to become rich by participating in the modern capitalist economy. The relationship between men and women is worse in modern societies, where men oppress women for economic gain, than in traditional agricultural societies where both sexes respected one another as equals. As seen in *Sika Mu Sakawa*, the traditional priestess, whom the filmmaker portrays as the devil, represents this political-economic reality. The shrine priestess is an independent woman, who represents the previous matrilineal Asante society where women were economically independent. In the movie, the devil’s control of Ampong’s sister’s womb symbolizes that capitalism has turned women’s bodies into cash machines at the cost of their reproductive capacities. In addition, priests and priestesses are represented as malicious, reflecting that Christianity does not allow women to earn their own income to escape the phallogocentric hierarchy. At the end of the movie, Ampong’s sister finds out about the money ritual and locates her missing sister in his brother’s secret prayer room. As a result, the devil becomes so angry that he wants to kill Ampong. The only way for Ampong to escape is to run into the family’s church. During an exorcism, the pastor reveals



Photo 2: A pregnant woman gives birth to money in the movie *Sika mu sakawa*.

to the family what Ampong has done. Once the evil spirit has left his body, he is forgiven for his sins. His family prays that he will become a true and loyal Pentecostal Christian. As can be seen, Pentecostal Christianity permeates this movie.

Many Akan and Yoruba video filmmakers associate women who perform money rituals with promiscuity. If a woman fully provides for herself, which is not the norm, it means that she is attempting to escape this male-dominated social structure. As a result, she poses a threat to men, who hope their women will not do the same. Christianity and Islam decrees that women should be economically dependent on men, which increases the attractiveness of wealthy men to women seeking husbands.

A recent predominantly commercial Yoruba video movie exploring this topic is *Abuja Connection* (2003) by Michael Ezeanyaeché, which tells the story of a whore in Abuja who enters into a covenant with an indigenous priest to succeed in her business of selling virgins to sick men. The men believe that having sex with virgins will cure them. After the men have raped and killed the virgins, she awakens in the morning to a huge amount of money in her bed. As this shows, economically independent women are evil and their money derives from a malevolent source.

CONCLUSION

As has been shown, Christian and Islamic filmmakers tend to dominate the Akan and Yoruba video movie industry and their movies frequently contain religious messages that are used to discriminate and demonize women. Female characters who reject archetypes such as Mami Wata and the witchcraft mother are depicted as evil, thus further emphasizing a male-dominated society, a trend that can be traced back to the introduction of Christianity and Islam.

This emphasis on the subjugation of women in the Ghanaian and Nigerian movie industries raises questions as to the desirability of these industries' growth for the status of women in these societies. The movie industry in these countries has gone through a significant transition, from being financially dependent on the resources of the colonizer to becoming an independent African enterprise. Unfortunately, amateurish filmmakers with a mainly Islamic or Christian proselytizing agenda control much of this independent, commercial cinema. In order to increase women's empowerment in Ghana, Nigeria, and the diaspora, the video movie industry should increase its investment in female filmmakers. Women should be ideologically and financially supported, capable of using the film medium in the struggle for female empowerment in both Africa and the diaspora.

NOTES

1. See, however, the contributions of Ewwierhoma, Garritano, Mohammed, and Olujinmi.
2. The Akan is the umbrella name of culturally and linguistically connected Niger-Congo groups in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and a very small minority in northern Togo.
3. In 1992, Madame Ukpabio founded the Liberty Gospel Church, which at present has many branches in Ghana and Nigeria.
4. Examples of the latter are the predominantly commercial Christian Akan movie *Material Girl* (2009) by Frank Rajah Arase and the predominantly commercial Yoruba video movie *Greedy Sex* (2013) by John Izedonmi.
5. The Yoruba are one of West Africa's principal cultural groups; the people inhabit present-day Ondo, Oyo, Kwara, Ogun, and Lagos states of Nigeria, parts of the Republic of Benin (former Dahomey), and Togo. There are many component sub-ethnic divisions among them: Oyo, Ife, Ijesa, Ijebu, Ondo, Ekiti, Akoko, Iyagba, Egba, etc., in Nigeria and Sabe (Savé) and Ketu, etc., in the Republic of Benin and Togo. See Akinjogbin; Igue and Olabiyi. *Oni* is one who possesses *orun*, sky, and firmament, cloud.
6. The Asante are part of the Akan in Ghana and the Ivory Coast that consist of eastern and western cultural groups. The eastern Akan comprise the Asante, the Fante, the Akuapem, the Akyem, Akwamu, Bron, Wassa, Kwahu, Assin, Denkyira, and Gomua. The Akan speak (and 30 percent of them also write) Fante, Twi, Akuapem, Denkyira, Asen, AkyemBosome, Kwahu, and Ahafo. In Côte d'Ivoire live the Agni, Baulé, Nzima, Ahanta, Sanwi, Aowin, and Sefwi western Akan groups. See Ogot. The Chakosi in northern Togo are also of the Akan stock. See Braffi.
7. *Sakawa* is a Nigerian (Hausa) word meaning "to put something (spiritual) in it" that has been incorporated into the Twi language.

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