

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Adorno considers film a cultural industry operating within capitalism, similar to other sectors that have to create products with a main focus on profit. The cultural sector operates by addressing market dynamics, production expenses, profit margins, advertising, and rivalry. Products created by the cultural industry often exhibit standardization (similar patterns) since this industry focuses on profit, and the reproduction process requires consistent needs across various locations (standardization, homogenization). This has rendered the technology of the cultural industry merely a means of standardization and mass production, forsaking all that pertains to the distinction between the logic of labor and the social system" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1993: 1). The idea of standardization and homogenization within the cultural industry is notably pertinent when linked to the film *The Woman King* (2022). Despite the film depicting African women's struggle against colonialism and patriarchy, it remains created within the Hollywood industry's confines, which adhere to market principles. This indicates that movies need to connect with a worldwide audience through a tested formula, which includes a powerful female protagonist, deep emotional turmoil, and a climactic and uplifting conclusion. This illustrates what Adorno termed pseudo individualization where cultural goods seemingly provide originality, yet fundamentally adhere to conventional, repetitive patterns to guarantee financial success. It can be contended that the film is not completely devoid of the

principles of global capitalism. The depiction of colonial resistance portrayed can indeed appear unclear: while it acts as an alternative narrative that offers room for the voices of frequently sidelined Black women, It also operates as an entertainment product which is regulated in such a way.

Gender equality or equality between the sexes, has made significant progress in its development in today's society. Challenges for women persist and change over time. It is undeniable that gender equality, particularly women's rights, has made significant progress compared to previous eras, although this equality has not yet been fully realized. In an article published in October 2017 on women's issues, the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) stated that women and their rights are a phenomenon in which women make choices within a framework of human rights, which includes equality and freedom to determine their bodies and lives as individuals. The development of gender equality is assessed not only from the normative perspective of international law but also from the perspective of social, economic, and cultural practices. In many countries, women's access to education, employment, and political power has increased significantly. However, in depth analysis shows that this progress remains uneven due to stark differences between social classes, races, and geographic locations. For example, women from minority groups or developing countries still face systemic barriers to accessing basic rights, indicating that the discourse on gender equality often focuses on the experiences of middle-class women in developed countries. Furthermore, although the idea of gender equality is increasingly accepted worldwide, the reality on the ground still shows resistance from entrenched patriarchal structures. The phenomenon of the glass

ceiling in the workplace, gender based discrimination in customary law, and the continuing high levels of gender based violence indicate that gender equality has not been fully institutionalized in social practice. Critical analysis in feminist studies emphasizes that equality does not only mean equal opportunity but also includes structural justice capable of addressing material and symbolic injustices inherited from the history of colonialism and global capitalism. Therefore, the current discourse on gender equality must be understood dialectically: on the one hand, there has been significant progress in the recognition of women's rights globally, but on the other hand, injustice remains hidden behind the narrative of progress. Therefore, feminist analysis, especially one rooted in Marxist critique, is crucial to uncovering how the issue of gender equality is often used as a symbol of modernity by states and corporations, yet in practice remains trapped within a capitalist framework that exploits women's labor and normalizes the double burden in the household and public sphere.

In this research, the authors applied Marxist theory, which asserts that feminists believe women's subjugation arises not only from patriarchy but also from capitalist economic systems that exploit labor and perpetuate gender disparities. Feminism is a social movement and ideology that strives for gender equality. Feminists seek to uplift women and eliminate the inequalities they face. Marxists argue that the film "The Woman King" highlights the struggle against systemic oppression rooted in capitalism and colonialism, emphasizing the role of women as catalysts for change in breaking down these structures. Another crucial element is that the Marxist feminist perspective emphasizes the tangible aspects of the oppression faced by women in the film. The Agojie not only

challenge patriarchal authority within the kingdom but also oppose the transatlantic slave trade system managed by colonial capitalist systems. In this context, women's bodies are seen not just as instruments of war or protectors of the realm, but also as items that can be traded, showcasing the harsh reality of how colonial capitalism ruthlessly capitalizes on individuals to amass wealth. Consequently, the film can be interpreted as a symbolic depiction of women's attempts to challenge their role as objects of exploitation and establish themselves as subjects capable of defiance.

History is frequently narrated from a prevailing viewpoint that tends to ignore the contributions of women in significant global events, especially in military contexts and struggles against colonialism. Gina Prince Bythewood's film, *The Woman King* (2022), showcases a story that highlights women's contributions in the fight against colonialism and patriarchal systems. The movie depicts the experiences of women warriors from the West African Kingdom of Dahomey, recognized as the Agojie, a powerful all-female military group that significantly contributed to opposing European colonialism in the 19th century. By emphasizing this conflict, *The Woman King* is not just enjoyable but also delivers historical and feminist themes that resonate in contemporary society. Additionally, it is important to highlight that the film serves as an alternative narrative to the prevailing patriarchal and colonial history. By placing African women at the forefront, *The Woman King* confronts conventional portrayals that frequently show women as submissive victims or solely domestic roles. The Agojie are depicted as dynamic, strategic, and intensely combative historical figures, enabling audiences to recognize how women significantly influenced

political and military affairs. This aligns with the goal of feminist studies, which is to emphasize the experiences of women who have been overlooked in official historical documentation.

This film analysis is significant as it highlights issues that remain pertinent today, including gender inequality, the fight against colonial oppression, and the significance of women's representation in historical narratives. In a research setting, this film analysis can serve as a key to comprehending how mass media, especially film, portrays women's challenges and shapes societal perspectives on matters of gender and authority. Current studies indicate that cinema is vital in influencing public perception and offering an opportunity to challenge historical accounts that have been largely controlled by male viewpoints (Smith, 2021; Hooks, 2020). It is crucial to highlight that *The Woman King* is not merely an artistic creation, but an ideological piece that serves to influence social and political perceptions. This film critically confronts cultural myths that have historically positioned men at the center of heroic stories by showcasing women as pivotal figures in the resistance against colonialism. Nevertheless, it is essential to critically assess the degree to which this portrayal genuinely reflects an authentic feminist viewpoint or remains ensnared in the commercialization of "women's empowerment" that is profitable in the global marketplace. In a Marxist-feminist perspective, it is essential to acknowledge that the creation of these films is shaped by the principles of cultural capitalism. The story of emancipation conveyed may fulfill two functions: firstly, it creates an opportunity to acknowledge women's contributions to African history, while secondly, it illustrates how feminist and anti patriarchal ideals are sold as entertainment for

global viewers. Therefore, film serves not just as an educational or representative tool, but also as a mechanism of capitalism that commodifies resistance within popular culture.

Apart from that, *The Woman King* also serves as a vehicle for exploring resistance to colonialism from a gender perspective, offering an alternative perspective to traditional narratives that often emphasize male characters. The film can be seen as a form of resistance to the exclusion of women in history, while also reminding us that women's contributions to the struggle for independence should not be overlooked. Within the context of feminist and postcolonial studies, analysis of this film is crucial for demonstrating how African women played a role in resisting the dual power structures of colonialism and patriarchy. It is important to note that the film does not simply portray women as supporting figures, but places them at the center of the historical narrative, a significant step in countering patriarchal historiographical traditions that tend to diminish or downplay women's roles. However, a close analysis also highlights the ambivalence of this representation: on the one hand, Agojie is recognized as a symbol of African female strength and sovereignty, but on the other hand, the film often falls into simplifications, such as omitting the complex involvement of the Dahomey kingdom in the slave trade. Postcolonial feminist criticism emphasizes that while the film successfully challenges the stereotype of the “passive African woman,” it still operates within a Hollywood framework that prioritizes individual heroism and dramatic resolution, rather than emphasizing long-term structural dynamics.

This analysis is based on data from a qualitative study of the film *The Woman King*, which highlights resistance to colonialism and patriarchy. This qualitative study engaged a diverse group of individuals worldwide who aimed to implement a critical interpretive framework to assist them (and others) in comprehending the harsh realities that define daily existence in the early years of this new century. A primary emphasis in qualitative research is examining political representation alongside textual analysis in literary and cultural formats, which encompass production, distribution, and consumption (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 17-19). Additionally, a critical interpretive perspective enables researchers to perceive films not just as entertainment, but as cultural artifacts rich with ideology. In *The Woman King*, qualitative analysis provides insights into the portrayal of women's resistance to colonialism, while also uncovering its inherent contradictions the film narrates a story of emancipation and liberation from patriarchy, yet remains connected to the global film industry's capitalist structures. This study uncovers not just the clear meanings within the narrative and conversations, but also exposes wider power dynamics, including the ways in which Hollywood reinterprets African history and how feminist ideals are promoted as global products. Importantly, this perspective also emphasizes the significance of film creation, dissemination, and viewing as integral to the cultural capitalism continuum. Movies are created considering global markets, circulated through worldwide channels, and viewed by audiences from various socio cultural backgrounds. This process affects how the film's message is interpreted: the risk exists that the principles of resisting colonialism may be minimized or even



misrepresented when presented in a mainstream style. Consequently, qualitative investigation through a Marxist feminist lens.

## 1.2 Limitation of the Problem

This study examines the application of Marxist feminist ideas and Marxist theory concerning colonialism and patriarchy as depicted in the film *The Woman King*. These feminist ideas include the principles of gender equality, the empowerment of women, and standards of social justice. This constraint stems from the insights the researcher derived after viewing the film *The Woman King* and examining it through the lens of Marxist theoretical principles. Crucially, a Marxist feminist perspective enables this study to recognize that patriarchy and colonialism are intertwined with the economic systems that uphold them. The movie illustrates how women's bodies serve as representations of defiance and are also sites of exploitation, manifested through their roles in combat, domestic duties within the palace, and the possibilities for commodification in the slave market. Consequently, the examination goes beyond portraying women as heroic figures and also reveals the material power dynamics that position women within the colonial-capitalist production circuit. Additionally, Marxist feminist theory informs this research to comprehend that women's portrayal in film frequently remains ensnared in ideological uncertainty. On one side, *The Woman King* highlights the depiction of powerful women Agojie as catalysts for change battling against colonialism. Nonetheless, the film continues to uphold a social and patriarchal structure, exemplified by placing King Ghezo as the source of ultimate political legitimacy, which means women's achievements frequently require approval from male figures. A critical examination reveals that the film



highlights personal heroism rather than societal change aimed at tackling the foundations of class, gender, and economic inequality.

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. How is patriarchy represented in the context of colonialism in *The Woman King*?

### 1.4 Objectives of the Research

1. To describe the representation of patriarchy within the contexts of colonialism in *The Woman King*?

