



## **An audience experience of production design in three period films in Ghana**

**Daniel Kofi Brako**

Film Artistic Department, National Film & Television Institute  
Accra, Ghana

### **Abstract**

Production design in films define the visual aesthetics in every frame on screen. It explains the visual representations as well as the creation of the physical worlds in films. As observed by the researcher, less attention is given to the production design in some period films shot in Ghana. Therefore, the films lack some form of authenticity and believability in the “look”. Besides, it creates some form of miscommunication among audience. This qualitative phenomenological study addresses this lacuna with three purposively selected period films in Ghana and semi-structured interviews involving twenty-two (22) audience members who were selected using snowball sampling. The paper dwells on formalism and realism theories in filmmaking. Thematic analysis is used to analyze the results. It is observed that props used in some selected period films did not suit the era envisaged. On the other hand, settings used in other period films enabled to define the period. The paper concludes that visual elements placed in every frame in period film genres must enable define the era in the story world.

**Keywords:** audience, production design, period films, phenomenology, Ghana

## **Introduction**

A plethora of research done on production design explains the terminology as the representation of visual elements such as the settings, props, costume and make-up in the narrative world (LoBrutto, 2002; Etedgui, 1999 and Olson, 1993). In addition, McClellan (2020) explains production design as the creative use of art, light and locations to tell a story on screen. Therefore, apart from the choice of visual and artistic elements, lighting comes to play a major role by making the creation of the narrative world more prominent in the audience eyes. This is what Barnwell (2004) term as production design in filmmaking, which brings the film script into reality by selecting specific visual elements. The responsibility of every production designer who is in charge of the production design in films is to interpret the film script into visuals on screen. According to Halligan (2012), production designers creates spaces in film narrative worlds for audiences to believe and when is communicated properly, they accept it as believable. As emphasized by Doyle (2019), film is a visual medium and for this reason, filmmakers must consider what they place in the narrative world when communicating to an audience.

In view of the above, it can be established that production design plays a major role in every film particularly period film genres to give a clue to the audience in terms of the era and locale (Shorter, 2012). As echoed by Tashiro (2004) production design in period films allows an audience to revisit the past or watch past events visually. As observed by the researcher less attention is given to the production design in some period films shot in Ghana. This paper adopted qualitative phenomenological study as a method. The paper purposively selected three period films from Accra and Kumasi, which represents the heart of filmmaking in Ghana. The films are *Heritage Africa* (Ansah, 1989), *Sinking Sands* (Djansi, 2011) and *Ama Ghana* (Gharbin, 2010). In addition, snowball sampling was used to select 22 member audience hailing from Accra and Kumasi. That is 11 male and 11 female audience members who were in the category of literates, semi-literates and illiterates. The

selected audience included eight (8) literates, eight (8) semi-literates and six (6) illiterates. One of the audience members of which was interviewed recommended the researcher's first referral contact, which led to the others. Selected audience members representing the viewers of such films assessed the production design in relation to settings, props, costumes and makeup. Pseudonyms are used to represent audience members in order protect identity and confidentiality. With an interview guide at hand, questions were asked to find out about their views on the production design in selected period films. The interviews were later transcribed and similar themes selected that enabled the analysis. This paper sets as a catalyst of secondary data collected by the author while conducting a research for a doctoral thesis, which considered an analytical study of the production design in three period films in Ghana, in 2018.

### **Theoretical anchor**

The paper rides on two classical film theories known realism and formalism in filmmaking. realism and formalism has been chosen because these two filmmaking tendencies is adopted when one is making a period film. Realism refers to the recording of daily happenings without any interruption of the film camera. This is what Hopkins (2016) explains as the actual recording of daily happenings. Similarly, Kracauer explains cinema realism in his thesis referring to it as photographs, which records real events. It must be noted that this theory despite its underlying limitations, is still relevant in today's filmmaking that enable film scholars to analyze production design in period films.

On the contrary, formalism film theory refers to the technical elements in filmmaking such as the sets, props, costumes, lighting and editing in films. As explained by Bordwell and Thompson (2004) the human brain consciously craves for form when he or she is exposed to any artwork. Therefore, irrespective of the medium, form plays an important role in every artwork. It can be explained as an enhanced type of filmmaking where the filmmaker wants the

audience to see a film at its best form.

Classical realist films achieved this through the utilisation of conventional devices for denoting the passing of time, editing devices and the adoption of a strict etiquette with regards to changing from scene to scene (such as camera close ups.) It is important to note that this classical ideal of film theory did not seek to exactly replicate real life scenes so much as portray an idea of true imagination (Stam, 2000). This presented a kind of realism in film narrative worlds. In the opinion of Hopkins (2016) films usually depict the idea of realism when they do not only rely on the events filmed, but rather the events that tells the story.

Essentially, Bazin thought films should be shot in a way that would make audiences feel as if they were actually there observing the events. In this sense, the most extreme example would be essentially static shots of real-life actions.

In contrast, Siegfried Karacauer introduced a new filmmaking tendency to the world which he dubbed "formalism." Formalist films can be described as highly stylized stories with elaborate sets, costumes and special effects with no interest in imitating reality.

Formalist film theory looks at the technical aspects of film such as shots, editing, lighting, sound. Thus, formalists are concerned about how these elements work (or do not work) to create impact on the viewer. Simply put, formalism focuses heavily on how the style of a production communicates an intended message. Thus, the visual elements in the selected period films. This paper combines two filmmaking theories such as realism and formalism in properly analyzing the production design in selected period films in Ghana.

## **Literature Review**

### **Perceptions of Production Design in Hollywood**

Historically, designing film backgrounds in the early days of Hollywood was in the hands of theatre designers. This comprised of several carpenters, painters and artists who transposed their ideas

from stage design to screen. For this reason, designers concentrated mostly on the backgrounds than the inclusion of three-dimensional props such as furniture set, table, beds and vases. Initially, the creation of three-dimensional space was given less attention in filmmaking. This can be likened to the backgrounds designed for proscenium stages in theatre performance. Sylbert and Townsend (2006) referred to these backgrounds as *backdrops* and *backings* used in theatre and film conglomerate; they usually encompassed backgrounds of painted scenery which supported the visual storytelling. Also, such backgrounds represented large scenery that appeared outside the windows of film sets to simulate cities and towns. Besides the painted backgrounds, designers employed materials like muslin, tarpaulin, cotton fabrics for their three-dimensional paintings, which served as backgrounds that were hung in the open air for performance. This innovative idea was introduced by Thomas H. Ince in his productions. By the late 1920s, Hollywood had established its structures in filmmaking which included a film art department. During this time most films were generally shot in the studio whereby the art department played a major role on creating uncountable sets in the studio and on sound stages (Sannah, 2004). Therefore, the work of an art director or production designer, who supervises the overall duties of the *film art department*, emerged as a discipline in the filmmaking process. As mentioned by Olson (1999) the title “art director” was used in referring to designers until the late 1930s when Cameron Menzies garnered the title “production designer” considering his detailed work on *Gone with the Wind* (Flemming, 1939), as a designer. According to Rizzo (2005), the *film art department* is normally headed by the production designer, with the art director playing the role as supervisor rallying all information to other design personnel working under him/her. He further mentioned that the department is the biggest on every professional filmmaking set. However, on low budget films, the art director does most of the jobs and remunerated as one person taking in charge of all.

Although, the silent era required less efforts in creating

backgrounds, the situation changed with the introduction of sound. Whereas the silent era presented narratives with no dialogue, the introduction of sound came with dialogue affecting backgrounds. Lots of camera movements were involved in creating a scene that required three-dimensional sets than two-dimensional. Also, filmmakers wanted a three-dimensional feel and more believable settings. The period of the 1930s represented the peak in filmmaking history known as *Classical Hollywood Era or Golden Age*. This evolution highlighted pioneering designers who emerged and made a lot of impact in the production design business. This involved the likes of Joseph Urban, Wilfred Buckland, Cedric Gibbons, Ben Carré, Anton Grot and Cameron Menzies. As emphasised by Abrams, et al. (2001), the period also saw the formation of eight film production companies. The major studios that represented five film companies were Warner Brothers, Loew's - Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Fox, Paramount and Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO). Whereas the other three that represented the minor film studios were Columbia, Universal and United Artists (UA). It is noted that the major studios handled production, distribution and exhibition. Meanwhile, the minor film studios only concentrated on production. The following art directors or production designers handled these major five studios: Cedric Gibbons for MGM, Hans Drier for Paramount, Anton Grot for Warner Bros, Richard Day and Lyle Wheeler for Twentieth Century-Fox and Vast Nest Polglase for RKO. The designer's core duty was to supervise sketches, illustrations, models and plans. Various personnel in the film art department handled the actual execution.

According to Rosenthal and Ratzky (1948) as cited by Sannah (2004), art direction or production design during this era was also influenced by various film movements in filmmaking. This is related to the various art movements in the history of art, for instance, Expressionism (represented by distorted shapes and lines) and Cubism (represented by geometrical forms). Later on, Art Deco (represented by angular lines and rich surfaces), Art Nouveau (represented by curves and intricate designs), Modern Art and the

Bahaus styles (represented by simplistic designs) originated. This revealed the introduction of major geometrical shapes in most of the film settings. On the other hand, a lot of styles influenced the Art Deco movement, such as Cubism, Futurism (represented by eclectic designs), Egyptian Art, Fauvism and American Indian Art. Meanwhile, Hollywood designers adapted these styles in creating spaces for the screen due to their unique form of aesthetics. Also, the kind of film movement demanded the kind of style designers used in creating the spatial space (Unique characteristics of German expressionism, 2012).

In line with the art movements that influenced production design of film sets and decoration, Adams (1994), Getlein (2002) and Kleiner (2009) have presented a large body of literature in art history. According to Adams (1994), the Expressionism movement which began in Germany was linked to a group of artists or painters who took delight in expressing their feelings through colours. This is similar to the Fauvism art movement which hailed from France, and, with related characteristics in their paintings, thrived in France until the onset of World War I. On the other hand, Getlein (2002) defines expressionism as a style where an artist's relative feelings dominate his/her detached views. Some of the artists that began this movement were known as Gauguin and Van Gogh. For production design in filmmaking, Expressionism movement can be likened to Ben Carré's work in *The Phantom of the Opera* (Chaney & Julian, 1925). Fischer (2015) confirmed that the shadowy mood in the film reflects the inner feelings of Ben Carré, as the production designer. However, Kleiner (2009), indicated that Art Nouveau refers to one of the architectural and design movements developed in Paris, France. It must be noted that Art Nouveau that is also known as New Art took its name from a shop in Paris called L'Art Nouveau. Artists of this movement believed in creating their works based on natural forms. Therefore, some of the architecture, painting, sculpture and interior decoration were characterized by twinning plants. Other forms of their designs took curvilinear features. Again, Fischer (2015) mentioned a typical example of Art



Nouveau designs in *The Thief of Bagdad* (Korda, A., Powell, M. et al., 1924), which Cameron Menzies played the role as a production designer. Most of the scenes in the film had reflected the features of this movement. For instance, the streets in the city of Bagdad, the stairways, vases and especially the palace. Owing to its linkage to feminist style, the queens' quarters in the film had curved shapes for the bedroom with its rolled form of staircase.

Furthermore, the Art Deco known with its origin from European architecture had no ornamented forms. With influence from the Bauhaus art forms, it required no decoration. Most of the materials used for this kind of architecture were machine made or hand-made. Soler (2014) identified that the wide spread of the art deco movement across the world especially in America exhibited in Hollywood films in the 1920s and 1930s. Its extensive design details were found in the sets involving architectural elements, bizarre stage designs, and stylish costumes and accessories.

On other hand, the Cubism movement, rose as radical move by artist on how they used space. Renowned works that can be associated with this movement are by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1911) is noted for its geometric nude figures. This was as a result of the inspiration he had from some African sculptures (Adams, 1994). This reflected on the geometric characteristics found in most cubist paintings.

Again, Kleiner (2009) mentioned impressionism as one of the art movements that arose around the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in France. It also marked the movement during the industrial revolution. To the impressionist painter, art works had to imitate the temporary moments of life in France. At the same time, it should not be so accurate, as compared to the realist ideology who aimed at producing reality. Among several artists, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro and Pierre-August-Renoir were front runners of this movement. Monet's outdoor paintings revealed detailed sketches placing emphasis on colour and light. On the other hand, Pissarro painted most works from photographs of everyday life in France. He also dwelt his work on shades and tints of colours. However,



Renoir was rather interested in dinning scenes, opera, ballet and other urban scenes.

The modernism movement exposed a lot of technological evolutions which influenced the arts and due to that, artists changed their mode of expression. The painters attempted in revealing scenes of their era. On the other hand, Dadaism emanated as a protest movement against art works, politics and businesses. Most of their works depicted absurdity and provocation. Marcel Duchamp represents one renowned artist of this movement. Duchamp's works were originally produced by other artists whom he selected. Also, Surrealism which came from Dadaism dealt more with the intuitive mind and dreams. A glimpse at their works gave irritating and depressing feelings experienced by the viewer (Getlein, 2002). It is noted that paintings usually serve as a source for production designers to make reference to creating their colour palettes and set designs. It may also go beyond the selection of props, costumes and serve as a lighting design source for the cinematographer. To date, paintings done by Caravaggio, Goya, Gauguin and other great artist have been used as reference points to define the visual representation in some films.

### **Thoughts on the Origin of Period Films**

The history of period films commences from the days of *silent era* in filmmaking, the era when film directors made their films without dialogue except with sound from a piano or music playing in the background as the story unfolds. Period films evolved out of the early epic films produced during the beginning of filmmaking. The early films made to capture magnificent power of cinema in recreating the past were epic films produced between 1910 and 1914. For instance, *Quo Vadis* (Leroy & Mann, 1951), *Cabria* (Pastrone, 1914) and *Spartacus* (Kubrick, 1960). The above mentioned films had recreations of ancient spectacle and extravagant settings. Henceforth, the filmmaker, D. W. Griffith was influenced by these films to produce his own epics. This marked the beginning of making several genre of historical films in the United States of

America. On the other hand, Heisner (1990), mentioned Griffith as one of the directors who introduced the building of elaborate sets and used varied costumes in his epic films. Therefore, his epic film, *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915), marks one of the famous films made apart from *Intolerance* (Griffith, 1916). It is noted that the *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915), tagged as a Civil war epic was produced with detail attention to period accuracy in the scenery. This has progressed with a chain of period films produced representing the past in visuals through the effort of authentic settings, props, costume and make-up across the globe.

Up to that time, most film scholars refer to period films as historical films. However, others argue that period film is a sub-genre of historical films. Meanwhile, upon a critical look at these films, one could attest to the former claim, because such films are based on historical authenticity, which reflects in the background, and present some form of visual grandeur. Therefore, Cook (1996) opined that 'historical film' is a generic term used to represent period films. Cook emphasises that every period film presents the past in the scenery even though it is based on romance, adventure, thriller or comedy in the narrative. Vidal (2012), supports Cook's submission and expresses the view that period films present past events through the power of *mise en scene*. The term *mise en scene* in Vidal's discourse represents the background of a film that enhances the story being told. *Mise en scene* represents everything placed in a film such as the sets, props, costume, make-up, actors, lighting and the staging. Similarly, Corrigan and White (2009) explained *mise en scene* as a French term which refers to the elements placed in a scene before an actual filming begins. To Corrigan and White, one significant aspect of *mise en scene* is the definition of an actual location in the material world such as physical settings and objects that surrounds us. They mentioned settings, props, costume and make-up as key elements of *mise en scene*. For instance, in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), Griffith paid more attention in creating sets, selected props and costumes which presented a historical accuracy of the worst moments in American history. This confirms

that Griffith had a clear spectacle about the true historical place. Vidal's idea is not supported by Burgoyne (2008), as he classifies the major America historical films as a main genre with its sub-genres such as War films, Biographical films, Epic films, Topical and Meta-historical films in film studies. Therefore, the War film is represented by powerful films like *Schindler's List* (Spielberg, 1993) which is as similar as Biographical film, *Gladiator* (Scott, 2000), and *Titanic* (1997) can be linked to Epic and Topical films. Also, films such as *JFK* (Stone, 1991) and *Flags of our Fathers* (Eastwood, 2006) can be seen as Metahistorical films. Among the sub-genres listed under historical films, he does not mention period films which also documents the past in history. He verifies that these five sub-genres form a list of films linked to the films that deal with historical past. Burgoyne (2008) is of the view that historical film presents history as the main content of the narrative as compared to costume or period drama that uses period scenic backdrops or some nostalgic settings to tell a story. Grindon (1994), also mentioned that several scholars used the terminology *historical films* to represent films that documented events as compared to costume films which were based on narratives using recreations over historical subjects. Meanwhile, a common feature of all the above films is that they are based on historical representations in their visuals, so one can state emphatically that, filmmakers cannot focus only on the events or contents of such films. In the same vein, the visual spectacle cannot be disregarded, as they also serve as a catalyst to move the story forward. Custen (1992), gives comprehensive thoughts on these arguments declaring that in the spare of written materials, biographical pictures/film may provide an audience with an information they viewed as truth. For instance, a viewer restricted to the writings on the period of military regime in Ghana, may have a different perception until he or she sees the film version of it. Gustavsen (2013), explained further that the easiest way to understand a period is to identify and analyse the images reflected in terms of style, costumes and dialogue within a group or society. The style which represents the overall *look* of every film reveals

vital information that can be related to a particular period.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Synopsis of *Heritage Africa, Ama Ghana and Sinking Sands***

#### ***Heritage Africa***

##### ***Synopsis***

Kwesi Atta Bosomefi (played by Kofi Bucknor), a Ghanaian native, after completion of his studies in Britain rename himself as Quincy Arthur Bosomfield as he attains a position of District Commioner in the Gold Coast. He opts for Briton lifestyle and shuns his own culture and tradition in executing his duties. In his service as a Commissioner, the colonial masters influence Bosomfield, which affects himself, family and the Ghanaian indigenes. He places impediments on the way of many petitions presented to him by some agitated Ghanaian workers who demands response for better living conditions from the colonial officials. Several attempts made to channel the petition through Bosomfield to the British Governor proves unsuccessful. The disturbed workers strike and march to the Governor with another petition that ends in casualties from gunshots fired by Police security officials at post. Bosomfield in betrayal, handles a casket (heirloom) presented to him by Akua Atta Bokuma (played by Alexandra Duah), his mother, which signifies his family lineage to the colonial officials. To show a sign of remorse, Bosomfield makes amendment and return to his people and cultural values, but gives up his life in the process.

#### ***Ama Ghana***

##### ***Synopsis***

Kakaaku (played by Alex Kofi Adu) and his wife Araba (played by Rose Mensah) desire for a wealthy suitor for their daughter, Ewura Ama (played by Vivian Jill). Subsequently, Kakaaku and Araba lures and extract money from interested suitors who seek for Ewura Ama's hand in marriage. After turning down several suitors considered unqualified, they finally settle on a well-to-do man, Ato Kwamena (played by Clement Bonney), for their

daughter. To begin with, Ewura Ama protests because she has no affection for Ato Kwamena, but finally accepts the offer out of desperation. Despite Ato Kwamena's wealth, his impotency and infertility wrecks the marriage. Ewura Ama, with the decision to satisfy her emotions leads a promiscuous life under the influence of her cronies. In solution, Ato Kwamena persists until he finds a solution to his impotency upon travelling abroad to seek for a medical attention. Ato Kwamena returns from abroad potent and goes to look for Ewura Ama. The two couples reconcile and lives together happily in a reunion.

### *Sinking Sands*

#### *Synopsis*

Pabi (played by Ama K. Abebrese), a teacher, meets Jimah (played by Jimmy Jean-Louis), a bank officer, and falls in love. The two lovebirds marry later on and lives happily. The unfortunate happens when Pabi unintentionally pours hot cooking oil on Jimah's face at the kitchen during cooking, which leaves a huge scar that mutilates his face. As a result, Jimah is demoted from his position as a bank teller to a lower rank of shredding official documents and sorting out mails. The decision is made by Mr. Osei (played by Jonny Akpakli), Jimah's manager to prevent him from scaring away customers. To take good care of Jimah, Pabi ignores an opportunity to be selected for a teaching fellowship programme during an interview that gets her upgraded to the position of a principal. However, Jimah is disturbed psychologically and emotionally finding himself in that state. The situation becomes agonizing considering the stigma surrounded him due to the scar. In retaliation, Jimah physically abuses Pabi that results in several bruises on her body. The abuse worsens as Pabi proclaims her pregnancy with Jimah. Pabi becomes exhausted with the maltreatment and gives up on the marriage with the unborn child.

#### *Aesthetics and authenticity*

Owing to the response on the settings in selected period films, an

interesting pattern occurred during the interviews. Osae-Koranteng (literate, 36) was more concerned with the aesthetic appeal in the choice of settings for *Ama Ghana* and *Sinking Sands*. This is what Osae Koranteng had to say:

*"Hmmm.... Pabi's mother's room in Sinking Sands reminds me of my grandmother's room in the village".*

However, Anning (literate, 60), Seddoh (literate, 50), Ampofo (literate, 37), Naa Ayele (literate, 49), Amoah (literate, 58), Baah (literate, 25) and Asare (literate, 28) preferred the settings in *Heritage Africa* due to the added realism it gave to the film. That is the film's authenticity and believability. In case of Yao (semi-literate, 42), Sarpong (semi-literate, 28), Baokye (semi-literate, 60), Kwarteng (semi-literate, 50), Boye (semi-literate, 45), Botwe (semi-literate, 36) Azumah (semi-literate, 45) and Ampofo (illiterate, 40), Osei (illiterate, 43), Tam (illiterate, 32), Opong (illiterate, 60), Mensah (illiterate, 40) and Nti (illiterate, 20) desired the settings in all three period films because they could familiarize themselves with them. This resulted from what they have experienced in real life or watched on television in relation to the elements. On the other hand, responses from interviewees on settings in the films which depicted our culture were quite striking. These are the responses proffered by some semi-literate and illiterate interviewees:

Joseph Yao (semi-literate, 42):

*"The village setting in Heritage Africa reminds me of life in the village. For instance, the scene in which some natives of the village are in cue to patronize a public toilet. In Sinking Sands, the bore hole-pipe scene where people were fetching water for household chores and the look of Kakaaku's residence in Ama Ghana".*

Sandra Sarpong (semi-literate, 28):

*"Generally, settings in the three period films presents cultural aspects in Ghanaian societies. In Sinking Sands, the cemetery where the burial of Pabi's mother took place presents us with a view of Ghanaian cemeteries. In Heritage Africa, the scene where Bosomfield's body is laid in state and gathered by family members in mourning depicts an aspect of our culture.*

*Also, the village spectacle in Ama Ghana reveals some Ghanaian homes as part of our culture”.*

Josephine Ampofo (illiterate, 40):

*“The settings in the three period films inform us about some aspects of the Ghanaian culture in terms of the kind of architecture available during 1940s, 50s, 60s and 90s”.*

Frank Osei (illiterate, 43):

*“The setting in Heritage Africa where natives witnessed the fetish dance had a mud house building in the background. I got fascinated about the mud house which reminds me of an old style of building in Ghana”.*

Mabel Tam (illiterate, 32):

*“In my opinion, settings in all the three period films portrayed our culture. This would enable the young children who are studying the history of Ghana in our primary schools identify with certain building materials used in the past visually”*

Rose Oppong (illiterate, 60):

*“It’s been a while since I watched these films but I still remember some specific settings in them. They reminded us of Ghanaian style of building from 50s to the 90s. The architecture, style and look of buildings in the period films presented some kind of reminiscence of the past”.*

Isaac Mensah (illiterate, 40):

*“The settings in the period films assist and present us with culture of building in Ghana. Any foreigner who watched such films would identify with certain materials used for buildings in Ghana”.*

Kofi Nti (illiterate, 20):

*“Nowadays, you watch Ghanaian films and they are dominated with luxurious building styles and expensive furnishings which does not reflect our culture nor add to the narrative. However, settings in Heritage Africa, Ama Ghana and Sinking Sands attempted to reveal elements of our culture”.*

Despite their preferences for the settings in different films they agreed on *Heritage Africa* and *Sinking Sands* as films that depicted our culture in terms of settings. Meanwhile, the semi-



literate and illiterate preferred settings in all three period films. It is noted that the selected audience were able to decipher between the beautiful scenery and culturally accepted scenery in all films. Their aesthetic views were based on how the individuals considered what was beautiful in their own judgements. The authentic *look* in the films also dwelt on the amount of research conducted.

### ***Culture, identity and nationality***

All literate respondents identified certain vintage props used in *Heritage Africa* and *Sinking Sands* because they had experienced them in real life. Props like flags have been used to define people's identity in most foreign films. With *Heritage Africa* and *Sinking Sands* filmmakers were able to emulate similar including a Ghanaian and British flag. From the responses it was obvious that the entire filmmakers were well informed about how to portray an identity through the use of props in a subtle manner. Meanwhile, some literate respondents had issues with the use of a Hyundai saloon car in *Ama Ghana* which did not fit the era. Also, they cited another use of a walking stick by Kakaaku in *Ama Ghana*, which was not culturally accepted in Ghana. For semi-literate and illiterate, they were okay with the props in all three films which defined our culture, identity and nationality.

Daniel Anning (literate, 60):

*"Some of the vintage cars used in Heritage Africa are so real I was alive when the colonial officials brought into the country. However, the Hyundai car used in Ama Ghana does not fit the period envisaged because it is more modern than the year assumed".*

Gloria Seddoh (literate, 50):

*"In Sinking Sands we see the use of a national flag depicting a sign of patriotism as viewed in some American films".*

Prince Botwe (semi-literate, 36):

*"I just admire the way props were used in the films to tell the stories in*

*our local setting”.*

Ernest Azumah (semi-literate, 45):

*“These are the films that can project Ghana on the global map. All props really fit the periods envisaged”.*

Anita Ampofo (illiterate, 40):

*“The walking stick in Ama Ghana used by Kakaaku to deter unqualified suitors is just amazing”.*

Frank Osei (illiterate, 43):

*“The frying pan used by Pabi on Jima was well enacted”.*

### **Geography and locality**

All respondents who shared their views on the costumes adorned on characters in all three period films expressed their desire for them. As audience, it allowed them to relate to the geographical location of the film as Ghana. These are the following views expressed by some literate, semi-literate and illiterate interviewees:

Anita Osae-Koranteng (literate, 36):

*“Hmm, am familiar with the kaba and slit as traditional costumes worn by Ghanaian women as part of our culture, which are seen in Heritage Africa and Sinking Sands”.*

Daniel Anning (literate, 60):

*“Actually the costumes in Heritage Africa and Sinking Sands present visuals on the history of early Ghanaian way of dressing. I will recommend the films to every Ghanaian who wants to know a bit about Ghanaian costumes”.*

Sandra Sarpong (semi-literate, 28):

*“I have seen these style of clothes worn by my parents in our family album. It presents some information about the history of clothing in Ghana”.*

Rose Oppong (illiterate, 60):

*“I personally have pictures of myself dressed like how some female actors are dressed in Ama Ghana, which depicts an olden style of dressing”.*

Frank Osei (illiterate, 43):

*“Anytime I visit my father in the village, I find platform shoes and bell bottom trousers in his closet as seen in Ama Ghana”.*

We can infer that the production designers’ visualisation and supervision of choice of costumes communicated to the audience

expressively. It informed them about the period and the settings of all narratives. The various settings with their conforming costumes presented in all the period films enabled the viewer to follow the narrative throughout. As affirmed by Bordwell and Thompson (2008), costumes play a vital role with motivating factors in every narrative.

### *Character enhancement*

According to respondents interviewed, the make-up for characters in all the period films were able to enhance their appearance. Also, the varied hairstyles done on characters added to determine the period that was easily identified by the audience. Considering the responses from the audience, we can infer that the filmmakers attempt in portraying an African look on characters' face worked perfectly. Application of make-up on characters in films were used to enhance their look or transform their appearance to achieve an effect (Boggs and Petrie, 2004). The use of make-up in all the three period films helped to finalize the idea of realism and formalism. For example:

Pascal Amoah (literate, 58):

*"In all the three period films I watched I noticed that they depicted the 50s, 60s and 90s costumes, make-up and hairstyle, For me, it was quite informing and educative, from natural to artificial".*

Kofi Nti (Illiterate, 20):

*"... Period films are just about visuals...costumes used by Bosomfield depicted a kind of trajectory showed his growth in character from beginning to the end".*

Nana Yaa Kwarteng (Semi-literate, 50)

*"Under normal circumstance hairstyles worn by characters in period films are so to depict historically hairstyles, but, Ama Ghana film goes beyond that by depicting the Afro hairstyle as a means of freedom after Ghana independence in the 60s".*

Generally, it is observed that some audience respondents admired authentic settings in *Heritage Africa* and *Sinking Sands*. Others preferred the aesthetic visual appeal presented in all the three period films. The use of certain props was commended by some audience respondents due to their reflections on culture and nationality. That is the introduction of the British flag in *Heritage Africa* and the Ghana flag in *Sinking Sands*. According to all audience participants, costumes reflected on our culture and way of dressing. Also, the audience respondents deliberated on the use of make-up and hairstyles to enhance characters' appearance in *Heritage Africa*, *Sinking Sands* and *Ama Ghana*.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have discussed the experiences of an audience and how they viewed the settings, props, costume and make-up in selected Ghanaian period films. It is evident that some audience respondents were able to identify believable settings in *Heritage Africa* and *Sinking Sands*. Other respondents preferred the beautiful settings in *Heritage Africa*, *Sinking Sands* and *Ama Ghana*. Again, it is noted that some audience members observed the use of props to portray our nationality and culture. Others considered costume, makeup and hairstyle used to depict the era and enhance characterization. Generally, respondents were able to identify physical and constructed sets in the three period films. In addition, all audience respondents identified realistic and fabricated props. In terms of costumes, original and the ones designed and constructed adorned by characters were observed. Natural and stylized hairstyles and basic and effects makeup were notified. It is clear that realism and formalism theories cannot be separated since the two tendencies combine to tell a believable story on screen.

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