



Female Representation in Select Films of Frank Rajah Arase: Evidence of Male Chauvinist Tendencies in the Ghanaian Film Culture

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Abstract

There has been constant resonance of feminine image misrepresentation in most narratives since the reinvention of video-films in Nigeria, Ghana, and indeed across the African continent. In spite of the binary struggle between the (presumed) male chauvinist filmmakers and their feminist counterparts, masculinity often re-emerges in new forms or topoi to dominate femininity. Consequently, there seems to be a shift in the representation of women that reinforces Laura Mulvey's sexual voyeuristic objectification of the feminine gender as reflected in near-nude costumes as well as sexually larded scenes that are common sights in African films, particularly those from Ghana. Employing the historical-analytic and observation methods, this article examines three selected films: *The Maid I Hired* (2010), *Why Did I Get Married?* (2007) and *To Love a Prince* (2014) by Frank Rajah Arase (FRA), an African filmmaker of Benin (Edo) extraction who largely operates in the Diaspora, to foreground and highlight the voyeuristic imprints in Ghanaian films (Ghallywood), which tend to demean the feminine gender in the context of African culture that hegemonizes the male folk.

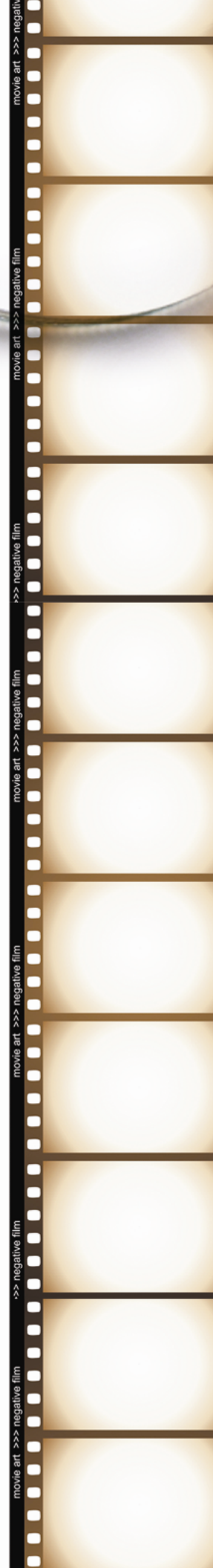
Keywords: Ghallywood; Feminine voyeurism; FRA; African culture; African film; Gender



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Female Representation in Select Films of Frank Rajah Arase: Evidence of Male Chauvinist Tendencies in the Ghanaian Film Culture

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Introduction

There has been constant resonance of feminine image misrepresentation in most narratives since the reinvention of video-films in Nigeria, Ghana, and indeed across the African continent. In spite of the binary struggle between the (presumed) male chauvinist filmmakers and their feminist counterparts, masculinity often re-emerges in new forms or topoi to dominate femininity. Consequently, there seems to be a shift in the representation of women that reinforces Laura Mulvey's sexual voyeuristic objectification of the feminine gender as reflected in near-nude costumes as well as sexually larded scenes that are common sights in African films, particularly those from Ghana. Employing the historical-analytic and observation methods, this article examines three selected films – *The Maid I Hired* (2010), *Why Did I Get Married?* (2007) and *To Love a Prince* (2014) – by Frank Rajah Arase (FRA), an African filmmaker of Benin (Edo) extraction who largely operates in the diaspora, to foreground and highlight the voyeuristic imprints in Ghanaian films (Ghallywood), which tend to demean the feminine gender in the context of African culture that hegemonizes the male folk. It is high time this observable shift in the filmic gaze is contested and negotiated, both in practice and in scholarship, by filmmakers, including

FRA himself, film critics, and development experts to ensure a kind of balancing in gender representation in FRA's films particularly and West African domestic film productions generally. In much of Africa, patriarchy is so entrenched that there are parts of meats reserved only for the male gender. One of such parts is the gizzard of a chicken (called efiandene among the Benin speaking people of Mid-western Nigeria) which is exclusively reserved for the male folk and women who dare to eat it are punished by the existing patriarchal laws. The advent of Christianity on the continent, especially south of the Sahara, seems to have further entrenched this patriarchal contraption in Africa as many male chauvinists have thus misinterpreted the bible to suit their patriarchal intents (Omoera, 2020). For instance, a balladic African male chauvinist school of thought in analysing the biblical creation account believes that God's creation of woman was not in His original plan and as such, a creation error. Accordingly, God had created all the animals in binary opposites of male and female except man (Adam) who God created alone in the paradise. However, seeing that He had created all the animals in binary opposites of male and female and Adam in a single gender of male, God thought that Adam needed a companion. Therefore, God's creation of Eve is an 'afterthought'. This kind of notion that propagates patriarchy in African societies is equally reflected in many African films.

Ukata (2010a, 1; 2010b, 65) has roundly condemned this seeming derogation and unfair representation of women in many African communities as well as African (Nollywood) films. She contends that Nollywood video-films such as *I was Wrong* (2004), *More than a Woman 1&2* (2005), *Omata Women* (2003), *Glamour Girls* (1997), among others, typified women in very outrageous ways that tried to feed on the stereotypes of women in Nigeria and by extension African societies. She argues further that, “it seemed as though women have nothing good to contribute to the society other than destroying moral values” (Ukata (2010b)). Omoera (2020) aligns with Ukata’s position when he argues that there is an urgency to expose the unbalanced situation of Benin women (African women) in political, cultural and economic spheres in relation to that of the men. This is the point Evwierhoma (2009) assertively makes when she uses Salami’s first major play, *Emotan*, to depict how women in Edo society in Nigeria (micro Africa) are stereotyped... and decry how the culture hemlines women, limiting their autonomy, through taboos and observances which many see as obsolete, behind the times and retrogressive.

Lizelle Bisschoff (2009) in her study of African film industries and the representation of women in African film focuses specifically on Francophone West African and Lusophone and Anglophone Southern African cinemas and finds that African women are underrepresented in theoretical work as well as in the practice of African cinema. Olukayode Adesuyi (2013) with a specific reference to the Yoruba film section of Nollywood decries the downgrading position of

women in filmmaking generally and especially in directing. The pervasiveness of such harsh gender inequality or imbalance is not restricted to African continent or African performative arts, including cinema. The condition is universal. Regardless of the obvious cultural differences, the way women are represented in many Africa films appears very similar to the ways women are depicted in Israeli, American, and even European cinemas. Using the Israeli cinema as a fulcrum of analysis, Harris (2017, 59) claims that, “In the main, Israeli films about conflict are war films, set on battlefields in which women are inherently absent as a characteristic genre.” Harris argues that in spite of symbolic representation of the death of Esther in *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* (dir. Thorold Dickinson, 1995), her role as a supporting character throughout the film signifies her position in the story of Israel as a helpmate for male heroism (2017, 59). *Tel Aviv Stories* (dirs. Ayelet Menahemi and Nirit Yaron, 1992) also exemplifies the politics of gender in Israeli films. It does not offer a particular solution or defined image of womanhood but speaks to a shared female experience of discrimination, exclusion, and objectification (Harris, 2017, 19). In other words, the womenfolk are expected to always pander to the chauvinistic whims and caprices of the men not considering their psychosocial or biophysical wellbeing.

Ralph Donald and Karen MacDonald (2014, 1) have argued that Hollywood’s war films “clearly show combat to be a man’s job, unsuitable for women, due to the female’s nurturing and

nonbelligerent nature.” Where they are present, they serve as “either an auxiliary or a provocative presence” (2014, 17). This, perhaps, explains why Norma Iglesias (2004) contends that film is a “gendered technology,” one that, like any mass medium or technology, men control. Carolyn Byerly further explains that “women’s marginalization ...” in film is “the result of a patriarchal media system that has manifested male biases ...” (2007). This article examines the replication of such patriarchal school of thought in three selected films – *The Maid I Hired* (2010), *Why Did I Get Married?* (2007) and *To Love a Prince* (2014) – by Frank Raja Arase (FRA), which are randomly sampled to foreground the application of voyeuristic imprints to objectify women as sex symbols. The researchers’ choice of FRA is purposive having consciously observed voyeuristic paw marks in most of his films. As a top cineaste in the Ghanaian film ecosystem for over two decades, Frank Rajah Arase (FRA) has been a major ‘force’ behind the direction of cinema hits such as *Mummy’s Daughter* (2000); *4 Play* (2010); *Somewhere in Africa* (2011); *To Love a Prince* (2014); *Ghana Must Go* (2016); *Crime Suspect* (2016), among others. These movies and the Ghanaian artistes that feature in them (or associated with them) have become very popular among the domestic and transnational audiences. FRA has trained, nurtured and mentored many Ghanaian talents both behind and in front of the camera. Thus, he has become a kind of archetype of a shift from the old Ghanaian cinematic tradition to a crowd pulling, new film direction that has marked a watershed in screen practice in Ghana and possibly elsewhere in the West African sub region –

apart from his native Nigeria, FRA has provided direction for the Sierra Leone movie industry. He arguably approximates as the most distinguished auteur in Ghallywood. Therefore, considering his cinematic oeuvre or film authorship could provide some useful insights into understanding the contemporary Ghanaian film culture. The foregoing informs why this article considers FRA's works, with respect to the representation of women. Specifically, the article makes contribution to African film scholarship as it queries the excessive application of voyeurism which hitherto was not part of Ghanaian or African film culture. It is, perhaps, from this standpoint that one borrows the words of Brimstone (1996, 288), to canvass support for the universal resolve of the womenfolk, in the feminist sense, to "demand constant renewal and re-engagement at every level," and put emphasis on plurality, conversation and continuation in gender discourse.

Frank Rajah Arase (FRA) is one of the leading directors in the Ghanaian film industry. Contrary to popular opinion that FRA hails from Ghana, he is a Nigerian, from Edo State. So, in a complete sense, FRA is a Benin or Edo man who plies his professional filmmaking career in the Diaspora (that is, in Ghana). His earlier contract with a Ghanaian production company, Venus Films that is owned by Abdul Salam Mumuni, gave birth to a number of Ghanaian blockbuster films. However, FRA now owns a production company called Raj and Heroes Films, which also has many signature films in its stable. Among these, FRA's film, *Heart of Men* (2009) signalled

the quagmire of voyeurism on Ghanaian screens and by extension, on other film ecologies in Africa. Some of his notable films are *The Maid I Hired* (2010); *Why Did I Get Married?* (2007); *Princess Tyra* (2007); *Agony of the Christ* (2008); *The Game* (2010); *Beyonce: The President Daughter* (2006); *Crime to Christ* (2007); *Iyore* (2015); among others. He is renowned for ‘making’ many Ghanaian screen stars, including Nadia Buari, Martha Ankomah, Van Vicker, John Dumelo, Kalsom Sinare, Yvonne Okoro, Frank Artus, Kofi Adjorolo, Majid Michel, Yvonne Nelson, Juliet Ibrahim, Jackie Appiah, and making them have a star power that is akin to that of Nigerian (Nollywood) actors/actresses. This has further contributed to the growth of star syndrome in video-films in West Africa (Omoera, 2009, 198).

FRA films’ genre that ostensibly intertwines glamour with crime is often replete with good narrative techniques, which involve high suspense, good story lines, excellent plot structure and exotic locales. Although his films are screen played by different Ghanaian writers, among who is Pascal Amanfo, the concept of a feminine voyeurism recurs in many of the films. The narratives mostly centre on family situations or challenges, especially the question of infidelity between husband and wife. Like Alfred Hitchcock, FRA interlaces the serious and the non-serious; he masterfully splices comic/seriocomic frames into grave actions, a technique that makes his narratives distinctively entertaining as they are sated with high emotional tenors. His filmic

worldview has been largely influenced by a sumptuous mixture of Hollywood, Nollywood and European film cultures, which he has been exposed to.

Breaking Patriarchal Structures through Feminist Concepts

Patriarchy is a masculine effort to impose male ideology which seeks to dominate the feminine gender in a given society. On the contrary, feminism is an effort of persons sympathetic to the cause of women or feminine effort to liberate female gender from patriarchal construct in a particular society. Feminism or feminist's struggle that is purported to have started in women's movements of the 1960s has a millennial root that stretches to antiquity. Shaka and Uchendu trace feminism "back to mythical figures like Liliath, to the legendary fighting Amazons of Greece and ancient Dahomey, and to classical plays like Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (2012, 10). Similarly, Umukoro and Okwuowulu argue that concrete evidence of feminism or feminist's streaks can be found in Paleolithic era when goddesses were adored and respected. According to them, "female goddesses such as Athena, Aphrodite, Hera, Hestia and Artemis were highly venerated and assumed great significance in hierarchy" (2010, 226).

Okoh, however, attributes the lowering of the statuses of the goddesses in the Greek pantheon to Zeus' impertinence, inferring that Zeus instituted patriarchy in Olympia by killing

King Cronus, his father and subduing his mother, Rhea. Thereafter, he usurped the women reproduction power and gave birth to Athena and Dionysus through his head and thigh respectively. This mythology changed the emphases of female and male divinities (cited in Umukoro and Okwuowulu, 2010, 226-227). Having situated the origin of patriarchal domination and feminist struggle, it is necessary to underscore the difference between sex and gender as such delineation will aid in the analysis of the selected visual texts in this study. Citing Agbo, Umukoro and Okwuowulu, there is a sharp distinction between both concepts. According to them:

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

The noticeable difference and relationship in both concepts infers that the biological trait of an individual determines his or her societal gender construct. Based on this stereotype, the feminine gender has, over the years, been subjected to a second class role regardless of her capacity; hence, the emergence of feminist movements. Feminist movements began in the western world due to the long deprivation women faced from economic activities. Based on their sexology, most of them were forced to channel their energy to domestic chores, edifying their bodies and becoming objects of sexual satisfaction to the male gender. Nonetheless, several other women who found this subjugation abnormal championed the feminist's agenda of struggle, resistance and

liberation. Shaka and Uchendu assert that “it was in an attempt to expose this cultural mindset in men and women as a mechanism of gender inequality that the feminist projects of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s emerged. Since these decades, feminist theory and criticism have undergone several processes and changes in focus and intentions” (2012, 3-4). Following the emergence of feminist struggle, different societies and cultures have evolved their peculiar concerns as pointed out by Shaka and Uchendu.

In Africa, for instance, the concept of womanist struggle has become pivotal and takes precedence over feminist struggle (Mabel Ekwierhoma, 2014a; 2014b; 2016). In the womanist struggle or womanism, women endeavor themselves to be brought into men’s affairs, especially the decision making process. It stresses that women have specific duties at home which are not in any way a second fiddle that should be disregarded by men. Womanist concept unlike feminist ideals does not seek equality with men, but the complementarity of both sexes in the pursuit of set goals. Obinna Nnaemeka asserts that the African model of feminism, often called womanism, has repudiated the western feminists’ abandonment of motherhood in their quest for egalitarianism (Umukoro and Okwuowulu, 2010, 227). Indeed, the African variant of feminism, with reference to the peculiar social conditions and cultural exigencies, has developed on the continent. Although

this variant appears to run counter to the antagonistic or aggressive disposition of its western variants, it articulates no less a feminist vision.

The womanist struggle in Africa permeates all strata of the African society because the African gender construct favours the male to ambitiously pursue his dream whereas the female is flattered by old men at the tender age and harassed sexually. The society rather than encourage the female gender places premium on her physical appearance as object for male sexual satisfaction. Thus, women or girls unconsciously channel their energies towards beautifying their bodies in preparation for 'ready-made' husbands, forgetting to pursue their dreams and aspiration (Shaka & Uchendu, 2012, 4-5). In any case, while acknowledging the African gender construct of both sexes, womanist movement seeks to demystify the premium placed on women's body and project the role of women in the family and society. Thus, womanist struggle is subtle but it still resonates in most African geo-cultural spaces because of the inequality placed on different sexes due to the prevailing social gender construct.

It is pertinent to note, therefore, that the binary struggle between male chauvinist and feminist/womanist ideologies has always been mirrored in the films of various cultures where the struggle is domiciled. In Africa, the concept of male chauvinism has been captured in various films especially that of FRA as earlier mentioned. Following the womanist African ideal which enthrones motherhood, and a conscious effort by feminist critics and the emergent feminist

filmmakers who have produced films that have attempted a role reversal of the male chauvinist portrayal of feminine image in Africa, the paradigm of these bizarre female portrayals which seemed to have stopped has only taken a new form as chronic male chauvinist filmmakers now employ voyeurism as an alternative means of expression. This observation is corroborated by Ogazie and Odetade (2017, 317) with particular reference to the derogation or debasement of womanhood in Africa as they contend that "...due to the unsatisfying and rising audience's taste or superfluous directorial interpretations, [some] African filmmakers principally those from Nollywood and Ghallywood have continued to trample on some hallowed African cultural heritage thereby promoting "anti-African" norms and behaviours such as pornography, indecent dressing, vulgarity, and uncultured sexual behaviours that are found in some Western films."

In her very influential book, *Fetishism and Curiosity*, Laura Mulvey uses Ousmane Sembene's *Xala* to underscore the significant contribution that African film has made to contemporary world cinema and its cumulative history and aesthetics. Among other things, she noted Sembene's commitment to promoting and transforming African culture via the use of the technological development of Western society in the interest of African culture (1996, 118-119). Arguably, it is such dialectical relationship between the two cultures that appears to have informed some of the current tendencies in African film ecologies, including that of Ghana. The cinema can

speak across divisions created by oral tradition (that draws largely from African culture), and written language (that draws largely from Western culture) and is, therefore, a perfect mechanism for a cultural dialectic (Mulvey, 1996, 120). The outcome of this cultural dialectic could be positive or negative tendencies as we have observed diachronically in many African media productions, including films, in which humanness and bestiality, civility and incivility, nudity and being properly clothed, pornography and wholesomeness, etc., often stand in diametric dimensions.

Furthermore, the concept of voyeurism involves the sexual contentment or satisfaction that a person attains or achieves by watching naked individuals. Voyeurism in Ghallywood and many other African films can be traced to Euro-American screen media. Mulvey has articulated voyeuristic motifs and the image construct for the Hollywood cinema as *scopophilia* (pleasure in looking). She associated *scopophilia* “with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (2006, 60). Mulvey further observes that cinema satisfies the primordial wish of pleasurable looking, developing *scopophilia* in its most narcissistic or conceited sense. In this kind of display, cinema audience derives pleasure in using another person as object of sexual stimulation through sight. Accordingly, the pleasure of looking has been between active (male) and passive (female). The image of the passive is encoded with erotic imprints which connotes ‘to-be-looked-at-ness.’ Therefore, the female gender is portrayed in a leitmotif of sexual object carrying erotic spectacle and traditionally displayed as sexual objects.

Comparing male and female sexual objectification, Mulvey argues that a man (male gender) derives no pleasure in gazing at the sexual advance of his fellow man. Thus, this justifies male's role as active pleasure 'seeker' where the female is passive pleasure 'seeker' (Mulvey, 2006, pp. 63-65). Epochie-Olise (2017, 77-78) agrees with Mulvey that the objectification theory posits that human beings, women especially, are seen as mere objects with a total disregard to the personality or dignity they may have... [they] are reduced to nothing more than objects of sexual desire, their purpose being one of sexual gratification.

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

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

Adjei supposes that voyeuristic scenes seen in Ghanaian films at present could be traced to Andre Bazin's development of deep-focus photography as a neorealist concept which brought the eyes closer to reality. He infers that such a trend, in turn, encourages soft pornographic scenes in

films. According to him, the voyeuristic trajectories seen in Ghanaian films are western narrative techniques that do not conform to the 'orature' narrative leanings in conventional Ghanaian films. He contends that independent European or neorealist cinema, including Hollywood, has influenced Ghallywood in expression of sex and sexuality" (2014, 14-15). Furthermore, he presumes that many Mexican and Venezuelan romantic soap operas that now dominate Ghanaian TV screens such as *Esmeralda*, *Aespuleo Bay*, *Second Chance*, *Hidden Passion*, *Storm over Paradise* and so on, which explicitly depict extended sexuality have become very popular in Ghana and thus blindly mimicked by indigenous filmmakers. Indeed, the trendy feminine nudity and obscene costumes in most Ghallywood films accentuate this view. Hinging his argument on the claims of M. S. Tili, God's Presence observes that the obscene costume and near-nude filmic motifs of Socrates Sarfo, one of the pioneer producers in the Ghanaian video film industry, significantly influence the voyeurism that is widespread in contemporary Ghana films (2013, 222). Consequently, film directors such as FRA who employ voyeurism technique tend to promote nudity and, in a way, tend to demean the feminine gender in the context of African culture that hegemonizes the men folk.

In *The Maid I Married*, FRA puts women at the middle of marital problems. The narrative starts with a party scene where ladies consciously flaunt their skimpy clothes. This scene underscores the argument of voyeuristic hoof marks in FRA's films, which this study technically

pursues. The story is about the family of Desmond (Mike Ezuronye) and Melody (Yvonne Okoro) who are husband and wife. Desmond, being a movie star is very rich and would want his wife to rather keep his home than pursue her own career. It would be recalled that this notion held by the filmic character, Desmond, pre-empted the feminist struggle. Even though Melody is extremely comfortable in their exquisite and magnificent home, she is very lonely and desires to work and build a career. Without her husband's approval, she engages in a work. Again, her attitude conforms to the concerns of the women who championed feminist struggle. Consequently, both couple becomes extremely busy to the extent that Melody employs the services of Juliet (Yvonne Nelson), a village girl and her childhood friend. Melody transforms Juliet through buying her skimpy clothes for her to look 'good' and contentedly takes care of her (Melody's) child.

As Melody's busy schedule entrenches problem in their family, Desmond claims that his premarital agreement with Melody is that while he, Desmond, provides for the family, Melody keeps the home. As a result of the friction in the house, Desmond lusts after Juliet because she seductively wears the skimpy garments that Melody acquired for her. The concept of Mulvey's *scopophilia* is highly valorised in the scenes that follow. This lustful scenario heightens the tension in the film as both partners feel the absence of each other. What's more, the emotional depth of both couple is portrayed by the director with a composite shot of both partners rendered in a

montage sequence where they react to their respective emotions in diverse ways. While Desmond soliloquizes as he drives, Melody goes to God in prayers: thus a moment of self-realization which is common with FRA's films.

FRA's male chauvinist ideology is equally portrayed in the aforementioned emotional states. Though both couple battle emotionally, Melody's emotions are torn to shreds as her 'best friend,' Juliet, who she brought into her matrimonial home as a maid is presumed to have taken over her husband. With this, FRA appears to take a stand in the male chauvinist and feminist binary struggle which implies that women should not pursue their careers to the detriment of their family. His stand reaffirms Shaka and Uchendu's earlier position that African society encourages female gender to channel their energies towards beautifying their body in preparation for a 'ready-made' husband, forgetting to pursue their dreams and aspirations (2012, 4-5). The film ends in a 'moment of truth' where the viewers discover that Desmond is not responsible for Juliet's pregnancy and he supposedly makes up with his wife.

FRA's films have analogous motifs that could endear him to be adjudged as an auteur director. This is seen in his frequent characterization of feminine characters as seductresses, as seen in Juliet's skimpy clothes as well as the ladies wearing pants at the swimming pool. Hence, his notion of seductive feminine characters conform to Mulvey's conception of female gender being portrayed in a leitmotif of sexual object carrying erotic spectacle on two levels: one, as erotic

objects among the characters in the film diegesis and two, as erotic objects for the viewers that are watching the film (Mulvey, 2006, 65). Furthermore, FRA characterizes them as ‘career women’ who are bereft of affection for their family and who can scarcely keep a home as seen in Melody’s character. This portrayal which contradicts the notion of motherhood in womanist concept of African feminist ideology is an indictment of feminine image in his films. In addition, he characterizes them as betrayers as seen in the betraying tendencies of Melody’s friend, Juliet, who in a bid to win Desmond’s love tells all kinds of lies against Melody.

Why Did I Get Married? is driven by just two characters: Williams (Majid Michel) and Janet (Yvonne Okoro). The two character-driven technique or leaning of the narrative is perhaps its most fascinating aspect. The film chronicles the family of Williams, a medical doctor, who, following Janet’s (his wife’s) advice abandons his medical profession to enjoy a blissful marriage with her. Afraid of having contact with other ladies’ private parts, Janet had advised Williams to abandon his medical profession. She tries to get contract jobs for Williams. However, Williams’ decision to go back to his profession was borne out of financial bankruptcy as well as a failed contract which he believes he lost as a result of his problems with his wife, Janet, at the time.

The beginning of the narrative presents Williams’ family in lovely mood with a conscious attempt by FRA to delineate the two characters that are both portrayed as deceptive personalities.

Their deceptiveness is seen during a self-imposed fasting which both opted to do. While observing the fast, both characters secretly eat ‘something’ and lie to one another that the fast is going on smoothly. Beyond this scenario which portrays both partners as pretenders, they are both depicted as serious-minded characters, though playful in nature. The serious and non-serious nature makes their characters flexible and it is this character flexibility that sustains the narrative which revolves around the activities of both partners in their house. Like most FRA’s films, Janet (female) is at the receiving end of most the problems encountered in the couple’s pursuit of marital bliss.

On one occasion, both of them had come home after celebrating their marriage anniversary, Williams not only accuses Janet of making him spend money, but prevents Janet from going to the toilet when she is pressed. His reason for doing this is that Janet wants to excrete his money which she just squandered. Williams’ harsh behaviour toward Janet, translated into physical abuse immediately Williams resumes work at the hospital. On her own part, Janet takes to alcoholism due to boredom at home as Williams now goes to work. Whenever Williams meets Janet in a drunken condition, he would ruthlessly coerce her to take more drinks.

In the portrayal of both characters, while Janet is portrayed as a never-do-well woman, who does not have any career and who often tries to seduce her husband whenever he is at home and feels frustrated whenever her husband goes to work, Williams on the other hand is portrayed as a medical doctor, a serious character who does not want his mother-in-law or wife to take care of

his financial responsibility or pick his bills. This explains why he decided to go back to his medical profession. Janet's seductive behaviour or 'moves' that conforms to Murvey's voyeurism is seen in various scenes which she played with her husband, Williams. This is highlighted in the family's situations where rather than using alternative means of making up, Janet uses futile seductive enticements on Williams. The unsuccessful seductive attempts on Williams are a strong indictment on the feminine gender presupposing that men could develop strong self-control even when they lust after feminine body. Conversely, William though ruthless in certain ways, is portrayed as a loving and caring man who does not joke with his job. His seriousness with his medical profession is seen in his response to distress calls when he is relaxing with his wife. Thus, the juxtaposition of his relaxation scenes with his wife and his reception of distress calls portrays his wife as a big distraction which he must always subdue to remain focused. Typical of FRA's films, the narrative swerves to a swift twist at its tail end as all the filmic actions are perceived to have happened in a dream; both couple is presumably yet to be married.

The narrative revolves around a desperate character, Solange (Yvonne Nelson), a beauty queen, who will do anything possible to win Akila's (John Domelo's) love. Akila is a prince and a gentleman greatly desired by all the female characters in *To Love a Prince*. First, Solange fakes an accident situation where she pretentiously runs into Akila's car. Though not badly hurt by Akila,

she is taken to the hospital by him. This accident provides an opportunity for Solange to meet the prince as well as tell him about a forthcoming beauty competition in which she wishes to contest. Second, during the beauty contest, the audience favours Bernice (Jackie Appiah) over Solange. Bernice is Solange's best friend. Following this, Solange secretly organises the kidnap of Bernice's sister, using her as bait to compel Bernice to step down from the beauty contest. Her stepping down gives Solange an opportunity to win the contest and subsequently invited to be hosted by the prince, Akila. On the other hand, at Akila's house in the company of Bernice, Akila openly confesses his love for Bernice and makes overtures to her.

As Akila and Bernice are preparing for their wedding, Solange arranges for Bernice to be blinded and crippled by some bad boys. Unfortunately, Bernice dies in the process. After her burial, Solange makes futile efforts to seduce Akila. However, being deeply troubled in the spiritual realm, Bernice's spirit possesses a dead body, Vanessa, and falls in love with Akila once again. Shortly before Akila proposes marriage to Bernice's spirit, he discovers that Vanessa is a dead body being possessed by Bernice. Consequently, he vows never to get married in his lifetime.

Characteristic of FRA's films, the portrayal of the character of Solange as an evil genius, seductress, murderer and desperado portrays the women folk in a negative way, while Akila, the prince, a male gender, is portrayed as a focused young man who would not fall for Solange's seductive tricks or activities. Emphases are laid on Solange's body and beauty which she (Solange)

flaunts at the point of her purported accident. At the beauty pageant, her character as a desperado as well as an evil genius is highlighted. Seeing that Bernice is the choice candidate, she arranges for the kidnap of her sister and thereafter prevails on her to withdraw from the competition. Even though Solange supposedly takes Hummer Jeep (an expensive car) as a price from the prince to give up on him, she keeps trying to seduce him. Her seductive manoeuvres are akin to FRA's trademarks that foreground the voyeuristic imprints in them. In trying to maim Bernice, she murders her best friend. In consequence, her character portrayal as a murderer is perhaps the height of feminine character stereotyping in FRA's films. Having killed Bernice, Solange's quest for the prince continues as depicted in the different scenes where she tries to seduce him. Her unremorseful nature as well as focus on marrying the prince overtly reduces female characters as mere charlatans whose means of survival wholly depends on men. This equally conforms to Shaka and Uchendu's earlier claim that African chauvinist construct supposes that women's energies should be channelled toward their bodies and subsequently marrying good husbands rather than building careers.

Comparing Voyeuristic Imprints in the Three Selected Films

Feminine portrayals in the three films under investigation are apparently stereotyped to achieve voyeuristic imports. First, the female characters are portrayed as women whose sources of

livelihood depend on men. In *Why Did I Get Married?* and *To Love a Prince*, Janet and Solange, the key feminine characters in both films rather than channel their energies towards building a career for themselves, focus on beautifying their bodies as baits for the key masculine characters. In *The Maid I Hired*, FRA though presents Melody, the key feminine character as an ambitious woman who is focused on building a career; he equally makes a strong statement on the evil or negative effect of a woman building a career to the detriment of her family. This is depicted in the emotional mêlée which Melody undergoes as she presumes that her maid, Juliet, has taken over her husband.

Furthermore, the three films are replete with voyeuristic scenarios as FRA always constructs a feminine sex symbol in his narratives. Even though Melody is the key character in *The Maid I Hired*, FRA builds the character, Juliet as a sex symbol to amplify the voyeuristic impact in the narrative. Juliet, a presumed village girl and childhood friend of Melody, is hired by Melody, to take care of her baby. Juliet's presence in the house serves as voyeuristic bait or fascination to Desmond, and by extension, to the male viewers who presumably start lusting after her. In *Why Did I Get Married?*, Janet is presented as a sex symbol to demonstrate feminine voyeurism. Time and again, she systematically made sexual overtures at her husband, Williams. On the other hand, Solange in *To Love a Prince* makes countless futile sexual advances at prince Akila. Insofar as the male gender will resist the sexual intents made on them by the seductress, FRA elongates the

voyeuristic scenes to presumably achieve his *scopophilia* imprints. Apart from these key characters being categorized as sex symbols by FRA, he habitually creates or brings in party scenes, swimming pool scenes, beauty pageant scenes, beach scenes where women who are nude or partly naked flaunt their bodies.

Conclusion

This study has examined Frank Rajah Arase's (FRA's) *To Love a Prince, Why Did I Get Married?* and *The Maid I Hired*. It benchmarked female representation in the films as temptresses, betrayers, seductresses, who are insatiable and incapable of being good mothers or wives against Laura Mulvey's notion of female gender that speaks to the portrayal of a leitmotif of sexual object carrying erotic spectacle either as erotic objects among the characters in the diegesis of the films or as erotic objects for the viewers that are watching the films. Consequently, the article posits that the bizarre portrayal of feminine characters often creates voyeuristic motifs in FRA filmic narratives and indeed many other Ghanaian films, which unfortunately reinforces the chauvinistic tendencies of the hegemonic male folk in Ghana and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. This observable shift in the filmic gaze should be contested and negotiated, both in practice and in scholarship, by filmmakers, including FRA himself, film critics, and development experts to

ensure a kind of balancing in gender representation in FRA's films particularly and West African domestic film productions generally.

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