Research article

Re-defining Ghanaian hiplife songs by women as liberatory narratives

Hannah Woode Amissah-Arthur, Theresah Patrine Ennin & Christabel Aba Sam

Re-defining Ghanaian hiplife songs by women as liberatory narratives

A careful study of contemporary Ghanaian hiplife songs by women reveals a rich lode of subtle sexual innuendoes, liberatory remarks, resistance discourses, and overt and covert protests. The name "hiplife" is a compound of hip-hop and highlife, which points to the two major influences that constitute the genre. Its most marked features are rap lyrics in Twi, Fante, Ga, Ewe, Pidgin English, and other local languages, which are performed over programmed beats, bass lines, and sampled loops. One of the inherent features of hiplife music is its objectification of women in many forms. However, recent Ghanaian women hiplife artistes have created music that counters these images and portrays women as more than the sum of their bodies. In this article, we employ a poststructuralist feminist approach to analyse selected songs by women hiplife artistes in Ghana, asserting that Ghanaian women hiplife artistes create music that is revolutionary and sexually liberating. We then contend that this emergence of a new wave of hiplife music by the women is both an indication of the democratic landscape that makes it possible for women's voices to be heard and for their views to be validated, as well as a resistance movement that seeks to change the narrative. This article has implications for African feminism, gender, and the creative industry, as it contributes to the discussion on ways through which the creative industry can be harnessed not just for entertainment but also for a reorientation of ideas and values. **Keywords**: hiplife music, gender narrative, women artistes, creative industry, resistance.

Introduction

Since the inception of hiplife music in Ghana in the late 1990s, there has been a mixture of acceptance and rejection by different generations in the country, and scholarly discourses have expressed and analysed hiplife songs from diverse conceptual positions (Avevor and Polley; Oduro-Frimpong; Nikoi; Anim-Koranteng; Arthur; Annin; Nkansah; Carl and Dankwa; Dankwa; Shipley, "The Birth of Ghanaian Hiplife: Urban Style, Black Thought, Proverbial Speech"; Osumare). Hiplife music is characterised by Ghanaian artistes employing and adopting both mannerisms and dress styles of American hip-hop artistes (Oduro-Frimpong). Several scholars have attempted to define the term hiplife and to trace its history. Scholars like Peter Arthur are of the view that hiplife evolved from high-life, and high-life evolved from traditional music. Others like Eric Charry opine that African rap is a direct imitation of hip-hop from the United States. However, the English lyrics and accents are localised, and relevant issues are tailored to suit communities. Hiplife has been regarded as a male-dominated field since it became popular. Comparing American hip-hop and Ghanaian hiplife, Joseph Oduro-Frimpong asserts that "though both

Hannah Woode Amissah-Arthur is senior lecturer in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.
Email: hannah.arthur@ucc.edu.gh
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3747-781X

Theresah Patrine Ennin is associate professor in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.
Email: tennin@ucc.edu.gh
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9448-9446

Christabel Aba Sam is senior lecturer in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.
Email: christabel.sam@ucc.edu.gh
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7926-0395

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American rap music and Ghanaian hiplife music feature female artistes, in both genres, male artistes dominate" (Oduro-Frimpong 1096). Similarly, Shipley ("Birth") maintains that hiplife remains a male-dominated space and, invariably, the stories emerging from hiplife are essentially the experiences of men living in a postcolonial society. Nii Kotei Nikoi argues that "hiplife often writes women out of modern Ghanaian history through its disproportionate focus on men as the drivers of history and progress" (34). Arthur also asserts that "hiplife is predominantly a male affair" (4). Despite the scarcity of literature on hiplife (Arthur; Oduro-Frimpong) and its bashing by the older generations who consider and describe it as "black noise and a nuisance" (Anim-Koranteng), hiplife continues to thrive among the youth.

Studies on women in hiplife music have gained ascendancy in recent times (Hansen; Shipley, "Birth"). Thus far, discussions of women in hiplife have mostly centred on women as sexual beings. The gendering of hiplife as a male-dominated sphere makes men's subjective experiences in post-colonial space representative, leaving women 'othered' in the margins (Nikoi), while male artists rarely sing about women's experiences as national subjects. As a result of the association of hiplife with moral turpitude, most Ghanaian women musicians prefer to work in the gospel music industry. Therefore, women musicians rarely venture into the hiplife music industry, and the few that do so generally fail to achieve mainstream success in Ghana (Collins). According to Akosua Adomako Ampofo and Awo Mana Asiedu, hiplife songs depict two kinds of stereotypical women. The positive stereotypes are of wives and mothers who are keepers of tradition, sources of joy, caring, welcoming of a man's relatives, and kind. The negative stereotypes include women as sex objects, exploitative, unfaithful, unreliable, jealous, weak-minded, ungrateful, and materialistic, amongst many others. Shipley asserts that how women are depicted by male hiplife artists reveals a critique of how women navigate the "transition between modern and traditional life" (Shipley, "Birth" 165). Similarly, Nikoi (245) asserts that hiplife obscures the various layers of oppression and ideologically justifies the continued oppression of women in Ghana.

In this article, we seek to contest the various scholarly ideas and research that have been discussed above concerning women in hiplife. We agree with Nikoi, who says that "[t]he male centred worlds constructed within hiplife and its music videos are unsettled by the presence of women's lived experiences. As such, hiplife itself needs to undergo a process of decoloniality to be appropriated towards a project of decolonial healing" (Nikoi 245). Regardless of the foregoing, we believe that a selection of hiplife songs by women will unearth hitherto unseen nuances in this creative space. Our analysis hinges on Arthur, who posits that, as a form of resistance, feminism becomes an ally of hiplife because of its opposition to the dominant culture, pitching hiplife or the youth against the old or authority and women against men or patriarchy (40). Over the years, though there has been a plethora of scholarship on hiplife, little has been written about how women, especially those in the music industry, attempt to resist stereotypical assumptions of women with regards to their bodies. It is this form of resistance that we examine using six songs by four women hiplife artistes, namely: Ebony Reigns, Wendy Shay, Eno Barony, and MzVee. We have selected these artistes because they are contemporary, educated young artistes between the ages of 20 and 34 years and thus considered young and hip by the youth. Secondly, their songs are popular and available to young people via various social media platforms. Their songs are also played during various social gatherings by people who find them entertaining. Lastly, their lyrics are known to be embedded with sexual innuendos, which have been crafted to create an interest in the songs and ideas for the empowerment of women. In sum, the rationale for their selection is both strategic and purposeful. It ensures that the analysis captures the active, young, and educated women artistes who purposefully aim to capture the hearts of listeners, especially the youth, in a bid to entertain whilst being current with social issues. We listened to the songs, transcribed, and to some extent translated the lyrics, then ordered them thematically by looking at the elements of sexual innuendoes, liberatory remarks, resistance discourses, and overt and covert protests by women. We interpreted our findings through the lens of a poststructuralist feminist background. The discussion is categorised under three main ideas: liberation, resistance, and subversion of traditional roles by women. Various songs by the selected women hiplife artistes were analysed to reiterate pertinent issues.

Theoretical orientation

Poststructuralist feminism has evolved with scholarly and intellectual feminist philosophers like Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Drucilla Cornell, amongst many others (Kolozova). In the first and second waves of feminism, much emphasis was placed on securing legal rights and later exposing systemic patriarchy, often relying on relatively stable categories of 'woman' and 'man'. By the late 20th century, however, poststructuralist

feminism—shaped by thinkers such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva—questioned the very stability of these categories, arguing that gendered subjectivities are discursively constructed rather than fixed. A gender-resistant approach, poststructuralist feminism focuses on the construction of women; how relations of power are constructed; and the notion of subject, identity, and culture (Kolozova; Davies and Gannon; Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe). It critiques the notion of a universal female experience and instead highlights how power, language, and culture shape diverse forms of subjectivity. In their attempt to define poststructuralist feminism, Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe assert that it is a body of theory that pays attention to the issues of knowledge, power, difference, and discourse and how these intersect and entwine in the lives of women. Poststructuralist feminist research is focused on the possibility of moving beyond what is already known and understood. Its task is not to document differences between those categorised as men and those categorised as women, but to multiply possibilities, to de-massify or break down ways of thinking about 'male' and 'female'—to play with the possibility of subjectivities that are both and neither—to understand power as discursively constructed and spatially and materially located. Power, therefore, is understood in terms of lines of force and not the property of one gender.

Based on ongoing scholarly contributions on poststructuralist feminism, we set out to analyse the song texts by Ghanaian women hiplife artistes, bringing to the fore the subtle forms of sex, liberation, and resistance. Poststructuralist theory aids us in exploring issues of knowledge, power, and resistance and their intersections with the Ghanaian women hiplife artistes' intentions of popularising their songs and promoting women's involvement in Ghana'smusic industry.

Liberatory discourse regarding sex in women's hiplife music

Sex is a universal phenomenon, but in traditional Ghanaian society, it is not a topic for casual conversation. Women are supposed to be ignorant or coy about the subject of sex, and it is frowned upon when a woman discusses sex in a public space. Men and boys can talk about it and even be crude in their discussions, but well-brought-up girls do not engage in such discussions.

In Ghanaian society, there are all sorts of euphemistic neutral names for the act of sex and sexual organs. Sexual innuendoes are a means through which women engage in discussions about sex, and these innuendoes are expected to be subtle and covert. Sexual innuendoes come in the forms of wordplay, puns, euphemisms, and verbal indirection (Avevor and Polley; Oduro-Frimpong). Scholars like Edmund John Collins and Oduro-Frimpong are of the view that a lot of hiplife songs are infused with amorous by-plays and sexual innuendoes. Most Ghanaian hiplife songs use local languages to convey their innuendoes. The Akan ethnic group, which is the largest ethnic group in Ghana, has several dialects. The most popular dialects are Twi and Fante. These dialects are also the most used in hiplife songs. Anita Avevor and Innocentia Polley argue that though hiplife songs play with words for artistic and pragmatic reasons, the use of words which are profane and offensive are stylistically used to make the songs melodious and appealing. It provides an avenue to talk about the 'unspeakable' with poetic license. Therefore, the women artistes we discuss in this article take advantage of this to talk about sex when ordinarily they would not have dared (Avevor and Polley 389). Oduro-Frimpong asserts that hiplife artistes try to avoid being too blunt when talking about sex by relying on euphemisms (Oduro-Frimpong 1096). This euphemistic style of expression and its cautious use in the public domain has been termed "euphemistic dysphemism" by Adeline Terry.

To quote Sameul Boateng extensively:

> 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. (Boateng 61)

Ebony Reigns, born Priscilla Opoku-Kwarteng (1997–2018), dropped out of Senior High School to pursue music. She died in a car crash before her 21st birthday. She, however, won the 2018 Vodafone Ghana Music Awards Artiste of the Year award posthumously, making history as the first woman recipient. Ebony Reigns's "Hustle",

featuring Brella, a male artist, describes a young woman who is calling people to come and buy her goods. The song contains both English and Twi words and simply asks customers to buy her goods because her business must survive. However, the play on words using the Twi word "*di*" creates sexual undertones in an otherwise seemingly innocent song, turning it into a sexually explicit reference to intercourse. In Twi, "*di*" has multiple meanings depending on the context. It could be "to eat", "to have sex", or "to buy someone's goods" (as in trading). In the same vein, "*mondi me dwa*" (come buy from me) is a euphemistic way of saying "I am horny". People also say "*Mahyɛ dwa*" to mean "I have intentionally dressed to look sexy so someone can 'buy my goods'". The chorus of the song goes:

Enti mondi me o, mondi me dwa
Obi mmƐdi me o, ɔndi me dwa
Mese mondi me o, mondi me dwa
Nneɛma meretɔn yi, mennhu ano

So [you all] come eat me o, come buy my goods
Somebody should come and eat me o, come and buy my goods
I say [you all] should come and eat me o, come and buy my goods
I am not making profit from what I am selling

The artist is using the metaphor of a woman who has arranged her wares for sale at the market and is calling for customers. In this chorus, she uses phonological repetition to achieve a melodious tune. The repetition of the same sound segments in every line, with the main word '*di*', creates the rhythm needed for the rhyme to work whilst also foregrounding the importance the artist places on the word. Therefore, the expressions "*mondi*", "*mmƐdi*", and "*ɔndi*" foreground the imagery of sexual intercourse. The fact that the first line of the chorus does not include the word "*dwa*" but only "*mondi me oo*" unapologetically translates as "eat me" and indicates that she is asking for someone to have sex with her. It also allows the musician to escape censure because "*di*" is a crude way of referring to sex and well-brought-up girls do not use that expression; they prefer less explicit expressions that will not raise eyebrows. Therefore, when she uses this expression in the context of selling goods, every Twi-speaking person is aware of the strong sexual undertones, but Ebony Reigns can defend herself and claim that she is talking about selling goods and not asking for sex.

This play on words allows her to verbally articulate what is taboo for a young girl to talk about: the desire to have sex. Explicit discussions of sex are not the preserve of young girls. Boys are allowed to talk about sex, but when a young girl talks openly about sex, she is seen as a "spoilt" girl, not worthy to be seen in polite circles. Ebony thus attempts to subvert this by boldly talking about the act of sex in a crude way.

In response, Brella, a male, talks about how he sees her struggling and sweating under the sun to sell her goods. He encourages her not to give up and says he will buy her goods:

Enti mɛdi wo oo mɛdi wo dwa
Ɛnnɛ mɛdi wo oo mɛdi wo dwa
Mɛdi wo oo oo mɛdi wo dwa
Ɛmma w'abam' mbu o
Gyae su oo

So I will eat you o, I will buy your goods
Today, I will eat you oo, I will buy your goods
I will eat you oo, I will buy your goods
Don't be disheartened
Stop crying

Like the analysis above, the word "*di*" takes an important role in responding to Ebony Reigns's call for a sexual encounter through its repetitive use in *mɛdi.* There is therefore the verbal indirection, which is achieved through the euphemistic use of the word "*di*" and unveils the sexual intent and underscores sexual activity as transactional. The word "*di*", therefore, still means "to eat", but in this context, it is not food that will be eaten, but a woman. The interesting thing about this song is that the woman initiates the sexual act; she calls for it boldly and bravely, and

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the man answers. In traditional Ghanaian communities, good girls do not initiate sex; they wait for a man to do so. But here, Ebony Reigns resists this passivity by asking for it, literally.

Similarly, Wendy Shay, born Wendy Asiamah Addo on 20 February 1996, was trained as a nurse in Germany and worked as a nurse and midwife before starting her music career. Her song "Uber Driver" is a mixture of Twi and English and asserts that every man is a voyeur of women. She includes all men, even celebrities and presidents, and goes on to mention the names of some former Ghanaian presidents.

Bɛma bia pɛ hwɛ hey
Sɛ me twa mu a na)mo hwɛ ha
Kufuor pɛ hwɛ
Even Nana Addo nso pɛ hwɛ hey
Mahama pɛ hwɛ Baby Jet, Bullet nso pɛ hwɛ
Agya eiii(yeiii) 3na eiii(yeiii) mmaa bɛku mmɛrima oo
Ɛhwɛ bɛkum mo ɛhwɛ bebree bɛkum mo eya e
Ɛhwɛ bɛkum mo oo ɛhwɛ bebree bɛkum wo eya wati
Wahwɛ saa di wo car akɔ pem
Obaa nti wodi car akɔ pem
Wahwɛ saaa di wo car akɔ pem
Asem yi deɜ ɛyɛ ase fim ah
W'ahwɛ Linda, ahwƐ Dianna, Carolina, Rosalinda, Uber driver
Wat is ur matter bottos watcha hey ee

Every man loves to stare
When I pass, they stare
Kufuor loves to stare
Even Nana Addo loves to stare
Mahama, Baby Jet, and Bullet also love to stare
Fathers, mothers, women will kill men
Staring will kill you, staring for too long will kill you
You have stared for so long that you have crashed your car
You have had a car crash because of a woman
This case is revolting
You've stared at Linda, stared at Dianna, Carolina, Rosalinda, Uber driver
What is your matter, buttocks watcher, hey ee

In this song, the stressed and repeated word that creates the phonological structure is "*hwɛ*". In Twi, "*hwɛ*" means to "look". However, it has the same rhyming scheme and shares a similar phonological feature with "*twɛ*", which is the Twi name for vagina. "*Twɛ*" is not used in polite circles; it is one of those taboo words that "bad" boys and girls use. Both words are monosyllabic. Though one starts with a voiceless alveolar plosive /t/, and the other starts with a glottal fricative /h/, there is the intentional use of the rhyming scheme, which is justified through the play on words. The idea behind this has been explained by Naoko Taguchi when he asserts that "a key aspect of pragmatic competence is the ability to recognize speaker intention, even when it is implicit and covert and to make accurate inferences about the speaker's communicative goals" (Taguchi 152). According to Samuel Kwesi Nkansah and Rexford Boateng Gyasi, there is a sense in this song of a man objectifying a woman's body, which makes it a site for attraction and an object of desire. They assert that there is ambiguity when the speaker screams "*Agya eii! Ena eii*!" (literally meaning father! mother!), which to them creates an image of one moaning in pain and/or pleasure, depending on the context. One is therefore left to wonder what staring has got to do with screams calling for one's parents (Nkansah and Gyasi 122).

There is a deliberate play on the words "*hwɛ*" and "*twɛ*", as attested to by many Ghanaian lovers of this song. When one listens to the song, one hears the artist deliberately placing emphasis on the "h" sound, so that instead of making it soft as it should be, it now becomes a hard sound mimicking the "t" sound, so that the two words become almost the same. Wendy Shay says all men love "*hwɛ*"/ "*twɛ*", even to their own detriment, as seen in the example of the man who crashes his car whilst looking at a woman.

It is obvious that in both songs the artistes use euphemisms and innuendoes in the local language to speak the unspeakable, to break the silence of being a good girl. This supports the claim that women musicians who convey

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their messages through sexually suggestive imagery are stigmatised and purported to be loose and without morals (Boateng 2016). This buttresses the traditional Ghanaian notion that good girls do not talk about sex and do not enjoy sex. These artistes, on the contrary, portray women who can talk about sex and enjoy sex.

God is a woman: Deviance and resistance in hiplife music by women artistes

Arthur asserts that feminism finds an appropriate ally in hiplife because women hiplife artistes, like feminism, oppose the dominant culture. Ghanaian women hiplife artistes have evolved over the years and have found ways of fighting the strictures and structures of hegemony by rejecting the stereotypical representations that have been put in place about women all these years (Arthur 40). As explained in the section above, the societal expectation that a woman should be repressed in expressing her sexual feelings are being debunked in contemporary hiplife songs. Now, apart from talking about taboo subjects, other forms of resistance are found in the type of language used in hiplife music by women.

In Ebony Reigns's "Date Ur Fada", she fluently uses the pidgin language in expressing her feelings. In the song, Ebony Reigns tells her cheating boyfriend that if he does not stop cheating on her, she will retaliate by dating his father. She refers to the boyfriend as a player, indicative of his promiscuous nature. She uses a befitting football metaphor to describe their relationship when she compares her boyfriend to well-seasoned football players such as Lionel Messi and former Ghanaian football player Mubarak Wakaso, referring to his ability to play the girls without them realising that they are being played.

The first interesting thing about the resistance captured by this song is the use of pidgin. Pidgin is purported to be a typical "super-central" language. It is a lingua franca that allows people to communicate across large geographical spaces (de Swaan). In 2022, Ghanaian pidgin had an estimate of eight million speakers, which made up 24% of the population (Huber, "Ghanaian Pidgin English"). Pidgin naturally appeals to a wide audience from the outset. It is easy to understand and widely used across different groups of people. Additionally, it strongly connects with the youth through its multilingual nature, shaped by local social networks and popular culture such as music and film. Secondly, it appeals to the youth through the multilingual configurations which are negotiated in local social networks and popular culture expressed through music, film, radio, and social media. In Ghana, pidgin has been categorised into two main types, as espoused by Magnus Huber ("Ghanaian Pidgin English: An Overview") and Kari Dako and Richard Bonnie: Ghanaian pidgin (regarded as substandard and usually referred to as broken Ghanaian English) and Student pidgin (seen as prestigious because of the status of its speakers). The fluency with which Ebony Reign speaks pidgin—a language that, according to Dako and Bonnie (2), is considered "an argot, the property of a clearly delimited in-group, which signals an antisocial identity that marks itself as in opposition to generally accepted norms in society"—becomes a form of deviancy on her part.

Secondly, her knowledge and use of football metaphors—for example, mentioning the names of popular players and football clubs—further places her in a very masculine space. Quoting Manase Kudzai Chiweshe and Tafadzwa Choto (1): "Football in Africa remains a male-dominated space. The widespread popularity of the game makes it an important prism to understand men and the idea of maleness in Africa. Football has provided an important space for the construction, valorisation and celebration of specific types of masculinities across the continent". This excerpt from the song, "Date Ur Fada" illustrates the mixture of pidgin and football imagery.

If you break my heart I go date ur fada
Bony pon dis
Danny beatz
The 90's badgyal trend
See I heard them say, heard them say
Boy you a player
You dey score like Messi play like Kaka
Dribble like Wakaso
You dey like Barcelona, Real Madrid
Arsenal, Man U, Chelsea
I go give you my heart, give you body
Do anything for you
Sacrifice my life to be your wife
I'm gonna be there for you
But if you break my heart

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I go date your fada
You gonna be my son
You go call me your mother

In this stanza, the lover is reminded of the origin of the bad girl trend, where women were no longer defined by traditional gender roles and expectations. The bad girl trend became a defining feature of the 1990s, especially with the explosion of transgressive women characters in television shows, popular fiction, and mainstream film (Young). The bad girl was a girl or woman who crossed over patriarchal limits and became co-opted in oppressive enterprises. These girls and women were morally ambiguous and demonstrated a willingness to offend their detractors (Chesney-Lind and Irwin). Hence, using this allusion, in addition to her use of pidgin, the speaker alerts her lover to the changing roles of women in contemporary times; that she can date his father to spite him (the lover). This act has been discussed by some scholars as forbidden because of its nature. According to Gladys Nyarko Ansah and Augustine Edem Dzregah, "the lyrics of 'Date Ur Fada' challenge the traditional Ghanaian ethos that permits promiscuity among men but not women by threatening (perhaps, proposing) to engage in a taboo relationship (that is, date the father of her promiscuous lover), a traditional taboo in Ghana" (Nyarko and Dzregah 8).

These shifting roles align with poststructuralist feminist perspectives, which conceptualize women as actively renegotiating the terms of their social construction while simultaneously occupying multiple, and often contradictory, subject positions. Furthermore, the invocation of the 1990s "bad girl" trope introduces alternative frameworks for interpreting and responding to gendered expectations surrounding marital infidelity (Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe). The invocation of the 90s bad girl trend also offers alternatives to gendered responses to marital infidelity. The case that men are usually excused and absolved of infidelity, whilst women are expected to condone such betrayal, is carefully revisited. Indeed, while the speaker acknowledges male experience in infidelity, she is quick to summon the lover to retreat and reflect on women's investments, especially within marital spheres, and the need for an equitable gendered response to marital infidelity. While the speaker's choice to date the lover's father may appear defaming, it is an avowal of women's agency and visibility in marriages. Indeed, the visibility of women in African marriages is an important theme that emerges from the song. Despite the diversity of African cultures, the marginalisation of women in marriages remains fervent across cultures. Indeed, contrary to the view that marriage is perceived as an achievement for many women, the speaker invites her audience to think of marriage as a sacrifice, especially as wifehood imposes substantial restrictions on self-care. The speaker admits that:

See the love I have for you [x3]
It's for nobody else but you
Back assy you know sey i get am o
Bobbie stand you know sey I own am o
And no style dey wey I no sabi do am o
Me i no like Versace
And i no like Designer
Me i no like Ferrari
And i no like Bugatti
I go give you my heart, give you body
Do anything for you
Sacrifice my life to be your wife
I'm gonna be there for you
But if you break my heart, I go date your fada
You gonna be my son, you go call me your mother

She carefully outlines what she believes to be the profit imbalances in marriage—how some women sacrifice body and soul in exchange for nothing (since she does not get any of these things, i.e. Ferrari, designer goods, Bugatti, Versace, etc). Part of the reasoning for highlighting her disinterest in such material things is to mitigate the potential of domination since men, especially in Africa, are perceived to be the providers. In other words, the speaker draws attention to new times in contemporary marriages and calls for the re-evaluation of women's roles in marriages.

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Eno Barony, born Ruth Eno Adjoa Amankwah Nyame Adom on 30 October 1991, became the first female Best Rapper at the Ghana Music Awards in 2021. In her song titled "God is a woman", the artist flaunts her womanhood and her ability to stay in the hiplife game despite it being dominated by men. She raps like a man and is outrageous in her dress and mannerisms. In the music video of this song, we see her with her breasts exposed on screen, touching them and calling the men to come suckle. She calls and taunts them about their inability to soar above her as a woman: "*Mo nkyere me nea ɔye bɛɛma*" (Show me one who is a man). The phrase "Show me one who is a man" is repeated five times. This foregrounds her subversion of her role as a stereotypical woman. In the Akan tradition, "*bɛɛma*" has many meanings; it refers not just to a male but a brave one, a wealthy one, a potent one, as well as one with a powerful physique or one with physical strength. She therefore challenges the masculinity of the men in the hiplife industry. Reiteration, re-articulation, and repetition can be described as resistance that circulates and forms the network of mobile points of resistance that produce new truths and norms.

In the song, she employs verbal indirection of what is known as 'dissing' in the African American hip-hop culture, where the message is meant to deride and disrespect a particular person or a group of people. It is also known as 'signifying' in a larger communicative practice (Mitchell-Kernan). She can be seen to be making fun of the men and letting them know that women are now doing much more than them:

This is the birth of a new era
Fra King na ombegye sack letter
We taking the game to a different dimension
Nti forgetti w'akata
Gone are the days aa na mmaa enfata
Ye shia bɛdwa aa mo mma yen kasa
Y'all be sleeping on women for too long […]
It took a woman to change this world with just an apple
So behave
Rappers aa moa no nti yiee
Mo mra me ha mbɛ nom ɛnofoɔ
Y'all sound like babies
Nea mmɛɛma no antumi anyɛ no
Sɛ me baa yɛ no ma bɛyɛ oo
Mo pim me er
Me ka me ho aa na mo su […]
*They no dey barb how a girl can do this sh***
Cos I came, and I saw and I conquered […]
Cos young girls look up to me
To lead them to a win
They say it's a men's world
But I entered without a passport

This is the birth of a new era
[…]
Gone are the days when women were not approved
Whenever we gathered, we [women] were not allowed to speak […]
Rappers who are not fluent
Come and breastfeed
What the men couldn't accomplish
I have come to accomplish it
Hail me
When I perform, then you begin to cry […]

Eno Barony's song is metaphorical in various ways. First, her title "God is a woman" is an attempt to place the woman as the ultimate supremacy amongst mankind. In another view, her lyrics, though geared towards male hiplife artists in the music industry, are a microcosm of the external 'fight' for a place for the woman in the patriarchal world. Her biblical allusion to the woman (Eve) changing the world with just an apple becomes a word of caution to men in displaying how powerful a woman can be. Her invitation to them to come and suckle

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her breast to get milk because they are babies is a metaphor representing both life and nurturing. In quoting Arthur, "Ghanaian women re-contextualise or reverse the female rappers in hiplife to locate their liberation in essentializing the female body as means of counter discourse, subverting power through the very language the dominant uses. They take advantage of the same concept of the otherness used against them and reinforcing the dialogicality of the gender discourse in Ghana" (Arthur 223).

It is this otherness that Eno Barony has taken advantage of to 'diss' her male counterparts in the music industry and to emphasise that to her, women are God. She acknowledges that although rap, a predominantly male style, has been monopolised by men, she has been able to break that notion and enter that world of men effortlessly. Her reference to entering without a "passport" symbolises her ability to get into a system without formality or protocol but through her own ability and hard work. The 'world of men' therefore becomes the hiplife industry, specifically the rap aspect of hiplife, which a lot of women fail to venture into but into which she has broken all barriers to emerge as the best. She boasts of being a role model to young girls in the country, one who will lead them to a "win". This win becomes a general accomplishment not only in the hiplife industry but various spheres of life. Eno Barony, therefore, considers herself a mentor for many young girls who seek success in their various fields. The lyrics of the song and her posturing are all elements of liberation in having entered a masculine space and succeeding there. We can also see this as resistance as she refuses to fit into the mould; instead, she dismantles hegemonies by stressing that God is a woman.

The importance of mothers in women's hiplife music

There are references to African marriage practices in some of the songs by women hiplife artistes; for instance, in a song by Ghanaian artist MzVee, born Vera Hamenoo-Kpeda on 23 June 1992. MzVee studied Business Administration at Ghana Telecom University and won awards like Best Female Vocalist and Best New Artiste at the Ghana Music Awards. She also received nominations for Black Entertainment Television Awards with her Nigerian counterpart, Yemi Alade. The song is an invitation to perform marriage rites in two African cultural contexts: Ghana and Nigeria.

According to Kofi Agyekum, "The Akans consider marriage as an important aspect of their social life and human behaviour" (Agyekum 1). Similarly, Beatrice Dedaa Okyere-Manu quotes Felicia Annin in saying that, to the Akans, "marriage is an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual, are acknowledged" (Annin qtd in Okyere-Manu 47). This suggests that sexual intercourse is only recognised within the confines of marriage. Virginity was perceived by the traditional Akan as very important and something that must be kept until marriage. In addition, they view marriage and the various rites and rituals attached to it as a very important practice that must be followed in its strictest form (Okyere-Manu 47). With regards to the process of contracting marriage, Okyere-Manu argues that "traditionally only a few people attend the *tirinsa* (knocking) ceremony. As a rule, the bride is not present and often the groom is absent as well. Someone acts on his behalf. This person may be his own father or a close maternal relative" (Okyere-Manu 50).

This, therefore, suggests that, within the indigenous Akan context, any time a man and a woman accept the responsibility to marry, the families or communities of both individuals come together. Both the leaving and the incorporation into a new family are celebrated. This celebration cements the community's social and communitarian character. Similarly, quoting Samson Uchenna Eze (49):

> Marriage is widely regarded as a significant accomplishment and affirmation of gender and social identity of females, as it is revered and controlled by indigenous customary laws and traditions in West Africa. As a result, women work hard to get married amid a hostile environment in which lust and dishonesty impact negatively on women. Women are victimized when men lure them into romantic relationships without the intention to marry them. This is a common social problem for young women in Ghana and Nigeria, hence the theme of the single "Come and See my Moda," a Ghana-Nigeria Afrobeats collaboration.

However, contrary to the general practice in these two countries, especially among the Akans of Ghana and the Yorubas of Nigeria, where the father is the central actor in contracting the marriage, the narrative in the song reverses the organic process of contracting marriages by elevating the role of the mother in the marriage system. Here, the mother is recognised as the one who has the sole right to give her daughter's hand in marriage, a practice that is not typically African:

If you want my body then come see my mummy
I no like your money but I know you want my body
My body my body
Ha le le le body
Come see my mummy
Make it official if you really mean am
Come and follow me all the way to Ghana o
Hurry hurry come carry your baby go
Come and see my moda ah (My moda ah)
You must to see my moda ah (My moda ah)
Come and see my moda ah (My moda ah)
You must to see my moda ah (My moda ah)

Eze (52) opines:

> The song emphasizes the place of the mother in familial decision-making process in Ghana and Nigeria, constructing a positive image that a man who cherishes a woman's body must as well, be ready to meet her family and initiate marriage rites. The chorus section (Come and see my Mother) emphasizes the power and authority accorded to African mothers. Childbearing is a fundamental aspect of African womanhood that empowers women into key decision-making pedestal in the society beginning with their immediate families.

Through such radical reversal, the speaker initiates gendered interrogations of the role of the mother in the marriage system in Africa. She calls for a gender equitable approach, which has the potential of mitigating the effects of customs such as dowries/bride wealth that hitherto commodify women. These contractual dynamics also hold significance for marital stability, especially when the woman is not seen as a beneficiary but a co-contributor to the survival of the marriage.

The speaker re-echoes the importance of recognising the changing role of women in African marriages. Intimations of such new trends in contemporary African marriages are recorded in the succeeding lines:

A woman of quality knows what she wants
If you want to marry me and do what you want
Then hurry hurry, come carry your baby go

Thus, women's visibility in contemporary African marriages is determined by voice and agency. And this is affirmed in the first line: "A woman of quality knows what she wants". The quality of a woman is therefore marked by her ability to partake in defining the rules of engagement concerning relationships: talk back to tradition, redefine gender roles, and assert her economic independence.

Similarly, Ebony Reigns's song "Maame hwɛ" (Mother see/look) is a liberatory song that draws the attention of the world to the idea of domestic violence and the need to seek help when in such situations. According to Philomena Ama Okyeso Yeboah, Confidence Gbolo Sanka, and Lucy Bonku, who cite Adjah and Agbamafle, "domestic violence remains unacceptably high in Ghana and should be treated as one of the major public health problems" (Adjah and Agbamafle qtd in Yeboah, Sanka, and Bonku 17). The speaker reminisces on the advice given to her by her mother and acknowledges its importance to her presently:

I hate you so much right now
"One day, you will know", these are the words of my mother
As I'm getting old, *e be now wey* I remember
So I'm packing all my tools, I'm going back a home
A young girl like me shouldn't be caught with an old-schooled fool
He told me he was a banker, not knowing bank robber
This man is a gangster, Bukom Banku, boxer
Ɔsɔre anɔpa a, bɔdambɔ-bɔdambɔ o (When he wakes up in the morning, he's drinks)
Ɛduru awiah a, shocker ne ganja nko ara o (In the afternoon, he smokes shocker and Ganja)
Now he dey beat me every night and day
Maame, hwɛ (Mother, see)
You used to warn me, but I didn't wanna know
Hwɛ nea akoa no de reyɛ me (See what this guy is doing to me)

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The speaker is a woman reaches out to her mother about the abuse she goes through in her marriage. According to Yeboah, Sanka, and Bonku (23), the line "One day, you will know" makes use of the pronoun "you", which means the mother could be addressing the young woman in particular or any other woman, since the spelling is for both singular and plural forms. According to her, the man is a drunk who drinks alcohol in the morning—"*ɔsɔre anɔpa a, bɔdambɔ-bɔdambɔ*" —and smokes marijuana in the afternoon—"*ɛduru ɛwia a, shocker ne ganja nko ara o*". The continuous repetition of "*Maame hwɛ*" (which directly means Mother, look) is a call and an appeal to her mother to save her. This call to her mother becomes a way of accepting the supremacy of a mother in contemporary Ghana as the solution to problems in African marriages. It is also a way of contributing to national discourse (Osumare) and a way of drawing attention and empowering women to walk away from abusive marriages. To buttress this point of abuse, we quote Yeboah, Sanka, and Bonk, who assert that "Ebony's '*Maame hwɛ*' then is a cry not only against male chauvinism and abuse but more importantly it establishes the cultural role of the mother as a trainer, an advisor, a nurturer and a keeper of life" (Yeboah, Sanka, and Bonku 24).

Conclusion

In this article, we have tried to examine and analyse the ways hiplife, a typical contemporary Ghanaian music genre, has been redefined by women hiplife artistes. In this process of redefining, we have tried to establish three major thematic ideas. One, sex is not treated as a taboo subject in certain hiplife songs by women artistes. We examined two songs that employ the euphemistic use of words combined with phonological repetition. These songs become liberatory in that they seek to unlock the conception and the stereotypical ideology of women being clandestine about their needs and wants with regards to sex. We also analysed songs that showcase women's desire for freedom from oppressive systems and practices that stifle and marginalise their development. Using male-dominated spaces and practices, such as speaking pidgin, rapping, and flaunting their bodies on stage, these artistes boldly proclaim that no doors should be shut against women; that nothing is beyond women's purview. These songs, we established, are songs of resistance in that they attempt to penetrate these masculinised and gender-biased systems in order to hit back at the various perceptions and discourses held about women. Finally, we analysed songs that draw attention to the important role of mothers in society and the need to re-vision maternal influence and importance in modern society. It is a rebuttal to society to redefine societal gender roles. These songs are created not just for entertainment but to engender discussions and societal discourses pertaining to women and their development. We have indicated that hiplife has evolved and is still evolving, and women have taken a key role in the industry to re-vision and redefine it to broaden its scope.

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