

The Iconography of Pop Culture in Ghana: Black Sherif's Music in Perspective

Felicia Annin¹ and Cecilia Addei²

University of Environment and Sustainable Development, GHANA¹
University of Mines and Technology, GHANA²

Article Info:

Received: 23 October 2023

Revised: 21 February 2024

Accepted: 28 March 2024

Published Online: 20 June 2024

Keywords:

Black Sherif,
Pop Culture,
Iconography,
Ghanaian Music,
Ghetto,
Marginalization.

Corresponding Author:

Felicia Annin

University of Environment and
Sustainable Development, GHANA
Email: fannin@uesd.edu.gh

ABSTRACT

Ghanaian tradition, like other African traditions, revolves around cultural values and beliefs. These cultural values and beliefs vary as a result of the different cultural contexts in Ghana. One of the most popular traditions in Ghana is the use of songs as a form of entertainment and a mouthpiece for satirizing society's ills. Mohammed Ismail Sherif Kwaku Frimpong, popularly known as Black Sherif, is a musician who employs the oral genre of Ghanaian music to unveil some of the pertinent issues in Ghana. This study uses the lyrics of the selected songs as data, which are transcribed and textually analyzed to situate Black Sherif's music as a pathway through which the young people divulge critical issues confronting them and the vulnerable in the country. The study explores how the artiste presents entertaining yet thought-provoking songs as a manner of expression and foregrounds the culture of Ghana through the use of diction, imagery, and symbolism. It argues that the young people play constitutive roles in nation-building by promoting the Ghanaian culture through the songs they write, so society should grant them an audience and heed what they say. The findings reveal that the economic situation of the country has rendered young people jobless and frustrated and that the ghetto lifestyle has emerged as a popular culture in Ghana.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.



INTRODUCTION

Oral literature is perceived as the best repository of African cultural norms and values. The marginalization of oral literature as an academic discipline in Africa must be remedied because every knowledge-led development strategy of any nation must have a solid folklore core of humanistic understanding and humane values (Sone, 2018). In Ghana, oral art forms such as stories, plays, poems, songs, and other creative works help preserve Ghanaian cultural heritage. Tim Delaney (2015) describes popular culture as a recognized vernacular or people's culture that predominates in a society at a point in time. For Delaney, popular culture is "determined by the interactions between people in their everyday activities: styles of dress, the use of slang, greeting rituals, and the foods that people eat are all examples of popular culture" (Delaney, 2015, p.1). The elements of culture contribute to its formation. These elements include beliefs, values, norms, customs, traditions, arts, and social practices. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2020), these elements are "building blocks of culture" and shape an individual's behaviors and perceptions (p.2). This work argues that popular culture in Ghana manifests in diverse ways through music written and performed by the youth. In Ghana, most youth find their

expression in the songs popularly called hiplife music. In his interview on Luv FM on the topic "The Genesis of Hiplife Music in Ghana" on 18th March 2022, Peter Arthur claims that hiplife has evolved and is a combination of rap/singing and speech. "Hiplife is pop music and pop music is environmental music. It emerges and negotiates with the environment" (Luv FM 99.5, 2022). Therefore, hiplife artists are poets who depend on words rapped on computer-produced beats.

Black Sherif has managed to worm his way into the hearts of many Ghanaians with his style of music. In an interview on the Atuu Programme on 11th June 2022, the host, Abeiku Santana, describes Sherif as the "fastest rising artiste in Ghana" and "Africa's most wanted hottest artiste" (UTV Ghana Online, 2022). Sherif expresses that his craft is free because it is a blend of highlife and hip-hop music. He asserts that blending the highlife and hip-pop genres is intentional to create a steady sense of his genre. He describes his songs as "melodious rap" and "trapping." Additionally, Sherif posits that he likes "singing the genre of trapping" because he wants to make the songs "free more than himself." In his view, Sherif reaches out to his fan base, who represents the young people on the street.

Black Sherif, also known as "Blacko," hails from Konongo-Zongo in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. He was born on 9th January 2002. His biological parents left him at age 10 in the care of his auntie and other extended family members. He attended his primary education at an Islamic School in Konongo-Zongo and completed his secondary education at Kumasi Academy Senior High School in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. He is currently studying for his bachelor's degree in Psychology at the University of Ghana. His works include: "First Sermon", "Second Sermon", "Cry for Me", "Samir Kinidi", "Money", "Money Remix" ft AMG Armani & Tulenkey, "Destiny", "Ade Akye", and "Ankonam" among others.

Black Sherif released "First Sermon" in May 2021 and his next album titled "Second Sermon" in July 2021, just two months after the "First Sermon" album was released and won several awards in the same year, 2021, during the Ghana Music Award. These awards included Hip Hop Artiste of the Year, Hiplife Song of the Year, and New Artiste of the Year. He also had, to his credit, four awards from 3 Music. Among his significant achievements was the Best Artiste of the Year 2023, Vodafone Ghana Music Awards (VGMA), with his song titled "Kwaku the Traveler" winning the Most Popular Song of the Year and his "Konongo Zongo" winning the Video of the Year. Recently, Black Sherif received the BET Hip Hop Award for Best International Flow for 2023.

Critics of hiplife have written insightful information on the genre, including its evolution and the lifestyle of hiplife artists. John Collins defines hiplife as a "Ghanaian popular music form that relies on both fusion Western and African musical elements and the deployment of languages and codes" (2006, p.1). Similarly, Bonsu and Adjepong (2019) trace the evolution of the hiplife music genre and argue that the elements of hiplife have been indigenised. Amos and Mensah (2015) explore the lifestyles of hiplife musicians and their influences on the Ghanaian youth. Dzitrie and Agbemava (2022) examine imaginative rap lyricism through "Kasahare" (rap) and argue that the role of "Kasahare" in the preservation of culture needs further study. Nikoi's (2020) paper on hiplife music examines Sarkodie's construction of a successful entrepreneurial branded self as an index of a "good life". Despite the numerous insightful studies on hiplife, none has explored the literary style of Black Sherif, so this paper seeks to draw attention to the artiste by projecting him and delving into the themes he sings about and the iconography of his lyrics.

This paper hinges on the theory of iconography. The German scholar of the eighteenth century, Juanio Akhim Winkelmann (1717–1768), established the groundwork for a methodical and contemporary approach to the idea of iconography. Subsequently, Warburg (1866-1929), an Austrian art historian, and his pupils created the

notion of contemporary iconography, forgoing the use of formal methods to art in pieces of art that resembled Heinrich Wölfflin's proposal. According to his student Erwin Panofsky (1892–1954), Warburg maintained that art throughout history was connected to religious, philosophical, literary, scientific, political, and social settings in various ways. Panofsky (1972) identified three levels of meaning that apply to all creative images. In the first level, the most tangible effects of an image are discussed without depending on its literary support. These effects are the presence of primitive, natural, and formal elements obtained from the combination of lines, colors, and primary materials in color, texture, material, curtains, and composition. The second stage involves the contractual presence of the work's dominant meanings being formed with the help of literature. In other words, the narrative of the piece of work is examined, and its subject, image, realization moment and place, narration, character names and identification, historical actors, and other details are all explained. Panofsky (1972) named the third stage dynamic for its in-depth analysis of drawings. The third category includes symbols and allegories that convey meaning, with deeper and more expansive interpretations with inherent significance. Analysis of the images, ethnic, socioeconomic, historical, moral, religious, and ultimately philosophical qualities takes place in this framework to create the image's meaning (see Esfandiari, 2021). Adams (1996) defines iconography as how the artist writes the images and what picture the image paints as a story that tells itself. In his paper, "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology," Hans Belting (2005) distinguishes between mental and physical images and posits that "The mediality of images reaches far beyond the visual realm, properly speaking. Language transmits verbal imagery when we turn words into mental images of our own. Words stimulate our imagination, while the imagination transforms them into the images they signify" (Belting, 2005, p.306).

Based on Panofsky's (1972) three stages of iconography, the study will analyze images employed in the selected songs, considering the relationships between objects and components, between the language and the type of composition/ theme, identify characters and historical actors, and the meanings of symbols and allegories used.

The study is guided by three objectives: to investigate how Black Sherif explores the plight of frustrated youth (the marginalized group) in his songs, to unveil how traditional Ghanaian song survives to support its culture strongly and to showcase Sherif's depiction of the ghetto lifestyle. This kind of research is a historical qualitative and content analysis study. Qualitative research is the study that produces descriptive data in the form of written or oral words of people and behavior that can be observed (Moleong, 2002). Black Sherif's songs are used as the data for this study. The lyrics of the songs were downloaded, transcribed, and analyzed. The following songs were purposefully selected: "First Sermon" (Mensah & Sherif, 2021a), "Second Sermon" (Mensah & Sherif, 2021b), "Gold Digga" (Sarpong & Sherif, 2021), and "Kwaku, the Traveller" (Sherif, 2022). These selected songs have received massive attention in Ghana and beyond. While some lyrics are written in English, others switch codes by combining English, Pidgin, and the local language, Twi.

AN OVERVIEW OF SELECTED SONGS

Black Sherif's song "First Sermon" (Mensah & Sherif, 2021a)

In this song, the persona complains about the hardship in his life and requests his debtor to come and pay for the money he owes him. He expresses his frustration at his lack of money due to his debtor's delay in paying him for the music he writes. The persona claims money seems more important to him than fame. His quest for money made him relocate to Accra, and it reveals that he has lived there for several years; however, no family member knows how he manages to survive there. He recounts his daily itinerary: "Mesɔre anɔpa then it's trap" [when I wake up in the morning then it is trap] (line 17); he cannot lie or pretend about his lifestyle. He apportions blame for his predicaments on the circumstances surrounding his life.

The persona justifies his existence in the music scene by claiming that everybody knows he has been “trapping” for a long time and they can confirm his history from “Panin” (in local parlance, a name given to the first twin) symbolizing the old musician or those who are already in the system. He boasts about himself and employs repetition to reveal himself as a well-known person. He informs his listeners that he has entered the music scene “coming like a raging storm”, a simile comparing his coming to a sudden or violent commotion indicating his aggressive nature; therefore, the other musicians should be ready to receive him: “fasten up [their] belt”, for they do not have an idea of where he is coming from though he might be late in entering the music scene: “Ten toes till I’m late” (line 32).

Additionally, the persona prophesies about his coming. It oxymoronically describes himself as “fresh”, representing a new start though “cold”, symbolizing beginning with a slow pace from “the zone”, the music industry. He goes all out: “outside inside out” (line 48), to write his songs and requests the listeners give him a few months. He pledges his loyalty to his music career. The persona ends by repeating the chorus so everybody is aware that he has been in the system for a long time and that his listener can confirm with Panin regarding his history and his name. The song ends by repeating the lines: “Coming like a raging storm/ Fasten up your belt” (lines 80-83) to highlight the imagery of a serious-minded person who has entered the music scene to frighten his predecessors.

Black Sherif’s Song “The Second Sermon” (Mensah & Sherif, 2021b)

The persona begins to narrate his relationship with his friends, “niggas” and the story of the “Chairman” who has encountered a problem “stepped on a block”. The persona and his “niggas”, about twelve in number, have assembled in front of the Chairman’s house. He says that the mother, Auntie Merie, does not have an idea about the kind of lifestyle he leads in Accra, for the mother will feel depressed should she have a hint of his lifestyle. He keeps to himself everything he does with his life, for he claims to be a gangster and is proud of his decision. He pauses to pay tribute to Sister Mariam to rest peacefully and that they will meet one day, and he will recount his story about his escapades after her demise. He claims his sister is in heaven, so she should intercede with God on his behalf, for he engages in bad deeds because of his quest for money. Though the persona does not applaud his lifestyle, he thinks it might be his fate or destiny. The persona refers to himself as “Kwaku Frimpong”, “Killa Man”, and “Killa Blacko” and describes himself as a troublesome person. Ironically, the Akan name “Frimpong” meaning “greatness” does not seem to reflect the present situation of the persona who is a hustler and has accepted his fate as a “Killa”, symbolizing destroyer, probably to destroy the music scene with his songs. Subsequently, he announces the arrival of “Sad Boys” in the house and warns those strangers to leave. He feels that the world is fake, so he refuses to pretend about his lifestyle and invites “Word to Ryda” to come and join them to enjoy the “Marijuana”, sarcastically employing repetition of the chorus to announce his spoilt attitude.

Black Sherif’s Song “Gold Digga” (Sarpong & Sherif, 2021)

The speaker addresses Eno Foowaah and complains she drives him crazy. He explains that Eno Foowaah’s daughter, Akosua, is no longer with him, for she has managed to secure a relationship with an affluent man in Accra. According to the speaker, Eno Foowaah influenced her daughter to go through separation with her lover, for Eno Foowaah complained about his poverty-stricken situation. As a result, Eno Foowaah has lost touch with her daughter Akosua. The persona refers to Eno Foowaah as a “Gold Digga” implying a greedy person, and calls on other people to shame her: “Mommɔ no kay wom wom wom/ Wawɔ ne ba atikɔ wum wum wum”. He uses an apostrophe to address Akosua’s mother to come and witness the improvement of his present situation. He is excited because he has been able to woo a slim lady and brought her to his house. One

early morning, the slim lady wakes up and calls him, but he could not hear. Later, she meets him at the 'penthouse', supposedly in the company of other people, and waves to him. The speaker, again, meets another slim lady with many piercings on her ears. Subsequently, he sends her to a town called Mamfe in the Eastern Region of Ghana, where they continue their enjoyment.

Black Sherif's Song "Kwaku the Traveller" (Sherif, 2022)

This song received a nomination for the World Hip Hop Award 2022. This nomination makes it the second Ghanaian song nominated for this award. The first was Sarkodie's song, which was nominated in 2019. The song "Kwaku the Traveller" presents a persona who calls himself "Kwaku Killa" and perceives himself as honest. He gets opportunities but does not utilize them, and he is astonished at how he lets go of these opportunities. Although he messes up with opportunities that come his way, he has premonitions of his destiny. He desires to make it to the end of the tunnel because he was born for this "shit", symbolizing the journey of music or his music career. The speaker feels no regrets about his actions of messing up and thinks it is a part of human nature to fall because he was young and inexperienced. However, he keeps progressing in his journey and compares using the simile: "more like a rolling stone" because he is unstoppable, for he does not have time to waste. He uses repetition to highlight his optimistic mind of making progress with his journey: "I keep going ..." (line 15).

The persona implores the reader/ listener to remember him in prayers. Also, the listeners should remember there was once a traveler named Kwaku the Hustler who traveled in search of money "guallala". He expresses how he misses his people and promises that he will be back. He proverbially expresses that he sticks to what he sets out to do until he achieves his aim: "When it's on, then it's on". He describes himself as a young man whose desire for money seems so bad to the extent that he admits his insanity is a result of his quest for money. Out of frustration, he smokes only weed and cigarettes. Ironically, despite smoking, he communicates with the Most High God.

In what follows, the study presents an interpretation and analysis of the lyrics of the four selected songs. Generally, Black Sherif employs code-switching, as presented in the lyrics of the songs. He combines English, Pidgin, and Twi languages. The original Akan version is provided, followed by English translations. By using this style, Black Sherif projects the Ghanaian culture by drawing on a wide range of imagery to portray his craft and his identity as a Ghanaian. Appiah (2003) posits that "hiplife's fusing of African and Western musical forms is emblematic of a broader trend in which Ghanaian youth are synthesizing local and global cultural influences to create new forms of expression" (p.106). Traditional Ghanaian music, like hiplife, contributes to Ghana's vibrant culture, and this is because the meaning of the song can be derived from the "world view of those who create, perform, and listen to it" (Annin, 2014, p.41). Like other Ghanaian hiplife rappers, Sherif employs a blend of lyrics, hip-pop and highlife in the creation of his songs to present Ghana to the world.

Sherif also employs complex rhythms, especially compounding and reduplication of words, in all his songs. Usually, Sherif begins his songs with an initial repetition of sounds. Consider the following examples in the songs that begin with rhyming at both internal and end rhymes:

Ayy aaa ai/ Oh aaa ai ai/ Ayyy ai ai/ Ai ("First Sermon", line 1)

ye ye ye, ye, ye, ye, ye/ (Oh oh oh oh) ye ye ye ye, ye ye ye ("Second Sermon", line 1)

Eeeyyy/ Eeyyy aah aah ah/ Eeeyy aah Eeeyy aah/ Eeyy aaah ("Gold Digga", line 1)

Sherif uses the above to get his listeners to pay particular attention to the flow of the complex rhyming lyrics. It is used for rhythmic effects, which usually occur in songs referred to as gibberish by popular Ghanaian

musicians like Ambulley and K.K Kabobo. In what follows, the study will analyze the selected songs in three thematic areas: the frustration of the youth, the family system, and the ghetto lifestyle/culture.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Black Sheriff and Ghanaian Frustrated Youth

The rapper titles his early songs "Sermons" and perceives himself as a preacher, connoting the role of a "prophet." He preaches the woes of the unprivileged people in society to the Ghanaian people and the world.

In the "First Sermon," the persona depicts the imagery of a frustrated youth who is embittered by the difficulties he faces on the streets "cause life on these streets be so crazy" (line 3). The persona exaggerates his frustration by personifying "Life" as a human being whose situation has made him/her "crazy". Through the diction employed, the persona drums home the issue of the street in the country. For him, the street youth symbolizes the unprivileged in society whose voices do not count and whose concerns are not addressed by the privileged class in society. The persona further heightens his frustration with how he is exploited by the privileged in society. He claims there is no recognition from society to the extent that after engaging his services, "they get me high on a daily" (line 4), yet "they" refuse to pay him on time: "Ano know why they delay me" (line 6) under the pretense of making him famous: "For the fame afi wait I'm not crazy" (line 7). Youth homelessness is a significant and growing social problem, even in the UK. However, reliable national statistics are problematic because homelessness is defined differently in England, Wales, and Scotland, and many people, such as those who have couch-surfed or slept in a car (often termed the 'hidden homeless'), do not register in formal statistics (Loosemore et al., 2021).

Reporting on Ghana's Street children on Ghana Broadcasting Corporation News (GBC) Online, Eugenia Serwaa Acheampong (2022) explores the issue of street children as a rising social concern as more and more minors and youth take to the streets daily and struggle to survive. She asserts that these children are unable to assess their rights to education, safety, quality healthcare, and right to a decent standard of living. Black Sheriff chronicles the situation of the persona, which parallels Acheampong's description of street children in the following lines:

Been a couple years in Accra [having been in Accra a couple of years]
 Obi are nnim how adey take survive [no one knows how I survive]
 Mesore anopa then it's trap [when I wake up in the morning, it is trap]
 Men afi no describe all my life [Men, I should not describe my life]
 Ano go lie this life no be new to me [I will not lie this life is not new to me]
 Obra be sending this news to me [Life is sending this news to me]
 Ano dey like how it looks for real [I did not like how it really looks]
 Enti media ha make e fool to me [I will not allow it to make a fool of me] ("First Sermon")

There is a graphic description and representation of the persona's lifestyle. Having lived in Accra for many years, he has to survive through undisclosed means. He is jobless and blames his joblessness on "life" which symbolizes society. Sheriff satirizes the unemployment situation in Ghana, which has compelled most youth to engage in robbery and streetism in order to survive. Sheriff's theme parallels Ama Darko's novel *Faceless* (2003), which explores the plight of street children in Abobloshie, a suburb of Accra. Darko recounts the disturbing realities of the intricate details of street children and slum life in Accra. Both Sheriff and Darko explore the issue of street children to draw their listeners' and readers' attention to help give children the attention they deserve.

In the song, Sherif continues with the brag by using pattern repetitions at both the syntactic and semantic levels to foreground the fact that his competitors should keep listening to his songs: “Keep it locked” {VP+NP+NP/ADJ P}/ “And keep it gangster” {VP+NP+NP}. Again, the persona echoes that because he comes mysteriously, his competitors will tremble at the sound of his trumpet expressed with an onomatopoeic device: “panpanaaa.” On hearing the sound, the opponents should remain in one spot/ balanced: “Check your body”/ “And check your appearance” (lines 58 -60), which can syntactically be expressed as {VP+NP}.

Sherif uses his chorus to boast about his potential and his entry into the music scene, as seen in the lines below:

Coming like a raging storm
 Fasten up your belt
 Coming like a raging storm
 Fasten up your belt (“First Sermon”)

It can be seen that the refrain talks about having the tenacity to take over the music scene. However, the slight variation he plays on the theme suggests his sophistication and amusement at his competitors. The “First Sermon” ends with Sherif boasting about how he thinks many people know about his music brand: “Cause obiara nim se me ye trapping nyε nne” [because everybody knows that I have been trapping for a long time].

In terms of progression, the song “Second Sermon” seems to be a continuation of the song “First Sermon”, for it begins from where the “First Sermon” ends. In an interview, Blacko confirms that the “Second Sermon” was inspired by the “First Sermon” and was released two weeks after the first (UTV Ghana Online, 2022). The persona introduces himself to his audience/listeners and affirms that: “Niggas in the trap mpe [do not like] plenty talking” (line 1), but they prefer action to just talking. We see the reason behind the “niggas” or “Killa” boys’ actions towards the Chairman, who supposedly uses the boys to work for him to enrich himself but ignores them afterward. On hearing the success story of the Chairman, the “Killa” boys converge in front of the Chairman’s house and summon him to meet them. We see that the persona exposes the exploitation meted out to them by the Chairman, an attempt to exploit the unprivileged class.

Black Sheriff and the Ghanaian Culture

Another twist to Sherif’s song is his representation of culture in how the family system is highlighted. In the “Second Sermon”, the persona projects his mother, Aunty Merie, as a loving and caring mother who appears ignorant about his lifestyle in Accra: “Aunty Merie nnim se [does not know that] this be the life a’dey live for here (Accra)” (line 9). He decides not to disclose his lifestyle to his mother for fear of stressing her up: “she go stress’oo” (line 17). In African society, motherhood and mothering surface as important issues. The African woman plays an integral role in Ghanaian society; the society expects a female figure to submit to her husband, manage the home, and bear children. The persona introduces his identity with the culture and tradition of Ghana in his representation of the family system, the recognition of the dead, and belief in life after death as the speaker pauses to pay tribute to his sister:

Silence for a minute. Rest in Peace to Sister Mariam eh (RIP) ...
 Yebɛhyia wo soro hɔ one day [we will meet in heaven one day]
 Then, I will tell you my story
 Sɛ wo gyaa yɛ hɔ no’oo [when left us]
 Mesaa behyɛ Nkran be trappi (Trapping nkoa) [I relocated to Accra for trapping]
 I’m doing so many bad things
 But Sika nti me mind hwee [because of money, I don’t care]
 Me nnim paa wo wɔ heaven nti eya’aa ka bi ma me’oo [I know you are in heaven so intercede for me]
 ‘Cause I really lose my way
 ɛnyɛ sei na yekyerɛ me’oo [this is not how I was brought up] (“Second Sermon”)

In the extract above, the persona gives an impression of his relationship with his sister to the extent that he intends to share the happenings in his life with the deceased. We see that the persona employs an apostrophe to address his sister, which is part of the traditional belief where the living pay homage to our ancestors by communicating with them. It confirms the belief in the traditional life of a Ghanaian in which the ancestral heritage is held in high esteem among the living. The importance of this belief is highlighted in J.H. Nketiah's *Funeral Dirges of the Akan People* (1955), which explains that the reason for funeral celebrations springs from the belief in life after death. Nketiah explains funeral celebrations as an essential part of the Akan culture, highlighting the relevance of recognition accorded to the dead. In the Akan culture, the dead should be given a befitting burial irrespective of the person's lifestyle on earth. The Akan culture believes that, after death, the dead becomes an ancestor who intercedes on behalf of the living. In the same vein, Sherif believes that the sister is in heaven and appeals to her to intercede on his behalf for the bad lifestyle and unhealthy habits. His plea for mercy is a result of the fact that he foresees that his lifestyle will launch him into a problem, hence the chorus:

Na Kwaku Frimpong de asem beba'oo (Asem beba'oo asem beba'aa)
 [Kweku Frimpong will cause/create trouble (Trouble will come)].
 Killa man de asem beba'oo (Asem beba'oo asem beba'aa) ... [Killa man will create trouble]
 Eh, Killa man de asem beba'oo (Asem beba'oo asem beba'aa) ... [Killa man will create trouble]
 Eh, Killa Blacko de asem beba'oo (Asem beba'oo asem beba'aa) ... [Killa Blacko will create trouble]
 ("Second Sermon").

In his song titled "Gold Digga", Blacko presents Eno Foowaah, who influences her daughter, Akosua, to enter into a love relationship with a wealthy man in Accra. The woman advises Akosua to end her relationship with the persona because of his poverty-stricken and impoverished lifestyle. According to the persona, Eno Foowaah's greed results in losing her daughter. Sherif juxtaposes materialistic love versus true romantic love between Akosua and the rich lover and between Akosua and the persona. Sherif satirizes the consequences of materialistic love as separation from family and calls on his listeners to tease and shame Eno Foowaah:

Mommɔ no kay wom wom wom [teasing]
 Eno Foowaah Gold Digga
 Wawɔ ne ba atikɔ wum wum wum [teasing]
 Afei ɔde asem aba [now, he has created a problem] ("Gold Digga")

Again, there is pattern repetition at a phonological level in the rhyming of the sounds "wom wom wom" / "wum wum wum" to ridicule Eno Foowaah for creating a problem. The speaker effaces all the memories of Akosua, his ex-girlfriend, and boasts about his newfound love, a slim lady he meets. He invites Akosua's mother to witness his romantic affair with the new lady. Again, Sherif emphasizes the relevance of cultural values with family involvement in marriage as the center of interest. We see that marriage is contracted between families rather than two people involved. Ghanaian culture, like other African cultures, cherishes the institution of marriage as a family affair and reserves the right to interfere. Jomo Kenyatta's book, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1961), explores the tribal life of the Gikūyū and discusses marriage as a process where both boys and girls are taken through initiation by circumcision to prepare them for marriage. Despite the advantages derived from the marriage process, changes have evolved in recent times.

Black Sheriff and the Ghetto Lifestyle

Black Sherif explores the ghetto culture among the Ghanaian youth that has evolved over the years. Sherif's "First Sermon" basically describes the lifestyle of the street boys as crazy: "Cause life on these streets be so crazy" (line 3). In demonstrating the ghetto lifestyle, Sherif employs lyrics such as: "Roll it tight and I'm

dazing"; "And keep it gangster"; "Nigga's bless fam" ("First Sermon"). The ghetto style resurfaces in the "Second Sermon". He begins with "Niggas in the trap mpe [do not like] plenty talking..." and reiterates his gangster lifestyle. He refers to his gangsters as "sad boys" who have the philosophy of "life being fake"; therefore, they "roll it tight". They engage in smoking "marijuana" and invite others to join them. Moreover, he describes them as "niggas" or "Killa" boys ("Second Sermon"). Again, in the song "Gold Digga", Sherif foregrounds the ghetto culture and creates an imagery of gangsterism in the way the speaker describes how his gang goes about their smoking spree: "nti ye rolli aaa na y'ashishi/ blunt blunt y'ahiti (line 32-33). He creates an impression that his success is a result of the motivation he derives from smoking marijuana.

In "Kwaku the Traveller", the persona projects himself as a successful person who smokes cigarettes and marijuana as the lifestyle of young men. Clearly, in depicting the lifestyle of ghetto people, Sherif highlights the deplorable situation of the youth who represent the minority in society. In this song, Sherif explores the plight of a young man described as a "hustler" who travels in search of money, "guallala". The persona continues his rendition of his optimism by employing a pattern repetition in "I go dey run my race/ I'm gonna keep my pace" (lines 23-24), syntactically represented as [NP+VP+NP] to highlight his desire to make it no matter what happens, for he perceives poverty or failing to embark upon his journey as "pain" which he cannot cope with: "cannot stand this pain" (line 26).

The persona, Kweku Killa, admits that he does not lie about the fact that he is extravagant, for he squanders "[big] stacks, big cash" (line 2), symbolizing huge sums of money within one minute. Though he does not believe "this shit," he cannot help it. He feels that nobody has the right to judge him because man is fallible: "Of course I fucked up". Then he rhetorically prophesizes: "Who never fuck up? Hands in the air, no hands?" which is a biblical allusion referring to the message in the Bible where Jesus admonishes the Pharisees who sought to stone a woman caught in adultery: "Let him who is without sin among you, be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). The persona posits that no one should condemn him just as Jesus did not condemn the woman but advises that she leaves her sinful lifestyle. He blames his attitude on his inexperience in life: "I was young what you expect from me?" (line 9). The persona's setback does not deter him from progressing in life, which he highlights in the chorus:

But I keep going on (oh, oh, oh)
 More like a rolling stone (ooh, oh)
 'Cause I have no stopping time
 Can't nobody stop a man
 ("Kwaku the Traveller").

He compares his determination to succeed to "a rolling stone", which is unstoppable, "no stopping time," and "[c]an't nobody stop a man." Again, we see the persona's attempt to preach that no man determines the destiny of another. There is an attempt to emphasize the persona's determination to make it in life with the pattern repetition of the following lines:

I go dey run my race
 I'm gonna keep my pace
 'Cause I really have no one
 to blame
 When I fall again
 I can't stand this pain
 I can't watch me fail
 So any time you pray
 Remember my name
 ("Kweku the Traveller").

The extract above uses pattern repetition at the phonological level with the end rhymes marked by the rhyming scheme: a-a-b-c-c-d-d-b. The production of the sound at the end of the lines expresses rhythmic effects. The first two lines are both syntactically and semantically parallel in the sense that the structure can be expressed as NP+VP+NP (SV0) in the line, "I go dey run my race/ I'm gonna keep my pace," with a general semantic feature of determination to succeed in life. Again, the persona emphasizes his determination in the repetition of the lines "I can't stand this pain/ I can't watch me fail" in the structural pattern: NP+VP+NP (SVO), which presupposes that the persona seems determined to surmount the challenges to his success. Although the persona bids his listeners (lovers) farewell, he does not expect his loved ones to forget him and promises to return, knowing that they will long for him. In a way, the speaker promotes Ghanaian culture that fosters unity and togetherness.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion, attention has been drawn to the background of Black Sherif, who hails from Konongo-Zongo and presents himself as a street boy, believes in the youth, and seeks to demonstrate the challenges that confront them. We examined the lyrics of the selected songs, which unveil the lifestyles of the youth of Accra who feel marginalized by society. The paper revealed that Sherif uses his songs to present the voice of the voiceless youth. In exploring the iconography of the selected songs, the study brought to bear cultural beliefs of superstition and the concept of religion. This study affirmed the creation of images to demonstrate life after death and the belief in heaven and hell. Hence, the frustrated youth are admonished to lead lives worthy of emulation on earth and the life yet to come. We argued that Sherif uses his songs to promote Ghanaian culture and highlights the importance of cultural values and the need for society to uphold them in high esteem. Through the analysis of the selected songs, the paper highlighted the need for family ties and the desire to accept responsibilities as fundamental tools for the growth of individuals and society as a whole. With this, the feeling of sensitivity is created in the minds of ordinary people (parents and children) to live up to their obligations. There is also a derivation of the ghetto culture, which emerges from the lifestyles of the youth who live together on both the streets and the ghettos.

Evidence from this paper is important in the sense that just as written literature permeates all walks of life, attention should be paid to oral literature, which encompasses hiplife songs. We see that hiplife songs that lie in the heart and center of Ghanaian culture are about to survive 'local identity'. It is, therefore, clear that most hiplife rappers use their songs not only as a mouthpiece for the youth but also to project and develop Ghanaian culture.

REFERENCES

- Acheampong, E. S. (March 8, 2022). Ghana's street children. *Ghana Broadcasting Corporation*. Retrieved from <https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/features/ghanas-street-children/2022/>
- Adams, L. S. (1996). *The methodologies of art: An introduction*. Harper Collins.
- Amos, P. M., & Mensah, J. (2015). The lifestyle of hiplife musicians and its influence on the Ghanaian youth. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 2(8). <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.28.1359>
- Annin, F. (2014). Poetry of Ghanaian hip-life music: Reflections on the thematology of selected hiplife songs. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(1), 41–48. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-19134148>
- Appiah, K. A. (2003). *Cosmopolitanism and culture*. Harvard University Press.
- Belting, H. (2005). Image, medium, body: A new approach to iconology. *Critical Inquiry*, 31(2), 302–319. <https://doi.org/10.1086/430962>
- Bonsu, N. O., & Adjepong, S. K. (2019). Hiplife music in Ghana: Its evolution and Westernisation. *Afro-Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(4), 1–21. <http://www.onlineresearchjournals.com/aajoss/art/337.pdf>

- Collins, J. (2006). *Western African popular music*. University of Rochester Press.
- Darko, A. (2003). *Faceless*. Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Delaney, T. (2015). *Pop culture: An overview*. Philosophy Now.
- Dzittrie, E., & Agbemava, X. M. K. (2022). Kasahare: Demystifying rap lyricism and artistry in Ghana's hiplife music. *Popular Music and Society*, 45(2), 202–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2021.1991173>
- Esfandiari, A. (2021). Comparative application of iconography theory in two paintings of the same name “The Last Supper” by Da Vinci and Giotto. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 9(3), 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.24200/jsshr.vol9iss03pp37-49>
- Hofstede, G., & Hofstede, G. J. (2020). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Sage Publications.
- Kenyatta, J. (1961). *Facing Mount Kenya*. Mercury Books.
- Loosemore, M., Bridgeman, J., Russell, H., & Zaid Alkilani, S. Z. (2021). Preventing youth homelessness through social procurement in construction: A capability empowerment approach. *Sustainability*, 13(6), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063127>
- Luv, F. M. (2022, March 18). *The genesis of hiplife music in Ghana by Dr. Peter Arthur – Former Eng. language & Comm. head -KNUST* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNSxxSi_ekE
- Mensah, A., & Sherif, M. I. (2021a). *First sermon* [Song]. Sentric Music Publishing Ltd.
- Mensah, A., & Sherif, M. I. (2021b). *Second sermon* [Song]. Sentric Music Publishing Ltd.
- Moleong, L. J. (2002). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Rosdakarya.
- Nikoi, N. K. (2020). Hiplife music in Ghana: Postcolonial performances of good life. *International Journal of Communications*, 14, 1951–1969. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/10392>
- Nketiah, J. H. (1955). *Funeral dirges of the Akan people*. University of College of the Gold Coast.
- Panofsky, E. (1972). *Studies in iconology: Humanistic themes in the art of the Renaissance*. Westview Press.
- Sarpong, S., & Sherif, M. I. (2021). *Gold digga* [Song]. Savage Studios.
- Sherif, M. I. (2022). *Kwaku, the traveller* [Song]. Sentric Music Publishing Ltd.
- Sone, E. M. (2018). African oral literature and the humanities: Challenges and prospects. *Humanities*, 7(2), 30. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h7020030>
- The Holy Bible: English standard version. (2007). John. *Print*, 8, 7.
- UTV Ghana Online. (2022, June 11). *Abeiku Santana Interviews Black Sheriff on Atuu* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hSx2OSGtOE>