

DISRUPTION OF GENDER NORMS TO ADVANCE CONTEMPORARY POLITICS: A
RADICAL FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF EFO KODJO MAWUGBE'S *IN THE CHEST OF A
WOMAN*

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ABSTRACT

This paper deconstructs leadership and kingship politics in the Ghanaian West-African culture as it pertains to gender. It proves that what governs the concept of the throne is unequivocally masculine and simply a game. The thesis further argues the need to encourage subversively radical methods in dealing with entrenched sexism that permeate the royal system and the current political system. Through Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's play *In the Chest of a Woman*, the research establishes that the concept of power in the Ghanaian traditional system is rigid and, consequently, requires unorthodox deviance to challenge gender oppression. It concludes that for women in Ghana to have any substantive political transformation, radicalism must be reconceptualized and integrated into West-African feminism for activism purposes and not avoided entirely.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my dearest husband, Mr. Theophilus Kabu and my two beautiful children, Theophilia-Anne and Apphia-Emerald who will grow to be agencies and hope to gender oppression. The family has taught me in this short journey what strength means and the importance of perseverance in life. Truly, nothing worthwhile in life comes on a silver platter.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Talking about sexism or gender inequality is not a far-fetched experience for a young girl from Ghana. During my stay in Ghana, I can recall a discussion at our Students' Representative Council (SRC) meeting in my high school days, which escalated into a heated argument. One female prefect questioned the students' top-notch leadership which was, seemingly fashioned to accommodate males automatically. There was never going to be a female school prefect based on how it was hierarchically orchestrated, which was not the argument. But what troubled her much was student leadership's bifurcation of roles. The boys' prefect was seen as the school's overall head while the girl was only a leader for the girls. The boys' prefect exercised control over everyone and had autonomous power, while the girls' prefect had no control over any boy. This female prefect condemned the practice as constraining both on her and even future female prefects. She was driving at something, but it was too upfront, and her unmatched confidence was a threat to all. "She is rebellious to have come up with that thought: such audacity," said some of the boys. Sadly, none of us female students could add our voices to the controversy and could only helplessly watch while she was judged for all the wrong reasons.

Maybe, the feeling of regret and my inability to rise in defense of my friend was long overdue. It is time to add my voice to the problem of gender gap and inequalities that have permeated through our society and culture. A look at the gender inequalities undergirding the traditional power structure is the proposed gender change that this research calls for. In the subsequent paragraph I give some background knowledge and provide context to the situations of gender-power in Ghana and map out feminist perspectives and approaches intended to dismantle gender inequalities.

1.2. Contextualizing Gender Inequalities in Ghana-West Africa

The face of politics in both the traditional and modern governmental systems have experienced a grave lack of female representation. In Ghana, no female king has ever emerged in history; however, this problem has not received much attention, especially in literature writing.

Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman* lends itself to examining the issue of women and power dynamics both in fiction and in the material world. For the first time in Ghanaian literature, a female character, as robust and radical as Nana Yaa, was featured to vocalize her grievances on stereotypes of women and power. As likened to the anecdote above Nana Yaa, the princess, expresses dissatisfaction in her community's entrenched male politics and decides to challenge it. She firstly engages in an open confrontation with the elders of the royal home, which does not yield much result. To go her full length to access power, she makes her daughter (Owusu) masculine, in order to steal the throne from her brother. The play teaches that the woman can be anything so far as gender lines are blurred, if she gets to pursue her own desires.

In reviewing gender and power scholarship for Ghana and West Africa, the vast majority of writing (Filomena Chioma Steady, Molaria Ogunidipe-Leslie) trace the problem of gender and power to the aftermath of colonization and westernization. That is to say that these schools philosophize that the impact of the colonial rule has been the cause of the intensification of the gender gap—resulting in the dire female absence in our current politics. This position is, in fact, valid but not entirely the case. While these theories have unveiled a lot about gender issues with respect to colonialism, they have failed to expose the traditional power setup—a culturally grounded practice that shapes individuals' perspectives. The external critical standpoint is not always favorable since people in Ghana and the West African countries principally base their

actions on cultural beliefs before anything else. Again, there is a gap in both creative writing and critical works regarding indigenous royal politics and its gender biases. Even where the conversation of gender discrimination is culturally specific, the focus is narrowed to themes that are distanced from power. Cultural feminism in the West African regions have focused on repealing archaic socio-cultural practices like “trokosi” (rites performed on widows), “female genital mutilation”, and puberty rites. These are regarded as needing attention but, not much has been done with the overt inequalities in the traditional power structure. By considering the play, *In the Chest of a Woman*, this study revisits the power issue that women suffer from history time up until present Ghana.

From time immemorial, women have outnumbered men’s population globally, yet, they remain the masses without any say in charting their lives’ course (Odame 2). In 2013, the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) confirmed that females are 51.2% and males are 48.8% of the country’s population. Regardless of their numbers, they turn to be sidelined, left in the margins, and oppressed by the minority male group (Ipadeola Abosede Priscilla, Filomena Chioma Steady). The idea of women asking for equal treatment is seen as asking for too much. Sad to say, women’s political participation in the whole of the continent of Africa “represent[s] less than 14 percent of all parliamentarians” (Steady 233). The margins between male and female members of parliament in West-African regions are wide apart. In Ghana’s parliament, “female MPs account for 14 percent (38 out of 275 parliamentary seats)” (Madsen et al., 3). Most women who come into political offices have to do so by ministerial appointments rather than through elections, typically in Ghana and Nigeria. Aside from Rwanda, South Africa, and Angola (who are not West Africa Countries), with impressive female numbers, over 90 percent of West African

parliament hover around 30% threshold and below. Nevertheless, the situation is relatively better when compared to the periods before the late 90s and the United Nations Decade for Women.

Gender roles and norms generally contribute to the imbalances and the limitations women suffer. The woman's natural body has been defined based on her biological essence to determine what she is (in)capable of doing. The same idea of essentializing the woman's body is acculturated in the traditional African system, which essentially defines who the woman is and sets boundaries to her dreams. For instance, the breast and womb are metaphors and symbols that reduce the woman to relegated roles. So, to be a woman is interpreted as simply a female entity responsible for procreation, care giving and performing auxiliary roles towards the man's vision.

Traditionally, the woman cannot perform certain roles based on the extended discourse of her biological construction. In Ghana, most of the stools (signifying rulership and authority) are regarded as very sacred, and the woman's menstrual cycle makes her unclean to administer rulership (Oduyoye 93). There are more preconceived notions and narratives that stop women from undertaking political endeavors. Socially, girls are trained to see herself as a property to be inherited. Thus, she spends most of her time learning and living to fit into her husband's dreams. These assumptions have negatively impacted women and left them impoverished and dependent on men--having their untapped potentials buried in them.

Unfortunately, while these unbearable roles of girls are strictly policed, that of men's roles come with wholesome leniency and privileges that make them get away with a lot. He is the stronger, focused, and intelligent human (whose opposite, weak, unstable, and unintelligent one is the woman) ready to awake and take charge. On the other hand, the woman is the weaker vessel, unintelligent, emotionally driven, shallow who must receive orders (but not a decider) to ensure its implementation. Filomina Chioma Steady points out in her book, *Women and*

Leadership in West Africa, that “women are arguably viewed as the emotional gender, having been socialized into roles related to motherhood, nurturing, compassion, and so forth Emotional tendencies are erroneously considered less rational and incompatible with abstract thinking” (6). Steady’s argument shows how such mindsets permeate our culture— as a consequence, working against the idea of women and leadership.

Moreover, the patriarchal culture runs on misconceptions. In most Ghanaian cultural situations, the woman who pursues political power is tagged as a witch trying to overthrow her male counterpart. Oduyoye explains, “They are women who work against the unity and coherence of community and who do not seek the good of others or relatively care for others” (121). Sadly enough, misconceptions are not old-fashioned but are evident in Ghana West Africa’s present politics. Furthermore, women have internalized notions about power which makes them apathetic and also hard to change. Priscilla Abosede Ipadeola, a Nigerian critic and writer of gender and politics, explains that gender role division is the repelling force that drives away women from politics because these women “popularly [hold the belief] that a woman doing this is acting contrary to her nature” (400).

One of the major limitations of women occupying top positions is balancing their private life and public life. Odame states that “the demands of domestic duties leave Ghanaian women little time or energy to devote to political activities or public affairs” (3). Unlike the man who is given the necessary support to grow his public image, the woman, on the other hand, is prohibited from taking up public roles and consistently come under domestic responsibilities.

Education, as a way of increasing awareness of gender imbalances, helps these communities extend the limits of gender. Very graciously, West-African theorists have succeeded in building knowledge that is more tailored to suit the West-African situation;

however, the ideologies exhibit partiality in their reforms to gender problems. As stated earlier, West-African scholars consider archaic customary practices like puberty rites, early marriage, female genital mutilation, widowhood rites and the likes, as culturally oppressive against women, which they extensively speak against. However, gender inequalities undergirding the traditional power structure are barely challenged. As much as these are all important, awareness in the socio-political spaces, where women suffer most, has not received much critical attention.

According to African womanist proponents, the woman has been defined to possess a different feminist disposition towards resisting oppression. She must be diplomatic and must ensure she uses moderations in her actions and apply tact and wisdom to navigate patriarchy; else, she will not survive the pressure of patriarchy. These are concrete admonishments that have marked most of the conversations in the discourses of African feminism. Women must “negotiate” “compromise” “complement”, “navigate,” and “maneuver” to escape oppression (Nnaemeka 2004, Kolawole 1997, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi 1985). Feminism must be implied and not explicit-- Ogunyemi aptly puts it: “the black woman must not be so mad as to destroy herself with the patriarchy” (66). This proposition explains why radicalism is eschewed in the African context. Nevertheless, the African feminist ideology that this paper leans towards is Ogundipe-Leslie’s Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (STIWANISM), which advocates for the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa” (229). Therefore, women must have the liberty employ all kinds of feminisms, including dissident actions, so long as they can translate into freedom and hope for women, as reflected in the play, *In the Chest of a Woman*.

1.3. Previous Scholarship

Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman* has received critical attention from Ghana and beyond. Central to these criticisms are the issue of gender inequalities and the importance of radicalism as an approach to effective activism and resistance. Whiles some critics argue that Mawugbe's feminism is problematic to the Ghanaian culture because it promotes selfishness of power at the detriment of others; pro-feminists envision this play as a liberatory apparatus to interrupts Ghanaian patriarchal set up for good. The study here argues alongside with the latter critics who are of the view that this kind of feminism necessitates real change needed for women in politics. Additionally, it explores possible rhetorical strategies that help women alleviate the overwhelming pressure that accompany women's desire for power.

Selasi Bonuedie's thesis on feminist works, recognizes Mawugbe's effort to adequately demonstrates that the Ghanaian culture is still not ready to embrace feminism however, through this writing lens, it has become imperative for women for push harder for liberty. Damlègue Lare's "Debunking Patriarchal Legacy in African Traditional Setting: A Reading of Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman*" critically investigates some of Ghana's cultural traditions and the dictates of patriarchy that militate against females' emancipation and lay a foundation for their marginalization and oppression. Lare argues further that Efo Kodjo Mawugbe, by the tool of drama, debunks the patriarchal legacy set in this fictional Ghanaian culture. Lare's linguistic analysis helps in challenging patriarchy and the language of power which enables some of the female characters refutes the gender norms.

Similarly, Brightmoore Nugah's "Gender Portrayal in *Edufa* And in *The Chest of a Woman*," investigates the gender roles and portrayal in the play. Using two of Ghana's dramas (by a female and male author,) Nugah concludes that the two playwrights, Sutherland and

Mawugbe, “witnessed male domination and female marginalization in Ghana from the 1960s. Both dramatists represented the issue of gender imbalance in Ghana in their plays excellently. They also encouraged female empowerment and the need for change in certain practices in the society which tend to hinder progress” (iv). Their protagonists did well by not condoning with cultural misrepresentations but resisted systemic patriarchy vehemently. While also exploring the feminist aspects of the play in its depiction of women, Awo Mana Asiedu’s “Masculine Women, Feminist Men: Assertions and Contradictions in Mawugbe’s *In the Chest of a Woman*” contends that Mawugbe’s play demonstrates contradictions that perpetuate an idea of fetishizing masculinity instead. Although Asiedu’s critical perspective narrows in on feminism, she hardly acknowledges the cultural situation of women and power and why the heroine’s radical engagement is necessary for challenging the deeply rooted discrimination of gender politics in the play. The analysis here is to situate the discourse in an African feminist context as I unpack and unlearn misconceptions that burden women who are enlisted into politics.

1.4. My Project

This project examines the tension between women and power amongst the people of Akans (the ethnic group mirrored in the play) traditional political system by engaging with conversation of feminism and activism in the play, *In the Chest of a Woman*. The study situates its discourses within the matrix of class, power, and gender. It investigates the importance of female representation in the leadership and the extent to which these roles can influence gender perspectives. In addition, it investigates how women of status can use their positions as a political investment to challenge sexist traditions. This project shifts from the usual feminist narratives about women in underprivilege positions to influential women in the West-African communities—most importantly dealing with the issue of gender imbalances from a precolonial

background. Ghana's national politics is a well-researched area which is beginning to include women in government (though at a very slow pace) as compared to the traditional political system with no records of female king since history. Three questions have framed the discussion and help probe into the issue of women and power.

1. What role does traditional cultural politics play in shaping contemporary narratives of women and power?
2. How does Nana Yaa's radical identity impact her prospects for power?
3. How does the concept of politics as a "game" increase women's inclusion in politics?

1.5. Methodology

In the Chest of a Woman serves as a case study to understand how power operates. I also use the interpretive/deconstructive method to shed light on the intersectionality of power, gender, and culture in the Ghanaian context. I use a rhetorical analysis approach to analyze radical feminism and rhetorics in circumventing power.

1.6. Relevance

This paper will be relevant to feminist works and political researches aiming to change the face of politics and gender in Ghana and West Africa. If the traditional institution of power is reinvented with female kings or chiefs, it will go a long way to impact visibility and advance national politics. The paper thus, shows the correlations between the actions of traditional power-gender relations and contemporary national politics—the former constitutes the cultural belief system from which the latter is consolidated. Hence, offering strategic gender conversations that examine the cultural dynamics is grave solution to gender inequalities. Moreover, the rhetorical

strategies analyzed in this paper provide creative approaches to female politicians who want to subvert patriarchy and venture into the “game” of politics.

1.7. Outline of the Paper

The paper is organized into five chapters. The first chapter, the “Introduction” contextualizes the prevailing gender problems in Ghana and highlights women’s efforts to normalize their identity and power discourses. It also states the purpose of the structure of the paper. The second chapter takes stock of what feminism means to both the female theorist and creative writer and the various methods that are useful to model discourses about West-African women. The argument shows how theorizing women in Africa from a political background has been skewed to post-colonial criticisms alone hence veering away from critics looking into the inherent cultural programs that fester the gender gap. It also argues for the use of radical approaches to resist women’s oppression even within regions of Africa.

Chapter three provides contextual background to Efo Kodwo Mawugbe as a playwright and his motivation to advance cultural narratives while modernizing old-fashioned practices that impede society’s progress. It again examines his contributions to promote the Ghanaian plays as a new genre and maintains a writing identity throughout his productions. It finally situates the play in the Akan traditional culture as mirrored in the play.

Chapter four is the central component of the paper. I title it the “Analysis of the Play” because it gets deeper with the play. It comprises two major segments. The first part looks at how power operates with the ideology of the throne as a symbol of a game in the play and what benefits it grants the female protagonist in enacting choices that get her closer to the throne. The second considers the practical rhetorical strategies (radical in nature) that are used to disrupt traditional power structures.

Chapter five or the conclusion, examines the primary objectives of the study, its implication and some recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is composed of the literature review segment. The focus of the review is to trace major contested ideologies that frame the unique experiences of women from the West-African regions. The use of “West-Africa” as the framework helps situate Ghana’s feminist contribution to the global discourse since Ghanaian writers hardly conceptualize women’s issues from an inherently local perspective. They also consider their ideologies as parallels to mainline feminism in order to assert their differences or, better still, their uniqueness. West Africa theories share common patterns and trends that connect women’s experiences in this region irrespective of the complex and diverse background— (historically, culturally, or ethnic-wise) thus, it is possible to generally categorize them to an extent. Against this background and scope, the review provides readers with the lens to understand what ostensibly is the West-African’s woman’s identity and her means of agency. It concludes that West-African feminist scholars generally eschew radical forms of resistance to patriarchal subjugation.

2.1. Introduction

The Oxford English Dictionary defines feminism as “Advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex.” The feminist concept began originally among the Americans and French before it gained roots in the British during the women’s suffrage era in the 19th century. Women began to speak up and seek redress in all spheres of their lives, where they experienced marginalization due to the prevailing androcentric culture that continuously theorized society around men. Virginia Woolf’s work, *A Room of One’s Own*, is believed to be one of the first publications in feminist theory that investigates women’s struggles in the literary space. In this piece, she explains that the woman does not have the competitive advantage to demonstrate her academic intelligence in writing

because she must first and foremost have “money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” but is denied at all points (4). Subsequently, the French critic Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex* in 1949 to illustrate the woman’s idea as the binary opposite of the man—that is, she is the “other” of the male “self.” One of her often-cited quotes in her second volume states, “One is not born, but one rather becomes a woman” depicts that society determines what femininity is as opposed to a woman’s biological construct. The movement had international recognition and spread like wildfire.

2.2. Emerging Voice of Black Women

In 1985 under the United Nations’ auspices, the Nairobi conference, which happened to be the first-ever international women’s conference was held to create more awareness about women’s rights. The conference was soon followed by the UN Decade for women which was set aside to ensure a progressive life for all women (Steady 19). This was when “sisterhood” had certain currency” (Rivkin and Ryan 894). Not until the subsequent conference held in Beijing in China, the solidarity of the movement came crumbling down. The movement struggles from internal issues like racism and struggles of power that disturbed the unity and peace it formally enjoyed. Anglophone sisters in the mainline feminism discriminated against women of color through their writings and representation. The excitement of liberation that once appealed to black women was waxing cold. Their white sisters overshadowed them and barely considered discrimination of the women of color. In Audre Lorde’s seminar presentation, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” she bemoans:

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference... know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house (2).

Forming the postcolonial feminists, black female critics situate their conversation in opposition to the western imperialist feminism which was blamed for perpetuating white supremacy against other women of color. Thus, black women interrogated and demanded ways to bridge the gap between the two worlds: the so-called First World and the Third World. The latter, wanting to speak about their cultural identity, use their political space to inform western feminists about their experiences. Writers such as Petersen Holst Kirsten in “First Things First Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature” address misrepresentations and the phenomenon of othering women (in the minority) who do not have the privileges of their white counterparts. “Western feminists discuss the relative importance of feminist versus class emancipation; the African discussion is between feminist emancipation versus the fight against neo-colonialism, particularly in its cultural aspect” (Kirsten 251). Women of color want to be heard, tell their own stories, and reclaim their lost identities. This is how freedom is translated to them.

2.3. The West-African Woman’s Voice

In most West African feminist criticisms, writers have emphasized ethnic and cultural background as the intersectionality of feminism that ought to be explained to white sisters who downplay their values and beliefs. Like postcolonial theorists, African writers accept that they have been misrepresented in mainstream discourses and portrayed as silenced women. Kolawole observes that the burgeoning of critical voices in African feminism are “firmly determined not to allow [their] voice[s] to be submerged by existing feminist discourses” (Kolawole 7). Most writers criticizing western writings of the African women recount that “as researchers/scholars, [they are viewed as] instruments for collecting the raw data with which foreign scholars manufacture knowledge (Obioma 386). Ogundipe-Leslie reveals that “the black, indigenous

African is the international ‘dirty secret.’ He/She is that person who cannot participate in world discourse or take action on his/her own behalf (2).” Adding that “Europe is a theory, African is native informant; Africa is descriptive analysis (6). Hence, even in the area of academia, they can barely be credited for any philosophical writings. Their writing was not so rich for the global discourse like it is for their white sisters, who were the standards and canons for interpreting women’s issues. These class differences have prompted female scholars of African background to investigate new methods of researching African women’s agency modes and their socio-cultural participation. Kalowale’s *Womanism and African Consciousness* is one of the early African feminists whose works addresses the wrong theoretical lens often used to interpret African women’s experiences. According to her, the western framework is “alien” to the indigenous cultural set-up and how women in Africa are mobilized. She explains further that the heterogeneity of culture makes the African woman dynamic in her behavior and presentation. Her “consciousness is not static but protean and dynamic” (39). A “discursive/dialogic” approach to theory will finetune African women’s perspectives. (37). Nnaemeka Obioma believes women in this part of the world will be heard if western theories are expanded to incorporate indigenous theories grounded in other cultures. Positing the concept, “nego-feminism,” she strives to reconstitute the “third space” in a feminist theoretical sense, advocating for that intersection, the “third space,” “which allows for the coexistence, interconnection, and interaction of thought, dialogue, planning, and action, constitutes the arena where I have witnessed the unfolding of feminisms in Africa” (Obioma 360). In sum, it can be emphasized that African feminism is multi-dimensional and versatile. Women’s agentic mechanisms are manifested even through the ordinary and everyday experiences.

2.4. Womanism versus Feminism

Internally, African critics have been obsessed with being labeled as womanist rather than feminist. They also strive to project themselves through their African heritage and culture. The African woman is said to seek not only her freedom but also the freedom of her continent. While the imported idea of feminism is seen as apathetic towards the opposite gender, Black feminists believe that they need each other to fight against the world powers that have plunged the entire race into servitude. Alice Walker coined the term “Womanist” in her collection, *In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*. The book considers the Black-American woman’s interactions and the culture of racial discrimination that affects her people and her life. Walker states that “womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” (xii). This expression implies that the two ideologies are have apply to two different cultural situations. She describes the “womanist” as a mature woman, confident, and community-centered in the other bullets. In “Feminism: The Quest for an African Variant,” Sotunsa Mobolanle Ebunoluwa remarks that “Womanism differs from feminism because it recognizes the triple oppression of Black women wherein racial, classist and sexist oppression is identified and fought against by womanists, as opposed to the feminism main concern with sexist oppression” (230). These matrixes create the urgency for a new identity for black feminism.

Clenora Hudson Weems, another Black American scholar, further explores the womanist concept with her term “Africana Womanism” which is supposed to be more inclusive and universal to the black race. In Pamela Yaa Asantewaa Reed’s essay “Africana Womanism and African Feminism: A Philosophic Literary, and Cosmological Dialectic on Family,” she assesses the relevance of Africana Womanism in most of the writings of diasporic African women. It seems Weems’ interpolation of “Africana” to the womanist tends to embrace the “Diasporic

presence,” [citing Hudson Weems words;] “Africana Womanism means that we deal with the Continental African, as well as the Diasporic African. From the African Caribbeans, African Americans, African Europeans, African Canadians—wherever we are, that is Africana” (Cited in Reed, 168). Although Hudson Weems disagrees with some assertions of Walker’s womanism, like the lesbian position, they both share similarities. Hudson Weems lists about eighteen characteristics of the black woman. She enumerates them as follows:

1) a self-namer; 2) a self-definer; 3) family-centered; 4) genuine in sisterhood; 5) strong; 6) in concert with the Africana man in struggle; 7) whole; 8) authentic; 9) a flexible role player; 10) respected; 11) recognized; 12) spiritual; 13) male compatible; 14) respectful of elders; 15) adaptable; 16) ambitious; 17) mothering; and 18) nurturing. (Cited in Reed, 168).

Let me hasten to add that, Hudson Weems’ description above is rather all encompassing—intended to universalize and capture the black woman’s identity broadly. All of these can apply based a woman’s unique background and culture. The womanist concept is a constant for most black women theorists because it idealizes and projects better image of the black woman in comparison with western writings that frame these women in a negative and marginalized way.

West-African feminists’ theorists have relied heavily on the womanist conventions to enhance the meaning and identity of women from these geographies. Mention can be made to scholars like Mary Modupe Kolawole, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, Filomina Chioma Steady, and Carole Boyce Davis who have amplified west-African stance on gender identity and feminism. Kolawole, a proponent of the womanist concept, corroborates Walker’s womanist concept which to her is ideal for black women’s experiences. She states:

I arrived at the term “womanism” independently and was pleasantly surprised to discover that my notions of its meaning overlap with Alice Walker’s. Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates

blacks. Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a “brother” or a “sister” or a “father” or a “mother to the other” (72)

Contrary to western feminism, Kolawole (like other black feminists) prioritizes culture and ethnic values over an extremist approach in tackling women’s oppression. Thus, Kalawole concludes that womanism is “the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval, and self-assertion in positive cultural ways” (24).

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi drums it home better. She argues that “the African woman is not a hater of men; nor does she seek to build a wall around her gender across which she throws ideological missiles. She desires self-respect, an active role, dynamic participation in all areas of social development, and dignity alongside the men” (36). Apart from giving specific philosophies about women in general, Nneameka’s article, “Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa’s Way” is considered as a methodology than a theory. She advocates for the term “nego-feminism” literally interpreted to mean, “no ego.” This method works in tandem with the womanist concept, which reiterates the need to use diplomatic approaches to negotiate power due to cultural circumstances. Hence, the African woman’s feminism must be devoid of ego or the self. Therefore, she takes exemption from western or radically extremist feminism. She explains further that: “the shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of “give and take /exchange” and “cope with successfully /go around” (Nneameka 378-379).

Catherine Obianuju Acholonu takes a delve into the construction of motherhood and how women interact with this ideology to shape their identities. In her book, *Motherism: An Afrocentric Alternative* she explains that. “...the traditional role of the African

woman has essentially been that of a matriarch and social nurturer. Motherism would refer to an Afrocentric feminist theory:... anchored on the matrix of motherhood (quoted by Salasi 25). Acholonu treats the roles of women as rather complementary to the role of men and not a substitute. From a biologically viewpoint, it is the woman who is endowed with the breastmilk to nurture and not the men. Hence, the relationship that exists between a mother and child is best suited for mothers and none else. According to Alkali et al, Acholonu views motherism as a sacred responsibility that is almost inseparable from the African woman's primary duties. They summarize below that:

Catherine Acholonu discusses women's freedom through Motherism, emphasising the impossibility of severance of issues of motherhood from the African woman. She chooses the mother-child love to stress that while it is thinkable for the White woman to have little or no space for motherhood (they may have shaped their opinion now) whether in aspects of feminism or not, the African woman in contradistinction cannot live without the significance of motherist concerns. (246)

She believes that the typical African woman would strive for excellence in motherhood duties to the extent of expressing guilt when they feel they are not matching up to their motherly roles. Quoting Abubakar Gimba's *Sacred Apples*, Alkali et al explains how the sense of guilt is depicted in Zahra's situation; one of the female characters who had secured a job as an industrial officer just six month into her work. She bemoans:

I just can't leave them behind... I feel I have abandoned them. Abdicated my responsibility to another woman, and turned them into some little orphans... I don't get to be with them enough... I feel guilty... (and she pensively characteristically adds like an African woman), ...I'd love to welcome them when they return from school. I'm never around... Only my brother's wife is... A very nice woman alright, but... I don't think it's the same as being around myself. (245).

Acholonu's perception about the mother-child tie does not necessarily imply that the responsibilities of the African mother are necessarily herculean, but rather a joy which makes women self-fulfilled. This is the same ideology that is translated in Filomina Steady book,

Women and Leadership: Mothering the Nation and Humanizing the State. She argues that, in relation to women and leadership, women's natural ability to nurture makes them very affectionate towards humans thus, they perform well as leaders than men who are egoistically disposed. She contends:

Motherhood on the other hand, [is] a strongly positive attribute in this study and [does] not convey the notion of servant leadership but rather an elevated and symbolic form of service through protection and collaboration, and by sustaining society in the highest possible order (8).

It is true that Motherism cannot be override in African women's discourse, however it is equally imperative to examine what/how to reconcile the hyphen in women-power. To what extent can the woman become actively involved in politics if she cannot negotiate motherly roles is important to note. Then also, society's role in perpetuating the sense of guilt and shame women feel must be reconsidered in order for women so bridge boundaries of gender.

2.5. African Feminism in Creative Literature

In literary writing, mainly among the West African communities, female writers have denounced feminist labels like it has been with philosophers and critics of this region. Feminism connotes the extreme dislike of men to these writers. Practically, the feminist is seen as a trouble-maker, someone who speaks her mind and disturbs society's peace. Few interviews with some of the West-African female writers show reactions to elicit rejection and disavowal of feminist labels. For instance, when the famous writer Buchi Emecheta (a born and bred Nigerian and later an immigrant in London) was asked about why she is constantly evading the feminist identity, she asserts:

I did not start as a feminist. I do not think I am one now. Most of my readers would take this to be the statement of a coward. But it is not. I thought before that I would like to be one, but after my recent visit to the United States, when I talked to real Feminists with a capital "F", I think we women of African background still have a very very long way to go before we can really rub shoulders with such women... So my sisters in America, I am not shunning your advanced help, in fact

I still think women of Africa need your contribution, and at the same time we need our men. (Emecheta, *A Nigerian Writer Living in London*, 1982)

Emecheta understands that the Nigerian woman back home lacks the privileges and class of the Americans who are independent economically to survive by themselves; however, the poverty gap and illiteracy problems are hinderances to women's freedom therefore, women will require to be shrewd about resisting their men. Women constantly need the backing of men to survive.

West African writers rarely create female roles that suggest radicals but rather female characters who are culturally conscious while navigating the patriarchal system. An example is one of Ghana's most articulate writers and scholar, Ama Atta Aidoo's "The Girl who Can." One of her short stories shows how easy it is to change preconceived notions about tiny legs through actions than words. In the Akan Fanti traditions, a girl must have fat legs with meat on it and not a spindly leg like what the little girl possessed. Thin legs were considered useless to perform motherhood responsibilities like supporting the hips of a woman during pregnancy. However, it was only through sports that the little girl could prove the importance of having a tiny leg—which of course changed this negative mentality. Aidoo has a practiced writing culture from a postcolonial feminist lens where she tries to examine the local women's issues at a higher plane like colonization. Ama Aidoo believes that —womanism adds the added understanding of our position in history to the discourse (Aidoo, *Facing the Millennium*, 1996). This is where Aidoo's womanist ideas are expressed in the kinds of literature she produces. She seems to take a moderate stance in identifying as either a feminist or a womanist. She has emphasized that her thought about women and feminism has evolved with time.

Also, African creative writers observe the place of motherhood in their stories. Evident among this is Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, which elevates the traditional

woman's ability to endure hardship for her children's betterment. Writers also use their platforms to reflect on women's experiences, be it bareness, polygamy, and the motherhood trials. In effect, female roles are not so provocative but believed to be culturally sound to appeal to society so that their lives can be bettered. Therefore, both creative writers and scholars must be "realistic and [apply] wholesome strategies devoid of unnecessary aggressiveness, and the centralizing of family, marriage, and motherhood as positive experiences for African women" (Ebunoluwa 232).

However, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, one of the contemporary feminist voices in West African literature, argues that we all have to aspire to be feminists. She even reckons that even children, (both boys and girls) need to be raised with feminist mentality. In an interview with one of America's social commentator, Trevor Noah, Adichie explains that the word, feminism has been clouded in stereotypes. But to be feminist is "[some]one who names a problem and for women, the problem is that we have been excluded" (The Daily Show). She is keen on creating female roles that are independent-minded and vocalizes issues of women subjugation.

2.6. Conclusion

It can be gleaned from the review above that West African writers take inspiration from black Americans and postcolonial feminist works to reconceptualize their identity. However, these theoretical engagements have technically narrowed their concepts of liberation to only the rural women who are preoccupied with basic female roles. The approach of feminism that this paper argues for is the Ogun-dipe-Leslie's STIWANISM, that is Social Transformation Including Women in Africa.

Ogun-dipe-Leslie registers her dislike for romanticized discourses that is propagated in most African feminist theories which often portray African women as rural poor women [who] are happy with their status quo and desire no change" (222). Leaning on the etymological sense

to define what feminism actually implies, Ogundipe-Leslie explains that “feminism or ‘femina’ means ‘woman’ in Latin. [Simply put] feminism, an ideology of woman [or] any body of social philosophy about women” (222). Ogundipe-Leslie takes the pain to enumerates various forms of feminism that can be applicable to the African culture and ultimately constitute women’s freedom in one way or the other.

[The] definition of feminism gives us enough leeway to encompass various types of feminisms: right-wing, left-wing, centrist, left of center, right of center, reformist, separatist, liberal, socialist, Marxist, non-aligned, Islamic, Indigenous, etc. Believe me, all these feminisms exist... Generally, feminism, however, must always have a political and activist spine to its form. If we take feminism to imply all these, is the African woman on the African continent, in an African context without problems in all these areas (222)?”

Her use of rhetorical questions is sarcastic which also evokes a critical tone against those theoretical assertions that only complement women performing natural roles. Ogundipe-Leslie acknowledges the usefulness of the western concept of feminism to Africa situations. However, she believes that the term feminism poses so much threats to men especially and even women. As such, she postulates the term, “Stiwanism” as a replacement of feminism to “bypass the combative discourses that ensues whenever one raises the issue of feminism in Africa” (223).

The point is not that women empowerment in the rural areas is not important. It is very needed just as much as it is for women with status to voice out their grievances on oppression and gender inequalities. The conversation of women suffering oppression must be handled at various levels so long as the gender gaps persist. Also, activism can take different forms including diplomacy, negotiation and militancy. If radicalism happens to be the way around gender subjugation, women should have the liberty of that choice. Chielozona Eze article “African Feminism: Resistance or Resentment?” corroborates this point. According to her, there is too much resentment hanging around African feminist discourse who play the victim of imperialism. What she explains as “voluntarism and victimhood,” a borrowed concept from

Achille Mbembe (95). In other words, African female scholars have become used to blaming their plights on colonialism rather than contending against internal patriarchal oppressions. Eze succinctly argues that feminism amongst Africans is merely an “anti-colonial project rather than a patriarchal investment” (97).

In the Chest of a Woman, complements the idea of reconceptualizing African feminism. The playwright demonstrates that it is possible to uphold one’s cultural believes and still challenge social norms of oppression. Moreover, the use of aggression, radicalism, and voraciousness can prove useful to feminist resistance. This is why Efo Kodjo Mawugbe’s play is essential to feminist work. Firstly, his identity as a male writer and pro-feminist, has positive implications on other male writers who eschew anything feminists. Secondly, female creative can diversify their roles by enacted strong roles to their female characters as one of the ways to committing to feminist resistance in Ghana and Africa at large.

In the chapter that follows, I shed light on Efo Kodjo Mawugbe as a creative writer, as well as how he recreates and applies cultural elements to instigate societal changes towards gender.

CHAPTER 3. BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

This chapter contextualizes the play, *In the Chest of a Woman* and provides background information about the author, Efo Kodjo Mawugbe. This segment endeavors to help readers understand how Mawugbe's background informs his writing and themes, especially regarding the play under discussion. The takeaway note is that Mawugbe promotes a progressive culture for women more than he presents cultural norms as static. To begin the discussion, I give a short bibliography of Mawugbe.

3.1. Who is Mawugbe?

Efo Kodjo Mawugbe (Late) was born to the late Mr. Michael Ayivi Mawugbe and Mrs. Madam Comfort Tulasi, therefore, hailing from the Volta region of Ghana which is located on the south-eastern belt of the map. Although he is a typical Voltarian, he still showed his creative ability to create stories of other ethnic backgrounds. Mawugbe is said to discover his writing and acting talent in the early stages of his life (Book of Condolence). His first performance that marked his career trajectory was playing the role of Senchi in Efua Sutherland's *Edufa* and writing a play for his house. Between 1975 and 1978, Mawugbe received his degree in Theatre Arts, majoring in playwriting. He undertook further studies abroad to ground his knowledge base in Theatre Art. He went to "British Council, Glasgow, and London, where he did a certificate program in Theatre Management and Audience Development" (Book of Condolence). This informs Mawugbe's stagecraft expertise in creating stories that captivate his audience, whose reaction complements his stage craft. According to Kwame Okoampa-Ahoofe, Jr., "it would not, in any way, be a gross overstatement for any critic or student of postcolonial Ghanaian theater to call Mr. Mawugbe "The real, and true, father of participatory theater in Ghana"" (modernghana.com). His staged plays include *In the Chest of a Woman*—produced for stage

(1984), *Constable No Rank* – a drama play produced by the BBC, London Africa Service, and stage (1986), and in 1989 *You play me* play-comedy for radio. *In the Chest of a Woman*, the play for this research pushes the boundaries of gender and power. The play is summarized below

3.2. Synopsis of the Play

Set in the fictional land of Ebusa, there lived a Queen mother who (on her dying bed) invited her children to her chambers to bestow her last blessings. She had two children, Yaa Kyeretwie (Serwaa), the eldest child, and her second and last born Kwaku Duah. Besides sharing the family inheritance amongst the two children, the Queen Mother was also supposed to ordain her son as the next king per the matrilineal custom practices. After apportioning the inheritance between the two siblings, the first child, Nana Yaa (the eldest child), rejected what was offered to her since she was looking forward to taking over the entire community in her capacity as the eldest. Unfortunately, she could not pass for rulership because she was a woman. None of her arguments could pacify her elders nor the Queen mother, who could only act in favor of traditions. Nana Yaa gets physical with one of the elders to prove her strength for power. This display of masculinity puts the Queen Mother in a state of a dilemma. That is, whether she should set aside the dictates of the customs to enstool a female king—for the first time in history—or adhere to the custom. She could only do the latter regardless of how she felt. However, she made a considerable change to the law that, whoever (Nana Yaa or Kwaku Duah) gave birth to a male child first should become the next of kin to Kwaku Duah. Soon after the Queen mother's death, the king, Nana Kwaku Duah got married but unluckily for him gave birth to a girl. Nana Yaa also casts her luck on childbirth but unfortunately misses another opportunity to produce a male son. But this time around, she will not risk it anymore. Nana Yaa orchestrates plans to hide the sex of the child. She executes her plans meticulously, so much that her daughter

lived as a boy for over a decade. The suspense of the play commences when the king (Nana Kwaku Duah) invites Owusu to the palace to undergo training to succeed him. While there, Nana convinces her daughter Ekyaa to seduce her nephew to fall in love with him. Owusu knowing well that he is a male impersonator rejects the love advances towards him. When Ekyaa notices that the love she confesses to the prince is not mutual, she intentionally gets pregnant and pushes it on Owusu to deny him. Certainly, Owusu has to face the law's full rigors as it is considered very offensive by the laws touch the princess without performing the needed rites. Therefore, his male organ had to be chopped off as punishment. Nothing he/she said could validate him and even entreating her mother to step into the situation yielded nothing. While this went on, Nana Yaa falls to the ground and is taken to backstage, where she was later confirmed dead. The executioners ready to carry out the punishment notice something awkward... Owusu didn't have the male genitalia. They run back to the durbar ground shouting: "he is a she" (87). The play is resolved with a deliberation from the community who suggest that the laws could be revised since it was created by them, (men).

The following section aims to help readers glean on the Akan royal kingdom, and why Mawugbe takes keen interest in this ethnic group to reflect on their power dynamics as portrayed in this play.

3.3. Gender Situations in West Akan-Ghanaian Culture

According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Ghana is made up of about ten ethnic groups with the following breakdown: Akan 47.5%, Mole-Dagbon 16.6%, Ewe 13.9%, Ga-Dangme 7.4%, Gurma 5.7%, Guan 3.7%, Grusi 2.5%, Mande 1.1%, other 1.4%. The various ethnicities can be further categorized under two broad umbrellas: the matrilineal and patrilineal groups. Apart from all nine ethnic groups (which are quintessentially patrilineal) only the Akan

group practices matrilineal inheritance. In other words, kinship is based on the female line. In West African cultural studies, usually the Akans and the Yorubas stand out for their matriarchal cultural practices which recognizes women's effort in Nation building. It is believed that gender was never an issue among these ethnic groups. West-African feminists like Oyeronke Oyewumi and Filomina Chioma Steady, Ifi Amadiume's have argued in their writings that precolonial West Africa did not have gender problems nor were they simplistic in their gender roles and performances as they are portrayed by the west. They blame the problem of gender as an accompaniment to western colonization. In her book *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender*, Oyeronke Oyewumi critiques postcolonial native writers for engaging a western patriarchal lens to chronicle Yoruba ethnic history in Nigeria. Thus, Oyewumi's works function as agencies of recouping women's positive images in the past. Oyeronke Oyewumi also argues strongly that what affects development in African society is not gender related but economic power. She asserts that "a rich and educated woman who is outspoken, hardworking and fearless can hardly be looked down upon by any member of the society." (quoted in Ode, 91). These conversations somehow downplay on the embedded discriminations that women face in their day to day lives.

Moreover, the distinguished historian of the Akan ethnic group in Ghana, Ivor Wilks describes the 16th century in Akan history as the "era of great ancestresses" (66). He asserts that women were the bedrock when it comes to establishing the kingdom as a whole—women's resourcefulness and limitless influence are worthy of note. Hence both writers share the view that both males and females alike had equal opportunities and privilege to cause change and growth. For Oyewumi, the hierarchical order of organizing relations amongst the Yoruba's is rather "seniority" and not gender. She argues that "the absence of gender in the Yoruba language

means that the “woman” theorized in many western feminist discourses in terms of negation and limitation has no equivalent in Yoruba culture. In contrast to the west, Yoruba women are not perceived as “powerless, disadvantaged, and controlled and defined by men’ (quoted in Bakare-Yusuf, xii).

Mawugbe’s *In the Chest of a Woman* replicates women’s role in precolonial Ghana. There are clear instances of women occupying recognized positions and participating in the decision-making processes. The play’s power structure mimics the Ashanti dynasty—a royal system known for its powerful royal influence in Ghana and West Africa. At the top of this power structure is the king, referred to as the (Asantehene). Being the royal majesty, he serves as “the principal chief [who] acts under the authority of the ancestors and he is seen by the subjects, to be the embodiment of their power and will” (Shroup 8). The next most powerful on the hierarchical structure is the queen mother or the “Ohemaa.” She is often the king’s mother and she ceremoniously ensure that the right son is enstooled to rule the people. The role of the Ohemaa from the Ashanti point of view is not just ordinary compared with other queen mothers. She is viewed as the conduit of sustenance to the king and beyond. During the colonial era in Akan history, it was by the courage of one of the queen mothers of Ejisu, named Yaa Asantewaa, who organized for a fight back against the British, who had before exiled the king. Yaa Asantewaa mobilized 14,000 armed men to go in the revolt against the British. Akyeampong and Obeng explain that “according Asante oral traditions, the very land on which the capital city of Kumasi stands was bought from a woman with the incoming Oyoko clan group led by a matriarch” (9). Albeit, the matrilineal practice does not erase the idea of the man having autonomous power. He does not always need the permission of the woman when it comes to making decisions. Oduyoye points out that “while mutual support tends to stabilize the family

life, the Akan husband does not expect his wife to stabilize him” (91). Patriarchy is not necessarily compromised within this system. For instance, the Ashanti kingdom is ruled by a conglomerate of male chiefs and other heads who run the day-to-day affairs—legislating laws that even affect women’s lives. Mawugbe’s probes more into this cultural institution and challenges women from these backgrounds so as to infiltrate the power structures that continues to exist in this community. Mawugbe virtue of writing to reach a large Ghanaian audience takes cognizance of cultural metaphors that have been explored in other Ghanaian plays to couch his story. The final section of this chapter gives a summary in respect to specific writing elements Mawugbe adopts to communicate his craft to his readership and audience.

3.4. The Ghanaian Play Genre as a Shared Writing History

The art of storytelling is not foreign to West Africa and Ghana. Africa is known for utilizing the oral forms of storytelling called folklore integral to teach and shape society. These traditional story mechanisms were undermined during colonization as students became acquainted with the European aesthetics of writing. It was not until countries gained their freedom and found the need to recover most of their practices that informed their values and identity. Among other materials that were to be brought back, the oral forms were conceptual artifacts to be recovered for the people. Ghana’s culture had undergone a severe transformation which affected the oral languages and oratorical traditions negatively. It was down the lane (approximately ten years after independence) when oral literature got revamped and integrated into writing—taking the form of both the western written style and the oral characteristics (Yitah 67). Efua Sutherland happened to be the first playwright to experiment with her children’s play by integrating the Akan storytelling tradition into the western drama genre, which evolved into the “New Ghanaian drama” (Addo 113). Ever since the Ghanaian drama was configured, other

playwrights, including Michael Dei-Anang, J.B. Danquah, F. Kwasi Fiawoo, R.E Obeng, Kobina Sekyi, and J.E Casely-Hayford, etc. used their Ghanaian play genre to posit a national literary identity (Anyidoho 7). The Ghanaian plays focused on recouping lost heritage, values, and beliefs, which are the hallmarks of their cultural pride.

The Ghanaian drama continue to share literary elements and symbols that are characteristic to most playwrights. In *FonTomFrom: Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theatre and Film*, Kofi Anyidoho, an editor of the book, views the Ghanaian genre as possessing specific motifs that are metaphorical and connect most literary writings. These motifs include the use of the “the Sankofa bird,” “Ananse the Spiderman,” “the primal drum,” and “the castle and the slave fort or castle,” which instate relevance to the Ghanaian culture. He explains: “while some of these metaphors emphasize achievement and celebration, there underscores the need for critical evaluation of self” (3). In other words, these concepts are supposed to help readers examine themselves in the light of their moral values and identity. These literary metaphors are amply utilized in his Mawugbe’s plays to maintain the tradition of the Ghanaian play genre.

3.5. Mawugbe as a Ghanaian Playwright

Efo Kodjo Mawugbe is not very different when it comes to continuing the Ghanaian literary traditions. He relies on mainly two of the motifs outlined above by Kofi Anyidoho, that is, the Ananse the Spider and the Sankofa bird. Mawugbe aptly employs these metaphors in most of his creative pieces. This style of writing stands out to critics who seek to understand Mawugbe’s writing traditions. In a thesis work by Faith Ben – Daniels titled “A Study of Some Major Influences in Efo Kodjo Mawugbe’s Plays,” he examines four of Mawugbe’s plays and traces his unique writing pattern in all four plays. One of his observations is the fictional representation of Ananse, the spider, and this role in shaping people’s lives in society. Ben-

Daniels concludes that the contextual implication of Ananse's fictional role in Mawugbe's work plays is a parody of society. ...Ananse as a folktale character does not expire with time" (iii). *In the Chest of a Woman*, as it reflects on social behaviors and traditions, is indirectly engaged with the fictional creature Ananse in his bid to outwit the cultural norms of the Ebusa community. Nana Yaa's role tends to highlight this goal of the wise Ananse, whose life in the story evokes moments of reflection. In fact, at the pronouncement of her death, the King, Nana Kwaku Duah remarks that Nana Yaa was the one "with the key to this complex puzzle" (90). In the thesis, "In the same vein, Anita Adorkor Addo reiterates a similar point in her thesis, "Ananse As A Folkloric Character in New Ghanaian Drama," that Mawugbe as a contemporary playwright employs the folkloric fictional character as "a cultural hero in whom most of our traditional values, customs and practices are reflected. He is also a hero from whom we gain advice and learn" (v). Nana Yaa's commitment and stance about women and power gains that political ascendancy after she passes on.

CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first segment considers the Ebusa traditional power system and deconstructs its gender and political establishment through the concept of “the game of thrones”. This is followed by an analysis considering the Ebusa traditional power system and how redefining gender roles gives the protagonist a competitive advantage to the throne. The study restates the point that gender roles and social expectations pose severe problems to women’s public lives, which benefit society than the woman herself.

4.1. The Game of Thrones

To explore the Ashanti dynasty and its power dynamics in the masterpiece, Mawugbe adopts the Sankofa tradition to serve the intended purpose. “Sankofa” is an Akan word meaning “Go back and get it;” also suggestive of the idea of recouping lost heritages. Among the cultural elements used in the play, the Oware game is used here as a metaphor to represent the power play in culture. In the play, the writer does not explain the dynamics of power vaguely but instead explores the concept through a cultural symbol—the “oware” game, meant to be played by royals. Mawugbe seizes the opportunity to project this traditional game image and deconstructs the nature of power and the embedded discourse. It is almost to say that one’s ability to experience power control requires that he/she should be a master of this game.

Therefore, the need to literally play the game of Oware is the first step to capturing power.

Interestingly, the play opens with a game scene, develops the plot sequence by the ideology of the game and resolves the conflicts in this same concept. The opening scene showing an engrossed moment with the mother Nana Yaa and her daughter Owusu is quite intense. The conversation’s nature is not a simple one to grasp but the unraveling of royal secrets through the

“Oware”. Owusu, (her disguised daughter) exclaims in astonishment after she was educated about the Oware game, saying:

Owusu: (Greatly impressed) It’s so amazing how such wonderful military maneuvers are hidden in the game of Oware.

Nana Yaa: That is why it is a game for Royals; Kings, Princes, Princesses, I mean people like you.

The Oware is simply a metaphor of Akan power and culture. Being well informed of this royal game is the sure way to having a successful political carrier, especially for the woman who must be strategic to play the game of thrones. Nana Yaa, the chief gamer, emphasizes this truth throughout the play. When her daughter is at the point of giving up, she chides her:

Nana Yaa: The whole exercise is a game. And you cannot betray me just when victory is within arm’s reach. No, my child, sustain yourself in the role for a little longer (31)

It is evident that possessing a mentality of politics as a game is crucial and helps engage circumspective approaches in order to realize one’s dreams. When Nana Yaa faces the painful rejection to be a king, she reorganizes the need to go by the rules of the game. Ideally, women must understand how power is constructed culturally in order to strategically dismantle it. The question here is, what then is the game tactics? Three (3) undergirding concepts have been identified here as the strategies for perpetuating power and male dominant culture or the game of thrones.

4.1.1. Masculinizing the Throne

To commence, the throne is portrayed as masculine and reinforces the idea that, one must be a man in order to contest the throne. In Nana Yaa’s flashback account where she narrates the scene of her dying mother (the Queen Mothers bestowing her blessing), she challenges the elders for their discrimination against her, arguing:

Nana Yaa: I am the elder child. Customarily, it is I who must succeed you and not my younger brother

2nd Elder: Don't forget he is a boy and you a girl.

3rd Elder: Besides, he will soon grow into a man

Nana Yaa: And is that going to make him older than me? Tell me...

She continues,

Nana Yaa: And who says the chieftaincy stool is made for only the hard buttocks of men

2nd elder: That is what has been the practice since time immemorial.

From the dialogue above, it can be concluded that chieftaincy or the throne as a subject is a male business in the Ebusa kingdom. These ideologies are founded on assumptions that the male body epitomizes strength, decisiveness, and authority needed for ruling, while the reverse is the woman. The notion of physical strength being the criteria for leadership is a thing of the past. Leadership is now about creativity and spontaneity (Adichie TedTalk), which is fairly demonstrated through Nana Yaa's level of intelligence. She does not take the game at face value but connects deeply with it like she was on a battlefield. Such mentality creates the maneuvers needed to navigate this power construct. As indicated, the Oware is a royal game; therefore, Nana Yaa uses that same concept to conquer and destroy it. If her position as the elderly one (which means a lot in this cultural setting) is overridden, obviously, she stands no chance to rule. The use of situational irony conveys the message of Nana Yaa meaning real business in this game. For instance, in the course of the Oware game, her daughter asked:

Owusu: Quickly takes count of the marbles and surprised at the results) But Mother, how did you know there are eight marbles here?

Her short answer takes her daughter back:

Nana Yaa: hahahaha... only fools plunge into battle without doing any homework about enemy's strength. Hahahaha... Let's go on with the game. Play, my child it's your turn.

She further states:

Nana Yaa In your desire to capture these two marbles by hook or crook, you've left your rear unguarded thereby giving me two clear options; either to let you capture two of my soldiers and I take six of yours out of two, or I rescue my two soldiers to allow you to re-marshal your forces. (*Pause*) No! It is a stupid battle strategy to allow your enemy time to reconsolidate his position. Go in for the kill whilst the troops are still in utter disarray. That way, you are assured of sweet, quick and lasting victory. Hahahaha... so I am going in for the six, whilst you have the two out of one if you still want it. (*Plays, but Owusu seems not to be responding*) what's the matter with you my child, aren't you going to play the game?

Owusu: I am hot.

Her choice of words to describe the game is figurative and punctuated with military terms that suggest a serious woman with a ready-to-fight posture. She refers to the marbles as “soldiers” and wins as “kills,”—which is quite over-ambitious in this context. However, that is how she draws inspiration from the game. She also implies the need for optimum alertness on her part, whose political goals are at stake. Her words create that forcefield necessary for change which demands extra determination for her political dreams. The reason being that power norms are deeply rooted in dominant male culture, which regular use of words cannot appeal to. According to Nana Yaa, the woman with a kinetic power is the most influential: “what men fear is the female power in motion” (Leg 1, p.31). Therefore, a female politician like Nana Yaa must wear that masculine personality to face the power systems.

4.1.2. Objectification of Women for Power

Moreover, the game of throne conceives women as a means to an end and not subjects to power. Women give away a lot in politics to see their favorite male candidate crown the king. It must be noted that Women do not have to think about possessing political power because they

are entirely ruled out of the game. From the play, it is evident that not every woman is undermined. Apart from the Gossips, Adwoa and Akosua, who may not be treated so seriously, any other female character maintains a positive image—even Abrewanana, who is very aged, is valued for possessing wisdom in their public discussions. Technically, the Queen mother’s position is recognized because she serves as the conduit for giving life to the king—” [she] alone can transmit royal blood’ (Oduyoyo 93). However, their incorporation of matrilineal culture is not the same as matriarchy; therefore, it does not accommodate women as potential rulers. This is how gender inequality takes form in the play. Observing the political situation, Nana Yaa decides to penetrate the gendered power system to demonstrate her ability to rule as a female king. She constantly asserts that she will be king and not queen. This is because these two positions are not the same. The patriarchal culture determines gender roles so that control and rulership are right for men. Thus, when Owusu insists that she is not the rightful heir, saying that “No, mother, I have no right to what is not mine. It is her birthright, not mine,” her mother chides her:

Nana Yaa: Nonsense! (Pause) Nonsense! RIGHT! How that word makes my stomach churn. Nobody has an absolute right to anything in the world. You are going to fight to capture the stool, my child. You have a right to it just as anybody. (Boldly) And I am saying you SHALL be King, I repeat KING, not queen, after my brother, Kwaku Duah and rule the people. And so be it!

A typical scenario of using the woman as an object to accomplish political power is seen when Nana Kwaku Duah manipulates her daughter Ekyaa to have a love relationship with her nephew, Owusu. Because Nana, Kwaku Duah understands what it means to be married to the next-of-king and the extent to which that would add to his ego, he sets up Owusu for love and sends Ekyaa’s boyfriend Agyeman on an errand. That sudden switch in Nana Kwaku Duah’s

character came as a shock because he has maintained a very calm composure until the quest to sustain power dawns on him. At this point, he loses his guard and discloses his plans clearly:

King: I know all that. You must use your female charm to entice his heart out of its shell. The mother has fed him with a bit of her stubborn leopard nature, I know, but go ahead. (Conspiratorially) I ostensibly brought him here under the pretext of studying the art of kingship, but the real reason is for you to win his heart forever. That way, when he succeeds me as a king, you shall be his wife, a queen. That is the hidden political angle to the whole enterprise.

Indeed, the objectification of women is a highlight in the game. Adwoa and Akosua's servants were right to have hinted at the king's ulterior motive for bringing Owusu over to the palace even when his time wasn't due and then transferring Agyemang to another town to disconnect from her daughter. This is how they summarize the whole plot:

Akosua: (Almost to Herself) Here is a beautiful fish, and over there is an equally tempting bait. (Pause). Hmmm... who knows, may be for the first time in history, contrary to human expectations, the hook may swallow the fish. (They both laugh loudly)

Adwoa: I want to understand one thing. Why would Daasebre want the two cousins to marry?

Akosua: Very simple; that way the stool and the wealth of the Kingdom remain in the family for good.

Adwoa: My goodness, I now understand. I now see what length men will go to sustain aristocracy in society. Eeei men, Hmm.... (Second Leg, p 44)

This analogy confirms the egoistic character of men who can easily weaponize women for selfish gains. This is aptly put by Adwoa, who states that men will go all stretch to keep their "aristocracy" (44). While the theme of women's objectification is a patriarchal apparatus, Nana Yaa engages with this ideology too and adapts the very patriarchal strategies to instigate change. She wants women to be the end and not the means. According to her, the whole point in taking

up this assignment is to dispute those gender assumptions perpetrated against women being incapable of ruling.

4.1.3. *Cultural Myths of the Throne*

In addition to the foregoing points, the game of the throne operates through particular belief systems, known as customs. The customs are referenced to the gods and ancestral powers who are considered as the originators of the laws. There is also the belief that these supernatural forces can interfere the natural world to punish those who break the laws by visiting them with death or incurable diseases. In the Akan-Ghanaian culture, these customs are couched in what is referred to as the taboos that give caution to the people regarding those forbidden activities in the society. One of such is the relationship of women and the throne (Oduyoye 52). Traditionally, women are forbidden to be kings because they have the tendency to defile the throne when they are in their mensural cycle. Nana Yaa's shows how these taboos can be dangerous to her fight for freedom to rule. Mawugbe's use of internal monologues helps readers and the audience understand the dangers of fighting for power in a traditional sense and also a way to showcase how the patriarchy is perpetuated and reinforced. Nana Yaa cautions her daughter on countless occasions to avoid sitting on the throne when due customs have not yet been performed. In an epiphany, Nana Yaa behaves strangely:

Nana Yaa: ... My mind is rebelling against the rest of my body. Save me...save me ...!*(She goes into a spin and falls down into a heap. Slowly, she lifts herself from the floor as if waking from a deep trance)* I can hear voices...Voices screaming out, warnings and threats...Threats of losing my female head if I don't let loose the ancient secret on my tongue. But why do you all stare at me? Will you people stop pointing those skinny, old, withered, bony fingers at me accusingly. You couldn't have taken any wiser

decision. If you had seen what I saw. Perhaps you would have done worse. Worse, worse, worse I say...(Leg 1, p.11)¹

The monologue shows the entrenched nature of the traditional powers and how the concept is reinforced. Nana Yaa's statement, "if you had seen what I saw," suggests having a kind of vision that spurs her on to resist gender oppression and break the grounds for women to emerge from the grass. Could this be the vision of knowledge? Most feminists always come to the state of awareness, that epiphanic exposure haunting them and pushing them to pursue freedom. It is also clear that Nana Yaa is really involved in a very intense fight, and even her ancestresses are warning her to discontinue her actions. Nana Yaa is undeniably courageous to keep such philosophies since the power establishment is maintained through these traditions and very immutable. Nana Yaa is not oblivious of the taboos of the land; she firmly warns her daughter, saying:

Nana Yaa: Now my son, listen carefully to what I am going to tell you. Over there in your uncles' palace at Nkwanta is a judgement stool on which Daasebre sits to adjudicate serious matters affecting the Ebusa Kingdom. Don't EVER sit on that stool, unless you've been enstooled and sworn as king. No woman, it is said, shall ever sit on that stool unless she's been sworn a queen. If you disobey this order your own blood shall be used in cleansing the stool. You needn't look so frightened. Only be careful. Your identity is well protected. You understand?

Of course, judgment seat representing purity, will be tainted by the woman's blood, a metaphor of dirt (Oduyoye 52). Women are thus, forbidden to occupy that spot; they are breasted and controlled by their emotions. The taboo about the throne is the hardest to challenge because

¹ This part of Nana Yaa's role when it was staged was excellently executed. Her voice reverberates to the auditorium, and she evoked a moody atmosphere which suggests that the gods were really against her. The audience also gets dragged into that space like a quiet abyss, and increasing audience awareness that Nana Yaa was treading on dangerous grounds. Her personality and body language complemented her words which helps achieve the desired result. (SOSHGIC drama team <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyTmzBhrdnU>)

of beliefs in the supernatural consequences. It is believed that the ancestral spirits are the founders of the traditions and will protect them to the last dot. However, Owusu sits on it and holds the staff of authority to pass judgment momentarily. That short scene is the spot of victory for Nana Yaa, and even though it did not end in a permanent triumph, the playwright uses this play to unpack deep-seated beliefs used to subjugate women.

Having unpacked the traditional intricacies of power and change, the following section considers how Nana Yaa enacts her own gender identity to negotiate the political system.

4.2. Redefinition of Gender Roles- Nana Yaa's Rhetorical Strategies to Political Power

On top of the traditional political programming being a predominantly male culture, women's role is another social leverage that women endure. Her domestic expectations take the better part of her, leaving her with little room to perform any public role Mawugbe's literary activism on gender roles helps understand how unnegotiated norms negatively impact women's political ambitions. This section identifies three rhetorical strategies utilized by the female protagonist, Nana Yaa, to effect change in gender narratives and to challenge women to pursue power.

4.2.1. Responding to the Womanist Myth

In a typical Ghanaian-Akan tradition, the woman's success is measured by how domesticated she is in her biological roles in maintaining the home. Women are trained to have a dependent mindset and make marriage the center of their lives. Moreover, she must aspire to be marriage material. She must be humble, sober, submissive, and her investment must be towards the man for his taking. She is supposed to consider herself as the weaker one and not supposed to be all by herself, fighting for recognition in the public spaces before male predators. She must be under the covering of some strong man, her protector, to shield her from external uncertainties.

For that reason, the home has been created for her safe living. Nana Yaa's role as a way of responding to these predetermined norms is very contradictory. This is how she interprets the identity of a woman. She tells her daughter:

Nana Yaa: ... I tell you, if there is anything men fear in this world, it is a woman who is a WOMAN!

Owusu: And by that you mean?

Nana Yaa: A Woman who accepts challenges. A woman who can shout back when a man shouts. A woman who is all out to give the command like the man. A woman who in no uncertain terms, rejects absolutely the definition of the word feminine to mean home-oriented, passive, needing-to-be-guided-and-protected. To the men, such a woman is a real woman and a woe unto manhood. In short, what men fear most is female power in motion! (31)

This is a long lecture about Nana Yaa's redefinition of a functional woman's idea and what femininity really entails. Her interpretation of a woman is directly in contrast with her cultural standards. As much as she can, she tries to do away with traditions that put her in a state of subservience. This is not to say that she hates her femininity. We see her in instances where she joyfully carries out feminine roles like showing basic courtesy. Nana Yaa conspicuously demonstrates her kind self by properly receiving the elders sent over to come for Owusu. She was kind towards them, and the reception was a warm one. Also, at other times she showed motherly care to her daughter. Except that she, demonstrate some differences in character, being strong-willed and having her priorities in place. Being uncompromising to gender norms, she professes that "In the chest of a woman is not only an extension of the breast and a feeble heart [but] a flaming desire to Possess and use power"! (First Leg, lines 1030-1033).

The use of "breast" is metaphorical. The woman's breast has been symbolic in the early postcolonial discourses to assert a sense of national pride and beauty. For instance, the French Pan-Africanists, also referred to as the "negritudes" engaged with poetry to honor and adore the

continent. Interestingly these powers relied on the black woman's body parts to concretize their ideology of beauty. However, they were criticized for sexualizing the African woman's body just for the intended purpose, but men did not regard their women as they professed in their writing in real life. (Newell 29). An extract of David Diop's "Mother Africa" reads:

Negress, my warm rumour of Africa
My land of mystery and my fruit of reason
You are the dance by the naked joy of your smile
By the offering of your breasts and secret powers . . .
You are the idea of All and the voice of the Ancient.
(Cited in Newell, 39)

Like most literary feminist critics, Mawugbe rejects the male nationalist fantasy and instead aims to expose women's real political struggles. In Nana Yaa case, she is not so much fascinated by the breast as just an apparatus for nourishment or feeding, but showing how the "secret powers" can be exhumed out of it. The expression: "In the chest of a woman is not only an extension of the breast and a feeble heart..." implies that women have been identified as fragile to perform roles of rulership because of their breast. That is why Nana goes for the breast to resist political oppression. To explain that strength and power do belong to women, she hides her daughter's breast to escape gender criticisms. She did indicate that the whole con play was momentarily, and so she was ready to let go of her at the right time. Nana Yaa's approach to freedom has been criticized as rather oppressive. For instance, Awo Mana Asiedu, a Ghanaian critic in the women literature, explains that Nana Yaa's feminism is disempowering because she seems to abhor her own femininity (126). This is somewhat true because, keeping to the societal standards as a typical woman will negatively influence her smooth sail. For instance, playing the role of a wife is too much work which can limit her plans and intensions. This explains why her subversive rhetoric, she tries not to stay come under any marital commitments with any man to

easily navigate her plans. It must be established that Nana Yaa operates as a transformational leader and not a charismatic leader.

Moreover, she is not enthused with playing any biological role as many others are preoccupied with, so as to make a point that “women’s reproductive role and other domestic burdens restrain them from playing an active role in [politics]” (Odame 7). She might not fit the Ghanaian ideology as she barely takes pride in her womanliness. The womanist believers tend to highlight the connection between motherhood and feminism and how it can be. It is hard to dissociate the woman’s experiences from her seeking any agency for liberation. Nana Yaa does not fantasize the motherhood ideals. She could have tried a second child to get that male son, perhaps, but that might have been too much work for her political ambitions. She instead uses what she has to get what she wants and makes that clear statement that women can rule. Nana Yaa’s radical persona is somewhat distinct from how Ama Atta Aidoo’s portrays her rebellious female protagonist, like in the play *Anowa*. Whereas Nana Yaa retires into the space of individualism without any remorse, *Anowa*, on the other hand, persistently gets haunted down by her emotional instabilities, and she suffering childlessness. *Anowa* is very independent and self-willed to the point that everyone, including her husband, calls her a witch.

Kofi Ako: I should have known that you were always that clever

Anowa: And certain things have shown that cleverness in not a bad thing.

Kofi Ako: Everyone said you were a witch; I should have believed them.
(Phase 3, p. 125)

All the strength and self-confidence came crashing down with the thought of motherhood. *Anowa*’s attachment to society’s definition of feminine happiness is grave. Thus, she is not able to fully resist the fact that is still valuable with or without children. The dream of motherhood fascinates her to the extent that she could not reconcile what is supposed to be true

happiness for herself even after gaining financial power and freedom. This is Anowa's struggle with the idea of femininity. She does not show commitment to the supposed markers of woman as society demands. An example is that Nana Yaa does not try another chance on childbirth, to see if she could produce her male child. She is not ready to be preoccupied with making babies which would in the end, cause her to veer off from her dreams. It is a common phenomenon to see women give up on their dreams or disappear from the limelight after marriage and childbirth. Nana Yaa will not exchange her dreams for any other social role which is not what she wants for her life. She is a ready-fighter, resolute, adamant, and unwavering towards her dreams even in the face of death. According to her, there is a reason for struggles, but "suffering must be creative. It should give birth to something good, substantive, meaningful. Something loving and lasting" (29).

4.2.2. Feminism through Parenting

The family structure coupled with biased roles has been identified as one of the institutions to perpetuates gender oppression. Girls are trained differently from boys. How children turn out in life much connects with the gender norms in which they are socialized into. Owusu's case is a perfect illustration of how a child's gender is a role designed and predetermined by society and not essentially connected to her biological characteristics. This is the same idea of Beauvoir who explicitly says that "one is not born a woman but becomes a woman (3)." In other words, Nana Yaa making her daughter impersonate masculinity attests that parenting choices can shape children's behaviors just as society is powerful. Basically, getting her daughter masculinized shows how gender is "performative" and not a biological trait. The concept of gender as performative is a proposition by one of America's feminist writers Judith Butler. In her essay, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Butler states: "There is no "proper"

gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property". She buttresses the fact that gender is not natural but a social construct, resulting in what she points as "the effect of a compulsory system" (cited in Rivkin and Ryan, 955). Using this play as a background for this concept, Mawugbe gives a glimpse of the gender circumstances in the play. Owusu as a child is neutral until she receives training from an independent mother who creates a gender script for her to follow through to materialize her dreams. Nana Yaa is somewhat extreme with her gender plans, but it is equally vital to situate the cause to her using this winding path. The restriction of society on the female child seeking power is frowned upon. Owusu would have never come close to control if she/he was socialized as a girl—her choices and aspirations will be way different.

Parents, mothers, teachers, role in shaping children's lives cannot be underestimated. Parenting should not be portrayed as a mere channel to maintaining gender norms that limit children from going their full length. Nana Yaa challenges the norms that intend to weaken the girl-child and instead takes advantage of her position to create a strong girl-boy through her parenting approach. Little interventions or resistances have come from the mothers, as they work as instruments to maintain the dominant male culture. There are also shame politics against women whose parenting styles do not conform to the norms of society. The woman's responsibility to train the child is one area where she receives praise or condemnation. Apparently, "[no] woman wants to experience the agony of deviant progeny so, in the end [they] usually become very effective agents in perpetuating [their] own marginalization" (Odooyuye, 214). Whereas patriarchy dictates how society should be organized, the female adult is charged to ensure that roles are adhered to—they not only guide the children but police them and gatekeep what should be entertained or detained. To emphasize that the girl-child is continuously

under monitoring is not far-fetched from this play. Nana Yaa's parenting is steeped in gender awareness and power dynamics and igniting a strong-willed daughter for political power. This is how she enlists her child in a predominant political space. She convinces Owusu:

Nana Yaa: You are going to fight to capture the stool, my child. You have a right to it just as anybody. (Boldly) And I am saying you SHALL be King I repeat KING, Not queen, after my brother, Kwaku Duah" (27).

Juxtaposing Owusu's upbringing with that of her nephew Ekyaa, there is a wide gap between the two concerning their political drives. Owusu is more focused and pioneering while Ekyaa lives a life of dependency and tries to find value and fulfillment through marriage, in this situation, by building a relationship with the soon-to-be king. Ekyaa fell for her father's antics to entice her cousin (Owusu) so as to keep his lineage reigning longer in the royal game. It is interesting to see how Nana Kwaku Duah sets his daughter up for match-making regardless of his daughter's existing relationship with Agyeman.

The idea of women building their dreams around a man is prevalent in today's culture, and it is time for parents, especially women, to up their parenting repertoires to train girls to stay true to themselves and their dreams.

4.2.3. *The Woman and the Community*

One of Ghana's famous adage which goes: "if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate the nation," is often cited to emphasize the need for educating the girl child. Though this is very attractive to even feminists, it has a constraining effect on women as they tend to overlook their well-being in exchange to get society's approval. The West-African Ghanaian woman has at the back of her mind that she a communal being and responsible for holding the family and community together. While the male counterpart can be selfish and individualistic with his goals and aspiration. The woman as a

communal entity is again reiterated in Kolawole's explanation of the African womanist concept.

She states that

The African woman seeks self-fulfilment within this plural cultural context. The average African woman is not a hater of men; nor does she seek to build a wall around her gender across which she throws ideological missiles. She desires self-respect, an active role, dynamic participation in all areas of social development, and dignity alongside the men. This necessitates a dialogic stance, a mutual understanding and not a dogmatic or diachronic ideological posture (36).

In summary, Kolawole holds the view that African women and their style of resistance must not be radical. Taking account of the political situation, men would protect their power than will compromise it with any woman. Hence, it is unlikely to conclude that dialogue is always the way out for female marginalization in this space. In fact, some of the assertions made above are hard to reconcile in real-life experiences. Nana Yaa's dialogue with the predominantly male construction of traditional council shows that there is little women can do to appeal to the elders' conscience to accept a female leader. Nana Yaa no longer wants to commit to the social norm of "seeking self-fulfilment in a plural context." She fights for her own happiness embraces the duty to please herself even though the term "self" is not encouraged for women's use. A typical example in the play is when Nana Yaa initially contends for a bigger share of inheritance just like her brother. When her mother shares the inheritance between herself and her brother, she quickly rejects it stating:

Nana Yaa: Let my mother know that if I am to rule, I want a whole kingdom and not some piece of barren land with four or five cottages scattered here and there. (General Murmur of disapproval)

Queen Mother: But you are not a man. (Leg 1, p. 19)

The above dialogue escalates into a verbal exchange between Nana Yaa, the princess and the elders who think of her as too individualistic and selfish, while considering that of her younger brother's as plausible to rule. Nana Yaa's outcry for independence is translated as a

threat to social well-being; hence, to ensure that she remains subjugated, they attack her independence. Nana Yaa asked to be treated with respect and accorded the right to rule. She goes for the significant share without feeling ashamed. This time, Nana Yaa creates that mindset that being possessive as a woman is not wrong at all.

Having been vilified and later denied the position of power because of her sex, Nana Yaa tries to play by the rules of the game as she uses machiavellian maneuvers to infiltrate the political program. The entire act can be captured in the Akan oral proverb, “if doing good is nothing, doing bad is also nothing.” In an actual sense, these should be some of the conversations that queens should be confronting, but they seem satisfied or feel that they will be too daring of them to challenge.

Moreover, women’s service towards the community is relived through the gossips, Akosua and Adwoa. Though they do not fit into the conversation of power, it is evident how they try to attain promotion through their service to the community. When Ekyaa showed signs of pregnancy, they quickly went to the palace and reported the case. They feel they will be rewarded for services that keep the community in shape. It happened so when it was confirmed by the king that her daughter was indeed pregnant. He says:

King: tell the women that I thank them very much for coming straight to report to me their observations. Such are the people who would not stay to see the Kingdom fall apart. I wish them peace. At the right time, they shall be rewarded abundantly. They may go. (p. 75)

The gossips, Akosua and Ekyaa’s role is also crucial to the structure of the play. They ensure the community’s smooth sail and are also used to knit the chapters of the play together. They furnish readers with missing links and gist readers with the information they may not be privy to. This same sense of communal attachment to the woman becomes a determinant of women’s dreams. Thus, in society, there are things like female jobs which embody this collective

identity. Works like, nursing, teaching, fashion, cooks, are considered feminine and suitable for women because they are services that emerge from the woman's identity. Her dreams must be towards the well-being of her people. According Oduyoye, "The rule is that a good woman does not put her needs first, for her selfishness is the *sine qua non* of a healthy community" (34)). Individualism has terrified most women who have the desire to go after dreams outside of the traditional norm. Nana Yaa's role shows how difficult it is for women to go their own route without conforming to the stereotype. However, with persistence, she can cause her daughter to sit on the stool—overturning the long-standing myth against women and power in the Ebusa kingdom.

4.2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the challenge of women rising into leadership positions is not just western but also a cultural issue reinforced through gender norms. However, if women would want to survive in their political pursuits, they must approach politics as a game, understand its operations and navigate the system in that sense. This might not necessarily favor the societal ideals for the woman whose joy and worth are hinged to her biological roles.

It is undeniable that Nana Yaa's courage and creativity are great values that resonate throughout the play. However, it will be unfair to state the emerging problems of her rhetoric that seems too selfish and did not account for other characters' safety in the play. Her choices greatly impacted characters like Owusu, and even Ekyaa who continue to walk in lie and deception. That said, Nana Yaa must not be solely accused for these atrocities. The stringent cultural norms have a stake in this mess and also informs Nana Yaa's trajectory or plan of action. The play's final leg (and the resolution of the play) provides an all-inclusive approach of handling complex social issues and conflicts that erupt in this play. The use of autocratic ruling procedures was long

overdue. The scene (an open forum) invites critical perspectives in solving the conundrum that has befallen the people, seeing, the culprits were just victims of circumstances. Also, the root cause of the individuals' actions needs to be traced and properly addressed here. Gender norms, coupled with immutable traditions, basically led Nana Yaa to orchestrate unconventional means to subvert power and materialize her dreams. Should the rules bend to accommodate women, Nana Yaa might not come this far with her schemes. The initiative of reconsidering the customs and norms through democratic means is a step in the right direction. This time around, the king, a symbol of authority and wisdom, is trapped by the law's dictates and unfortunately cannot help himself or his family from complete erasure. It only takes the people's voices and freedom of speech to: question the customs and tradition, identify the flaws and then insist on changing these obstinate traditions that makes the system progressive and a better place to live. The significance of the public debate is simple: society must be fashioned democratically and assess the people's interest too. Okyeame Boateng argues that "the customs were made not by gods; they were made by men and therefore can be unmade by men" (94). In other words, the laws should serve the people and not vice versa.

Nana Oppong's adamance to change depicts the insensitive nature of customs when they are portrayed as unbending. Even though it is clear that Owusu's ordeal was never out of her own volition, Nana Oppong, insists that custom takes its full course by ensuring that Owusu faces the death penalty. His characterization describe what strict rules looks like. He sounded inhumane, heartless, and selfish. He was unperturbed about the ill-fate of the unborn child who is innocent to all this drama. He retorts: "the seed in that womb is the case of the gathering. That seed is unwanted. The Ebusa Kingdom has no place for bastards" (95). Nana Oppong's (re)actions show that he somehow tries to promote a personal interest than faking an attitude of

patriotism. Unfortunately, when his plans boomerang on him, Nana Oppong begs for the same people to intervene for him and “cast the laws aside” in order to spare his son’s life. A clear scenario that explains why cultural norms should be flexible.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the study examines the primary goals set out in the “Introduction” of this thesis. It also discusses the implication of the study to feminism and activism in culture and politics. The final part considers the significance of the research and states some recommendations for future works.

5.1. Changing the Face of Traditional Politics

Through the analysis of the play, *In the Chest of a Woman*, this paper has investigated the construction of the Akan traditional society and its power dynamics. It has unpacked the patriarchal nature of the throne by examining how power is perpetuated by the instrumentality of gender. It further assesses the gendered nature of the king’s political position, which denies women of power because they are not masculine while at the same time keeping them in the boxes of unrealistic femininity. This understanding clearly pushes Nana Yaa to contend with the gender norms and prove her masculine strength towards power. Furthermore, conceptualizing the throne as a game spares Nana Yaa the stress of chasing after unattainable female expectations. She actually escapes these gender traps to remain faithful to her dreams. She teaches that the female politician needs more than femininity to survive in the political space. She needs to be very intelligent, cunning, a gamer, and proactive to achieve any feat for herself

From the theoretical point of view as illustrated in the literature review, I argue that feminism in West Africa must embrace radical actions as part of women’s various forms of activism. So long as the customary norms do not bend to reconsider its patriarchal standards, women should have the liberty disturb the boundaries and create the necessary discomfort to cause that will bring this desired cultural change. It is difficult if feminists feel bounded to prioritize culture over their struggles. Rose-Marie Tong puts it succinctly: “Feminist theory is not

one, but many theories or perspectives attempts to describe women's oppression, to explain its causes and consequences and to prescribe strategies for women's liberation. (quoted in Kolawole 11)

Even though feminists and writers condemn the monolithic ways of defining African women, they also become equally guilty in their quest to explain how activism should be expressed. The idea of women as womanists and not feminists transcend the creative writing spaces as well; therefore, female writers are not inspired to prescribe aggressive and radical roles to their female characters. For instance, most African critics would have the comfort and safety of celebrating elements that project the Akan culture than talk about Nana Yaa's creative adventure to subvert power. In this analysis, it can be attested that both offices the queen mother and the king carry some level of authority however, the king's right to legislate and execute laws puts him above all. So, the question remains: to what extent is the amplification of the office of the queen status empowering enough, as compared to having a narrative change of women occupying the throne? Women's political status as queens among the Akan community, though influential, has been tokenized in cultural studies and therefore does not enhance critical examination of the inherent sexist practices in the traditional power system. The analysis herein demonstrates that there still persists the problem of sexism even among pro-women societies like the Akans of Ghana and the Yoruba of Nigeria, who practice matrilineal inheritance. Women need to break barriers and take up positions that give them full autonomy and control. This is the kind of precedent set forth by Nana Yaa in the play because she understands that the queen's office comes with somewhat higher restrictions than it does the king.

5.2. Gender Roles and Power

In understanding the intricate nature of power and male dominance from this study, gender roles and rigid customary practices have been identified as costly to society's growth. From the play, Nana Yaa and Owusu show how they negotiated these norms to find their way to the top. Nana Yaa proves that female roles and social definitions of the Ebusa society do not promote women's political interest. Pursuing these female roles will only limit the woman from giving her maximum concentration to political demands. Nana Yaa reprioritizes her needs accordingly, takes a different parenting strategy, and dares to be selfish to get her plans into fruition. These approaches are not socially correct; however, they propelled her into that space of political competition. Hence the gender script can only sustain the patriarchal project and not dismantle it. What is more essential to the discussion is her ability to enact her own identity, negotiate it, stick to it, and make it happen.

5.3. Implications

The research is set as an instrument of activism for cultural change in the local power structure through radical gender roles. This is important because increased women's participation in traditional power construct will contribute to shifts in paradigms pertaining females taking up higher political roles in government. As indicated in the introduction segment, if traditional female chiefs and kings were to emerge in present Ghana, it will enhance visibility of female leaders at the national level. The reason is that the female politicians will not have to prove themselves beyond reasonable doubt as the practice would have normalized through these traditional roles. Women alike would come to terms with the fact that the throne or presidency is not only established for men. Having such female leaders represented as chiefs and kings in real situations, and creative writing serves as a viable tool to effect positive narratives. Thus, the need

to push for the Nana Yaa's characters to awaken and disrupt the socio-cultural power system. So far in Ghana, there has not been any female chief/king. This is where the play features as too radical for the cultural situation. The traditional role of a king has been only reserved for men, and as it stands, it is currently the norm in all ethnic cultures. The effect of the acute shortage of women in the decision-making positions both politically and traditionally has contributed to the struggles and backlash that female politicians have to endure since society is not used to women leaders.

5.4. Future Work

For future works, I recommend that researchers extend their feminism and activism to the cultural-political power that also discriminate against women from engaging in political roles. Reimagining new roles for women in our conventional setting will go a long way toward positively impacting women in general. In as much as West-African scholarship blame marginalization on mainstream feminism, it is equally necessary to dismantle inherent biases in the traditional power hierarchies that continue to deny women the opportunity to rule.

Moreover, West African writers must embrace radical mechanisms as equally viable in resisting sexist cultures. Writers must endeavor to talk about the conflicts and enact fictional characters who can engage with radical rhetorical ideas to subvert the patriarchy, as Nana Yaa demonstrates in the play, *In the Chest of a Woman*.

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