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A critical discourse analysis of selected animated cartoons of African origin

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ABSTRACT

Animated cartoons provide entertainment for children. In addition, they serve as agents of socialization. The content of animated cartoons is capable of changing, molding and influencing the thoughts and actions of children. Using Thompson's Modes of Ideology, this study provides a critical discourse analysis of the ideologies projected in three selected animated cartoons of African origin and how the projected ideologies are portrayed. Data were gathered through document analysis and examined using textual and thematic analyses. It was discovered that animated cartoons are embedded with certain ideologies or worldviews capable of changing the mindsets of children. Ideologies such as patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and sexualization of women were projected in the animated cartoons. It was also found that the selected animated cartoons project parent-child power imbalance and marriage and childbirth as the ultimate. In addition, the findings revealed the projection of certain ideologies through authorization, affiliation, alienation and entrenchment which are in line with Thompson's Modes: legitimization, unification, fragmentation and reification. This study concludes that animated cartoons contribute to the spreading of certain ideologies.

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1. Introduction

Animated cartoons are one of the most influential tools of popular culture highly valued by children because of the pleasure and entertainment they derive from them. Although some adults enjoy animated cartoons, they have been associated with children since time immemorial. Animated cartoons refer to colorful and humorous short films that feature anthropomorphized animals, superheroes and adventure and are intended to appeal to children (Pryor, 2004; Rankin, 2022, May 03). Children are thus the primary target of animated cartoons.

During childhood, children are open to influences from their environment (Casey et al., 2008) and thus imitate happenings around them either knowingly or unknowingly to form their self-identity. The opportunity for great influence presents itself everywhere at the phase of childhood and this includes influence from media which is regarded as the next leading activity of children aside sleep (Reich, 2018), especially animated cartoons. In effect, animated cartoon serves as a major socialization agent as far as the ways of thinking and acting of children are concerned (Laskar, 2021). VisikoKnox-Johnson (2016) contends that fairy tales, including animated cartoons, have a major impact on the development of children as they influence the values and beliefs of children. The perception of children about the world, their formation of values and their upbringing process are therefore influenced by animated cartoons (Rai et al., 2016) which have both favorable and unfavorable consequences on children.

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Ghilzai et al. (2017) and Ramesh (2021, August 17) revealed that animated cartoons aid brain development, language acquisition, learning skills, team work, creativity, problem solving skills as well as the development of moral values. Notwithstanding the benefits children obtain from animated cartoons, they could be detrimental to children because of the tendency to influence the behavior of children in a negative manner (Acheampong, 2017; Turkmen, 2016). Because of the significant role animated cartoons play in the lives of children, it is worth investigating the ideologies and lessons animated cartoons offer children to inform censorship.

Language has the power to control and shape the attitudes and behaviors of people (Fairclough, 2010; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Typical of all discourses, animated cartoons contain ideological underpinnings and persuasive elements which are used to drive home an intended message (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1996, Wodak, 1996). The language of animated cartoons therefore contains strategies that are capable of appealing to children. Research has shown that animated cartoons can be used to train, educate and cause positive social change as well as negative change (Ghilzai et al., 2017; Turkmen, 2016). According to Rozzaq and Ratnadewi (2016), language can be used to dominate, control and manipulate people. The language of animations has the propensity to result in inequality, discrimination, ideology, domination and hegemony (Kazanoğlu, 2016) which are all central to critical discourse analysis (CDA).

CDA is a method for studying language and according to Rogers (2011) is interested in the negative uses of power which are expressed through discourse that results in manipulation, domination, ideology, oppression, underrepresentation and inequality. Similarly, Catalano and Waugh (2020) postulate that CDA is concerned about discovering the relationship between language, ideology, power and social structure. CDA views language as a social practice and is interested in uncovering hidden ideologies and concealed power relations in discourse (Johnson & McLean, 2020).

As the second largest and second most populous continent in the world, Africa has the youngest population (United Nations Children's Fund, 2023). More so, Africa has a thriving animation industry (Nunis & Treanor, 2020, October 15) which produces animations that depict indigenous African beliefs and culture. Considering the fact that animated cartoons are capable of shaping the thoughts and actions of children, it is important to investigate the values and ideologies animated cartoons of African origin offer children.

According to Silverstein et al (1986), the ideas and themes portrayed in the media mostly form part of social practices in the real life of children because children subliminally accept media portrayals as the reality. Research has shown that although animated cartoons are considered puerile and safe for the consumption of children, they are also embedded with certain ideologies and concepts (Alshurafa et al., 2021; Atabey, 2021; Bobrowska et al., 2019). If animated cartoons promote ideology (Bobrowska et al., 2019; Kazanoğlu, 2016), then they have the tendency to shape the thoughts and behaviors of children.

Although literature on children's animated cartoons abound, studies have mainly focused on violence and the effects on children (Acheampong, 2017; Amoah & Ampong, 2020; Hassan & Daniyal, 2013). Regardless of the growing body of literature on children's animated cartoons, the aspect of CDA research, involving children's animated cartoons of African origin has not yet been explored. Lemish and Johnson (2019) examined children's television programs in the USA and Canada and discovered the existence of gender stereotypes and hegemony in children's media. Similarly, Alshurafa et al. (2021) also analyzed the Saudi YouTube sitcom *'Masameer'* and found out that the sitcom was a medium for the propagation of ideologies. Also, Alsaraireh et al. (2020) explored gender representations in the Disney animation *'Frozen'* using the Gender theory. Furthermore, Raja et al. (2021) investigated the subtle messages used in Disney animated cartoons which they contend results in the exploitation of the cognition of children.

This study analyzes the ideologies projected in children's animated cartoons and how they are portrayed using three selected animated cartoons of African origin namely *'The Secret Princess'*, *'Mark of Uru'* and *'Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters'*. Inasmuch as animated cartoons can influence the development of children positively, they can also influence children negatively by exposing them to inappropriate content. This means, some of the ideologies and concepts portrayed in animated cartoons could be inimical to the psychological, physical, mental and social development of the child.

2. Literature review

Critical discourse analysis is a multidisciplinary method for studying language with the primary concern to gain an understanding of critical social issues (Van Dijk, 2006). CDA studies the relationship between how language contributes to discourse and how it relates to social practice. Early proponents of CDA such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun Van Dijk believe that language has social implications and it is not just a medium of communication that is secluded (Fairclough, 1989). This implies that language and society are interdependent as linguistic expressions reflect social practice; hence, language cannot be separated from society. CDA considers language as a type of social behavior (Fairclough, 1989) and so CDA is interested in how language reflects power, ideology and hegemony in discourse. CDA is not only interested in laying bare the latent ideology, inequality and hegemony embedded in discourse but also in attaining the goal of CDA which is causing positive social change (Catalano & Waugh, 2020; Fairclough, 2010).

Eagleton (1997) describes ideology as 'the general material process of production of ideas, beliefs, and values in social life' (p.28). Ideology can therefore be regarded as part of social life because social life is never devoid of the sharing of ideas, beliefs and values. This echoes the assertion of Ayyildiz (2021) that ideology cannot be separated from social life because ideology is practiced in life through culture. In the light of CDA, Van Dijk (2000) operationally defines ideology as 'the fundamental beliefs of a group and its members' (p.7). Van Dijk (2000) acknowledges that language use and discourse are greatly influenced by ideology which in turn influences the ways in which individuals acquire, learn or transform their worldview.

Studies have demonstrated the existence of racist ideologies and inequalities in children's media, especially, animated cartoons (Lippi-Green, 2012). According to Zornado (2002), people including children 'reproduce dominant culture as a result of the lived relations determined by the ideology imposed on them' (p.4). The views of children are therefore, shaped by the use of text, strategies and the language of animated cartoons (Şenocak & Ayyildiz, 2021). Ayyildiz (2021) describes children's media including animated cartoons as a source of ideologies transmitted through discourses. Animated cartoons, thus, serve as platforms for the spreading of certain ideologies to children.

As far as children's media discourses, particularly animated cartoons are concerned, the highly influential work of Lippi-Green (1997), which set the pace for research in children's animated cartoons, is worth mentioning. Lippi-Green (1997) studied how the use of oral English accents in Disney animated cartoons depicts ethnolinguistic minorities. In an attempt to discover the patterns of stereotyping and the spread of language ideology in children's animated cartoons, Lippi-Green (2012) again analyzed Disney animated cartoons. Findings from the study revealed that Disney Animations use accent to emphasize a character's personality and motivations.

Likewise, Jimenez (2022) explored the representation of women in Disney animated films and the messages they convey to audiences especially, children. Findings indicated that female stereotyping was more inclined between the 1930s and 1950s movies than the later ones. Jimenez (2022) concluded that despite an improvement in the representation of women in the recent Disney movies, gender stereotyping still persists. Götz et al. (2018) sampled the results of analysis of children's television programs in eight countries around the world including the USA, Canada, Cuba, U.K., Israel, Taiwan, Belgium and Germany. Findings showed the continuous widening of the gender gap irrespective of strides made in gender advocacy and campaign against gender inequality.

Baig et al. (2021) examined child rearing and socialization in children's fictional movies and animations using Disney's *'Cinderella'* and *'Tarzan'*. The study revealed that children's fictional movies and animations serve as a major platform for the dissemination of certain ideas about gender construction and concluded that the language of children's fictional movies plays an essential role in how ideology and gender are constructed, hence, should be given critical attention to curtail the phenomenon of gender stereotyping in society. Utami and Harianto (2021) investigated how *'Omar dan Hana'* animated cartoons construct Islamic values. Findings revealed that *'Omar dan Hana'* animated cartoon serves as a vehicle for the transmission of Islamic values and education. Kazanoğlu (2016) investigated episodes of the Turkish cartoon *'Pepee'* and found out that is embedded with educational elements interspersed with Islamic ideologies.

Omari (2019) investigated gender representation in Tanzanian cartoons using the social identity theory and found out that women are stereotyped and depicted as unsuccessful, weak and dependent. Oamen (2021) critically analyzed the ideological underpinnings of gender power in Nigerian newspaper cartoons using the social semiotic approach. Results indicated that cartoonists tactically use various semiotic modes to shape the mind-set and views of the public on issues of gender.

3. Methodology

The study gave scholarly attention to animated cartoons of African origin since the majority of studies (Arnold et al., 2015; Baig et al, 2021; Daniels, 2020; Götz et al., 2018; Lemish & Johnson, 2019; Lippi-Green, 2012; Soares, 2017) have largely focused on Western animations. In this study, we selected three children's animated cartoons of African origin which are representative of broader trends in African media and society. Although there are some animated cartoons of African origin, most of these cartoons are mainly educational series and short episodes which render them unsuitable for a detailed analysis, per the focus of the study. For the purpose of carrying out detailed analysis, full-length animated cartoons of African origin were considered for this study because they offer comprehensive narratives which are suitable for detailed analysis. Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive database of full-length animated cartoons of African origin. However, a thorough check revealed about twelve full-length animated cartoons of African origin, five of which have won international awards and were considered as the animated cartoons of African origin that are representative of current trends in children's animated cartoons. Our search revealed that two of the award winning animated cartoons used anthropomorphized animal characters while three used mainly human characters. The three animated cartoons that used human characters were thus selected for the study because some sources have indicated that human characters are more relatable to audiences. For example, Krcmar et al. (2024) found that children understood better when cartoon characters were humans. The animated cartoons chosen were '*Mark of Uru*', '*The Secret Princess*' and '*Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters*' designated as AC1, AC2 and AC3.

The selected animated cartoons originate from Nigeria, located in West Africa. Nigeria has the largest population and is known for its Afrocentricism and respect for traditional institutions, indigenous customs and values. In addition, the three animated cartoons were selected because of their cultural significance. They were inspired by African history and mythology and portray African beliefs, culture, customs and values which align with prevailing ideologies of African societies. For instance, '*Mark of Uru*', portrays African ideologies, culture and religious beliefs. '*The Secret Princess*', also unveils topics about African culture in a subtle way and gives a reflection of the African ideology, lifestyle and culture (African Glitz, 2018, August 13). '*Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters*' offers lessons on African culture and history.

The selected animated cartoons are all award-winning movies which share similar characteristics in terms of their portrayal of African ideologies, culture, customs and values and the country of origin, Nigeria. '*Mark of Uru*', '*The Secret Princess*' and '*Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters*' were also chosen because they are full-length animated movies which allow for comprehensive examination of text. For the analysis of the data, following CDA approach, textual analysis was conducted to identify the linguistic and the paralinguistic features, visuals and gestures of the characters in the selected animated cartoons to uncover instances of ideology and how they were portrayed. The unit of analysis was a scene. This was followed by the analysis of the social and cultural context in which the text was constructed to identify the ideologies depicted by the social structures of the text. The dominant ideologies that emerged from the data were patriarchy, sexualization of women, hegemonic masculinity, parent-child power imbalance and marriage and childbirth as the ultimate. The scenes, dialogues and visuals were closely examined to uncover the depiction of the ideologies listed above. The instances that depict particular ideologies were identified and categorized. Thematic analysis was used to identify and categorize recurring themes. Patterns or themes that portray the dominant ideologies were identified from the data and coded to generate themes.

4. Theoretical basis of the study

According to Thompson (1990), the meaning of language is not always explicit yet it influences and shapes the way of thinking and acting of individuals. Thompson (1990) prescribes five modes through

which ideology operates and emphasizes that the operation of ideology is not limited to the five. Again, Thompson (1990) accentuates that the modes for the operation of ideology do not always operate independently but different modes may sometimes overlap. The modes include legitimization, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation and reification and they each have associated discursive strategies. Thompson (1990) explicates that the ways in which individuals think are molded and influenced by the meaning of language which is not always explicit because whereas some are emphasized, others are excluded. Like all discourses, animated cartoons cannot be exonerated from Thompson's (1990) assertion because they also serve to promote certain ideologies.

Legitimization is the process whereby dominant relations are established through logic to provide reason for a set of social relations in order to persuade an audience (Thompson, 1990). It is typified by rationalization, universalization and narrativization (Thompson, 1990). Dissimulation involves concealing relations of dominance by representing them in obscure ways. It is typified by euphemization, displacement and trope. Whereas unification entails the construction of a united front or oneness despite individual differences, fragmentation seeks to divide a group of people irrespective of the things they share in common (Thompson, 1990). Unification is typified by standardization and symbolization of unity whereas fragmentation is realized by differentiation and expurgation of the other (Thompson, 1990). Reification refers to the establishment of relations of dominance by presenting past events as permanent and unchangeable (Thompson, 1990). It has four discursive strategies; naturalization, externalization, passivization and nominalization.

5. Results and analysis

5.1. The ideologies projected in the selected animated cartoons

The examination of the data showed that aside providing entertainment, animated cartoons also project certain ideologies. Although the study focused on dominant ideologies such as patriarchy, sexualization of women and hegemonic masculinity, among others that may be viewed as problematic, the selected animated cartoons also highlighted positive social and progressive cultural values such as remorsefulness, inclusivity and team spirit. Dominant ideologies such as patriarchy, sexualization of women, hegemonic masculinity, parent-child power imbalance and marriage and childbirth as the ultimate were embedded in the selected animated cartoons. Table 1 presents a frequency distribution of the dominant ideologies. The study focused on these dominant ideologies because they have the propensity to influence the actions and behavior of viewers, particularly, children and also contribute to their worldview.

5.1.1. Patriarchy

Patriarchy refers to 'any system of male superiority and female inferiority' (Rothman, 2016, p.139). It involves the subordination of females and takes intricate forms grounded in African tradition (Williams, 2019). Oamen (2021) argues that, the male centric nature of the traditional Nigerian society promotes the distinction of gender roles and positions which is apparent in their system of social hierarchy and delineation based on sex. Amonyeze et al. (2023) makes the assertion that Nigerian movies are a demonstration of how creative content and language are used to portray the female gender negatively while projecting masculinity as the dominant gender. According to Williams (2019), gender advocacy has failed to attain the desired results in Africa as a result of the deep-rooted patriarchal ideologies transmitted to

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Ideologies in the Selected Animated Cartoons.

Ideology	AC1	AC2	A3	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Patriarchy	23	6	4	33	39
Sexualization of women	8	14	0	22	26
Hegemonic masculinity	5	6	4	15	18
Parent-child power imbalance	5	3	4	12	14
Marriage and childbirth as the ultimate	3	0	0	3	4
Total	44	29	12	85	100

Source: Authors' Analysis (2023)

children via socialization. The patriarchal ideology of the African society was made manifest in the excerpt;

All he wanted was a boy who could take the throne after him according to the culture of the land (AC1)

Emphasis is placed on the desire for a male heir who would inherit the throne, a manifestation of patriarchal values where male children are prioritized over female children in issues of succession, inheritance and leadership. There is an inclination to safeguard cultural norms and practices which suggest that the heir to the throne must necessarily be a male. 'All he wanted was a boy' places importance on the gender of the needed heir which indicates a situation of gender stereotyping or marginalization of female. There is an indication of power structure where traditional leadership is concentrated in the hands of a male.

The superiority of men over women as consented by women is demonstrated in the excerpt:

Sade: Thank you very much for this great honour. But this is not what I want. All I want, all I have ever wanted is just have a family and friends and just be a normal girl next door. If not for Akin who fought a great battle and won (AC1)

Sade rejects 'the great honor' of being ruler and opts to be a 'normal girl' which aligns with societal norms and expectation—an internalization of patriarchal standards. Sade conceded to male superiority by handing over the throne to Akin (male) because she deemed it unthinkable for a female (Sade) to ascend the throne. She therefore declined from ascending the throne and handed over the crown to Akin whom she thought was more deserving than her. The above excerpt is an encapsulation of how deep-seated gender norms and patriarchal values influence the personal goals, perceptions and desires of women in society.

Furthermore, a society where absolute power and authority resides with men who are involved in decision making was portrayed as exemplified below:

As the village elders held a meeting on One man suggested that ... Another man said ... Another man said they should ... So many men came up with different wicked ideas (AC1).

Consistent with Mudau and Obadire (2017), decision-making was treated as the preserve of men, hence, all suggestions on pertinent issues were recorded as emanating from men. The achievements and exploits of women were also obscured as found by Jain and Bhasin (2022) whereas those of men were celebrated. Irrespective of the role played by women in the acquisition of properties, ownership was bestowed on men. Omari's (2019) assertion that even when women are involved in decision making, their decisions are not clearly stated is therefore incontrovertible.

The extract, 'What are you waiting for? She is just a woman' (AC2) reflects misogyny.

The woman is considered insignificant and inferior because of her gender and this is as a result of ingrained patriarchy, a finding which is consistent with Jain and Bhasin (2022). This finding is again consistent with Götz et al. (2018) who argue that male characters are portrayed as superior whereas female characters are portrayed as subservient in children's media and further affirms Omari's (2019) revelation that cartoons stereotypically depict women as acquiescent and lacking the drive for success while men, are depicted as successful and decisive. This portrayal is based on the premise that women lack the physical ability to perform certain tasks (Aiston, 2023) and is however, not peculiar to African animated cartoons but other African movies. Amoyeze et al. (2023) for instance found out that Nigerian movies portray patriarchal ideologies. More so, the patriarchal ideology is evident in Western animated cartoons (Arnold et al., 2015; Baig et al., 2021; Götz et al., 2018; Jimenez, 2022; Kazanoğlu, 2015) as well. Patriarchy is, however, more prevalent in African media because of the entrenched patriarchal values in African culture and tradition.

5.1.2. Sexualization of women

Sexualization occurs when 'a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy' (APA, 2007, p. 2). According to Coyne et al. (2016), sexualization of the female

gender in children's media affects the self-image and world-views of children in the long term. It also promotes negative body image and low self-esteem among girls and women (Zeven, 2019). From the data, women were portrayed in sexualized forms. The images of women were objectified to portray them in physically attractive forms and this resonates with assertion as cited in Vance et al. (2015) that sexualization involves reducing a woman to her body, body parts, or sexual function.

There was a clear distinction in the portrayal of women and girls. For instance, the little girl in AC2 was presented well covered or clothed to depict a state of innocence and the lack of sexualization. However, women were depicted in clothing which barely covered their body as opposed to the little girl. As a mature woman, *Little Azuka* is depicted in revealing clothing which emphasizes her curves and sexuality, contrastive to her image as a little girl where she appeared in a long cover cloth. In line with Vance et al.'s (2015) postulation that objectification involves portraying women in evocative and seductive manner although clothed; women were objectified and depicted with exaggerated sexual features despite being clothed.

The extract *'I can now see why he wants you. You are beautiful! You are mine now'* (AC1) can be described as contributing to the sexualization and objectification of women. The above extract reduces women to objects of desire based on their physical appearance. This revelation affirms Jain and Bhasin (2022) that women in movies are objectified and expected to look their best. This reinforces the notion that the value of a woman lies in her attractiveness to men. Oamen's (2021) assertion that the media depict women in ways that stereotype them as sex objects is also substantiated by this finding. The sexualization of women is not unique to African media as Western media also portray women in sexualized forms.

5.1.3. Hegemonic masculinity

The ideology of hegemonic masculinity was prevalent in the selected animated cartoons, a finding which affirms Harriger et al.'s (2021) finding that masculinity themes are predominant in children's animated movies. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a set of performances and standards that are regarded as masculine for which men ought to aspire (Chandler & Munday, 2020; McVittie et al., 2017). Personality traits such as independence, aggression, physical toughness, emotional restraint, insensitivity and muscularity among others are attributed to masculinity (Chandler & Munday, 2020; McVittie et al., 2017). Men who lack these traits are linked to femininity.

The extract, *'Forfeit your weapons. Now get up and fight like a man'* (AC2) reflects the ideology of hegemonic masculinity which implies that true masculinity is defined by physical confrontation, violence and antagonism. This reinforces the idea that men should resolve conflicts by use of physical strength and aggression. Ghofrani's (2023) observation that violence is persistently symbolized as a form of domination and power in movies and used by men to show dominance and control is therefore incontestable. Again, masculinity is equated with strength, dominance and assertiveness while femininity is associated with weakness, powerlessness and docility. The excerpt links masculinity to fighting and warfare and normalizes violence as a masculine trait. Men who are averse to physical fight and aggression are thus seen as deficient or less masculine. Wrestlers were portrayed as brave, fearless, powerful, egoistic and muscular to show their masculinity, a reflection of hegemonic masculinity.

Also, polygamy was attributed to masculinity. *'Playfulness'* was viewed as a defect of masculinity as in the excerpt; *'Akin, you must reduce your playfulness; you are becoming a man'* (AC1). *'Playfulness'* is portrayed as an attribute of femininity whereas seriousness is attributed to masculinity. This does not only perpetuate hegemonic masculinity but also, gender stereotyping. It thus portrays a yearning to maintain societal expectations and norms with regard to gender behavior on what is accepted as *'becoming a man'*.

In AC3, the school bully was presented as domineering, muscular, powerful, fearless, stubborn and stout whereas another boy, *Tamuno* was portrayed as timid, thin, dull and weak.

Tamuno's attributes were ascribed to femininity and mocked as *'Tiny, timid, twitchy Tam'*, *'dullard'* and *'weakling'* because he lacked the perceived traits of masculinity. This finding corroborates Coyne et al. (2022) who found out that hegemonic masculinity in children's animations largely promotes the endorsement of the muscular ideal. In the excerpt; *'And you cannot tell your dad and great granddad... Tiny, timid twitchy Tam... Elsie isn't here to save you. Weakling, weakling'* (AC3), societal beliefs on what defines traditional masculinity are reinforced. *'Tiny'*, *'timid'*, *'twitchy'* and *'weakling'* connote that the boy in question, *Tamuno*, lacks conformity to the ascribed masculinity traits of strength, assertiveness and bravery. *'Elsie*

isn't here to save you' implies a sense of dependency and vulnerability on the part of *Tamuno* who is incapable of defending himself but has to rely on a girl, *Elsie* for cover. This is seen as a major flaw, hence, *Tamuno*, is referred in derogatory terms like '*weakling*' which connotes shame and stigma because of his lack of what is perceived as the ideal traits for masculinity.

The ideology of hegemonic masculinity has led to the situation whereby boys and men who exhibit attributes ascribed to femininity are looked down upon as deficient (Coyne et al, 2022). This may put pressure on men to conform to the narrow definition assigned to masculinity which is capable of creating unreasonable expectations on men and feelings of inadequacy among men who do not fit into this social construct or narrow definition. Ngcobo (2024) links the portrayal of dominant masculine ideals in South African music to gender-based violence and coercion which men resort to as ways of reinforcing their dominance over women.

5.1.4. Parent-child power imbalance

There exists the notion that the increase in child right advocacy has led to more democratic relations between parents and children (Sevon, 2013, June 10-12). This notwithstanding, the voices and ideas of children face suppression and opposition in some African homes where the right of the child as to when to speak remains the prerogative of the parents. The ideology of parent-child power imbalance was apparent in the data where parents resorted to the use of coercive power or 'power over' to stamp their authority. Children were gagged by their parents from expressing their views on certain issues and also by imposing their decisions on children by virtue of their role as parents. The data revealed the use of imperatives, conditionals and reason-consequence constructions by parents to portray them as more experienced, wiser and more knowledgeable than their children as demonstrated in the following excerpt;

Akin's dad: There is no but. The matter is settled...

Akin: But

Akin's dad: No but. I said, no but, the matter is settled (AC1),

The father's statement reflects and asserts his authority and decision-making power within the family making his words as final and non-negotiable. Parental authority was portrayed as absolute. The repetition of the phrase '*no but*' underline the father's desire to maintain control over the son and the situation to prevent any further discussion. Despite the attempted resistance and assertion by the son through the interjection '*but*', the father's decision reigned supreme. This finding reflects communication patterns between parents and children which discourage open dialogue and negotiation as a result of entrenched power imbalance. An attempt by younger ones to challenge older persons is perceived as disrespectful. Exposing children to such ideologies consequently strengthen the perception of adult superiority especially, among children. This finding is in line with Techacharoenrungueang and Wanchai (2017) that adults are usually portrayed as more powerful and controlling over children in children's media to advance an ideology.

The extract; '*And you cannot tell your dad and great granddad...*' shows power imbalance between younger generation and older generation. The mere mention of '*dad and great granddad*' brings into the picture the power and authority associated with older ones within the traditional family setting where younger ones are expected to defer to the wisdom and judgment of older ones.

The phenomenon of parent-child power imbalance can be attributed to the respect of African societies for traditional institutions which emphasize respect for the elderly. This is ingrained in African cultural values which stress on respect for the elderly and honoring parents. As a way to uphold traditional customs and values, children defer to the absolute authority of their parents without opposition, and this is seen as a sign of respect.

5.1.5. Marriage and childbirth as the ultimate

Findings corroborated Maponya's (2021) assertion that marriage is perceived as the most important thing in a person's life in some African societies. For most people in Africa, marriage and childbirth are regarded as

the ultimate in life and inability to accomplish them is interpreted as failure in life (Maponya, 2021; Williams, 2019). The importance and prestige attached to marriage and childbirth motivated and drove *Queen Atike* to exchange her baby in order to protect her marriage and avoid humiliation as exemplified in excerpt below;

Please, you know what would happen to me if the king found out that I had a girl. He would send me and my baby packing. (AC1)

In a similar vein, the importance placed on childbirth forced *Olurombi* to go as far as seeking spiritual help to have a child so as to redeem her dignity as a woman and to avoid stigmatization and rejection. *Olurombi* faced rejection and stigmatization because of her inability to bear a child as exemplified below;

*She was **childless** and because of this, other women in the kingdom **made fun of her. For them, having a child was the most important thing for a woman** (AC1)*

The extract '*for them*' refers to an unspecified individuals or even groups and this is suggestive of societal norms and cultural expectations that pertain to women and motherhood. The extract '*having a child is the most important thing for a woman*' shows the importance attached to childbirth. Society views childbirth as a defining feature of womanhood. A woman's value is thus measured in terms of motherhood (Maponya, 2021). The superlative, '*most*' lays emphasis on the prominence of motherhood as a defining feature of womanhood.

The extract '*She was a **lonely, sad, childless woman. She had no friends***' (AC1) portrays a state of seclusion, desolation and hopelessness as result childlessness. It portrays cultural expectations, the assumption that women should have children which is a plus to their social connection. There is an emphasis on '*loneliness*' and '*sadness*' which is indicative of the profound emotional impact *Olurombi's* childlessness has on her. This reinforces Maponya's (2021) assertion that without children, family and social connections, happiness is elusive. The ideology of marriage and childbirth as the ultimate goal for women puts pressure on women to conform to this societal expectation at all cost. These messages, however subtle, convey the ideology that marriage and childbirth are the ultimate in life and children who watch these subconsciously form the mind-set that without marriage and childbirth, a happy and fulfilled life is elusive.

5.1.6. Social values

Although the study focused on dominant ideologies such as patriarchy, sexualization of women and hegemonic masculinity, among others, the selected animated cartoons also highlight positive social and progressive cultural values such as remorsefulness, inclusivity and team spirit. AC3 highlights the value of team spirit. AC1 emphasizes the virtue of remorsefulness where the king expressed regret for his actions regardless of his status in society. Again, *Bukky* expressed remorse and apologized to his parents for her inactions which led to the closure of the bakery. This is indicated in the statement '*I'm sorry about the bakery. It's all my fault*' (AC3). These underscore the need for not only children, but all individuals irrespective of their status or age, to be responsible for their actions. The accomplishments of the *Motley Mopsters* were attributed to the team spirit and togetherness that existed among the members. This is demonstrated in the extracts; '*We're all coming along. You can't do it alone*'; '*We did a great job today. That's what family is about*' and '*I'm not sure where you came from but we are a family. So we've got your back*'. The use of the first person plural '*we*' indicates a sense of togetherness, inclusivity and team spirit, which are all positive social values necessary for social cohesion. Also, AC2 teaches the importance of teamwork and unity. Irrespective of the different backgrounds of the *outcasts*, they stayed together as a family. This finding is an affirmation of Kidenda (2018), Utami and Harianto (2021) and Şenocak and Ayyildiz (2021) that animated cartoons provide vital moral and cultural values which promote social integration.

5.2. Portrayal of the projected ideologies

The tenets of Thompson's (1990) Modes of Operation of Ideology were used to explore how the projected ideologies were portrayed in the animated cartoons. Authorization, affiliation, alienation and entrenchment were identified as the modes through which the projected ideologies were portrayed.

5.2.1 Authorization

Authorization involves the use of logical reasoning as grounds for the establishment of relations of dominance (Okuley, 2023). Although Okuley (2023) identified three associated discursive strategies of authorization; justification, camouflaging and oral tradition, the data revealed justification as the means through which authorization was achieved. Justification employs the use of logic or common sense to appeal to an individual's sense of reasoning (Okuley, 2023). For instance, the parent-child power imbalance was projected through justification where adults were presented as more knowledgeable, wiser and more experienced to take decisions and overrule the decisions and views of children. This is seen in the excerpt '*Sade, I don't want you to get in trouble. I am your mother. I know what is best for you*' (AC1). This depicts maternal authority which suggests the inherent wisdom and guidance of mothers in making decisions for their children. The idea that mothers are care givers, nurturers and have the best interest of their children at heart is justified here; hence, they will not take decisions which would be detrimental to their children. The mother asserts her role as the child's mother and places herself as an authority figure with lots of experience which qualifies her to take decision for the daughter. The mother by the above statement implies that it is her responsibility to take care of her child. She portrays this ideology by justifying her position as the decision maker and acting in the best interest of the child. The mother again justifies her decision by the statement, '***I know what is best for you***' to suggest that her decisions stem from the desire to protect her child from harm and danger. This revelation is in line with Thompson's (1990) mode of legitimization which involves the use of logic to establish relations of dominance through the discursive strategy of rationalization.

5.2.2 Affiliation

Findings revealed the projection of ideology through affiliation which refers to the inclination to seek connection to a group irrespective of the differences that exist with regards to beliefs, values, language and class among others (Okuley, 2023). It involves maintaining and establishing relationship with others and is in sync with Thompson's (1990) unification mode. Through similarization, hegemonic masculinity was projected. Similarization is a strategy of affiliation and refers to the situation whereby individuals who share like or related characteristics or attributes consider themselves as one people owing to the things or attributes they share in common (Okuley, 2023). Polygamy, for instance served as a defining feature of manliness in AC1 for men. *Azuka's* father identified with his son, *Azuka* because of their polygamous attributes as reflected in;

My son wants to be like me. I was wondering, am I going to be the only one with seven wives. Hahahaha (AC1).

The father identifies with his son and is elated about the son's decision to have many wives because he views the son as following his footsteps; thus, the child views the father as a role model particularly, in issues of polygamy. The father's acknowledgement of his son's aspiration to emulate his polygamous lifestyle is indicative of a sense of affiliation between father and son. It indicates the son's identification with the father and the father views this as a shared identity even though they may share divergent views on other matters.

5.2.3 Alienation

Otherization, a strategy of alienation was identified as the means through which the ideologies of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and marriage and childbirth as the ultimate were projected. Alienation entails a feeling of being separated from a group or the lack of association to a group despite shared attributes (Okuley, 2023) and is in line with Thompson's fragmentation mode. Otherization entails treating people differently on grounds of sex, ethnicity, race, language and class among others despite their shared attributes (Okuley, 2023). Patriarchy was projected through otherization whereby women were considered and treated as subservient and inferior to men who were considered superior as shown in the extract '*What are you waiting for? She is just a woman*' (AC2).

The woman is otherized or belittled to her gender with the phrase '*just a woman*', which sought to demean her. She is looked down upon, marginalized and viewed as inferior because of her femininity.

Evident is the 'us' versus 'them' mind-set which creates a sense of separation between the speaker who is a man and the woman being referred to. There is otherization through discrimination solely based on gender where women are treated as less important and less competent. Hegemonic masculinity was also projected through otherization where men who did not possess attributes ascribed to masculinity were discriminated against, associated to femininity and considered weaklings as exemplified; '*Tiny, timid twitchy Tam... Elsie isn't here to save you. Weakling, weakling*' (AC3). The boy *Tam* is positioned as inferior and less masculine. A distinction is established between him and the ideal masculine standards. More so, women were treated differently or otherized based on their ability to give birth. A case in point is *Olurombi* who was ill-treated and stereotyped because of her inability to bear children as indicated below;

She was childless and because of this, other women in the kingdom made fun of her.

She was a lonely, sad, childless woman. She had no friends (AC1).

5.2.4 Entrenchment

In sync with Thompson's reification mode, entrenchment was identified as a mode through which the projected ideologies were portrayed. Entrenchment refers to the situation whereby ideas, habits, attitudes or ways of doing things become firmly rooted as the ways of doing things to the extent that modification becomes almost impossible. It has three associated strategies: normalization, attribution to innate traits and inactivization (Okuley, 2023). Through normalization, certain ways of acting or doing things become the standard or are viewed as the normal ways of doing things (Okuley, 2023). A typical example is the patriarchal ideology which was projected as normal. Male dominance was established as the status quo hence, was unquestionable. This is exemplified in the excerpt;

*Atike is the third wife of King Adide. King Adide had suddenly woken up one morning and sent his two wives packing after having six children, all girls. All he wanted was a boy who could take the throne after him **according to the culture of the land*** (AC1)

It was therefore normal for the king to send his wives and daughters packing simply because they do not matter in the normal scheme of things, where patriarchy is the way of life. '**According to the culture of the land**'; only male heirs are deemed eligible as successors to the throne. Again, patriarchy was projected through inactivization which entails blurring or deleting the actors or initiators of events to satisfy an interest (Okuley, 2023) and is in line with the passivization discursive strategy of reification. Furthermore, findings revealed the inactivization of women to advance the course of male supremacy or patriarchy as indicated below;

*As the village elders held a meeting ... **One man** suggested ... **Another man** said ... So **many men** came up with different wicked ideas.* (AC1)

The above portrays the inactivization of women in the decision-making process where all the ideas and suggestions were presented as those of men. In addition, the data revealed the underrepresentation of women to reinforce the patriarchal ideology. Patriarchy was enacted through inactivization in the excerpt '*I wish I could go back and fix what happened to **my father's bakery***' (AC3). In this instance, although the bakery was a family business belonging to both parents, '*my father's bakery*' suggests the bakery belongs solely to the father, thereby portraying a lack of agency on the part of the mother. Ownership of the bakery is bestowed on the father and the mother's contribution and involvement in the bakery is explicitly unacknowledged. Children are raised in patriarchal homes, hence grow up conceding to male authority without challenging male domination which is seen as normal.

The ideology of hegemonic masculinity was also projected through normalization and attribution to innate traits. Through attribution to innate traits, social realities such as gender performances, natural traits and sex roles are presented as intrinsic. Hegemonic masculine traits were viewed as intrinsic and attributed to the natural traits or attributes of men. For example, masculinity was ascribed to bravery, fearlessness, seriousness, egoism, emotional restraint, toughness and muscularity among others as exemplified in the excerpt; '*Akin, you must reduce your playfulness; you are becoming a man*' (AC1). Society is socialized to view certain traits as defining characteristics of men (Chandler & Munday, 2020; McVittie et al., 2017). These

defining characteristics such as seriousness among others thus become the norm or are seen as the normalcy and what ought to be. 'Playfulness' is viewed as an abnormal behavior for men; hence, Akin is reminded to behave like the man he is developing into.

'Forfeit your weapons. Now get up and fight like a man' (AC2) portrays hegemonic masculinity by attributing masculinity to ability to fight without the use of weapons because men are viewed as strong and brave per their innateness. A deviation from this is thus, considered a defect. In addition, the sexualization of women was projected through attribution to innate traits. Women were portrayed in evocative, sexualized and objectified forms which revealed aspects of their body and drew their body contour per their biological or physical makeup as women.

6. Conclusion

Findings from the study support Van Dijk's (2006) affirmation that discourse produces and enacts certain ideologies and world views by normalizing them as mental representations and further substantiate Bobrowska et al.'s (2019) stance that animated cartoons serve as expedient channels for the transmission of ideology. Apart from dominant ideologies, the animated cartoons were interspersed with positive social values such as remorsefulness, inclusivity and team spirit. Dominant ideologies such as patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, sexualization of women, parent-child power imbalance and marriage and childbirth as the ultimate, which generally mirror the prevailing norms and happenings in some African societies, were portrayed in the animated cartoons. Some of the findings of this study, such as patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, sexualization of women, are in tandem with studies on animated cartoons of Western and Asian origins (Ahmad & Ibrahim, 2017; Baig et al., 2021; Garcia-Claro et al., 2022; Gtz et al., 2018; Lemish & Johnson, 2019; Shapiro, 2017; Soares, 2017). This means the portrayal of these ideologies are not unique to African media. Nevertheless, ideologies such as patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, marriage and childbirth as the ultimate and parent-child imbalance were more pronounced in the selected movies. A plausible reason for this could be because of the deep respect Africans have for their cultural values and traditions which place premium on these ideologies.

The dominant ideologies were projected through authorization, affiliation, alienation and entrenchment and these are consistent with Thompson's modes: legitimization, unification, fragmentation and reification. The most obvious finding is the identification of entrenchment as the most occurring. This could possibly be explained by the premium Africans place on traditions and customs. Furthermore, Jank's (1998) assertion that the various modes of ideology interrelate and enforce each other was confirmed by the findings.

This study recommends the critical analyses of content creation by producers and regulators of children's media for their appropriateness in order to avoid the normalization of unsuitable ideology. Future studies could focus on a larger sample to allow for generalization and also focus on how children interpret these ideologies. Future research could also look at audience analysis and how children receive these animated cartoons. Furthermore, since this study does not explore the long-term effects of these ideologies on children, a longitudinal study could be conducted to find out the prolonged effect of regular exposure to animated cartoon ideologies.

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