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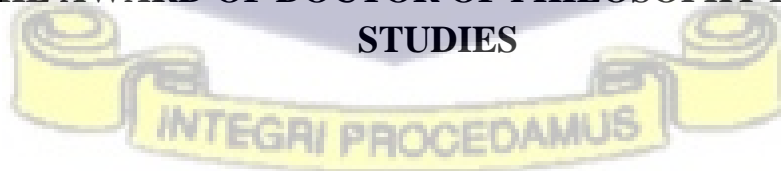
**WOMEN AND POWER IN AFRICA: A CASE OF THE AKAN  
(KOKOFU) WOMEN IN GHANA**

**BY**

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**10364058**

**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO UNIVERSITY OF GHANA,  
LEGON IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT  
FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICAN  
STUDIES**




**MARCH 2020**

**DECLARATION**


I, Rebecca Serwa Akoto Tandoh, author of this thesis, hereby declare that except for references to other people's works which have been duly acknowledged, the work presented here was done by me as a PhD candidate of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana Legon, under the supervision of Professor Albert K. Awedoba, Professor Esi Sutherland-Addy, and Professor Emmanuel K. Akyeampong. This work has never been submitted in whole or in part for any degree elsewhere.

  
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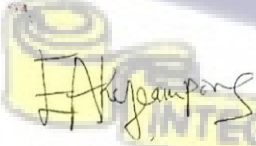
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PROFESSOR EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMONG

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DATE

**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to three distinguished and fascinating women: Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem II for believing that I hold many attributes of the old and the possibilities of the new, my mum Mary Akua Domfe (Original Asuo Gyebi Ghana Limited), and to Dawn-Ashley, my best friend and the best cheerleader anyone can ever hope for.



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I am grateful to all the women who opened their homes, their hearts and minds to enliven and sustain this study: these are your beliefs and sentiments, thus your stories. It is my hope that you continue to live and sustain generations through these shared insights. Ultimately, I hope that I have been a useful conduit.

Aseda piesie w<sup>ɔ</sup> Nyame.

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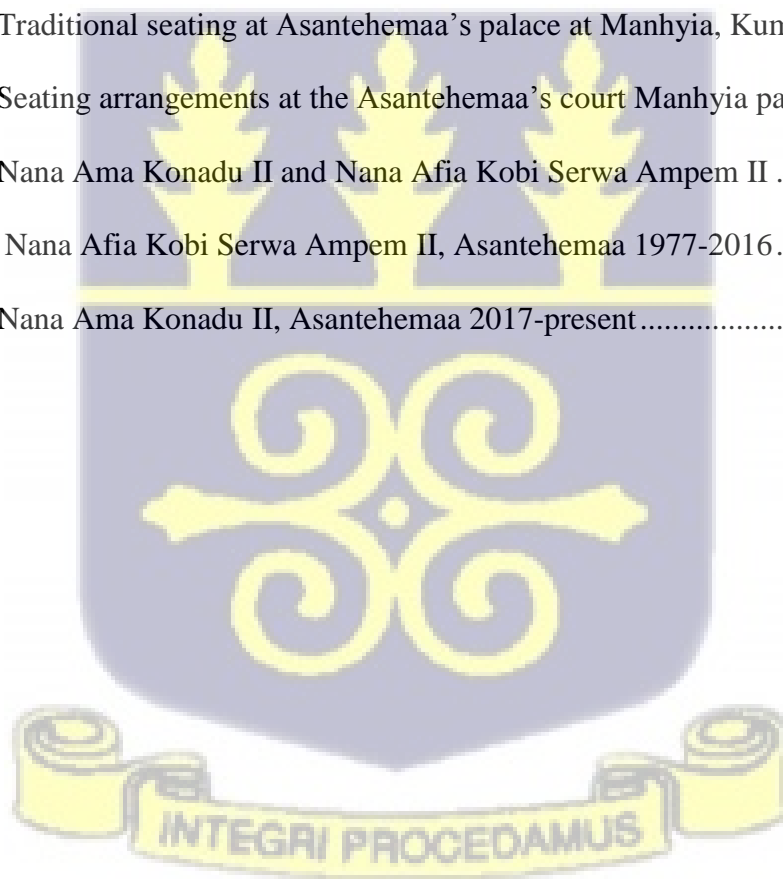
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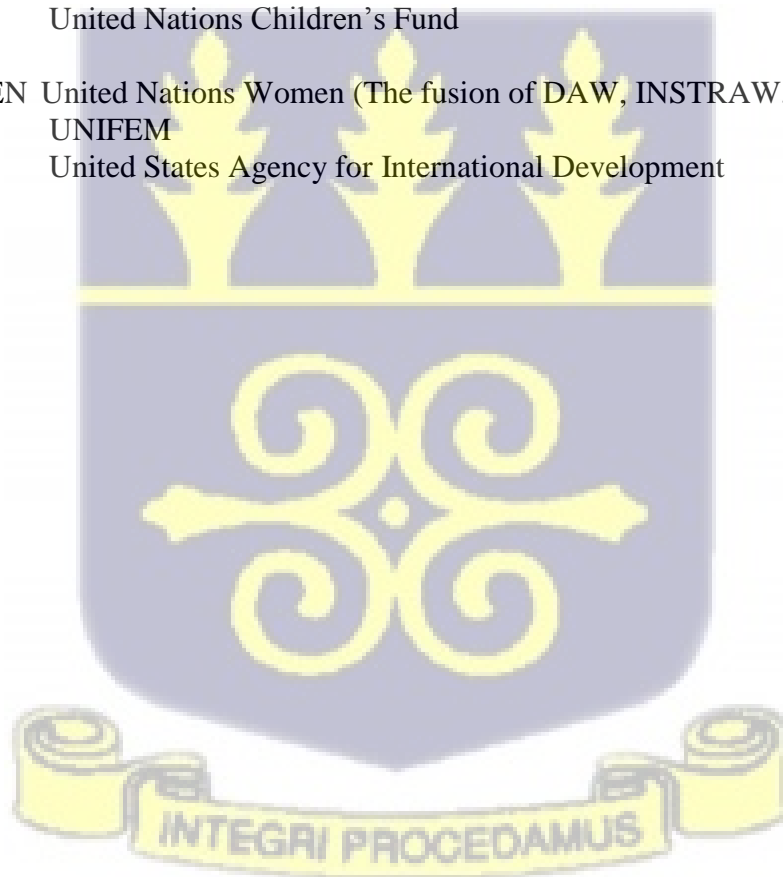
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGE	Advocates for Gender Equity
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EGIDS	Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GNI	Gross National Income
GoG	Government of Ghana
GPF	Global Policy Forum
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HDI	Human Development Index
INSTRAW	International Research and Training Institute for Advancement of Women
IAS	Institute of African Studies
KNUST	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MOWAC	Ministry of Women and Children
NCWD	National Council on Women and Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGP	National Governance Program

OSAGI	Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
U K	United Kingdom
U N	United Nations
U S A	United States of America
UNBJPA	United Nations Beijing Platform for Action
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific Communication and Cultural Organisation
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNWOMEN	United Nations Women (The fusion of DAW, INSTRAW, OSAGI, and UNIFEM)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development



**ABSTRACT**

This thesis seeks to move the discourse on women and power from prevailing notions of powerlessness to cultural notions of power and authority which brings the discourse closer to different notions of agency and actions of women. The presumption that African women lack power and agency to effect change is well established in academia. Unfortunately, recent studies have not sufficiently addressed this case empirically. Evidence from Nigeria and Tanzania show on the contrary that women in some African societies have power and agency which raises many empirical questions about notions and perceptions of power. The issue of women and power has been a global preoccupation for many years. However, different societies approach it differently to reflect their peculiar areas of concern or circumstance. In the twenty-first century, there are still key issues to address, even though the United Nations prefer a global front using the human rights approach. Given that the various member states chartered their individual roads to emancipation, and evolved to where they find themselves today at differing times and chalking different milestones, it seems contradictory to prescribe global indicators to measure where we are and what has been achieved. For example, women in Africa, Ghana specifically should not be measured only by the yardstick used in measuring advancement in Europe or elsewhere. History and cultures produce different perceptions and as such culture is relevant to policy and should be operationalized in their appropriate context. Powers that women possess differ from culture to culture and are defined from culture to culture. Women, in trying to move with the times have also redefined their goals in certain context. Women in Afghanistan for example may still walk behind the men, even in 2020 not because of religious and cultural reasons, but because of the existence of landmines in the fields due to wars.

Similarly, women at the Gambaga witch camp in Ghana often return to the witch camp after long and hard fought-and-won family reunifications. They cite better economic and social conditions at the camp. After instrumentation of certain rights, compelling African countries to sign them and trying every conceivable way to incorporate them into domestic policies, some African women are secretly going through a medical procedure to fit back into the cultures which ‘western liberators’ fought so hard to free them from. The philosophy that underpinned the study is interpretivism, with a qualitative research study design, using interviews, focus group discussions and observations in studying a sample of 44 participants of the Akan Asante Kokofu community in Ghana. I examine the origin and etymology of power (*tumi*), and their gendered forms and how they have evolved overtime. Finally, I analyze how women in this society define and utilize power from their own standpoint, and how the Ghanaian society in general, and communities around them view the whole discussion of the society from their own standpoint. Based on focus group discussions with traditional leaders and lay persons in the Akan community of Kokofu, this study asserts that women in these societies had power and have always had power, except that this power is exercised differently and does not fit into western notions of power and authority which in Akan parlance, is referred to as *tumi* and *tumidie* respectively. Consequently, this study concludes, inter alia, that the premise of empowerment as a development tool and goal is flawed because it assumes powerlessness.



## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.0 Introduction

The discourse on women and power in the twenty-first century has gained and continues to gain tremendous attention globally especially, in Africa generally and in Ghana particularly. The conventional notion is that women are not only marginalized in decision-making processes but also, they are the most powerless in all societies globally (Eyben, 2008; Pfeiffer, 1994).

On the other hand, some scholars (Oyewumi, 1997; Swai, 2010) argue that women have power and that perhaps the context of women's marginalization and powerlessness has not been adequately researched and understood from an empirical point of view by the scholars, hence the issue of marginalization and powerlessness of women has come to occupy center stage of the discourse on women and power in decision-making.

However, this study seeks to move the discourse on women and power from the "conventional notions of marginalization" (Oyewumi, 1997) and powerlessness to cultural notions of power and authority or agency to help bring the discourse closer to "alternative conceptions of agency and actions of women" (Swai, 2010).

In the meantime, the presumption that "African women lack power and agency" (Swai 2010) to effect change is well established in academia. Perhaps, the assumption of the inherent powerlessness of women came with the making of international instruments to promote gender equity and equality and therefore necessitating empowerment as a development tool.

## 1.1 Statement of problem

Do all women lack the requisite power therefore needing empowerment to participate in personal and national development? Is empowerment bringing the conception of women's power in the Akan polity close to the conception of women's power elsewhere or conception of women's power contained in international instruments?

While it has not been completely useless, it has at best been a remedy without ailment in some African context.

The issue of women and power has become a global preoccupation since creation<sup>1</sup>. However, different societies approach it differently to reflect their peculiar areas of concern or circumstance. Meanwhile, as already indicated, in the twenty-first century, there are still key issues to address, even though the United Nations would prefer a global front using the rights approach.

Given that the various member states chartered their own individual road to emancipation, and evolved to where they find themselves today at differing times and chalking differing milestones, there has been a seeming contradiction as to how to prescribe global indicators to measure where Africans in general and Ghanaians in particular are and what has been achieved. For example, African women in general and Ghanaian women, should not be measured by the yardstick used in measuring or gauging gender inequality trends in Europe or America. Diverse cultures produce different perceptions and as such culture is relevant to policy and should be operationalized in their appropriate context.

Powers that women have differ from society to society and defined from culture to culture.

Women, in trying to move with the times have also redefined their goals in certain contexts. For instance, women in Afghanistan may still walk a few yards behind the men

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<sup>1</sup> In the biblical story of Adam, Eve and the serpent, even the serpent knew that the best person to approach was Eve, not Adam. This was a contribution from an 87-year-old preacher in a focus group discussion.

even in 2019. But the reasons may have changed. While they did it because of religious and cultural reasons, they currently do so because of the landmines. Similarly, women at the Gambaga witch camps in Ghana often return to the witch camps after long and hard fought-and-won family reunifications<sup>2</sup>. They cite better economic and social conditions at the camp (Tetzlaff, 2015). Elsewhere in Kenya, women are ‘cutting’ themselves to comply with their traditional definition of womanhood instead of illegally subjecting other people to Female Genital Cutting (FGC) (Thomas, 2003)

After instrumentation of certain rights, compelling African countries to sign them and trying every conceivable way to incorporate into domestic policies, some African women are secretly going through a medical procedure (Hymen restoration) to fit back into the cultures (Female Genital Cutting (FGC) which the United Nations through various civil society organizations, fought so hard to free them from.

A cursory examination of the origin, etymology of words and gendered forms of the Akan ethnic group in Ghana; and how they have evolved overtime provides an insightful graphic of how women in this particular society define and utilize power from their own standpoint. It is imperative to note therefore, that a systematic analysis of Ghanaian societies in general and the communities around them, and the Akan cultures in particular, as this thesis argues, will not only elucidate the clarity of the view of the Akan women but also presume that the discussion on women and power could well be understood from the Asante Kokofu women’s standpoint.

Unfortunately, however, recent studies have not sufficiently explained or addressed this case empirically. For instance, evidence from Nigeria and Tanzania show that on the

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<sup>2</sup>Monica Tetzlaff: A presentation at the IAS seminar (Univ. of Ghana, Legon). The title of the presentation was *Alleged Witches Camps, Outcast Homes or Pwaanyankura-foango? A Recent History of Ghanaian Human Rights Work in Contested Spaces*. It was held on May 29, 2015.

contrary, some women in some African societies, have power and agency and hence it raises many empirical questions on notions and perceptions of women's power and agency (Swai, 2010; Eyben, 2008).

The point of departure of this thesis is that women in Akan societies have power, have always had power, except that this power is exercised differently and does not fit into western notions of power and authority which in the Akan language are referred to as **tumi** and **tumidie** respectively.

Consequently, this study posits, inter alia, that the premise of empowerment as a development tool and goal is flawed because it assumes powerlessness. Furthermore, it maintains that women's empowerment is a western concept which must be recognized in trend and that the Africanist conception of power critical to move the discourse away from America-centricism and Euro-centricism towards African context for ensuring balance in debate on the development plan and development process (Oyewumi 1997).

As it is to be expected, the various roads to emancipation in Europe and the United States of America and the varying successes chalked by Europeans and Americans have become the yardstick by which other women's situations in Africa are measured (Oyewumi 1997). These differing roads to emancipation have some commonalities but the cultural contexts are different.

Even among the earlier struggles in Britain, France and the United States of America, what was central to all the agitations was the 'women's right to vote' or suffrage. After the attainment of suffrage, the cause shifted to the fight for women's rights and eventually in the nineteen nineties evolved into "Women's Human Rights" (Bunch, 2000), which gave it a global impetus. The emancipation overview is helpful in understanding and identifying gaps in the instrumentation, conceptualization and gauging instruments for

measuring women's power in societies outside Europe and the United States of America (Oyewumi 1997).

Studies conducted by various scholars (Boahen 1983, Arhin 2003, Busia 1951, Stoltjie 2006, Aidoo 1981) about the Akan culture in Ghana confirm that women in the Akan society have always had power before, during and after colonization. Accordingly, it is difficult to support with unambiguous evidence because culturally and/or traditionally, women are not seen running for political offices or parading in male corridors of power.

Thus, this thesis posits that the frequently asked questions about women and powerlessness - related issues can adequately and empirically be answered and addressed by the women themselves. It maintains that the instrument used in measuring power is problematic in Africa because it uses the western approach (Euro-centric and American-centric) to power, and the principal attributes of culture and context do not receive adequate consideration or not applied effectively.

This thesis investigates this Euro-centric-cum- American-centric approach in the fourth chapter. It concludes that the western concept of power is in dissonance with the general Akan notions of power and the Asante notion of power in particular. In other words, the western concept of power has a very different meaning in Ghana, especially in some Akan communities. Power is often measured at face value and conclusions of 'powerful' or/and 'powerless' are measured by sheer numbers and proportions. The essence of cultural identity is therefore ignored and invariably lost.

In development discourse, 'Empowerment', for over three decades, has been fused with 'women'. The fusion, women's empowerment, is such that in development discourses the two seem inseparable. Some of the ideas and reasons behind women's empowerment programs are problematic, because there is an assumption of powerlessness or lack of power requiring correction through an external stimulus. Once powerlessness is assumed,

there is the automatic reaction to empower, which also comes with the need to protect the group needing empowerment as victims. Such assumptions with the resultant victimizations have the consequences of disempowerment, dislocation, and loss of access to traditional avenues to power. (Swai, 2010)

It seems it is not the lack of understanding but the consequences of such assumptions that make the utility of the word empowerment problematic. “Empowerment” means: “to give power or authority to; authorize, especially by legal or official means”<sup>3</sup>. While its modern usage dates to 1984, the concept in advocacy and development discourse is still very fuzzy (Eyben 2008).

I like the term empowerment because no one has defined it clearly yet; so, it gives us a breathing space to work it out in action terms before we have to pin ourselves down to what it means. I will continue using it until I am sure it does not describe what we are doing” (NGO activist, cited in Batliwala, 1993).

It has been said that ‘empowerment is like obscenity, one does not know how to define it, but one knows it when one sees it’ (Strandberg 2001).

Others have defined women’s empowerment as

A bundle of a number of things. An array of policies, practices and attitudes that allow women to actualize themselves, to realize their potential’<sup>4</sup>(Manuh, 2016).

‘Women’s empowerment’ frames the opening paragraph of the *Beijing platform for Action* and the empowerment has meanings associated with it in the paragraph – participation, power, equity, social justice – as resources that state and civil society institutions could draw upon to make change happen.<sup>5</sup>Indeed, within the whole text of the *Beijing Platform for Action* ‘gender equality’ appears only 12 times, compared with 30 appearances of ‘empowerment’.

<sup>3</sup>*Dictionary.com* Unabridged. Random House, Inc. Accessed on 24 Apr. 2016.

<*Dictionary.com* <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/empowerment>>. Accessed 24 April 2016

<sup>4</sup>Takyiwah Manuh in a video <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2yckl7> Accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2016

<sup>5</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China: Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>.

In the current global agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 5 which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, assumes general powerlessness of women. Such broad and general statements only lead to the women-as-victims approach, which systematically denies, obscures and denigrates women's power (Swai 2007). This has created a sense of dislocation and women finds themselves always negotiating their subjectivities (Swai, 2007).

The various efforts to mainstream gender equity have been slow and redundant in Ghana. In September 2004, *The Women's Manifesto for Ghana*<sup>6</sup> was launched. It was the product of collaboration spearheaded by ABANTU FOR DEVELOPMENT<sup>7</sup>, together with civil society groups, all political parties, NGOs working for gender equity, and committed individual women and men. The ministry has changed its name from The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MoWAC), to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP). However, Ghana did not have a gender policy until December 2016. The Ministry operated with a document referred to as the STRATEGIC MEDIUM-TERM DEVELOPMENT PLAN, which for all intents and purposes looked like something imported from another country into Ghana. The result was a proliferation of agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, supposedly to help facilitate implementation. Discussions on gender equity for sustainable development abound, but the discussion is usually suspended at and confined to the civil society level. In a sense, the discussion is usually at capacity development workshops in the urban rather than rural areas of the country.

On June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Elizabeth Akpalu, Executive Director of Advocate for Gender Equity (AGE), called on the government of Ghana

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<sup>6</sup> The manifesto is a political document that outlines broad national issues of concern to women that needs to be addressed by government and other relevant agencies within set time frames. It is an advocacy and lobbying document for the promotion of gender issues and women's active participation in public decision-making processes.

<sup>7</sup> ABANTU is an African and a gender-oriented NGO.

To develop, publicize and fully implement a comprehensive National Gender Policy by the year 2005 to help clarify the relationship between the work of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWAC)<sup>8</sup>, state institutions and constitutional bodies dealing with women's issues<sup>9</sup>. She lamented that Ghana had come very far but had achieved minimal results where issues of women were concerned, the Minister explained that "...after 30 years of establishing the National Council for Women and Development (NCWD) no single policy to address women issue had been put in place"<sup>10</sup>.

Fourteen years after this public lamentation and over forty years after the founding of NCWD not very much has changed, and everyone seems quiet, including ABANTU and the ministers who were appointed during this period.

In October 2004, The National Governance Programme organized a conference under the theme: *"Traditional Authority and Good Governance: Implications for Democratic Consolidation."*<sup>11</sup> Two plenary sessions were devoted to the theme: *"Traditional Leadership in Search of Gender Equity"*. There were three papers presented: *The Importance of Gender Relations in Traditional Governance; A Critique of Existing Statuses Affecting Female Traditional Leaders; and The Changing Role of The Ohemaa – Challenges and Prospects.*

During one of the discussions, a participant wondered what the problem was. He said that he really needed help understanding the gender issues and asked if the women leaders have been educating community women. He said he wanted to know because he personally put a woman on the list as a candidate in the previous Ghana parliamentary elections. He financed a good part of the campaign, but women did not vote for the female candidate. In fact, some women voters campaigned against her. Most participants agreed that there is something missing, but no one seemed to be quite sure.

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<sup>8</sup> MOWAC's core mandate is to generate policy, policy coordination and evaluation of gender issues.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpts from a newspaper article in metro news of Ghanaian *Daily Graphic*, Friday, July 2, 2004 Pg. 28 under the title Develop National Gender Policy.

<sup>10</sup> Excerpts from the Executive Director's presentation on the production and dissemination of the women's manifesto for Ghana.

<sup>11</sup> The national Governance Workshop 7 (NGW 7) October 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004 was hosted by the National House of Chiefs and sponsored by UNDP through the National Governance Programme.

In women's rights and gender relations and advocacy theorizing, law has always been instrumental. At the same time, we talk about how cultural norms have been resistant to social change where gender relations are concerned (Oyewumi, 2007). Civil society and UN agencies encourage and appear to coerce countries to enact laws from international instruments. It is presumed that law and culture are oppositional, but it is only when law operates outside of its culture that it appears alien. The various UN instruments have not been easily integrated into policies obviously because their historical bases are either missing or unarticulated.

In Akan societies where wealth is reckoned in people, the expression of power aimed at accumulating followers. For example, European missions to Kumasi in the early nineteenth century commented on that;

the elaborate royal receptions for outsiders: a capital crowded with people, many of whom had come from outside Kumasi; the rich regalia of important chiefs (umbrellas, palanquins, horns, swords, linguist staffs, gold bodily ornamentation); the firing of guns, all calculated to create an atmosphere of astonishment of power that impressed European and Asante alike.<sup>12</sup>

Amid kinship and rank, material culture thus lay at the center of Akan understandings of power. Similarly, Akan women point to the number of their children as evidence of their power, not where they are located in the civil society corridors of power, for example, parliament.

Power, in particular the exercise of it, has been at the core of gender debate and analysis (Aidoo 1984, Oyewumi 2002). Interpretations of who has the right to lead, to exercise power or participate in choosing the leader to exercise it have usually been from the patriarchal perspective. Whether it is the story of succession (Stoeltje 2006), the suffragettes of the seventeenth century or the experience of Nana Yaa Asantewaa of Akan (Boahen, 1983; Arhin, 2003), it is usually told by and from the male point of view. It is as

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<sup>12</sup> Extracted from a proposal submitted to UNESCO in 2006 titled *Astonishment of Power*

if no other system has existed/exists apart from patriarchy. However, the Akan of Ghana are known to be matrilineal (Busia 1961, Allman 1994, Oyewumi 2008), a political arrangement whereby the woman, rather than the man in the patriarchal system, is the one around whom political power revolves (Meyerowitz 1951) or the source of political power. The art, craft and practice of political power in that system must, therefore, offer some enlightening insights into the women and power discourse.

The declaration of colonial rule in the Gold Coast in 1874 saw the passage of Native Jurisdiction Ordinances that curtailed the power of chiefly rule and emphasized the ascendancy of the new colonial political dispensation. The realities of colonial rule in Africa, particularly the need to rule on the cheap, revised the colonial estimation of the role of chiefs. The colonial government needed to use chiefs as intermediaries in colonial rule (Indirect rule) and thus sought to shore up the waning influence of chiefs. This was made more urgent with the onslaught of young men (nkwankwaa) and women on chiefly power (Austin 1964, Allman 1991; 1996). Around 1903, the process of strengthening chiefly power began, reaching its most formalized sense in the Native Authority Ordinance in 1927. The conception of chiefly authority under British rule was generally male. Female traditional rulers did not receive the same attention and focus. Yet women were the subject of various ordinances passed under customary law and other byelaws, redefining marriage, family, inheritance, and other pertinent spheres. These ordinances indicate that women in this society were not as powerless as some authors (Farrar1997), would like us to believe, but rather legal instrumentation had been steadily used to curtail their power and consign them to the domestic realm. On the other hand, around this same period in history, women elsewhere in the United States of America, France and Great Britain were engaged in a series of civil rights demonstrations demanding rights and equality. In those societies they had used legal instrumentation to get power. Legal instrumentation had been used in those societies, but they had traveled in

opposite directions: The Akan women in Ghana had traveled downward and lost some political power gradually, while the women in the Great Britain, France and the United States of America had traveled upward and gained more power each time.

A glance through the evolution of the women's rights struggle in Great Britain, then France, then the United States of America, then through Africa, Ghana and finally the Akan polity of Kokofu will elucidate the historical basis for their struggle and an appreciation of some advancements resulting from suffrage agitation and efforts. In a sense, a historical journey of how they gained or lost power to understand how they got to where they are today. It will also shed some light on how some countries are receptive to some measurements and global indicators while others, such as some African countries like Ghana do not appear to have historical basis to fit. Another objective for including a whole section on the world overview is to lay the right foundation on which to situate this thesis. Secondly, this thesis would find its place on the global stage if it is linked as such. This summary of the various roads to emancipation illustrates how instruments designed to measure power in different societies cannot be adequately useful in discussing and analyzing power in African matrilineal societies especially the Akan (Oyewumi 2007).

The discussions of women and power often raise definitional and yardstick questions. But the answer can only be articulated through the understanding of the origins of the suffrage. In this case, an overview of the various agitations for women's rights in Britain, France and the United States must be brought to bear. Women in various parts of the world designed and chartered their own cause, traveling their own unique journey to emancipation. It had been uniquely their own, though there were some similarities. Generally, they all realized the right to vote or suffrage, as critical to women's participation as individuals with equal human rights.

Though they vary from country to country in terms of degree and extent, confirming how global some of the issues are, there is also the need to accommodate cultural relativity so that resultant international instruments can be incorporated into local policies and still have enough historical basis to be applicable. A walk through the suffrage histories of some countries (France, USA, and Great Britain) paints a vivid picture of why they have the laws and policies they currently have – there are historical bases for the policies. In other parts of the world while some countries struggle with how to integrate international instruments into local laws to formulate policies as in the case of Ghana, others have already tried and appear to be struggling with solutions such as affirmative action as in the case of Uganda (Tamale, 2015).

In Africa, the road to emancipation has been different due to the existing laws and sometimes contradictory traditions that existed before colonization and the importation of western political institutions. Gender is not deployed in African societies the way gender is deployed elsewhere. Consequently, any attempt to put them in any singular category will yield diverse results. For example, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has a ranking system which rates country's gender equality status. The same criteria are used for all the countries on the listing. The current Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) ranking list is topped by Rwanda, an African country. The Rwandan parliament is made up of 56% women. South Africa is made up of 42%, Mozambique is made up of 39% women, and Angola is made up of 38% women. Sixteen countries in African have a higher proportion of women in parliament than the United States of America and United Kingdom. Many indigenous societies in Africa and many institutions have been developed around women and run by women. Therefore, a woman leading is not new in Africa, the foundation has been there, just waiting for African women to buy into the idea that “the equal participation of women

in politics and government is integral to building strong communities and a vibrant democracy in which women and men can thrive” (Swers, 2002)<sup>13</sup>.

The position of this thesis is not to deny that women are burdened, it is not contesting the existence of patriarchy, and it is not arguing that there are no instances of gender-based oppressions in contemporary African and Ghanaian society. What this thesis claims, is the assumption that undergirded this research, which is that

Some women in African society exercise power in multiple ways that are difficult to acknowledge or recognize when the tools designed to study Western societies are to be used to conduct a study of African societies. (Anunobi, 2002)

It should, “as an initial condition, consider the reality that stares us in the face” (ibid), that is to say African societies are different and hence acknowledging the difference, poses a number of empirical questions about women’s power or powerlessness.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

This thesis intended to tease out what makes people think that women are powerless and what constitutes power and powerlessness perception in the power and agency discourse. Broadly speaking this thesis explores and analyzes Akan women’s notions of power with all its elements from their own standpoint. This thesis sought to achieve the following objectives.

Objective 1. To identify and frame the elements that make up the notions of power in the Akan Asante polity of Kokofu.

Objective 2 To ascertain whether Kokofu women have power.

Objective 3 To establish and examine the kinds of power Kokofu women have.

Objective 4 To investigate the sources of Kokofu women’s power.

Objective 5 To analyze how Kokofu women use/utilize power

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<sup>13</sup>Retrieved online - [www.statusofwomendata.org](http://www.statusofwomendata.org) Accessed on 09/03/2016

Objective 6 To articulate the cultural/traditional understanding and notions of power from Asante Kokofu women's standpoint.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The central question of the thesis is:

What is the Akan (Asante) women's definition and notions of power from their own standpoint?

In answering this central question, the following questions will also be answered.

- i. Do Akan women have power?
- ii. What kinds of power do Akan women have?
- iii. Why do Akan women believe they have that kind of power?
- iv. What are the sources of Akan women's power?
- v. How do Akan women use or exercise power?

### 1.4 Scope of the Study

This thesis focuses exclusively on women and power in the Akan women from Asante ethnic group using the state of Kokofu as a case study.

There is a proliferation of agencies in Ghana, both governmental and non-governmental, supposedly facilitating implementation of women's rights and women's empowerment. However, statistics from both the Ghana Living Standards Survey and the Ghana Poverty and Inequality Analysis do not reflect these efforts. Women are still perceived to be the underprivileged. The Ghana Poverty and Inequality Analysis, utilizing the Ghana living Standards Survey summarizes the state of Ghana in the following manner:

Women make up 43.1% of the economically active population in Ghana. Rates of female-headed households are on the rise in Ghana. The number of female-headed households who are either widowed or divorced has also risen over time. Contrary to worldwide findings that female poverty is correlated with higher rates of female-headed households, findings from

the Ghana Living Standards Survey indicate that female-headed households may not actually experience higher poverty than male-headed households. This is because reasons that females head households differ across the country. Ghana's child protection law, the Children's Act, prohibits child marriage; however, data from 2011 shows that 6% of girls nationwide were married before the age of 15. Between 2002 and 2012, 7% of adolescent females (aged 15–19) were married. Most of these women live in the Volta, Western, and Northern regions, and generally live in rural areas regardless of region.<sup>14</sup> (Pg. 6 Executive Summary)

The above summary shows that women in the Akan dominated regions of Ghana; Ashanti, Bono East, Brong Ahafo, Ahafo, Central and Eastern regions are not open to abuses and other prohibited practices such as child marriage. This is probably due to some agency and autonomy on the women's part.

There have been studies in the past that made the claim that indeed, some women in Akan societies are powerful (Aidoo 1981, Stoeltje 1995, Allman 2002, Clark 1984). Such studies then provide us with examples of women who have taken leadership roles in Akan societies. There are many examples of such women in Akan history. For example, Nana Afowa Dankonto of Dormaa, Nana Yaa Akyiaa of Asante, Akroase Akyaa of Kumase<sup>15</sup>, Nana Dokuaa of Kyebi, and Nana Dwaben Serwaa of Dwaben. Understandably, such aspects of power were not known in the West and Europe where the colonizers came from, so they made it a priority to curb such powers in Africa through traditional authority ordinances. History puts the Akan women listed above within that period: eighteenth to nineteenth century.

One of the issues that will be resolved in this study is the issue of time and space: what was happening in Africa, specifically during that period, between 1750 and 1950? To use the ladder as a metaphor, women elsewhere (U K, France USA etc.) have been ascending while women in Africa, specifically Akan women, have been descending. Law or legal

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<sup>14</sup>The Ghana Poverty and Inequality Report: Using the 6<sup>th</sup> Ghana Living Standard Survey 2016.

<sup>15</sup> This is the spelling of Kumase when it is associated with Akroase Akyaa.

instrumentation has been the medium in both cases but oppositional. While the various roads to emancipation in the various instances earned women some strides towards suffrage and full emancipation, the opposite happened in the Ghanaian/Akan context. In Asante, a series of ordinances were introduced to curb the power of women.<sup>16</sup>

How can diverse groups from different historical experiences be compelled to adhere to laws and legal instrumentations which are familiar to some because they can see traces of their struggle but appears alien to the other group because there is no historical basis for it?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study adds value to the ongoing knowledge production on women in African and the discourse on women and power in Africa. It sheds light on traditional and indigenous notions of power and usage. Traditional notions and definitions of power must be documented, studied, and shared. While the rhetoric about women's rights as human rights continues unabated, amidst the many women's conferences and the existing international instruments, it is still not clear why implementation and/or enforcement has been so poor in several countries including Ghana. The study has practical significance in terms of future efforts and campaigns to advance women's causes. The realities on the ground must be understood through existing cultures before drawing conclusions. It would help develop proper policies based on context within the various communities. Universalisation of rights and its accompanying instruments are great ideals to strive for. But legal instrumentation and their ensuing policies must have local historical basis where culture can move policies in instrumental ways instead of dismissing cultural relativity as fragmentations. The fragmenting elements that advocate of universalisation would rather

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<sup>16</sup> Examples of ordinances to control women include Colonial Marriage Ordinance 1884, the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance 1924, Native Courts (Ashanti) Ordinance 1935, and the Ashanti (Declaration of Native Customary law) Order of 1946.

keep closed and not discuss must be opened; it may well be the missing piece. The fragmenting aspect contains the elements that will provide what is lacking - a culturally relevant and culturally sensitive approach to the collection of women's knowledge systems, including their notions and perception of power, towards a more just world which understands and incorporates all its fragments.

This study contributes to the general understanding of societies and to the construction of appropriate and group/community-specific social theories. For example. One would understand the reason why women who are seeking power from every corner and opportunity do not understand the rationale behind more women should be in parliament or in male corridors of power. One would appreciate the reason for affirmative action to be used to ensure access and women's visibility at institutions of development and change, such as parliament. Women by their sheer numbers can bridge the divide by just voting for female candidates. There are some understanding and definition of power or differing notions of power running parallel.

This study helps to provide answers to frequently asked questions as well as suggest a roadmap to uncover other avenues of women involvement. It therefore contributes to the current discussions and understanding of gender discourse in Africa. Ultimately, it redeems, articulates, and shares Ghanaians' cultural understanding of power in particular and Africa in general. Hopefully, this thesis will fill some gaps in the women's knowledge collection articulated by Mo Ibrahim as the ultimate goal when he said:

We must be just as critical of those who seek to hide the challenges we face, as those who seek to present Africa as a continent of victims. It is our role to speak the truth as we find it and stimulate debate about the issues that matter most.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This appeared in the Times of London on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012.  
<http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/news/2012/message-from-mo/> Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

Africa has many challenges but studies such as this show that Africa is not a continent of victims: rather many aspects of our lives are glossed over and hidden under a pile of automated instruments which are not designed to measure realities in Africa.

This Ethnographic study of Akan women in Ghana document their definition and notions of power. This clarifies what drives the Kokofu community in its development agenda. An appeasement, carrot or reward must be well understood as such by all parties. If some Akan women do not feel powerless by not going to parliament or participating in the political process by running for political office or voting for a female candidate, then it may be that they either have power as defined in their own way, or do not feel that parliament is the best place to get or exercise power.

The assumptions of powerlessness lead to

- i. disempowerment from traditional/cultural avenues of power,
- ii. dislocation from women's cultural central space of being,
- iii. victimization of women into needing many remedies without factual ailments, and
- iv. shields women from the accountability discussion which undermines SDG 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

The discourse on empowerment deserves its own space and forum and does not fit into the scope of this study beyond the necessary mention of 'women's empowerment' in this introduction.

## **1.6 Broad outline of the Study**

Chapter one is the introductory chapter which covers the background to the study. It also states the problem, research questions, research objectives, scope of the study, and significance of the study and the broad narrative of the study. The organization of the rest of the report is also summarized in this chapter.

Chapter two covers the review of literature that is relevant to the subject matter of this thesis. The literature reviewed spans over three centuries of writings from 1705 (Barbot) writing generally about the coast of Guinea to the twenty-first century writings by Aidoo, Stoltjie, Arhin, Oduyoye, Allman and others writing specifically about Akan women. The selected literature is organized under themes of historiography of Africa in general, through historiography of women in Africa, historiography of Ghana, historiography of women in Ghana, to historiography of Akan women in Ghana. The selected works are further categorized into three: writings confirming the evidence of power of women in Akan society, those who are doubtful (Farrar, 1997), those who are frightened by such enormous power (Chinweizu, 1990) and those who unveiled it incidentally (Bartle, 1982) and have labeled it “covert gynocracy.” Literature reviewed includes both published and unpublished materials on women and power.

#### Chapter Three- Conceptual and Theoretical Framework with Methodology

This chapter covers the three distinct theories: Universalism, Cultural relativity and Standpoint- how they relate to the global *women and power* discourse and explain aspects of the discourse. It also articulates how Standpoint theory emerges as the preferred theory in support of the chosen methodology. The chapter continues with the conceptual framework as a guide to explain some aspects of the phenomenon. The chapter ends with the methodology for the study: *The power of Akan women through the study of women in the Akan Asante polity of Kokofu*. It was conceptualized for the instrumentation of the tools for the data collection. It covers how the ethnographic study was designed to achieve the stated goals: justification and scope of the population and sample, stating challenges and how they were met, with its limitations and delimitations.

Chapter four: The Situational Analysis of Women and Power in Ghana covers the various roads to suffrage by three countries: United States, Great Britain and the United States of

America. This demonstrates the utility of certain indicators and measurements in the inequality discourse. The chapter also traces the various efforts at the international level and the numerous efforts by successive governments in Ghana to advance women. Various indicators and trends are analyzed in relationship to women Members of Parliament (MPs) since 1960 to establish the historical antecedent which makes the non-African yardstick unfair and inappropriate. Gaps and plausible reasons for them are analyzed under chapter four. The chapter then questions the place of culture in this gap. Chapter four ends with some cultural dimensions that can fill or bridge the gap between national democratic governance and the traditional/cultural governance where everyone's power is acknowledged, understood, and integrated to accelerate development.

Chapter five covers The Analysis of Data from Fieldwork. The chapter begins with the analysis of key concepts and themes in the Akan worldview: Etymology of Akan, kinship, matriarchy/matrilineality,  $\square$ kaniba (Kanniba), Abrewa,  $\square$ hema, and  $\square$ baapaninare well-articulated to be understood in the discussion of power. Concepts such as personhood and concept of mind are also discussed. There are three main sections or approaches to the analysis of the data collected:

- under four main themes which emerged from the fieldwork discussions,
- The second section falls under the conceptualization of power and how the discussion guide was designed. Participants discussed questions of power and the transcripts are integrated and analyzed.
- Issues raised by some scholars in the literature reviewed are addressed.

Some Asante Twi proverbs which featured repeatedly in the interviews have been analyzed according to their relevance to the subject of women and power in Asante polity of Kokofu. These proverbs and some folk songs represent the collective perception of Akan

women's power. The chapter ends with answers to questions emanating from the literature review in chapter two above.

Chapter six provides the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study. It discusses the research findings and how it answered the research question and realized objectives. It illustrates how the findings of the study contribute to the ongoing discourse on *women and power*. It concludes with recommendations on how the recognition of women's power can help address real development and societal issues in African communities. It ends with references and an appendix.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

In the twenty first century we can boast of many writings about Africa's history and the many efforts to include women in the historiography. This chapter reviews some of the pertinent materials that are related to the subject matter of this thesis: Women and power in Africa.

#### 2.1 Historiography of Africa in general

As well documented, Africa was labeled the 'dark continent' because it was without history. And it was termed as such because it was alleged that Africa could not write and history is associated with writing and records. In the 1950s Basil Davidson among others challenged these assumptions which resulted in a new African historiography. It is believed that this also intensified various liberation movements and initiated a "wave of decolonization across the continent" (Adjaye, 2008).

In 1964 UNESCO launched the first phase of the General History of Africa project. It ended in 1999 with the preparation and publication of eight volumes. Phase II was launched in 2009 entitled The Pedagogical use of the General History of Africa. It was during this phase that The Women in Africa History platform was developed to encourage the teaching of and material support for Women in Africa History.

The general history of Africa project was a demonstration that "it is possible to treat Africa as a historical unit, without injuring the integrity of the diverse cultures" (Ogot, 2015:4). The committee of experts intimated that in writing these volumes, their hope is "to provide an account from which further collaborations, refinements and revisions can be made in the future" (Ogot 2015:6).

By studying the contributions of archeology, art and even written sources it is possible to understand that Africa has a history that is even more advanced than originally anticipated (vocem Personae)<sup>18</sup>. Understandably there was no room for women's history while they were struggling to get a general history of Africa rolling before refining the specifics. Women have been generally ignored in African history and a few books provide any overview. As stated above, the whole continent was dismissed not just a particular gender. Few authors like Hafkin and Bay 1976, Berger and White 1999, Imam, et al. 1997 provides an overview. Robertson (1988) offers "important ways in which African women's history questions assumptions found in women's history and in African history, particularly by understanding African experiences of marriage and family, economic production, religion, legal issues, and class formation, including slavery".<sup>19</sup> Meena (1992) and Oyewumi (1997) give some conceptual and theoretical insights to consider any study of Africa women's history. Others like Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997) and Imam et al. (1997) offer broad chronological categories with themes and chapters on many activities in which women have been involved.

## 2.2 Historiography of women in Africa

### Writing Women into History

The many efforts made to write women into history are impressive. Knowledge gathered and shared in women studies has also illuminated and opened new avenues to a diverse understanding of gender through the development of alternative frameworks to aid our gauging and understanding of women in Africa. The numerous and diverse anthologies demonstrate the concerted efforts made to write African women into history.

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<sup>18</sup><https://vocempersonae.wordpress.com/2015/05/03/africa-the-dark-continent-without-history/> Accessed 1/21/2019.

<sup>19</sup><http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846733/obo-9780199846733-0005.xml> 3 Accessed on 1/21/2019

In the *Restoring Women to History* series (1999), an entire volume is dedicated to women in Africa. The volume has covered many of the questions deemed current in the field of women's history. The authors have sought existing evidence to fill the gaps within the scholarship, such as "what type of evidence is available, and what gaps exist within the scholarship" (Berger, 1999). *Restoring Women to History* also adds to the knowledge production by generating new questions and shedding new light through comparative historical analysis.

E. Frances White's essay, *Women and Nineteenth-Century States*,

examines the status and activities of women in West Africa from the earliest periods, through the rise of various kingdoms and states, to the establishment of colonies, and independent nations. It looks at women's participation in trade including the slave trade and agriculture; women's political roles in chiefship, other leadership positions, and nationalist movements; and the current constraints under which women function.

(White 1999:87)

In *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Iris Berger (1999) traces women's history from earliest times to the present. Berger explores the place of women in many spheres and highlights the evolving positions. The evolving configurations of gender and how women negotiate between their public and private lives is also well documented by Berger. (1999).

Allman et al (2002), explores the question of "how African women negotiated the complex political, economic, and social forces of colonialism in their daily lives" (p.4). By documenting the lives of ordinary women at specified periods, the authors challenge "the notion of a homogeneous African women's experience" (p.8). By documenting life histories, oral narratives, and court cases, they could illustrate that "African women's experiences defy static representation" (p.23). They paint a very vivid picture of how these women struggled against colonialism and conclude that 'those women were not hapless victims' (p.40). Using "a broad range of sources: customary court cases, early anthropological writings, and colonial government documentation" (p.24), the authors

transport readers many generations back and offer front-row seats on the trip. The anthology is divided into three parts. The first part covers ‘Encounters and Engagements’, the second part covers ‘Perceptions and Representations’, and the third one covers ‘Power Reconfigured/Power Contested’.

While all the various writings in the other categories are important contributions to African historiography and knowledge production it is the third category that is most pertinent to this particular work. Hanson, Tashjian et al., Bastian, Schmidt, and Lyons cover a diverse range of historical experience spanning the entire colonial period. Hanson (1999) illustrates the kind of power women had before colonization and how they lost it. All five writings cover the different ‘ways in which women were excluded from public discourse’, but also how these women stood up and fought the system, challenging the innovative use of ordinances as in the Asante cases, and new configurations of patriarchy.

“Binding Memories” by Gengenbach (1995), utilizes a distinctly innovative approach which allow women to make and tell their history from their own ‘standpoint’. This is the history of Magude, Mozambique by the women who participated, and witnessed the story as it unfolded. When there are discussions or recollections about events, especially about war it is usually about the contributions of “a few Good Men” to borrow a phrase from Susan Geiger (1996).

The author intimates that the kind of study she had in mind placed her at the confluence of two then-prominent streams in African historiography: the rich, often controversial tradition. (Gengenbach, 1995: 10)

In Tanganyikan Nationalism as ‘Women’s Work (1996), the author narrates how a simple biography with a possible auxiliary data of supporting cast of women in Tanganyikan nationalism evolves into a masterpiece where “their stories revealed their own relational

constructions of nationalism; how their pre-TANU life experiences informed their work and performance as party stalwarts; and what they shared as a cohort of “political women” (Geiger 1996:469).

In these two essays, the authors use very distinct and innovative styles to tell women’s stories. They both utilize interview material to construct biographical narratives through which to explore the many facets of women’s stories or Herstory.

This approach is precisely what feminists argue for, a standpoint approach - where African women can tell the story from where they are standing and not from any Western or elaborate and laid-down template into which they must fit to tell a story.

In “Queens, Prostitutes and Peasants”, Hay (1988) laments over the woeful number of writings about women. She notes how many scholars whose focus remains in the urban areas of Africa draw a more dismal picture of opportunities for women in towns. Further, she points to the newer studies as being considerably less enthusiastic and attribute economic independence for women in colonial towns to “being achieved through activities that were illegal, or immoral, such as beer brewers and prostitutes” (Hay,1988:434). Hay raises some critical issues regarding knowledge produced that do not reflect a positive image of women in Africa. Thankfully, most of these writings become ‘fugitive’<sup>20</sup>. Fugitive, in the sense that most of the work is not in the mainstream of academic publishing.

Allman et al (2002), demonstrate that women had stories to tell by their own agency as ordinary mothers, wives, migrants and urban dwellers in any colonial context at any point in time. By utilizing primary sources such as life histories, oral narratives, court cases, the authors illustrate that African women’s experiences cannot all be stratified into simple

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<sup>20</sup> Fugitive is a word that Hay used in private discussions with a friend to mean that the work is not in mainstream sometimes ‘fragmented’ and deemed incomplete. See p. 437 in her endnote 3.

static representations. The authors look at the processes and the contexts to make the cases in the various circumstances. The editors also look at the relations and contexts to group the various works.

In “Africa After Gender”, authors state their two overarching objectives as primarily “to make a productive intervention in the dynamic of North/South relations between scholars living and working in Africa and those who reside in Europe and North America” (Cole et al, 2010), which is demonstrated in the diverse editorial board. They also argue that gender in Africa requires a genuinely transdisciplinary approach. (p.3)

Sheldon (2017)

provides a chronological overview of African women’s contributions and involvement in sub-Saharan African history. Beginning with early history and ending with current events, the book covers religion and slavery in the 19th century, continuity and change in women’s work and family life, the impact of colonialism and women’s resistance, and politics after independence

With a continent as vast as Africa and women as diverse as imaginable from over fifty states, she tried to cover as much as possible. It is clear to see her comfort zone, which is the modern era or at least post-colonial. The author just makes the point that women are central to every crucial step in Africa and have been since time immemorial. However, her inability to delve into the impact of the introduction of agriculture, the arrival of Europeans, and Islam on indigenous societies, has been criticized as non-chronological and more of a sub-Saharan than a general study of African women. (Schiller 2018)<sup>21</sup>

### **2.3 Historiography of Ghana**

Writings about what is today Ghana can be divided into phases or periods. The periods in Ghana’s history can be classified into pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial and national.

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<sup>21</sup>Review by Laurence Schiller to be published in The Independent Scholar Vol. 4 2018. Accessed online on 01/21/2019

### 2.3.1 Pre-colonial period

There are writings about Gold Coast now Ghana dating as far back as 1705 by Bosman and even before the work of Barbot<sup>22</sup>. There are also writings by Romer (1756, 1760, 2000)<sup>23</sup> and the narrative by Bowdich (1819) with vivid maps. The writings from the pre-colonial period, though they serve many useful purposes, are from a period dominated by European travelers, missionaries, and traders, who were non-historians and “whose narratives were clouded by their own perceptions of Africa” (Adjaye, 2008). Bowdich, for example, wrote from the account of his trip to Kumasi “as a member of a peace mission on behalf of the Africa Company of Merchants in 1817” (Bowdich 1819:227). The book has great maps of the interior because it captured Asante at the peak of its power. However, it has been reviewed as “little more than a jumble of superficial information” (Ward 1966:15). Bowdich himself noted that his book was driven by “European curiosity”, and conceded that “superstition - the inability of the natives to compute time, and the comparatively recent establishment of the Moors, may be pleaded as additional apologies for the imperfect history” that he collected (1819:228). However, Romer (1760) mentions a nation “ruled by a woman and is very densely populated.” (Pg.153). The footnote (144) places this nation north-east of Asante and the period as “two years after the Akims were beaten”. Romer does not mention women again in his rather detailed account of Gold Coast societies and their traditions.

### 2.3.2 The colonial period early 19<sup>th</sup> century to mid-twentieth century 1800-1957

The colonial can also be quickly separated into writings by non-Ghanaians, writings by Ghanaian scholars with European training and expertise, and then the category of works by local untrained writers.

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<sup>22</sup> Though Jean Barbot collected his data in 1678, it was not published until 1992.

<sup>23</sup> According to the editor’s introduction, the first publication in 1756 was only 64 pages about trade of various national companies on the Gold Coast. In 1760, a 348-page book was published by Romer. The second book held more details beyond traders and customers, to include the societies and their traditions. The current book, published in 2000, is a conflation of both the 1756 and 1760 books.

### 2.3.2.1 Non-Ghanaians

The first in this category are works by Rattray, (1923), Meyerowitz, (1951; and Ward, 1958. They were non-Ghanaian administrators, anthropologists, and missionaries “whose writings were either clouded by misconceptions of Africa or compromised by the colonial project in whose service they operated” (Adjaye 2008:4). Many of the writings throughout the pre-colonial and the early part of the twentieth century focused on military expansions and commerce. However, the anthropologists (Rattray, 1923; and Meyerowitz, 1951; 1962) produced quite detailed work in language, social structure, law, customs, and belief systems.

The writings from the colonial period, though an improvement on works by European and non-trained writers in terms of utility, should also be approached with some caution, because some of the writings illustrate that though they were writing about Africans, the audience was Europeans. In Rattray's book *Ashanti* (1924), he writes”

I sincerely hope that some of this material will be of value to African missionaries. I have always maintained that necessary and valuable as anthropological training is to the administrator or merchant it should be an indispensable adjunct to the training of the missionary. (Pg 10)

This statement and many other aspects of his speech at Oxford in 1923 which became part of the preface to the book, demonstrate that it was part of a larger scheme of the ‘colonial project’ (Salamone 2000:19). The observation has also been made that “a large body of those works was essentially the history of Europeans in Africa rather than the history of Africans themselves” (Adjaye 2008:5) An example of this writing was J. W. Blake’s *European Beginnings in West Africa 1454-1578* (1937). There was no African agency in those writings. The late nineteenth century saw the writing of *The History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti* by a native son, C.C. Reindorf (1895). That was soon followed by

Claridge (1915).<sup>24</sup> Both writers compiled the war efforts and campaigns over two centuries. Reindorf mentions “the old, women and children of Akem and Akwapem obtaining refuge in Akra” but only to emphasize that the infirmed were protected during the battle of Katamansu. (pg.225). Queen Dode Akabi is also mentioned in passing. Both authors add a detailed historiography though devoid of women.

### **2.3.2.2 Ghanaians trained in the West**

The second sub-category comprises the writings by Joseph Casely Hayford (1903) and John Mensah Sarbah (1906). Though these scholars were Ghanaians, they had been educated in the West and so “their views were considerably compromised because they were trained in the same European tradition” (Adjaye 2008: 6). It has been noted that “perhaps nowhere in the world has a pre-colonial polity been more thoroughly researched than the kingdom of Asante” (Hart 1987). But they had mostly been on political history devoid of any thoughtful consideration of the cultural context of the society, especially the women. A few of the writers in these two categories devoted any time to women except in passing or out of fascination, as Rattray did.

### **2.3.2.3 Category of Untrained Writers**

However, Prempeh I<sup>25</sup>, in the third category (of untrained writers) demonstrates his regard for women and illustrates their place in the Akan culture (Boahen, 2003). For example, in many instances, he advocated for the women in his fold, which included Nana Yaa Akyaa (his mother), and Nana Yaa Asantewaa as colleagues and addressed Nana Yaa Asantewaa as “Chief Yar Asantiwa” (p.177).

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<sup>24</sup> Adjaye (2008) flags Claridge’s European bias, citing that the book was “financed by, and dedicated to British Governor Sir Hugh Clifford” (p.12).

<sup>25</sup> Prempeh I’s diaries and writings at Seychelles Island have been published into a book edited by Boahen et al 2003.

### **2.3.3 Post Colonial Period (National)**

Adu Boahen (1966) shifted Ghanaian historiography in a positive direction by “looking at it from the inside, the African standpoint” (Cohen 2001, Adjaye 2008).

Many scholars (Falola 2006, Temu and Swai, 1981) have also expressed concerns over the gaps in the state of African historical production and advocated a quest for a historiography “to be made to relate more effectively to the local context” (Falola 2006). Emphasizing the need for African voices, others have also asserted that “there are realms of knowledge and programs of knowledge outside the academy that might be understood and drawn upon to work at the reconstruction of the African past” (Cohen 2001).

This literature review is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather it cites specific writings to demonstrate particular points of view. The approach had been to look at the evidence chronologically to see whether there could have been some writings about women. Not surprising, there is little (Romer, 1760; Rattray 1923) which clearly show that they wrote from men’s perspective.

### **2.4 Historiography of Akan women in Ghana**

Tashjian and Allman (2002), begin with a quote by Rattray about being “confounded by conjugal relations in ‘this matrilineal society’” (Rattray 1929:22), “particularly by what he saw as the ‘ambiguous position of a wife’” (237). Through the prism of conjugal relations in early Asante, Tashjian and Allman (2002) give a detailed account of how the production of cocoa and the “interventions of indirect rule impacted the meanings and makings of conjugal relations in Asante” (Ibid: 32) It chronicles how Asante’s first colonized generation lived through the evolution and reconfigurations of power and authority. This generation came to “understand the marriages of their parents and the harsh realities confronting them when they became adults and tried to negotiate the then monetized realities of marriage” (2002:63).

In *Women Writing Africa*, the authors have impressively testified to the literary presence and historical activity of African women. The volume 2 (*West Africa and the Sahel*) 2005, covers a spectrum of verbal and written forms of expression which demonstrate “the reality of African women’s lives in history and in the present before a world that is only just waking up to their importance” (xxi). For example, “What We Women Can Do” epitomizes a Ghanaian woman and specifically the sentiments of an Akan woman. Incidentally, Efwa is an Akan name and stands for the mother, sister, wife, daughter, aunt, or lover in any man’s life. *Women Writing Africa* covers many topics.

Because of such detailed work by such diverse authors, whether as group projects or individual studies, there is a better understanding of the situation of African women during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

“The woman in Question” (Hawkins, 2002) illustrates how women in Ghana (Northern and Ashanti regions), stood up firmly in the face of a deliberate conspiracy between the colonial administration and the patriarchal systems in the respective societies. This happened during a period when women were the subjects of most litigation but rarely appeared in the courts and even when they did, it was without any recognized rights. This article also illustrates how “concepts such as wife, marriage, lover, and adultery became increasingly problematic in the colonial courts” (Hawkins 2002:118) because there were no clear demarcations and categories in indigenous settings (132) or because indigenous settings were not consistent with these categories

In “*Queen Mothers and Good Government in Buganda*”, Hanson (2002) gives a vivid account of how the well-structured society of Buganda, harmonious with strong and powerful queen mothers set on a path of erosion until the queen mothership was reduced to a cursory mention in passing. In both cases, the colonial administration used legal instrumentation to curb or control the power of women in Buganda society. The institution

of Queen mother declined because colonizing Europeans “could only see and comprehend the political power of men”. (Hanson 2002:220) The colonial administrators used legal instrumentation to curb the powers of the queen mothers into oblivion as they did in the LoDagaa women’s case of Ghana. (Goody 1949; Hawkins 2002)

#### 2.4.1 Asante women and customary law

Similarly, in Ashanti region, there were many ordinances<sup>26</sup>, ranging from age of marriage for girls<sup>27</sup>, which was set at fifteen years of age (Allman, 1996), to when a wife could leave her matrimonial home and farm (Allman 2000). The Native Jurisdiction Ordinance of 1924 was used to compel women to stay and work on matrimonial farms even though they knew the women would not own the farms eventually, in a matrilineal society.

Customary law was based on the assumption that Africans existed outside of history until the arrival of Europeans which is problematic in colonial discourse. In most societies they fused pre-existing customs and the applicability as a means of social control with the guidance of the men in the various societies. The basis of colonial rule rested on its legal structure, through which the colonial state codified the basis of its control. Colonial states were forced simultaneously to pursue two contradictory objectives: to ensure capital accumulation while also maintaining social control. Their attempt to reconcile these goals manifested itself in the notion of "Customary Law" (Mamdani 1996), under which Africans were ostensibly governed by a separate traditional legal system.

Primarily, the colonial administration and the Asante chiefs “conspired”<sup>28</sup> to use The Native Jurisdiction Ordinance to reinforce gender subordination, control improper marriage and curtail increase in concubinage and its resultant venereal diseases in Asante.

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<sup>26</sup> The Native Jurisdiction Ordinance of 1924. (Declaration of Native Customary Law) Order of 1946.

<sup>27</sup> The 1884 Gold Coast Colonial Marriage Ordinance which was extended to Asante with the implementation of the Ashanti Administrative Ordinance, No. 6 of 1919.

<sup>28</sup> At a meeting in Kumasi between the then DC, Major Gosling, and members of the council of chiefs in 1926 to discuss the possibility of a law. (Allman 2000:170)

As Allman wrote, “The chiefs and D.C. were in agreement that measures had to be taken. ... Every woman should have a husband” (Allman 2000: 170). In many instances, this is how some aspects of women’s freedom got eroded (Hawkins 2002:118) but women also used their own agency for autonomy in most of these instances, especially in the Ghana case. The most interesting but not surprising aspect of many of the works is how men collaborated with the colonial administration when it came to power exercised over women (Allman 200:170). What is even more interesting is how women contested and challenged such actions dictated by indirect rule by demonstrating their agency. For example, in the LoDagaa case - “The woman in question” (Hawkins 2002) - Augmin, a widow, appealed to the District Commissioner of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast that she had been forced to marry against her will. Augmin won.<sup>29</sup> In those days litigation by women was rare, and appeals were much rarer. The courts did not even enter women’s names because they usually appeared as bystanders and not as litigants. Even when they appeared before the courts they did so as ‘the wife of...’. Augmin challenged the earlier ruling that she should be married to her late husband’s nephew or a man who had been helping her since her husband died. This would have enabled the husband’s nephew to collect dowry on her head, and the lover to also get a wife. Augmin opposed the ruling of the Native Authority courts that Vaare should take her as a wife. She appealed to the District Commissioner of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast that

I resist this because I have five children and cannot marry another man thereby leaving my children. I also resist the claim that I have not married Varre and do not intent to do so, and that Vaare, not being a new husband, is not liable for the repayment of dowry (conjugal payments) .... Varre has never asked me to marry him.... I would not like to marry Varre even if I could take the children with me. I want to remain in my late husband’s house to see his tomb.

The above case illustrates women’s hidden ability to defend their identities beyond the courts during the colonial period. ‘The woman in question’ appeared in many court

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<sup>29</sup> National Archives of Ghana, (NAG), ADM 61/4/4, *Angmin vs Tabbere*, 15 July 1944.

records still without a woman's name until much recently when they have been replaced by such words as plaintiff or defendant. However, Augmin's name appeared on the case docket. Augmin demonstrated agency and the freedom to exercise such agency

Much literature exists on how powerful some women in Akan society were. Rattray (1923), Busia (1951), Oduyoye (1979) and Arhin (1983), have all discussed the importance of the position of the *Ahemaa* (female traditional leaders). Oduyoye (1979) even suggests that it is due to the tenacity of the *Ohemaa* in administering protective regulations for women that matrilineal inheritance has survived in Asante and is guaranteed in national law. Similarly, Arhin (2001) gives an account of the political-military roles of Akan female rulers and describes their elaborate court with a '*Ntam*', a formula for starting a judicial process.

Through various prisms scholars from diverse disciplines have brought some nuanced and critical knowledge to the fore: Akyeampong (1990) gives an insightful analysis of how gender is configured and understood through spirituality resulting in very powerful avenues for women.

#### **2.4.2 Akan women and Power**

Garcia Clark (1984, 1989, and 1994) explored many nuanced pieces of the puzzle and demonstrated that women's roles cannot be neatly packed into seven clear categories as Oppong (1974) would have it. However, Oppong (1980) admitted the frustration and difficulty in attempting to document and measure women's status<sup>30</sup>. Clark through the prism of Asante Market Women in Kumasi Central Market looked at the position of women in the economic and social context and gives a view of how women negotiate their daily lives as mothers, wives, and businesswomen across household boundaries. Clark

(1994) further explores how women assert themselves in *Onions are my Husband* by

<sup>30</sup> At the UNESCO meeting of experts on the research of “women, development and population: trends, Evaluation and Prospects” in Paris on November 28, 1980. Ss/80/Conf.627/5.09



negotiating the domestic boundaries between accumulations of wealth, and prevailing cultural norms.

Aidoo (1976, 1981), Arhin (1983), and Stoeltje (1995, 1997) illustrate how women, specifically Akan women, have power and authority. All three authors tell what kinds of power actually exist. They give examples of such powers through the traditional roles they play in the enstoolment of the chief and as members of the traditional council. Another example is through their military roles as Aidoo (1981) wrote, by declaring war and as Arhin (1983) indicated, by going to war and fighting alongside their men.

Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian (2000) add momentum to many attempts to move the discourse on women towards bringing women into the mainstream of Asante historiography within a comprehensive Asante social history. It provides a fascinating counterpoint to the much more prevalent scholarship on African women in patriarchal societies. The authors show how, as the colonial economic and political systems increasingly favored male interests, Asante women struggled to regain control over the products of their labor and their personal lives. But the general focus is on commodity production, family labor, and reproduction in colonial Asante. The book captures the resilience and tenacity of a generation of Asante women and their struggles in defense of social and economic autonomy.

Similarly, Garcia Clark's works (1984, 1989, and 1994) are all in Asante and about how Asante market women in Kumasi Central Market negotiated their space in filling their three central conventional roles as wife, mother, and trader. Clark has repeatedly showed that Asante women are independent and industrious. In *Onions are my husband* (1994), the author tells a detailed story of survival and accumulation by Asante market women. Through her detailed ethnographic work, it is easy to understand a part of the configurations of gender in Akan society.

### 2.4.3 Authors with some reservation and degree of skepticism

Manuh (1988) outlines the importance of the  $\square$ hemaa's court and its utility in the advancement of 'women's rights as a human right'. She traces the root of the  $\square$ hemaa's court to Asante political and constitutional structure which is sustained by a social context.

Manuh asserts that,

The  $\square$ hemaa's judicial functions primarily revolve around women in line with the  $\square$ hemaa's role as a protector and enforcer of women's rights. Given the socio-economic and cultural developments which have occurred in Ghana as a whole, for example, the growth of educational opportunities, health, migration, and a more heterogeneous mix of the population, perceptible changes have also occurred in women's roles, statuses, values, and beliefs. Thus overall, "the space now 'accorded' the  $\square$ hemaa has contracted somewhat but her office is still important and cases come to her court" (Manuh, 1988:12).

She notes in her study, "it is not easy to ascertain precisely what changes have occurred in the composition of the  $\square$ hemaa's court over time, and how far the present composition dates." Manuh's usage of the word "accorded" appears to be in the same spirit as how "empowerment" is frequently used. The context connotes someone giving the space and therefore shrinking that given space at will. Nonetheless, her question of composition and evolution are explored and covered in this work under the analysis of data from fieldwork.

The available works range from writing generally about Africa to those writing about African women to writings specifically about Asante women. Most of these scholars through many narratives have labeled women's action as autonomy, and agency, not necessarily equating agency and autonomy with power and authority. There are those who are frightened by such enormous power by women (Chinweizu, 1990). Chinweizu categorizes women's power into three: womb, kitchen and cradle, and labels them as control centers of female power. Bartle, (2014) unveiled it incidentally and labeled it "covert gynocracy." Bartle cites an explanation suggested by Bleak (1975) that

“Women hide their power under a barrage of ideology expressing male dominance, and the outward show of respect and courtesy of women for men defuses potential conflict and protects the economic and social position that women substantively enjoy”.

There are still those who are doubtful that women have any power at all (Farrar, 1997). In some instances, women’s power is dismissed with doubts of matriarchy, as if it is impossible to admit that some women in some African societies have some power without admitting that matriarchy ever existed. Farrar vehemently dismisses matriarchy as

A nineteenth-century cultural evolutionist constructs like for example, the “consanguineous” and “punaluan” stages in the supposed evolution of the human family. None of these constructs is based on any evidence of a historical nature. Instead, they derive from misinterpretations of nonwestern, so-called primitive cultures, combined with clever, yet purely imaginary, reconstructions of the primordial human social organization. (Farrar, 1997)

Farrar’s analysis is based on a comparison of the Bono-Nkoranza Hema in Ghana and the Pabir maigira (queen mother) of a patrilineal people in northern Nigeria. It is tragic that anyone would attempt to compare women leaders in matrilineal and patrilineal societies, of distinctly different origins. The author even argues that no official in the Asante Hema’s administration are males. There are many chiefs (male subordinates) under the Asantehema and considerably more of her attendants are male. There are many contradictions in the paper as he acknowledges the Akan Ohema as “a most potent voice; one to be heeded by all, but especially by the King himself” (589)

In his conclusion, Farrar is still looking for a solution to “the problem of the ultimate origins of queen mothership in Africa”, and suggests “detailed studies, historical and anthropological, of the various female political titles where such studies remain possible”. (590)

Rattray (1923) worked in Asante for a good while before he realized the authority of the women. When he inquired why the informants kept that from him, they simply said, “The white man never asked us this” (1923: p.84). Akan women were probably not very visible

during that period and that is probably why Rattray did not encounter them early enough and why Bartle (1978), in shock, labeled it “covert gynocracy”. These are some of the factors that make this work timely.

The above authors provide significant insights into a range of issues in relation to women and power. They all serve as building blocks and avenues I can safely consider covered. All the works cited in this chapter and many more are focused and necessary pieces of the puzzle, and they all fit very well in very special ways. Aidoo (1981) emphasize the significant role of Asante queen mothers in the nineteenth century, a role overlooked by colonial officials and male historians alike (Hay 1988:433). In this work, I have also acknowledged that women alone cannot be a legitimate category of analysis as confirmed by the diversity of the works I have become acquainted with in this chapter. I have quickly learned that considerations of class, age, ethnic identity need to be added to the distinction. Many important gaps still exist. The diversity also suggests that there is the need to rethink the basic chronological framework from a woman’s point of view. There is the need to also give attention to incorporating the voices of African women to really uphold the slogan “Nothing About us Without us”<sup>31</sup>

I had assumed that, as demonstrated above with knowledge production and historiography in Ghana following a linear pattern of progression, the trajectory of women’s participation in political, intellectual, and cultural life in Ghana would follow a fairly uniform, straight path, characterized by clearly defined steps and phases. However, the course of women’s historiography may better be viewed as a meandering path without a regular pattern of progression. The anthologies are disparate works. Prima facie, they have one common characteristic: their chronology spans the nineteenth to the twentieth century with minor exceptions. Beyond that, the fragmented nature of modern research takes over, with

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<sup>31</sup> A banner and a working group. At the Human Welfare Conference at Oxford University (2017). Under the theme “Reinventing Empowerment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”

purpose, content, research design, and analysis differing exponentially. However, as stated above they all have a place in the tapestry and puzzle and lay a very important foundation for this work to stand on.

These are all very important works that provide significant insights into a range of issues in relation to my work. They all serve as building blocks and avenues I can safely consider covered, *fait accompli*. All the works cited in this chapter and many more are focused and necessary pieces of the puzzle, and they all fit very well in very special ways.

This work is about Women and power in Africa: Case study of the Kokofu - an Akan Asante community in Ghana. Many of the works reviewed above discuss women in the nineteenth and twentieth century, specifically during the colonial period. Some chronicle women's struggles in other parts of Africa and specifically in colonial Asante of Ghana (what was known as Gold Coast back then). While many covered women's experiences from their own stories, they have been mostly regarded as illustration and demonstrations of women's agency in the face of colonialism and patriarchy. Relations of power has been at the core of all the experiences, but sadly, none of them has travelled beyond agency. As such there is no available literature to review specifically for what women defined as power in their respective societies.

## **2.5 Influence of Oyewumi (1997) and Swai (2010)**

Many African scholars, Ifi Amadiume (1987), Marjorie Mbilinyi (1994), Amina Mama (1996), Ayesha Imam (1997), Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997), Tabitha Kanogo (2005) Akyeampong (2000) and Elinami Veraeli Swai (2010), have all examined the question of power and women in Africa. Most of them have argued that to understand the conscious goal of development on the Africa continent and the power relations in society, it is essential to understand the current condition of women in Africa. As new avenues and concepts became clearer, it expanded the scope of the historiography. The added readings

added a scope of spirituality to inform more broadly on institutional definition of power from the Asante institutional center.

This work has been especially inspired by the ideas of ‘cultural scholars’ such as Oyeronke Oyewumi: *The Invention of Women: Making an African sense of Western Gender Discourse*, and Elinami Veraeli Swai: *Beyond Women’s Empowerment in Africa: Exploring Dislocation and Agency*. These works invoke interesting questions that are relevant to this work, especially beyond colonial powers into the lives of African women. Oyewumi’s work defines “feminist scholarship as leaning toward a hegemonic angle, where the experiences of western women are used as a measure to gauge the experiences of women in Africa” (Swai 2010:36)

In her analysis of struggles by women within historical moments in Nigeria, Oyewumi (1997) points out that “African women have power and this power is not related to any modern system” (72). As many of these scholars have demonstrated, “there are alternative ways of seeing and studying African women” (78). Both scholars suggest that telling the stories of women from women’s own perspective is “an act of reinserting them in the historical trajectory without casting them as silent and powerless female” (Oyewumi 1997:183, Swai 2010:68).

They have all written-on behalf of women from the inside as cultural scholars, but none of them has embarked on the ‘there is an ongoing discourse that you do not have power. Do you have any power?’

Even though all the various anthologies by (Allman et al 2002) documented life histories, oral narratives, and court cases, the authors did not ask them to share their views about power to learn the kinds of power they may have. However, they made the argument that there are cultural and traditional avenues to power by some women in Africa.

What Oyewumi and Swai have not done yet is asking women to talk about power from their own standpoint. This is because, in any power situation, power or the object or expression of it must be recognized as such by all parties involved. In a sense, in any negotiation situation, a carrot must be recognized as such by all parties as a pacifier in that context. For example, an Akan woman should understand that political participation is an expression of power. In other words, if you are so powerful how come we do not see a lot of Akan women in parliament? This and many other questions have been answered in the following chapters.

In reviewing the available literature for general knowledge, it also became necessary to note suggestions and recommendations relevant to research. Most of the recommendations (Bartle, 2014), suggestions (Manuh 1984, Farrar 1997), and questions have been addressed in chapter five – Analysis of data from fieldwork.

## **2.6 Influence of McCaskie (1985) and Akyeampong (1995)**

While authority and power are based on rational grounds in the West, power is considered mystical in Africa. Mystical power is considered an ascribed aspect of womanhood in Akan.

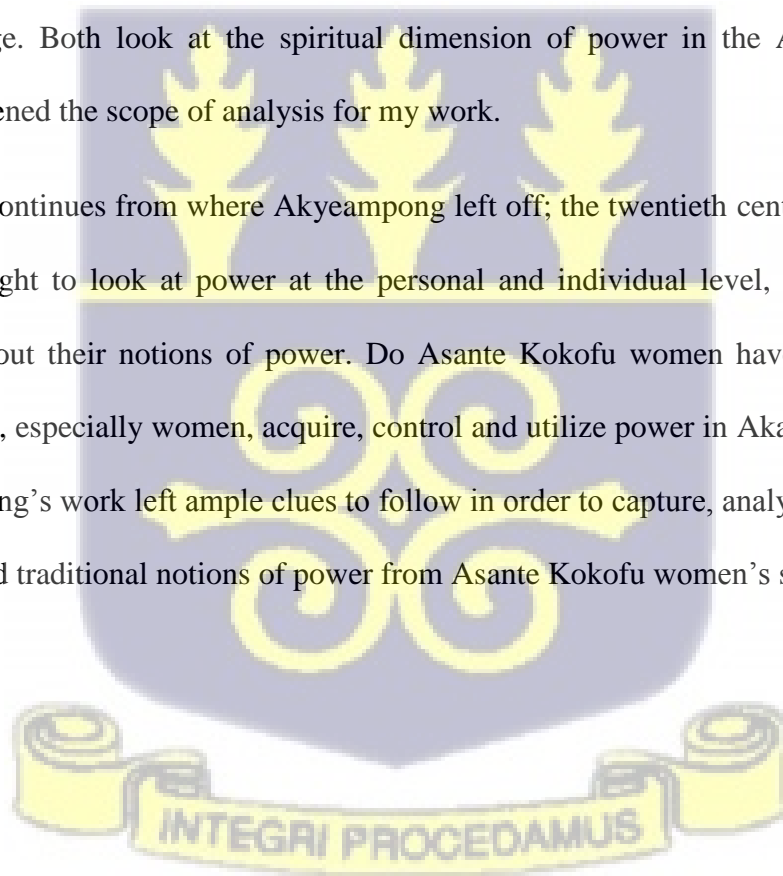
Akyeampong (1995) highlights the varied and complex nature of power within the Asante cosmos. The authors also explored Asante conceptions of power. The essay explores the variations in Asante conceptions of power by analyzing three historical incidents in which the demonstration of women's power was central:

- i. the 1818-1819 Gyaman war and a coup by royal wives;
- ii. the rise of a spiritual, back to our roots movement (Odomankoma);
- iii. and the British attempt to confiscate the Golden Stool and the Yaa Asantewaa war of 1900 with a woman commanding Asante military forces. (p 498)

However, all these instances are historical antecedents and analyses of institutional expressions of power. Akyeampong's work admittedly "sought to extend the frontiers of discussion on power in Asante society" (1995: 506), nonetheless from the center to understand how power is pulled, regulated and distributed at the institutional level. The essay concludes with a reflection on the relational nature of power in Asante and the relevance of spirituality to current Asante notions of power. Akyeampong's fieldwork ends at the end of the twentieth century and sheds invaluable light on the dynamic and shifting cultural foundations of power in Asante.

McCaskie's work analyzes power at the bureaucratic institutional level, while Akyeampong looked at power from the center and institutions of kingship and matrilineage. Both look at the spiritual dimension of power in the Asante worldview which widened the scope of analysis for my work.

My work continues from where Akyeampong left off; the twentieth century to the present. I have sought to look at power at the personal and individual level, by asking Kokofu women about their notions of power. Do Asante Kokofu women have power? How do individuals, especially women, acquire, control and utilize power in Akan Asante Kokofu? Akyeampong's work left ample clues to follow in order to capture, analyze and understand cultural and traditional notions of power from Asante Kokofu women's standpoint.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Overview

Chapter one proposed to move the discussion from prevailing notions of powerlessness to traditional notions and understanding of power in Akan society. The ongoing development discourse that uses ‘women’s empowerment’ as a development tool is flawed because it assumes powerlessness in any setting where women are. This is problematic because such an assumption also leads to another assumption – women as victims needing protection and redemption. This assumption of powerlessness is flawed because power is relative. Ghanaian women in general or specifically Asante women may not have the power to effect policy change because they are not well represented in parliament, but that does not mean they do not have power to effect change elsewhere in the communities where they live. For instance, one of the types of power they have, as this research has shown, is the ability of women as initiators, facilitators and sustainers of girl/child marriages in Ghana. If we recognize them for having that power alone, they can be formidable partners for development and could help with bringing solution to that problem. Furthermore, so many assumptions have been made about women, all seeing them as powerless, voiceless victims, constantly needing civil society to advocate for them. In this study, women shared their own personal stories and experience about power from their own standpoint as knowledge produced by women on their notions of power and how it relates to them. It will give the world a better understanding of how Akan women, well documented as having agency and autonomy,<sup>32</sup> do not seem to strive to be where they can use that same energy to effect policy changes. Chapter two discusses some of the aspects of the available

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<sup>32</sup>Akyeampong 2000, 2006, Allman 2000, Clark 1984, 1994, Stoeltje 1995.

literature: overview of efforts made by various scholars not only as knowledge producers, but also to write women into history. There are many writings on women and power in Africa but few from women's standpoint or incorporating their own narratives. A few gaps became obvious and the most glaring is the discussion of power and women's voices. This work fills the gap as Asante women share their definition and notions of power in diverse ways, as covered in Chapter 6 (major findings). This chapter (Chapter 3) discusses the epistemological and theoretical framework guided by the methodological considerations and design of methods which enabled a rich and deeper data collection and analysis for a better understanding of power dynamics in Asante society.

### **3.1 Focus of Study**

In this study, women's definition and notions of power are expected to generate a deeper understanding of the power dynamics that seem so misunderstood by various people who have encountered or read about Asante women. The objective is to document women's notions of power from their own standpoint. Secondly to identify and frame the elements that shapes the concept of power in some African societies, particularly the Asante women of Akan society in Ghana. Ultimately, to articulate and share the cultural understanding of power in Asante society.

### **3.2 Gender and culture**

This is a reflection of the political history of the gender epistemology. It also reflects the reality that there exists great diversity, not only among feminist/gender scholars, but also in women's relations with, and responses to "patriarchy". Gender is a social construct which includes ways of categorizing beliefs, attitudes, practices, relations, concepts and ideas about manhood and womanhood. Social constructs, in turn, are affected by context, thus gender, gender relations and the study of gender are influenced by local and geopolitics. Thus, in the study of power it is important to be mindful of the relations

between gender and other bases of distinction such as age, class, kinship, ethnicity, religion, and social class. In this work I have shown how culture has shaped the identities and practices of men and women in some African societies. An important aspect has been the examination of the different kinds of evidence (ethnographic, historical, literary, sociological, and visual) available for studying gender relations and identities, male and female roles, and changes therein over time.

### 3.3 Search for Theory

There is a search for a social theory to describe and explain the nature of power among the Asante women. The search for an indigenous model for economic development is on (Akyeampong, 2018)<sup>33</sup>, but we need a model for socio-cultural development.

The discourse on women and power thrives on cultural understanding and notions of power. However, the goal of this study is to situate the discourse at the centre from the periphery. In which case there is the danger of universalists dismissing it as hiding behind cultural relativity or cultural particularism.

It is to avoid this conflict that women's power, though very heavily laden with cultural norms, needs to be discussed from the women's standpoint through women's own voices.

#### 3.3.1 Universalism

Universalism in this context refers to 'the notion that human rights are universal and ~~and~~ apply to every human being'.<sup>34</sup> Chanock pleads for universalization as aspiration as opposed to reality (1988:25). He calls for universalization of rights culture at the national level, to counter both the demagoguery of local ruling classes, and the threat of fragmentation posed by community-based elites. The problem with this position is that it packs all notions of difference into a box which makes implementation and adherence at the local

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<sup>33</sup> In a private discussion with Professor Emmanuel Akyeampong on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2018 at Harvard University.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.globalpolicy.org/home>. Accessed on May 7th 2018.

level exceedingly difficult and almost hopeless. In a sense, by advocating for universalization, the United Nations' declarations become the standard instruments for all member states to comply. But this poses some serious problems because such instruments, without cultural considerations are difficult to integrate into local policies. For instance, there have been efforts made to get women to participate in governance, but the results have been dismal looking at the input in terms of resources over time.<sup>35</sup>

How come women in Ghana do not seem to understand that political participation is one of the best avenues to systematic change? This study shows that the phenomenon can be unraveled through the analysis and understanding of the aspects of cultural underpinnings. So, while civil society and various experts are busy using standard western gauges to measure certain indicators and drawing generic conclusions, the solution is hidden in the ignored or excluded variable called culture. Universalisation serves as utility to an extent in the analysis of human behavior in conformity. In this work: women and power in Asante, there is a wide gap between the notion and concept of power at the local or indigenous level and how it is operationalized at the national or international level. Culture is one of the key variables that can explain this gap.

### **3.3.2 Cultural Relativity**

While cultures are the usual way of describing difference, it has not always been readily acceptable. It has been variously argued that culture should not be accepted as the primary way of describing difference (Chanock 1988: 25)

Cultural relativists object to Universalists arguments, and argue that “human rights are culturally dependent, and that no moral principles can be made to apply to all cultures.”<sup>36</sup>

It has been argued that, “The rights movement, born of the womb of western culture is intolerable of competing world-views.” (Nhlapo 2000: 138) Nhlapo does not deny that the

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<sup>35</sup> The next chapter is dedicated to the input, expected outcome and measurements.

<sup>36</sup><https://www.globalpolicy.org/home> Accessed on May 7th 2018.

language of culture may mask a defense of privilege of certain times. But he is wary of the kind of one-eyed glimpse that sees privilege only in someone else's front yard, and thus concludes that every attempt to use a different yardstick is nothing but a defense of privilege. As far as Nhlapo is concerned, "Culture is about dignity, and the question of dignity is constitutionally guaranteed". (139)

There are concerns that the African context has given rise to a dual breach: between rights and justice and, even more so between democracy and justice (Shivji 2000:41).

The preceding arguments have led to the suggestion that we may need another avenue apart from law to express difference. (Mamdani 2000:7)

The above suggestion will bridge the wide gap between Universalism and Cultural relativism. It is not even necessary to list binaries such as north and south or modernity and tradition which affect human manifestations of values, principles, practice and behaviour. In addition, the geographical spaces in which these manifestations take place add to its impact. Some scholars contend that gender is socially constructed. (Oyewumi, 1997; Swai 2010) This means that the construction of gender will take its own form in Africa and not follow the dictates of the western construction. Africa is composed of 52 countries<sup>37</sup> and many countries have over 100 ethnic groups. This may depend on what counts as an ethnic group. If Somali counts as the basis of ethnicity in Somalia, then there is one principal ethnic group with sub-divisions on clan basis. There are currently 73 living languages in Ghana and the two main languages are Akan and English.<sup>38</sup> The social constructions of any categories is more complex in Africa than anywhere else due to the cultural differences. However, in spite of the ethnic diversities there are great cultural similarities. Even the languages are related. In the case of Ghana, as reported by

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<sup>37</sup> Some suggest 54 and even 55/56 has been suggested. It is a question of what counts as a country; is it merely being a member of the AU?

<sup>38</sup><https://www.ethnologue.com/profile/GH>. Accessed on 05/11/2018

Ethnologue<sup>39</sup>, most of the 73 languages are subgroups which are variations. For example, Akan has many variations with numerous sub-dialects. Nonetheless it does not make it any easier to integrate cultures for smooth general operation. Cultural relativity explains the phenomenon (Asante women's power) exponentially. However, Asante is part of a larger Akan group with variations and degrees of Akan (ness) and the extent of the analysis and applicability would be problematic if only culture is used in the broadest sense.

### 3.3.3 Standpoint theory

Standpoint theory is a postmodern method for analyzing inter-subjective discourses. This body of work concerns the ways that authority is rooted in individuals' knowledge (their perspectives), and the power that such authority exerts (Morrit, 1997:15).

One of the central themes in standpoint theory is that "Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order" (Harding 1993: 56). Different theorists utilize different labels to emphasize their theory:

Hartsock (2004) uses the label 'feminist standpoint' whereas Dorothy Smith uses the label 'women's standpoint' reflecting the way in which standpoint theory argues for "women's place" as a starting point for enquiry (Harding 2004:21).

In this study, the emphasis is not necessarily on the 'feminist' or 'women' as the qualifier but on the general aspects of the theory. Some of the arguments of the theory's developers add value to this work. For example, while Hartsock's work has clear feminist leaning, some of her arguments address difference beyond feminism. The concept of standpoint, Hartsock (1983) argues,

rests on the fact that there are some perspectives on society from which, however well-intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and with the natural world are not visible. (117)<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>39</sup><https://www.ethnologue.com/cloud/aka>. Accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

<sup>40</sup>Hekman (1997) also analyzes Hartsock in *Truth and Method: feminist Theory revisited* and quotes Hartsock on page 3.

African societies should be studied by multiple theories simultaneously. To study women and power, many tools should be utilized. Some aspects of the phenomenon cannot be explained with universalism, but cultural relativism brings out many aspects of the paradoxes. This study does not embrace standpoint in totality. The significant aspect found useful is the strategy of women telling their own stories and defining their own space and disposition.

Standpoint emerges as the most appropriate theory to explain this methodology and its utility. In this work, I have collected data on notions, definitions, perceptions, and women's role in the pursuit and advancement of power from the standpoint of Kokofu women.

The use of social constructionism was helpful in understanding how the Akan society is constructed. Constructionism as an epistemology was very helpful in analyzing power as a social construct. How women are perceived as powerful and what is womanhood in Akan and what constitutes Akaness, are all norms derived and culture-laden.

### **3.3.4 Assumptions of Constructionism**

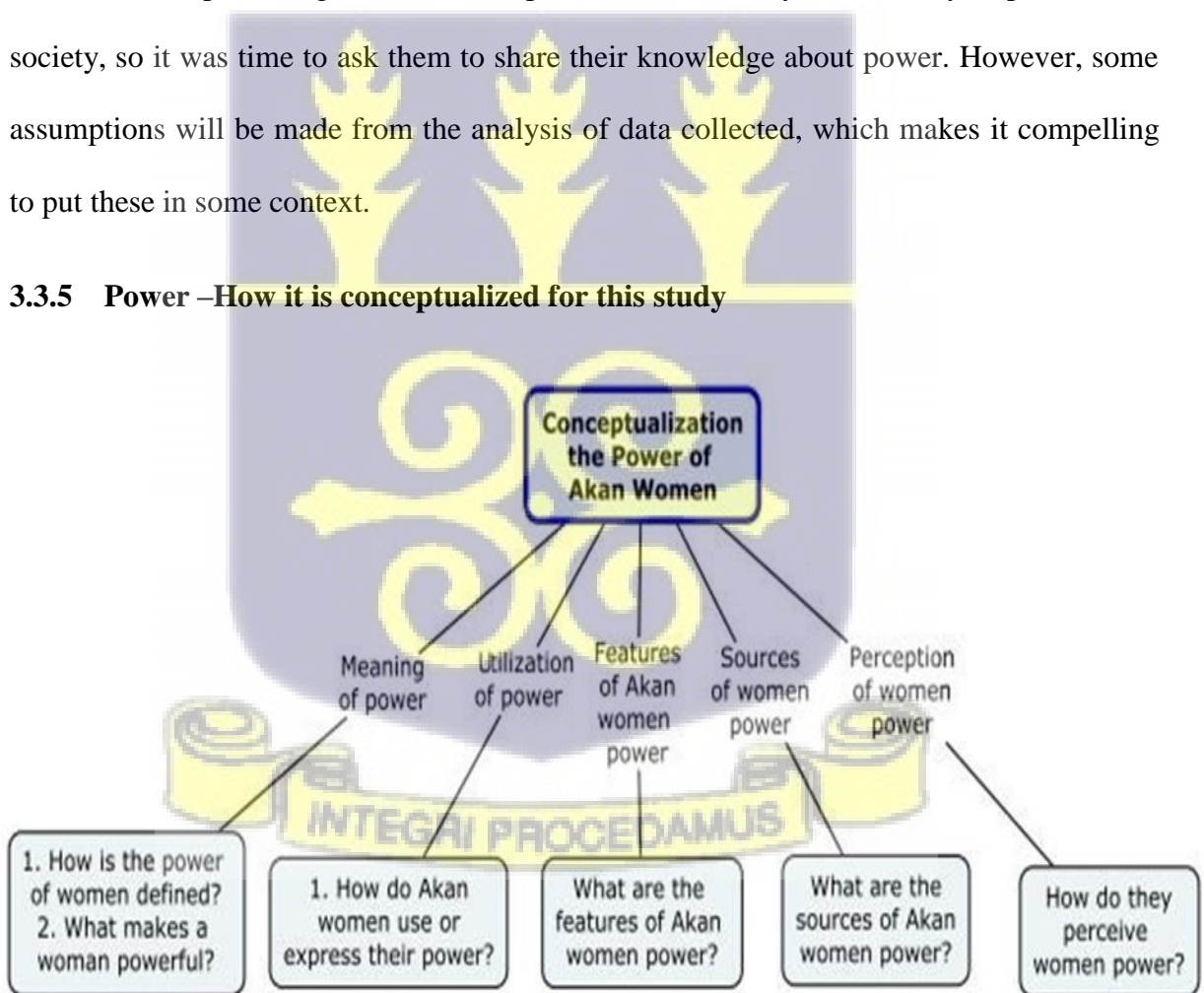
Bur's (1995) work on social constructionism highlights four basic assumptions of the constructionism as:

- A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge – the world does not present itself objectively to the observer, but is known through human experience, which is largely influenced by language.
- Historical and cultural specificity – the categories in the language used to classify things emerge from the social interaction within a group of people at a particular time and in a particular place. Categories of understanding are situational.

- Knowledge is sustained by social process – how reality is understood at a given moment is determined by the conventions of communication in force at that time. The stability of social life determines how concrete our knowledge seems to be.
- Knowledge and social action go together – reality is socially constructed by interconnected patterns of communication behaviour. Within a social group or culture, reality is defined not so much by individual acts, but by complex and organized patterns of ongoing actions.

In this study, I collected detailed data on Asante Kokofu women and their notions and definitions of power as part of their knowledge system. The assumption of the researcher had been that, prevailing definitions of power had obviously not had any impact on this society, so it was time to ask them to share their knowledge about power. However, some assumptions will be made from the analysis of data collected, which makes it compelling to put these in some context.

### 3.3.5 Power –How it is conceptualized for this study



### 3.3.5.1 The limitations of power in this study

Power in this study is limited to socio-political power. Power in this context is how the participants define the type of power they have.

### 3.3.5.2 The assumptions of power in this study

- ▣ Nobody is devoid of power.
- ▣ Everybody has some power depending on the type and context and what it is intended to achieve.
- ▣ Power is the potential ability to influence behaviour, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things that they would not otherwise do.
- ▣ Politics and influence are the processes, the actions, the behaviours through which this potential power is utilized and realized. (Pfeffer, 1994, p.30)<sup>41</sup>

At any given time and place different modes of power interplay, producing different results from context to context, be it gender class or age. The interplay blurs the boundaries to the extent that each mode or interplay creates its own pattern.

No form of power is monolithic or univocal, existing in isolation from all other modes of social structuration. Rather, each variable of power acquires its specific value in the context of all variables operating in each situation.

Power can be visible, hidden or invisible. Visible power is the one exercised by groups and individuals at decision making tables such as government bodies, consultative bodies or local assemblies. This approach assumes that access to this arena by comparatively powerless groups is relatively open. It is also assumed that by seeing who participates in these arenas, we can tell who has power by the winners and losers.

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted by Rex C. Mitchell, PhD. In Fundamental Concepts about Power. <http://www.csun.edu/~hfmgt001/thoughts.htm#lead>. Accessed on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2017

In analyzing power in society, a definition which includes culture is very helpful. Foucault recognizes power as ‘ubiquitous’ and beyond any particular structure. Bourdieu goes beyond Foucault and illustrates how power is created as cultural and symbolic. In *Search of Cultural Interpretation of Power*, Navarro (2006), explains that this culturally and symbolically created power is “constantly re-legitimised through an interplay of agency and structure through ‘habitus or socialized norms or tendencies that guide behavior and thinking’”. (568)

### 3.3.6 Habitus

Habitus is the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them (Wacquant, 2005).

Habitus stands to demystify most of the findings of this work and explains a good part of the analysis. Habitus can be attributed to Pierre Bourdieu (2002: 27).

### 3.3.7 Glancing through the Power cube<sup>42</sup>

The power cube is a framework for analyzing the levels, spaces and forms of power.<sup>43</sup>

There is a sense that power manifests itself in numerous ways and an analysis to establish the existence or lack of it in any space or level requires a clear conceptualization and specific tools.

This study limits its analysis to socio-political power. Habitus is employed in the analysis of data from fieldwork to explain the institution of ‘hemaa’ as a sustainable social category and leadership model.

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<sup>42</sup><http://www.powercube.net/analyse-power/levels-of-power/> Accessed on February 5, 2018

<sup>43</sup> ibid

### 3.4 Adopting a model for the study

My objectives compel me to take phenomenology as my interpretivist approach since I interpret Asante Kokofu women's lived experiences and how they experience the symbols they offer as evidence of their power or expressions of their power.

This research design is informed by four questions posed by Crotty (2003)

- What epistemology informs this theoretical perspective?
- What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology?
- What methodology governs my choice and use of methods?
- What methods do I propose to use?

Crotty, (2003:4)

#### 3.4.1 The four elements of the model

The four elements of the model are epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. In this model, epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge or, as Rosenthal and Rosnow (2008:744) define it, 'the origin, nature, methods and limits of human knowledge or human understanding of the world'. The theoretical perspective deals with 'how we know what we know' and deals with the philosophical stance informing the methodology. The methodology is the strategy, plan of action process and design that lies behind the choice of the research methods. And the methods are the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyses data in relation to some research question or hypothesis. (Gehrels 2013:20).

In this study, the researcher needed to study beliefs of power of Asante women from their own standpoint. This has to do with the participants own definitions and notions of power. There was no particular theory espoused for this study and as such, no particular philosophical stance informed this methodology. However, Interpretivism, standpoint and habitus emerged as guide for the process. What was needed was a methodology that would accommodate and produce detailed information to be analysed for a better

understanding of the phenomenon. What do Asante women say about the type of power they have, can only be documented through a detailed ethnographic study.

As illustrated, “the epistemology and the theoretical perspective together form the theoretical approach, while the methodology and the methods form the practical approach”. (Crotty, 2003) The author further explains that “the theoretical approach is more fixed and the practical approach is more flexible and responds to the particular research objective of the study” (p.62) The design makes it easier to manage the study but, as Gehrels (2003) suggests, “there is no strict lineal relationship between the elements of the model.” (p 21).

In view of the framework and models used, I found it practical to address both theoretical (epistemology and theoretical perspective) and the practical approaches (methodology and methods) in one composite unit.

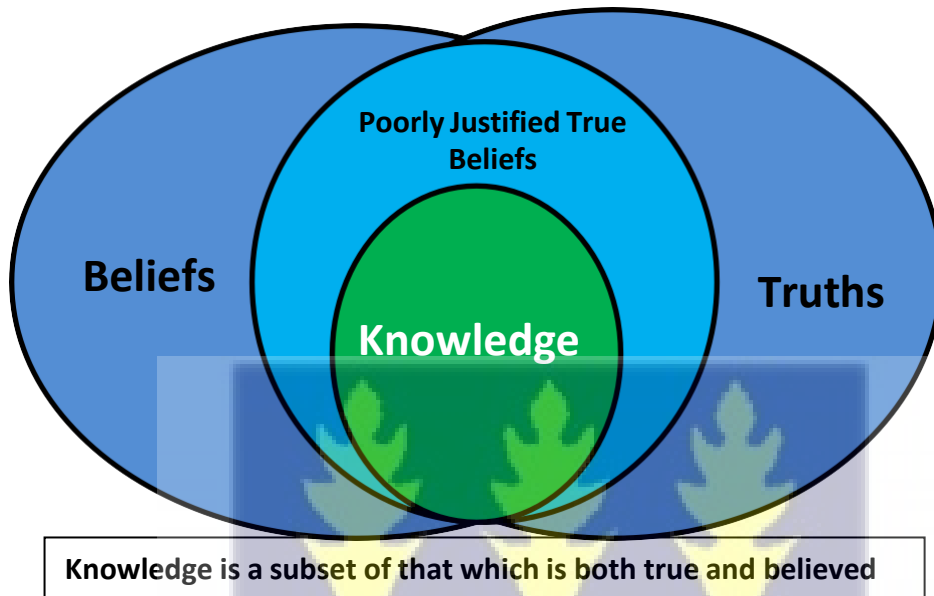
### 3.4.1.1 Theoretical Approach – Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective



#### 3.4.1.1.1 Epistemology

My research follows the approach of **constructionism**. Crotty (2003) defines constructionism as “the epistemology situated between the extremes of objectivism and subjectivism”. The belief in constructionism is that the essence of creating knowledge is

not by finding an objective truth waiting for us to be discovered. (Crotty, 2003). I chose constructionism because it informs this study, about definition and notions of power, with the approach that “the realities we study are social products of the actors, interactions and institutions.” (Flick 2006:78). As illustrated below in this proposition<sup>44</sup>, knowledge is a subset of that which is both true and believed<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 1: Knowledge is a subset of that which is both true and believed**

#### 3.4.1.1.2 Theoretical perspective

The theoretical perspective chosen for this study is **interpretivism**, which “requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action” (Bryman and Bell (2007:19). Phenomenology is selected as my interpretivist approach. As explained by many authors, “Phenomenology is about interpreting lived experiences and situates and relates key aspects like ontology, epistemology, logic, and ethics to give meaning to an individual’s experiences of the world through their senses”. Smith (2003) and Crotty (2003)

<sup>44</sup> Adapted from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/outline\\_of\\_epistemology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/outline_of_epistemology). Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019

<sup>45</sup> This is attributed to Plato.

There are four main paradigms identified by Bryman and Bell (2003) for studying societies and organizations: functionalist; **interpretative**; radical humanist; and radical structuralism. The best paradigm for my study of women and power in Asante Kokofu society is interpretative. The collected data is analysed and interpreted in numerous ways.

This research design model also situates this research in the symbolic interactionist tradition, that “reality is negotiated between people”, “always changing” and constantly evolving’. (Richards and Morse 2007)

### 3.5 Methodology

The methodology is “the strategy, plan of action process and design that lies behind the choice of the research methods”. (Gehrels 2013:20).

Criticisms of methodology come from both within and outside the research community. Even those who use social research findings to support their argument complain that the findings of social research are too obvious, and they also complain about the ideological biases of researchers. (Hammersley 1993, Intro)

Ideas about the purpose of research and its political character also have implications for judgments about the sort of methods employed. For example, some feminists argue that the use of quantitative methods conflict with the basic principles of feminisms, especially if employed in the study of women. (Hammersley, 1993)

Jayaratne (1993) looks at some of the issues from a feminist perspective and suggest that some changes in the traditional quantitative research process and in traditional research environments which would “make quantitative research useful for testing feminist theory.” (pg 109)

The problem arises when researchers using qualitative methods apply their standards to quantitative research or vice versa. But each function within

different assumptions so finding fault with one approach with the standards of another only results in misunderstanding. Each approach should be assessed on its theoretical basis. (Hammersley, 1993)

As illustrated below in the table, the two methods have distinctly unique features. While one approach may be more appropriate for a specific inquiry, the other will add value, though complimentary.

The methods explain how the study was conducted for the completion of this thesis. It is organized under different subheadings including population of the study, sample and sampling procedure, focus of study, data collection instruments, data collection procedure and strategies, and data analysis plan.

### **3.5.1.1 Qualitative Research Approach**

The methodology chosen for this study is qualitative research approach. This approach is most suitable for this study because it enables the use of varied qualitative data collection techniques in the field to gather firsthand information about the phenomenon being studied using interviews, focus group discussions and observations.

### **3.5.2 Rational for the Qualitative Research Approach**

In this study, to document how Akan women at Kokofu define and view culture, a qualitative design offers the best approach to data collection. To understand what they are sharing, it was critical to interview, involve the participation in focus group discussions and observe their daily activities to document the experiences of the respondents in relation to the exercise of women. As an Akan, it was tempting to treat the context as familiar, but I kept a very safe distance in order that my personal experiences and biases will not affect the outcome of the findings.

Crotty (2003) also caution that:

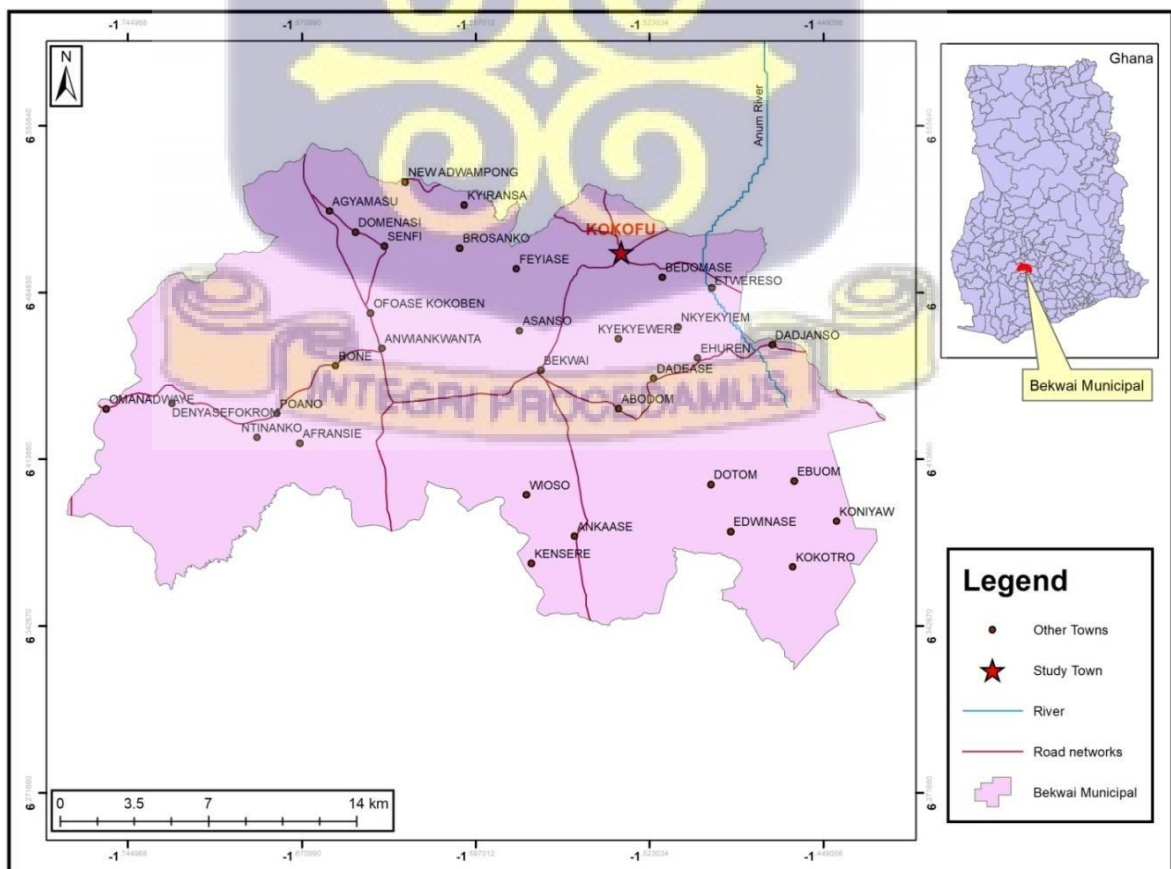
Culture is not to be called into question; it is not to be criticised, least of all by someone from another culture instead, one is to observe it as closely as possible attempt to take the place of those within the culture, and search

out the insider's perspective. Thus, any phenomenon of culture being studied must be studied as it appears (Crotty, 2003:76)

As an observer, I documented the culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences. I took field notes of cultural happenings. I interviewed key informants, traditional leaders, and various stake holders, some in private and some as part of focus group discussion. I analyzed artefacts such as stools, umbrellas and linguist staff. I also analysed texts such as proverbs and songs.

### 3.5.3 Research Population

The research population is the Asante Kokofu women among the Akan population of Ghana. To study a given phenomenon in a population, it is almost impossible to study the entire population except in a census. For example, “Are women powerful?” “Are Asante women powerful”, or “Do women in Ghana have power?” It would be nearly impossible to interview every single person within Ghana and those outside Ghana's borders who are Ghanaians (de facto and de jure). If one was to study the entire population, it would not be cost effective and would be very time consuming.



**Figure 2: Study area map**

### 3.5.4 Setting/Context

The Akan is broadly defined in this study to cover most of the 10 geographical regions in Ghana, generally, where Akan is spoken and specifically where the eight clans<sup>47</sup> enclaves are found. Asante is defined in this study to cover the traditional area officially designated as Ashanti region in Ghana<sup>48</sup>. Asante is defined as the people within and outside the Ashanti regional boundaries who are of Asante descent. This population is the most cited, discussed, and referred to among all ethnic groupings in Ghana. It was very difficult to design the research beforehand. However, because it was not difficult to enter the community, it was not very difficult to observe and collect preliminary data in order to design many aspects of the research and articulate a sampling strategy. Kokofu's coordinates are 6° 28' 13" N, 1° 37' 32" W. However, Kokofu is in the Bekwai district, and it is one of the most populated areas in the Bekwai district. However, Kokofuman (the kingdom of Kokofu is wider and beyond the geographical boundaries of Kokofu within the above coordinates: Kokofu includes some people in the Eastern, Western, Volta and other parts of the Ashanti region of Ghana. For this study, Kokofu is defined as the town showed within the above coordinates and part of the Bekwai district.

Kokofu served as the starting point, especially in the development of Asante socio-political culture. Kokofu defines a starting point, where Asante customs, especially those pertaining to women, can be studied. To study Asante women, Kokofu appeared considerably more pristine than Kumasi or Bekwai. Kokofu's rich history of matriarch Nana AnkyaaNyame<sup>49</sup> and the title Osagyefo<sup>50</sup> makes it one of the best places to study women and power. Kokofu Hema<sup>51</sup> is the only female stool occupant with the title 'Osagyefo'. Present day Manhyia and the Osei Tutu dynasty started at Kokofu and later migrated to its present site Kwaman, which has since been renamed Kumasi. Kokofu Hema has an elaborate court which is akin to the Asante Hema's court at Manhyia

palace in Kumasi.

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<sup>47</sup> The eight distinctive Akan clans are Aduana, Agona, Asakyiri, Asenee, Asona, Oyoko, Bretuo, and Ekuona clans.

<sup>48</sup> The Asanteman (Asante kingdom) is beyond the geographical boundaries of the Ashanti region of Ghana. It includes Worawora in the Volta region, Dikoman and Atibie in the Eastern region, and Bechem and Nkoranza in the Brong Ahafo region.

<sup>49</sup> Ancestress of the Oyoko clan.

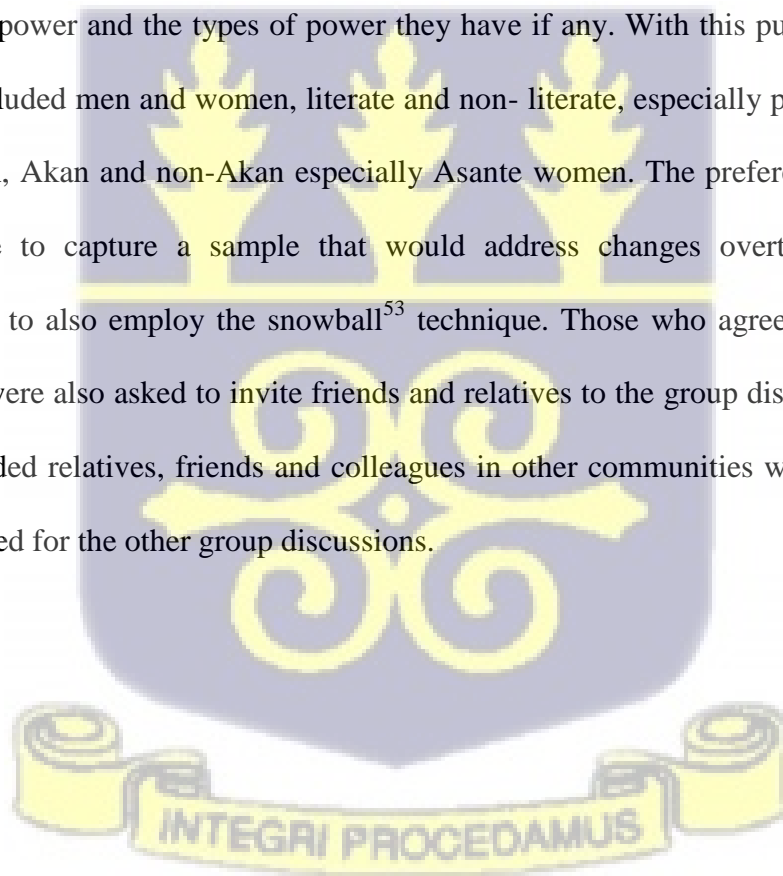
<sup>50</sup> Osagyefo means war leader. Yaa Asantewaa was never conferred that title.



### 3.5.5 Sampling

This is a qualitative study of Akan kokofu women so a purposive sampling procedure was used to select a sample size of 44 respondents made of 32 males and 12 females (non-probability sampling method)<sup>52</sup>. Snowball sampling was used to supplement the purposive sampling to make it easier for respondents to identify other respondents to participate in the study.

The sampling method was informed after I did preliminary exploratory research data collection and analyzed and realized that I needed to purposively select the participants. The objective of this study is to document notions of power from women's standpoint. In this case, Asante women and their neighbours (to study perception), to discuss their notions of power and the types of power they have if any. With this purpose in mind, the sample included men and women, literate and non-literate, especially people over the age of eighteen, Akan and non-Akan especially Asante women. The preference for the age is to be able to capture a sample that would address changes overtime. It was very convenient to also employ the snowball<sup>53</sup> technique. Those who agreed to participate in the study were also asked to invite friends and relatives to the group discussion. They also recommended relatives, friends and colleagues in other communities who were contacted and recruited for the other group discussions.



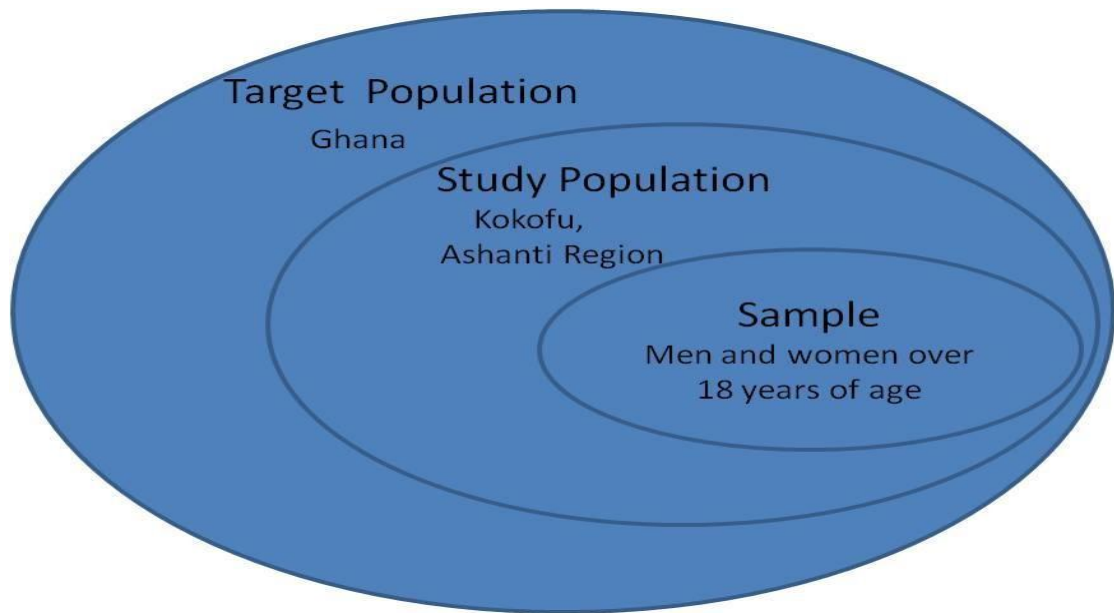
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<sup>51</sup> Queen mother

<sup>52</sup> Researcher sought out elements that meet specific criteria.

[http://changingminds.org/explanations/research/sampling/purposive\\_sampling.htm](http://changingminds.org/explanations/research/sampling/purposive_sampling.htm) Accessed on 01/21/2018

<sup>53</sup> Researcher relied on participant referrals to recruit new participants.



**Figure 3: Sampling Frame**

To paraphrase Babbie,

If there is no clear agreement on how to measure a concept, measure it several different ways. If the concept has several dimensions, measure them all. Above all, know that the concept does not have any meaning other than what you and I give it. The only justification for giving any concept a particular meaning is utility. Measure concepts in ways that help us understand the world around us. (12th Edition, pg. 183)

Every effort was made to acquire and analyse as many objects and sites of possible meaning for Asante women's power to elucidate the ongoing discussion between researcher and the assembled units of analysis. They included observations, group discussions, analysis of indigenous knowledge systems and open-ended interviews.

### **3.5.6 Data collection method**

The sample included 12 men and 32 women who comprised of community representatives, traditional leaders, and functionaries. Kokofu is one of the oldest Akan communities in Ghana. The Kokofu traditional system is the ideal structure that most of the Akan traditional groups seem to emulate. As shown in Table 2, the data collection

involved three focus group discussions with 29 participants. One focus group had 8 males and the other two focus groups had 10 and 11 females at each session. Apart from the focus group discussions, 7 key informants were interviewed and 8 participants were observed.

These included very educated men and women, as well as not so well educated but people matured in the Akan world view to make a meaningful contribution to the discussion on women and power. Other participants included traditional authority, journalists and schoolteachers. While these unplanned activities added their own challenges, they also added multiple perspectives and interpretations.

**Table 1: Data collection strategies and instruments**

	<b>Focus Group Discussions (Guides)</b>	<b>Key informants Interviews (Guides)</b>	<b>Observation of Individual respondents (Guides)</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>Percent age</b>
Male	8	2	2	12	27.3%
Female	21	5	6	32	72.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100</b>

There were many sources of data collected for the analysis. The instruments used for the data collection were interview guides for interviews, focus group discussion guides for focus groups and observation guides for observations. The primary data collected through interviews, focus group discussions and observations completed data literature gathered from second sources included archival records, books, journal articles, newspaper articles and credible internet sources.

### **3.5.6.1 Observations**

There were many observations at Kokofu, Kuntanase and Kumasi. These observations were done bearing in mind that I was an insider in order not to be biased in my approach to the data collection and analysis of the findings. I recorded and videotaped the activities

of the participants observed and transcribed and analysed the data. There were also videos of some private and in-house activities which enriched the data. I watched and participated in a number of social contexts. These include detailed group discussions and private recordings. I visited Kokofu on many occasions when there were funerals, Akwasidae<sup>54</sup> and Homecoming events. In all cases I took part in customary rites and discussions. I also took pictures and videos and added them to the fieldwork for analysis. In some instances, I had conversations with visiting urbanites<sup>55</sup> about this thesis and recorded the discussion with their permission.

### 3.5.6.2 Focus Group Discussions

There were three focus group discussions, one focus group discussion with men at Kokofu Palace and two focus group discussions with women at Kokofu Palace. The first group formed during a routine forty-day meeting of the traditional council. I requested audience and obtained consent from the chief of Kokofu (personally), and the traditional council, through the registrar of the council. I had extended invitations to those that fit the sampling criteria. I went there to secure the meeting place and confirm the time. The participants were mostly stool occupants.<sup>56</sup> Some lived outside Kokofu but most of them, especially the women lived at Kokofu. The ages of the participants ranged from sixty-two to ninety-five years.

<sup>54</sup> A forty-day celebration on the Akan Calendar. Most events and family gatherings in many Akan, especially Asante communities are planned around this forty-day calendar.

<sup>55</sup> Kokofu women who currently live in Kumasi, Accra or outside Ghana.

<sup>56</sup> The Kokofu traditional system follows a typical hierarchical Asante traditional system with stool occupants from various houses coming together to occupy offices as wings of the Kokofu traditional council. For example, there is the Nifahene - chief of the right wing, the Benkumhene - Chief of the left wing, Kyidomhene – chief of the rear guard, etc.

### 3.5.6.3 Interview and Focus Group discussion guides

The same questions were used for the interviews and focus group discussions. These questions were open-ended to give the respondents enough room to express themselves. It also enabled me to prop for clarification of issues to ensure that the data collected was authentic and reflected the reality of the Kokofu women. The Kokofu Traditional Council Secretariat facilitated the data collection processes by identifying 26 participants for interviews and observations which were done concurrently in many instances. I had private meetings with highly successful leaders whom I thought useful and expedient to include. Some of them were Asante women industrialists, members of parliament, very educated and well-travelled. They were all interviewed at their respective establishments. However, two of them have passed on since the time the data was collected.

### 3.5.7 Data analysis methods

The available data is qualitative data from observations, focus group discussions and interviews. Analysis is to find patterns, connections and relationships. The available data was coded to reveal patterns and themes. The data is categorized to identify patterns and make connections in order to interpret and explain findings. To make the findings insightful, different methods were used. In this study, three methods were utilized. Content, narratives, and discourses were analysed. The assembled data was also used to explain why certain phenomenon occurred the way they did in the resultant theory.

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<sup>57</sup> A traditional council meeting takes place every forty days on the Akan calendar. It happens in most towns and villages in Asante. This is the day after an Akwasidae and Awukudae.

### **3.5.7.1 Indigenous systems of knowledge**

Proverbs, song texts, and oral traditions such as recitals at rites of passage and initiations and traditional songs were transcribed and analysed. Clothing, heirlooms, artefacts and regalia were also analysed – in attempts to flesh out cultural understandings of power and its manifestations over time.

### **3.5.7.2 Content analysis**

This was used to analyze responses from interviewees, proverbs, and data emanating from physical items such as clothing and artifacts.

### **3.5.7.3 Narrative analysis**

This was used to analyze data from observations from the field, observations as participant observer, focus group discussions and interviews.

### **3.5.7.4 Discourse analysis**

This was used to analyse interactions with people. For example, it was used to analyze the conversations with key informants and the social context in which the discussion occurred.

### **3.5.8 Credibility**

The credibility of this study is very critical. To ensure the success of the study there was the need to take measures which would ascertain that the process of data collection, analysis and the results are verifiable and believable. I also used multiple sources to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The choice of focus group discussions, individual in-depth interviews and observations, was to make the study authentic. The context and the method ensured dependability because participants understood it. By analyzing proverbs, and other indigenous knowledge sources helped to substantiate and supplement the data gathered.

### **3.5.9 Ethical Considerations**

It was assumed from the onset that not all participants could read and write.

It was also assumed that not all participants could communicate in the English language. Cognizant of these assumptions and to address potential vulnerabilities, I strictly observed research ethical protocols to win the trust of the respondents and create the necessary report needed. I had an introductory letter from my institution which I showed to my respondents before interviews, focus group discussion and observations. There was no participant under the age of eighteen (18). Asante Twi was the local language used in all discussions and interviews. In a few instances participants interacted in both English and Twi. The interview, focus group and observation guides were all written in both English and Twi (Asante) to accommodate participants who preferred discussions in Twi but could not read or write in the local language. The management of the focus group discussions – it was envisaged to be women- only discussions but there were two sessions of focus group discussions with women and one session of focus group discussions with men to which provided a nuance balanced perspectives about women and power.

#### **3.5.9.1 Conscious-Partiality**

The validity of value-laden research cannot be value free especially in an ethnographic study. Bryman and Bell (2007) recommend conscious partiality as a replacement. This is particularly useful because I constantly needed to remind myself of my personal values, my relationship with the research topic and the potential for bias. My ‘self’ as the primary tool in this work, I identify with many of the participants. As an Asante woman, my personal experience and age have helped me to understand the cultural and social norms which are under study.

### **3.6 Summary of Chapter three**

This chapter combined the theoretical framework and the methodology to demonstrate how the process started with a theoretical framework to determine what theories would be

useful. Many theories, though useful in many studies cannot explain some aspects of this study. They were analysed for their utility but decidedly not useful for this study. Since the study was relying on data from the women themselves, standpoint emerged as the guiding theory.

This informed the model for the study: Epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. The theoretical approach (epistemology and theoretical perspective) informed the practical approach (methodology and methods). Under methodology the rationale for the research approach, the setting and context, sample and data sources were all explained in detail.

Under methods, data collection methods are discussed. The method of data analysis was also explained in details. Ethical issues are addressed by showing the processes and the different mechanisms used to ensure confidentiality and credibility of the study.

As in any good study, the objectives were refined as the research progressed and new insights were realized. For example, I understood that not all the Kokofu women who wanted to take part in the study live at Kokofu, so I made arrangements to meet them outside Kokofu. Time, budgetary and other resource constraints had impact on the sample design.

The nature of the data collection method (open-ended in-depth, and group interview), the human resources available to the fieldwork and their skills base, were reviewed and many drastic considerations employed. For example, two people had volunteered to help the me with data collection, which turned out to be unrealistic because this is not a funded project, but they expected compensation.

The aim of this methodology was to gain in-depth understanding of the world as seen through the eyes of the people being studied, rather than imposing preordained concepts. This was to allow the meanings to emerge from the data. In this instance, the objective

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was to be the tool for respondents/participants to share their notions and definitions of power and any other knowledge they felt necessary to incorporate. The nature and scope of the findings and the analysis are presented in the following chapters.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN AND POWER IN GHANA

#### 4.0 Introduction

At the beginning of this thesis report, power is discussed as if it is understood by everyone as posited. Reviewing literature for the thesis in the second chapter, the defined themes could only show periods and writings which included or covered women and the various contexts in which women earned such inclusion. Chapter three compelled the conceptualization of power and defined the boundaries for such modes in this context to reflect the methods used.

This chapter begins with an overview of three distinctly different roads to emancipation. These various roads to emancipation are included to establish that while their various narratives have produced the kinds of laws which historically reflect the roads they have traveled, it is alien when a yardstick emanating from that experience is used to measure anything outside those boundaries.

While every effort was made to avoid binaries of any form, a couple of binaries formed the bases for this chapter: The Ghana governance system of democratic dispensation has the duality of national/traditional, which in effect has the duality of the individual/group, or person/society modes of power.

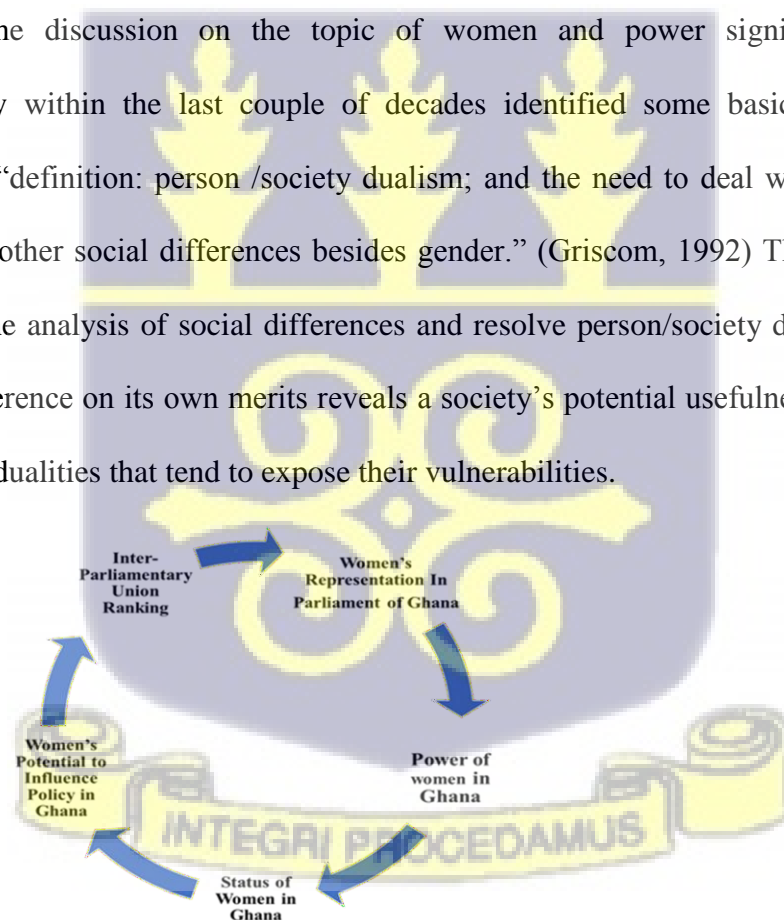
While the national reflects the collective responsibility and collective action through national policies, the individual or person acts through a different mode of power, in this instance, the power to act in certain ways.

The focus of this chapter is to find the modes of power in this discussion and how power is understood at the national level in the Ghanaian society. The assumption of this thesis is that there are two basic notions of power running parallel in Ghana:

- The national/democratic governance, the nation/state, which is a culmination of all international instruments, bilateral agreements, and various transnational commitments and,
- The cultural indigenous system, the traditional system, which is based on beliefs, customs and traditions passed on through the generations.

Assuming that the understandings and notions of power are not homogenous, how do the different notions of power affect our development thinking at the nation/state level? Does this thinking at the state level reflect dealings at the grassroots level where the impact of development is felt?

Psychology is a field that has many dealings with power, and they have managed to advance the discussion on the topic of women and power significantly. Feminist psychology within the last couple of decades identified some basic problems in the literature: “definition: person /society dualism; and the need to deal with race, ethnicity, class, and other social differences besides gender.” (Griscom, 1992) There is the need to improve the analysis of social differences and resolve person/society dualism. Analyzing social difference on its own merits reveals a society’s potential usefulness in many fronts, instead of dualities that tend to expose their vulnerabilities.



**Flowchart - Status of Women in Ghana**

**Figure 4: Flowchart-Status of women in Ghana**

It has become the norm to measure women's power by their suffrage and their ranking on the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) listing, which shows how women are represented, which in turn demonstrates the power women in a particular country or society has, which in turn illustrate the status of the women in that country and how much power they have or their potential to influence policy, as illustrated in the flowchart.

In this chapter Ghanaian women's evolution through their unique emancipation is covered under the broad umbrella of the pre-colonial era, the colonial era, and the post-colonial era. This chapter discusses the evolution of women's power from the global/international to the status of women in Ghana at the time of this study.

Utilizing data from the United Nations instruments<sup>58</sup>, current Sustainable Developments Goals, through current efforts by the government of Ghana to accelerate women's participation in government and development efforts, the question – do women in Ghana have any power? - is answered. Using the global indicators: The Human Development Index and the Gender Inequality Index, at least questions pertaining to political power will become clearer to address how well women in Ghana are currently placed.

#### **4.1 Various roads to emancipation.**

This section is a glance through the evolution of women's struggle for power in Great Britain, France, the United States of America, Africa, Ghana and finally the Akan community of Asante Kokofu. The discussion of the first three non-Africa countries will illuminate the issue raised about the unsuitability of certain metrics developed outside of Africa being used to measure human development in Africa. It also sheds light on how and why some issues are very important to some countries. If the roads to emancipation are markedly different, then it will follow that any policy emanating from a particular

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<sup>58</sup> The 1953 Convention on the political rights of women, the 1967 Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), and Ghana government policies emanating from these instruments.

experience will be alien to any external context which does not share the historical basis of any such instrumentation and resultant yardstick.

#### 4.1.1 Suffrage in Great Britain

British women's history from the early 1500s through the mid-1600s is wrought with atrocities such as beheading for adultery or improper behavior, hanging and burning at the stakes.

The law's resolutions of Women's Rights (1632) laid out the laws then in place regarding women's legal rights and duties in each of the three estates:

unmarried virgins, wives, and widows.

The history of women's civil rights is placed between 1648 and 1928 in Great Britain. The year 1648 marks the beginning of agitation by women for suffrage and 1928 marks the end of the struggle for suffrage with the People Act 1 which gave every woman in Great Britain the right to vote.

In 1648, Leveller women demonstrated in London, calling for equal rights for women and presented a petition. The following year, ten thousand Leveller women signed the second women's petition to parliament.

In the 1700s, women took to writing and publishing of essays relating to the status of women.

Mary Wollstonecraft a notable writer during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century published two books: *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, With Reflections on Female Conduct* (1787) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1791). Such efforts and

agitation led to the 1832 Reformed Act, which enfranchised the growing middle class but excluded women. (Heater 2006)<sup>59</sup>

When Queen Victoria was crowned Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain in 1837, it was assumed by many that the new dispensation would favour the fight for suffrage and other issues concerning women. Instead, in 1840 a judge upheld a man's right to lock up his wife and beat her 'in moderation' (Wojtczak 2009). In 1851 Women's suffrage petition was presented to the House of Lords which was signed by 1,499 eminent women, presented by John Stuart Mill<sup>60</sup>. Signatories included Florence Nightingale, and Mary Somerville. The following year, John Stuart Mill delivered a speech in the House of Commons for Votes for Women. Soon after that, in 1867, the Reform Act extended the vote to most working-class male householders. The following year in the 1868 General Election, many women got on the register and voted. But the House of Common Pleas declared women's suffrage illegal. Women made a lot of strides but suffered some setbacks. There were numerous publications on the condition of women in Great Britain: Equality of Women by Lydia Becker (1868), The Right of Women to Vote Under the Reform Act of 1867 by Dr. Pankhurst (1868), Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors-Is the Classification Sound? by Frances Power Cobbe (1869), On the Subjection of Women by John Stuart Mill (1869), women and politics, women's work and women's culture-a series of essays, and many more. While the Victoria magazine was busy publishing the duties of women, the Vigilance Association was also busily engaged in women's issues.

Between 1831 and 1901 (Victorian era) the clear stratification for women and men was not even discussed as Queen Victoria herself epitomized domestic virtues and became an icon of late-19th-century middle-class femininity and domesticity.

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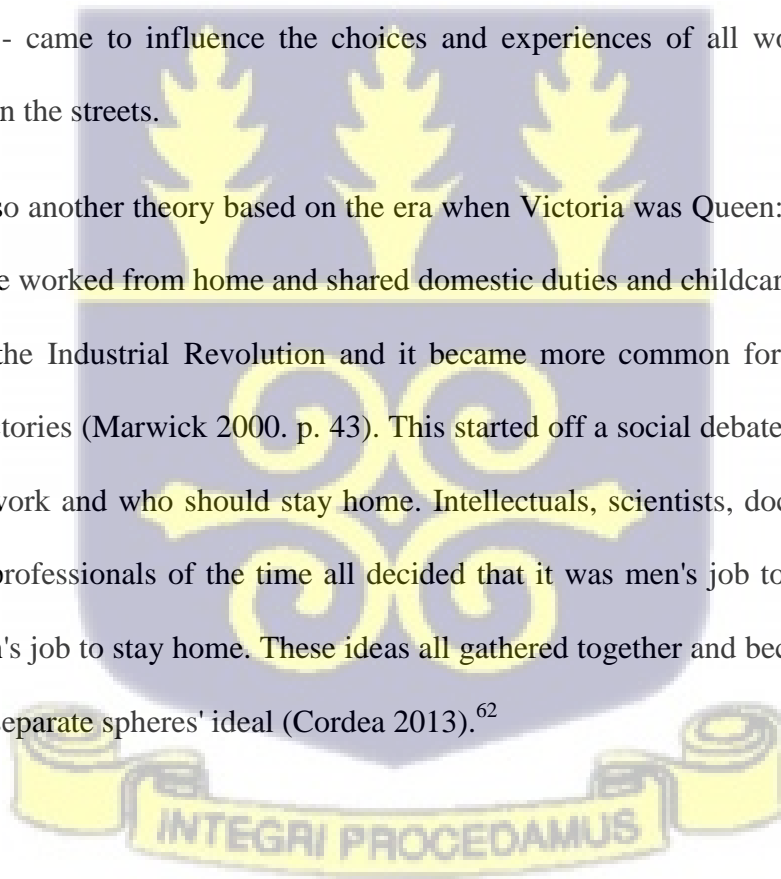
<sup>59</sup>Reformed Act increased the number of voters from 435000 to 650000 (of a total population of 14 million) but banned women from voting, including duly qualified women landowners who could vote for MPs.

<sup>60</sup> John Stuart Mill did not become MP until 1865.

During the reign of Queen Victoria, a woman's place was in the home, as “domesticity and motherhood were considered by society at large to be a sufficient emotional fulfillment for females”<sup>61</sup>. These constructs kept women far away from the public sphere in most ways, but during the 19th century charitable missions did begin to extend the female role of service, and Victorian feminism emerged as a potent political force.

The transformation of Britain into an industrial nation had profound consequences for the ways in which women were to be idealized in Victorian times. New kinds of work and new kinds of urban living prompted a change in the ways in which appropriate male and female roles were perceived. In particular, the notion of separate spheres - woman in the private sphere of the home and hearth, man in the public sphere of business, politics and sociability - came to influence the choices and experiences of all women, at home, at work, and in the streets.

There is also another theory based on the era when Victoria was Queen: Before the 1800s, most people worked from home and shared domestic duties and childcare. After the 1800s, there was the Industrial Revolution and it became more common for people to go and work in factories (Marwick 2000. p. 43). This started off a social debate about who should go out to work and who should stay home. Intellectuals, scientists, doctors, philosophers and other professionals of the time all decided that it was men's job to go out and work, and women's job to stay home. These ideas all gathered together and became known as the Victorian 'separate spheres' ideal (Cordea 2013).<sup>62</sup>



<sup>61</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/ Ideals of Womanhood in Victorian Britain](http://www.bbc.com/news/Ideals_of_Womanhood_in_Victorian_Britain). Accessed on June 25 2019.

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/trails>. Accessed on June 25 2019. This is also discussed in depth under the Ideals of womanhood in Victorian Britain. Victoria was raised and ruled at the height of this era, and she very much appeared to believe in and embody it. She felt that her husband was more suited to be a ruler than herself, and she found being a monarch a great ordeal after he died. So, it is likely that she opposed women's rights aspart of her wider belief in fixed gender roles.

Women made few gains after mid-1850.<sup>63</sup> And it took almost half a century for women to mobilize and gather another women's suffrage petition of 257,000 signatures to be presented to parliament in 1896 (Atkinson 1992). In 1918 The Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 was passed, allowing women to be elected to parliament (Fawcett 2011 p, 170). It was not until 1928 that the Representation of the People Act was amended. This Act allowed everyone over the age of 21 to vote in Great Britain. It was not until 1970 that the Equal Pay Act, which declared that men and women get the same wage for the same job, was passed. Margaret Thatcher became the first woman to lead a political party in 1975, in the year that the Sex Discrimination Act became law. Employment Protection Act also made it illegal to dismiss someone on the grounds of pregnancy and establishment of maternity leave. The following year, the Domestic Violence Protection Act was passed which gave police more power to arrest offenders, and increased courts' protection of battered women.

Margaret Thatcher became the first female prime minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain in 1979. It took some time before Theresa Mary May was elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 2016. It took women in Great Britain two hundred and eighty years (280) to be granted universal suffrage.<sup>64</sup>

#### **4.1.2 Suffrage in France**

The history of women's suffrage and emancipation in France comes to the fore when analyzed through the role women played in the French revolution. Though there are only snippets of some activities by women before the revolution, the revolution is said to have been started by women publicly demonstrating against the rising cost of bread. It was women who broke into the king's palace in Versailles and decapitated body guards and it

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<sup>63</sup>Women could buy insurance with their own money in 1871, and laws regarding women's property changed in Ireland. In 1875 women delegates were admitted to the Trades Congress in Glasgow. The 1888 Local Government Electors Act gave women the vote for county councils.

<sup>64</sup>Agitation for the right to vote started in 1648 and ended in 1928 by an amendment of the Representation of the People's Act which allowed everyone over the age of 21 to vote.

was a woman who assassinated the main advocate of the guillotine, ending the frequent use of the guillotine, putting an end for the call for blood which had spiraled out of control. Before the revolution (Ancient Regime<sup>65</sup>), women in France had very little power: Both single and married women had few rights: until marriage, a woman was controlled by her father, and after marriage control shifted to the husband. Women had no power over their property or even over their own person. They were underpaid, and the law confined women to domestic service, heavy labor and ill-paid domestic industries like the lace trade.

Due to the rapid changes in France between 1789 and 1795 women of all classes were compelled to reevaluate their roles in society. This is a period in which women in general took an active role in politics, through social clubs and feminist movements, though not all women shared the same experience. It depended on class and social standing and their involvement and perspective varied marginally until the Enlightenment. But that “some of the women involved had both a strong sense of female independence and measure of political consciousness is not in doubt” (Maillard 1789). This emerges, for example, from the account by Stanislas-Marie Maillard<sup>66</sup> who, while doing his best to maximize his own role but minimize his responsibility, nevertheless gives details of what the women were saying and doing.

At the Hotel de Ville, where they congregated before heading off to Versailles, at least some of the women 'did not want any men with them . . . [and] reiterated repeatedly that the [Commune] was made up of aristocrats.

They broke into the building and tried to destroy the papers they found there, saying ‘that it was all that had been done since the Revolution had begun and that they would burn them ... these women repeated that the men were not strong enough to avenge themselves and that they would show themselves to be better than the men' (Mace 1893, p. 29)

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<sup>65</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica online, s.v. “Ancien Regime,” Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016

<sup>66</sup> Stanislas Maillard describes the Women’s March to Versailles (5 October 1789), Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, accessed September 27, 2019 at <http://chnm.gm.edu/revolution/d/473>

There are many accounts of how “thousands of Parisian women led by fishwives and fruit sellers from the central market tramped twelve miles to Versailles in October 1789 to bring the king back to the capital” (Garrioch, 1999; Beam, 2009; Flower, 2011). Whilst all the writings are generally about the political crisis and the changing climate of ideas, they are all men-centered. They have shared knowledge about the agitations among the people, and the high price of bread, but what is hidden in plain sight, is the fact that there were dominant and indisputably gender-specific actions taken. Despite the tendency of some historians to gloss over the political awareness or even the presence of women, (Roessler 2005:68) it is clear that this action was not only initiated and undertaken by women, but “that some of the women had both a strong sense of independence and some measure of political consciousness” (Garrioch 1999, p. 239). Women in France obtained universal suffrage in 1944. It had taken one hundred and fifty-five (155) years<sup>67</sup> of agitation and bloody struggle. Many have argued that women did not gain explicit rights during the French revolution, but the activities they participated in did influence feminism and women’s rights from that point onward. The French women’s March on Versailles, the pamphlets they published, and the political clubs they formed invariably changed the way women were viewed in that society. Even though these views were lost during the Napoleon era, they set the precedent for women’s rights in the future. The revolution of 1789 disbanded the monarchy and established a Republic. Three features of the old regime ended: it killed monarchy by proclaiming national sovereignty, it killed nobility by proclaiming the abolition of privileges, and it killed the spiritual domination of the clergy by proclaiming the enfranchisement of conscience and of reason.

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<sup>67</sup> It started with the March on Versailles in October 1789 until 1944 when suffrage was granted

Currently women in France have made many advances to rank 17 on the IPU world classification list with 39% and 32% women elected at the lower and upper house respectively<sup>68</sup>.

#### 4.1.3 Suffrage in the United States of America

The timeline of the women's rights movement in the United States is often placed between 1788 and 1920. It begins with the ratification of the constitution in 1788 when the terms persons, people and electors are used, allowing the interpretation of those beings to include men and women. The agitation for equal rights ended in 1920 when the nineteenth Amendment to the U S Constitution was ratified. Women's struggle in America dates as far back as 1799 when Abigail Adams declared to her sister that she would "never consent to have our sex considered in an inferior point of light"<sup>69</sup>, through the women's rights movements, to the remarks of Patricia Roberts Harris, who, nearly two hundred years later, told a skeptical senator at her 1977 confirmation hearing, "If my life has any meaning at all, it is that those who start out as outcasts can wind up being part of the system."<sup>70</sup>

Immediately after the civil war, Susan B Anthony demanded that the fourteenth Amendment include a guarantee of the vote for women as well as for African American males. At the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls in 1848, 68 women and 32 men signed a Declaration of Sentiments<sup>71</sup>. Within a couple of years, it had gathered enough momentum for the first National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, which attracted more than 1,000 participants. In 1869 the National Woman

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<sup>68</sup> [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org). Based on the world classification list of 1st February 2019. Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>69</sup> Abigail Adams to Elizabeth Shaw, 19 July 1799, Elizabeth S. Shaw Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>70</sup> New York Times, 11 January 1977.

<sup>71</sup> It outlines grievances and sets the agenda for the women's right movement. It is a set of 12 resolutions adopted which called for equal treatment of women and men under the law and voting rights for women. It is the equal rights adaptation of the Declaration of Independence.

Suffrage Association was founded by Susan B Anthony and Elizabeth Cady. Later that same year the American Woman Suffrage Association was formed. While the former group tackled a host of issues the latter's primary goal was to achieve voting rights for women through congressional amendment to the constitution. But women throughout America did not gain the right to vote until the passage of the nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1919 and its adoption in 1920. Though by 1896 women had gained the right to vote in four states (Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho and Utah)<sup>72</sup>, women activists in U S participated in various civil disobedience demonstrations for almost half a century before President John Kennedy established the Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 and appointed Eleanor Roosevelt as chairwoman. The commission's report documented substantial discrimination against women in the workplace and made specific recommendations for improvement, including fair hiring practices, paid maternity leave and affordable child care. Two years later the Equal Pay Act<sup>73</sup> was passed by Congress. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) barred discrimination in employment based on race and sex and also established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to investigate complaints and impose penalties. In 1967 Executive Order 11375 expanded President Lyndon Johnson's affirmative action policy of 1965 to cover discrimination based on gender. The 1970s and 1980s was a very active period for the Women's Rights Movement. The decade had begun excitingly with the publishing of Ms. Magazine in 1971, which became the major forum for feminist voices. 1972 saw the passing of The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)<sup>74</sup> by Congress. Women's rights chalked another success

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<sup>72</sup>[www.history.com/this-day-in-history/seneca-falls-convention-begins](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/seneca-falls-convention-begins) Accessed on July 9, 2019. Publisher: A&E Television Networks.

<sup>73</sup> It made it illegal for employers to pay a woman less than what a man would receive for the same job.

<sup>74</sup> Originally drafted by Alice Paul in 1923, the amendment reads: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." But the Amendment died in 1982 when it failed ratification by a minimum of 38 states.

with *Roe v. Wade*<sup>75</sup> in 1973. Many advances emanating from the agitation included Title IX of the Education Amendment, the Equal Credit opportunity Act, The Pregnancy Discrimination Act, and many other acts banning various discriminatory practices against women. The 1990s saw the tightening and clarifications of the various acts in various Supreme Court cases. For example, *Roe v. Wade 2* (1992) reaffirmed the validity of a woman's right to abortion under *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

Many of the early suffragists and women's rights leaders came to the movement by way of the abolitionist cause; In their struggle to free the slaves, they became more aware of their own secondary status.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, women's organizations in the United States worked for broad-based economic and political equality and social reforms. Between 1800 and 1910, the number of women employed in the United States increased from 2.6 million to 7.8 million, though the better paying jobs went to men. But not all women in the United States believed in equality for the sexes. Some women upheld traditional roles and argued that politics were improper for women. The challenge to traditional roles represented by the struggle for political, economic, social equality was as threatening to some women as it was to most men.<sup>76</sup>

In the area of politics, it took women seventy-one (71) years to obtain universal suffrage and it took another forty-two years<sup>77</sup> to get the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) set up to address women's issues and concerns. Women gained the right to control their earnings, own property, and custody of children in the case of divorce. With the establishment of EMILY's list (Early Money is Like Yeast) in 1984 as a financial network

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<sup>75</sup> The Supreme Court established a woman's right to safe and legal abortion, overriding the anti-abortion laws of many states.

<sup>76</sup> Women Suffrage in the Progressive Era • American Memory Timeline • Classroom Presentation | Teacher Resources • Library of Congress (09/03/2016)

<sup>77</sup> The Commission was set up in 1961 by then President John F. Kennedy to look into all major concerns of women in the area of rights.

for pro-choice Democratic women running for political office<sup>78</sup>, more women have been elected to congress. Even though women's share of U S State positions is growing, men still occupy the majority. 24.6% of U S state legislators are women. Women hold 443 (22.5% of state senate seats and 1,371 (25.3%) of congressional seats. The number of women serving in State Houses has more than quintupled since 1971.<sup>79</sup>

While the quest for equal pay and achieving the presidency remain unconquered, women are in a better position to do so. In 2016, the U S had a woman, Hillary Clinton, on the ballot as President of the United States. But women in U S have a long way to go. The percentage of women in congress falls below the global average which is set at 30%. The United States currently stands at 23% women at Congress and 25% women at the Senate<sup>80</sup>. According to the IPU<sup>81</sup>, The United States of America is ranking 76 with Afghanistan and Cabo Verde behind 75 countries including Rwanda China, Somalia, Cameroon, and twelve other African countries.

The first two were the dominant colonial powers in Africa and so handed down their histories of women's suffrage. In addition, together with the United States, they are seen as the "exemplars" of democracy and women's empowerment, a perception that the tortuous paths of women's enfranchisement in their histories do not bear out. Furthermore, while their traveled roads are illustrative of diverse approaches in the struggle for equality, none of the three countries is a paradigm and certainly cannot design a yardstick of redemption emancipation or empowerment, for diverse countries from other parts of the world, especially Africa, to use in assessing their standing.

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<sup>78</sup> Founded by Ellen Malcolm in 1984.

<sup>79</sup> Women in government. [www.catalyst.org](http://www.catalyst.org) Accessed on 10/17/16

<sup>80</sup> Women in National Parliaments-world classification situations as at 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019. Accessed at [archive.ipu.org/wmn\\_e/classif/htm](http://archive.ipu.org/wmn_e/classif/htm) on 04/24/2019

<sup>81</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. Women in politics: how the US compares with the world. Published online by Jenny Starrs on September 25, 2015. [thegroundtruthproject.org](http://thegroundtruthproject.org). Accessed on 10/17/16

#### 4.1.4 Suffrage in Africa

For many African nations, voting rights during colonialism could not be a concern to both men and women. In many instances, universal suffrage came with independence. However, many African countries have shown that women must be included to drive sustainable development. Rwanda still leads the IPU world classification list with 61.3% women in Parliament.

Since 2006, the continent of African has made very bold strides: Africa can boast of women presidents and Nobel Prize winners. It started with the election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as president of Liberia in 2006 and her winning of the Nobel Prize in 2011. It followed with the election of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as Nigeria's Finance Minister in 2007, then Eleni Gabre Madhin founded the Ethiopian commodity exchange in 2008. Elsie Kanza of Tanzania became Head of Africa at the World Economic Forum in 2011, and soon after that Joyce Banda was elected as president of Malawi in January 2012, then Fatou Bensouda became Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in June 2012, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma was elected first female head of the African Union in October 2012., then when Ameenah Gurib-Fakin was elected the president of Mauritius in 2015, she became the only female head of state among 54 nations that comprise the African Union in 2018. Many African countries have made a lot of progress in the area of gender equality, as many African countries currently have a higher proportion of women in parliament according to the world ranking by IPU.

#### 4.2 UN instruments for the advancement of women

The United Nations was founded during the Second World War in 1942 but did not come into existence until October 1945. The commission on the status of women (CSW) was convened soon after the founding of the United Nations in 1947. The commission was supported by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in consultation with

the U N Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The CSW assisted in setting standards and formulating international conventions to change discriminatory legislation and foster global awareness of women's issues.<sup>82</sup> In 1975 the United Nations General Assembly declared the International Recognition of Women's Work Worldwide and Ghana was one of the first member states to become signatory to it. Soon after that the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was also signed by Ghana in 1980 and ratified in 1986. On the basis of these commitments Ghana has been submitting periodic reports to the CEDAW committee. Article 7 of the convention states that:

parties should take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of their countries and to ensure to women, on equal terms with men. (CEDAW, 1979, United Nations General Assembly).

There are many conventions promulgated over the years which form the instruments protecting women's rights globally. They include:

The 1953 Convention on the political rights of women.<sup>83</sup>

The 1967 Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW)<sup>84</sup>

The year 1975 was declared international women's year and was marked by holding the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City. 1976-1985 was also declared U N Decade for Women. There were additional conferences on women in 1980 and 1985, and it was during this period that the U N Development Fund (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) were established. After the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the declaration and platform for action pushed Women's agenda to the fore and an additional U N Office was established for the promotion of gender equality: It is known as the office

<sup>82</sup>[www.unwomen.org/csw](http://www.unwomen.org/csw) Accessed on 25th June 2019.

<sup>83</sup> This is generally recognized as the first international law instrument

<sup>84</sup> There have been many other conventions such as those in 1951, 1957 and 1962. The focus here is primarily those pertaining to political rights and equality.

of the special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI). Currently UNWOMEN is the fusion of DAW, INSTRAW, OSAGI, and UNIFEM.<sup>85</sup>

#### 4.2.1 The MDGs and the SDGs

The MDGs – the Millennium Development Goals laid the foundation for the Sustainable Development Goals. After a successful implementation of the eight millennium development Goals in 2015, the world agreed on seventeen more detailed goals to eradicate extreme poverty and achieve sustainable development. Though they are all connected and complement each other, the most relevant to this work are SDG 5 and SDG 10. SDG 5– Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls and SDG 10 – Reduce inequality within and among countries.

SDG 5 focuses primarily on gender equality while SDG 10 pays attention to culture. Since formal institutions or cultural conditions create additional barriers for women, making it more difficult to start or grow a business enterprise, it is imperative to address cultural issues. In a sense, processes of social exclusion, driven by multiple economic, social, political and cultural factors play a major role in entrenching inequalities of outcome and opportunities.<sup>86</sup>

Many different ways have been designed to measure the indicators. Working with national and sub-national governments, analytical tools, policy frameworks, financing methods and knowledge management systems have been developed to undertake integrated strategic planning in order to contribute to a more balanced and inclusive development.<sup>87</sup> The headline indicators for the assessment of a country's starting position with regards to sustainable development are added to other indicators to form a composite profile and rank of the country.

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<sup>85</sup><http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history#sthash.UeRQU0nP.dpuf> Accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

<sup>86</sup> UNDP Support to the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 10: p.5

<sup>87</sup> GETTING STARTED WITH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: a guide for stakeholders. December 2015

For the SDG 5 the headline indicator is proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%) and the IPU rank. In addition to that, the data collected for School enrolment, secondary (gross), and the gender parity index (GPI)

For SDG 10, the headline indicators are the Palma Ratio of a country and its Gini Index.

The Palma Ratio is a measure of inequality. It is the ratio of the richest 10% of the population's share of gross national income (GNI) divided by the poorest 40%'s share. (Geoff Riley, 2019)<sup>88</sup>

The Gini Index is a simple measure of the distribution of income across income percentiles in a population. A higher Gini Index indicates greater inequality, with high income individuals receiving much higher percentages of the total income of the population. (Jim Chappelow, 2019)<sup>89</sup>

### 4.3 Ghana - women's road to emancipation

There have been many efforts made at the international level to advance women as enumerated above. Ghana has also showed its commitments by integrating the international instruments into national laws and domestic policies. By extension women in Ghana have advanced in many leaps due to the efforts made by women from the above profiled continents, making the case for women globally and implying women's rights are human rights. It is through this universalization that some general tools are utilized in measuring gender inequality and similar indicators.

#### 4.3.1 Efforts by colonial government

Equal Universal suffrage was granted to men and women of the Gold Coast in 1950.

Every person, whether male or female, shall be entitled to be registered as an elector for a municipal electoral district and, when registered to vote at the election of a member of the legislative assembly for such electoral district." If such male or female has attained the age of 21 years and for a period of at least six months immediately before the date of his application to have his name entered on the register has owned any assessed premises or has rented a living room in any assessed premises or has occupied any

<sup>88</sup><https://www.tutor2u.net/economics/reference/what-is-the-palma-ratio>. Accessed on 12th July 2019.

<sup>89</sup><https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gini-index.asp>. Accessed on 12th July 2019

part of any assessed premises within the electoral district. (The Elections Ordinance adopted by the Legislative Assembly on September 15, 1950)

#### **4.3.2 Efforts by successive governments since independence**

When Gold Coast gained its independence in 1957, the Ghanaian women's right to vote was confirmed by the constitution of Ghana. Article 42 of the 1992 also re-affirms it as:

Every citizen of Ghana of eighteen years of age or above and of sound mind has the right to vote and entitled to be registered as a voter for the purposes of public elections and referenda.

There have been many efforts made at the international level to advance women. Ghana has also demonstrated its commitment by translating the international instruments into national laws and domestic policies in accordance with article 40 of the 1992 constitution. Specifically, article 17(1) and (2) of the 1992 constitution guarantees gender equality and protection from all forms of discriminations. Evidence of Ghana's efforts is in the indices such as SIGI (0.262), HDI (0.558), and GII (0.565).

Women in Ghana enjoy other laws: Ghana customary law, the English common law and the statutory law in addition to Ghana constitutional Order in Council in 1957 and the enactments in force immediately before the coming into operation of the constitution. The NCWD was set up by a decree by the Supreme Military Council in 1975. The PNDCL 111 is related to international human rights instruments such as the African Charter and the CEDAW on Women's Property Inheritance Rights (Government of Ghana, PNDCL1985: I). The principle of Universal Adult Suffrage is enshrined in the 1992 constitution of Ghana. The 1992 constitution also guarantees gender equality and women's rights under chapter 6, section 5 and 6b of clause 35.

CEDAW necessitated the establishment of the Ghana National Council on Women and Development. The United Nations also declared 1976-1985 the international decade for women. The National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) was established by NRCDC 322, 1995 to accelerate the integration of women in development and the

elimination of discrimination against women.<sup>90</sup> NCWD became the umbrella organization for all women's groups who advocated for the various gender disparities and social injustices against women in Ghana.

The 1992 Constitution of the Fourth Republic guarantees

Equal opportunities to all citizens and directs that appropriate measures should be taken to achieve regional and gender balance in recruitment and appointment to public offices. It declares that the state shall take the necessary steps to ensure the full integration of women into the mainstream of the economic development of Ghana (chapter 6, clause 36, section 6)

In 2001 the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women (NMAW) was elevated from the status of council to a ministry headed by a minister with a cabinet status. After restructuring and designation as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) by Executive Instrument 1 of 2013, its mandate was also expanded to include gender equality and equity, the promotion of welfare and protection of children and the empowerment of the vulnerable, the aged, and persons with disabilities for sustainable national development.

It has been asserted variously that if fewer women participate in formal decision-making, the resultant decision and its effects on policy is unlikely to favour gender equality. (Manuh 1984; Tsikata 2009) In a sense, representation at the table is likely to reflect the outcome of decisions.

#### **4.4 Indicators and Trends in Ghana's parliamentary elections**

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, a country's gender equality has come to be assessed and judged by certain indicators to determine if their women have any power or are better situated to drive development in their country. The foremost indicator is suffrage: do women in Ghana have the right to vote? Suffrage is now considered as given

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<sup>90</sup> Graphic online April 21, 2015 'National Women's Machinery is 40 years. Accessed on June 21 2019.

and a fundamental human right, so the standard indicators are gender inequality ranking. The automatic follow up question is how many women are in the parliament of Ghana? For many in civil society, this determines how well women are placed at the table to participate in the discussion, institute and promulgate policies to drive sustainable development. In a sense, if more women are in parliament, it is likely that they will look out for women's interests and more women-friendly programs will be seen.

#### 4.4.1 Parliamentary Elections of Ghana 1960 - 2016

**Table 2: Trends In Parliamentary Elections in Ghana's 4th Republic – (1960 – 2016)<sup>91</sup>**

	Contestants			Elected		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
<b>2016</b>	137 (11.83%)	1021 (88.3%)	1158 (100)	35(12.73%)	240(87.27%)	275 (100)
<b>2012</b>	133 (11.6%)	1009 (88.4%)	1142 (100)	30(10.9%)	246(89.5%)	275 (100)
<b>2008</b>	103 (10.7%)	856 (89.3%)	959 (100)	20 (8.7%)	210 (91.3%)	230 (100)
<b>2004</b>	104 (10.9%)	849 (89.1%)	953 (100)	25 (10.9%)	205 (89.1)	230 (100)
<b>2000</b>	102 (9.3%)	986 (90.7%)	1,088 (100)	18 (9%)	182 (91%)	200 (100)
<b>1996</b>	59 (7.6%)	721(92.4%)	780 (100)	19 (9%)	181 (91%)	200 (100)
<b>1992</b>	23 (5.2%)	418 (94.8%)	441 (100)	10 (5%)	190 (95%)	200 (100)
<b>1979</b>	23 (2.9%)	781 (97.1%)	804 (100)	6 (4.3%)	134(99.3%)	140 (100)
<b>1969</b>	7 (1.5%)	472 (98.5%)	479 (100)	1 (0.7%)	139 (99.3%)	140 (100)
<b>1965</b>	Not known	N/A	N/A	19 (18.3%)	85 (81.7%)	104 (100)
<b>1960</b>	52	N/A	N/A	10(10%)	94 (90%)	104 (100)

<sup>91</sup> Table adapted from numerous sources including Tsikata 2008:21 (for 1960 – 2000), International Foundation for Election Systems, Parliament of Ghana (11/01/2017 & 18/01/2017), Inter-Parliamentary Union ([www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)) Accessed 06/24/2019. Author added data for 2012 and 2016 from the Electoral Commission at [www.ec.gov.gh](http://www.ec.gov.gh).

#### 4.4.2 Analysis of Trends in the Parliamentary Elections of Ghana since 1960

While globally women's representation has steadily increased since 1975, women's contest for parliament in Ghana has been at a much slower pace. Even though female contestants continue to increase since 1992, the number of elected females fluctuated between 9% and 10.9% from 1996 to 2008; A decrease from 11% to 9% in the 2008 elections (Tsikata 2009:5) However there has been a surge in the last two consecutive elections. This is very well below the 40% goal targeted by Ghana's affirmative action policy.

In the 2008 elections one hundred and three (103) women contested for parliamentary election but only twenty (20) were elected. This represented a 20% reduction from the previous election. In real terms women merely did not add to the existing seats to reflect any part of the newly created seats. In other words, all the thirty (30) newly created seats went to male contestants.

In the 2012 and 2016 election, the number of female contestants saw an increase of over 30%: 122 (2012) and 136 (2016). The two consecutive past elections also recorded an increase in number of elected female parliamentarians 29 (2012) and 37 (2016) which is impressive from 20 (2008). Though the increase is exponential, the numbers tell a positive story too.

When parliament of Ghana convened after the 2008 elections Justice Joyce Bamford-Addo was elected as the first female speaker. She was also sworn in by the first female Chief Justice, Georgina Theodora Wood. The then President, John Agyekum Kufuor also appointed women to ministries and cabinet which added to the excitement that women had really arrived at the table.<sup>92</sup> These events induced a comforting euphoria even though it

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<sup>92</sup> There is an Akan adage which says 'se wani wo mu a, yenni ngya wo' meaning 'if your eyes are partaking, you will not be left out'. So in a sense being at the table means you are guaranteeing your share. The best way to guarantee your share is to be present at the table.

was obvious that the milestones did not reflect the realities in the general population. The following two elections confirmed the euphoria in the general population. The number of female contestants shot up considerably and more women were elected to parliament.

Though more women have been contesting for parliamentary seats, it is still proportionately below the number elected and still below the IPU threshold of 30% and the 40% marked by Ghana's Affirmative action policy. (Tsikata 2009). The successive governments and the various interest groups for gender equality have made a lot of efforts which have been productive. Ghana seems to be doing everything as a country to sustain compliance in terms of meeting all the requirements of the numerous U N instruments and global obligations. However there seem to be some serious gaps which raise a number of questions: How come more women are not contesting for parliamentary seats? How come more women are not being elected? How come women are not contesting for unit committee or other district level positions? What are the factors that help or hinder women's access to substantive influence in decision-making processes in politics and society? Does women's leadership advances gender equality and the wellbeing of women more broadly? What roles are the 39 women who are currently in parliament playing? Women in Ghana's parliament are seldom seen nor heard. This raises some serious concerns about the nomination and selection process. When Ghanaians vote for women do they look for substantive or symbolic representation? When women go to parliament of Ghana, do they do so as representatives of their various constituencies or they go there with some cultural expectations and limitations?

#### **4.5 The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) ratings and the World ranking system**

The inter Parliamentary Union is the organization of all parliamentarians from all the U N member states. The classification is data that is compiled by the IPU on the basis of information provided by national parliaments. 193 countries are classified by descending

order of the percentage of women in parliament. For example, Table 4.1 above indicates the number of contestants, male and females and the number of the elected males and females in Ghana's past elections. Those percentages are forwarded to the IPU and ranked as part of the larger database of 193 members, which becomes the country's gender equality status. The same criteria are used for all the countries on the listing.

#### 4.5.1 Global Overview

The current Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)<sup>93</sup> ranking list is topped by Rwanda, an African country. The Rwandan parliament is made up of 61% women. Namibia is made up of 46%, South Africa is made up of 42%, Senegal is made up of 41%, Mozambique is made up of 39% women, and Ethiopia is made up of 38% women. There are six African countries (Rwanda, Namibia, South Africa, Senegal, Mozambique and Ethiopia) among the first twenty countries of the list and listed before United Kingdom. Sixteen African countries have a higher proportion of women in parliament than the United States and United Kingdom. Women globally seem well placed in this decade and women from the global south seem to be gathering momentum. The efforts by women from the global north (France, United Kingdom and the United States of America) do not seem to reflect their suffrage history. Britain ranks 39<sup>th</sup> on the IPU world classification list with 32% and 26.4% representing the percentages of women at the lower and upper houses respectively. The United Kingdom lurk behind some of their colonial subjects including Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa

#### 4.5.2 The status of Ghana on the IPU ranking list<sup>94</sup>

Ghana ranked 145 on the IPU list with 36 women in Ghana's parliament which represents 13 % of the 275 members in the house. It is a 3% increase over the previous election and added 6 women to the house. Ghana beat Cote D'Ivoire (11%), and Nigeria (5.6%). Ghana

<sup>93</sup> www.ipu.org. Based on the world classification list of 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019

<sup>94</sup> Based on the situation as at 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019 and data available at www.ipu.org

has a better gender inequality status than Nigeria, Benin, Cote D'Ivoire, Japan, India and forty-two other countries.

The IPU ranking and trends in the 2016 parliamentary election in Ghana clearly demonstrate that women in Ghana are well placed. However, there are other numbers (the coefficient of human inequality, the Gini Index and the Palma Ratio) which together gives a composite picture of the Human Development Index (HDI) and a much better human development report of a country. The Ghana Statistical Services Website only lists the countries with top Palma ratio in 2015 and the countries with the lowest Palma ratio in 2015. Since Ghana is in neither group it can safely be concluded that Ghana's coefficient for both Gini and Palma are moderate. This also implies that there are better prospects for women in Ghana. However, there are gaps created by the interface between democratic governance and traditional/cultural norms which needs to be addressed.

#### **4.5.3 Affirmative action as a plausible solution to fill gaps**

It has been argued that affirmative action is justified by the persistence of inequalities in representation in politics and public life. (Tsikata 2009:9) Though affirmative action has been used in Ghana since independence, its success has varied from sphere to sphere. It has been successful in addressing regional imbalances in access to education and access to healthcare but it has not been very successful for redressing gender inequality in political representation. (Tsikata 2009:2).

Commitment to affirmative action is half-hearted. Moreover, it appears that the basis for affirmative action is not shared or properly understood. However, many advocates (Tsikata 2009, Manuh 2011, Luther 2017) believe that gender equity in political representation can greatly be improved if there is commitment to a robust affirmative action agenda.

Affirmative action is very provocative and sort of spit culture in the face. *When Hens begin to crow* (Tamale,1999), looks at gender and parliamentary politics in Uganda but the findings and outcomes are relevant to all African nation states struggling with cultural elements in their democratic dispensation. Such cultural underpinnings as 'Hens do not crow, only cocks do' make it an abomination for a woman to seek any political office. Despite ex-president Nkrumah's efforts in allocating 10 seats for women in parliament on the eve of independence, women are still seen as intruders in that highly gendered political space. The Hansard<sup>95</sup> reports show that women make fewer comments and rarely introduce any legislation. Women in parliament usually limit their comments to discussions of women and the poor in society. There are many gendered cultural practices that impact women's political careers as there are a far greater number of women who would never venture politics or parliament even if the doors were left ajar<sup>96</sup>. Some women parliamentarians tend to make their contributions in semi-private or small group discussions. Many Ghanaians are against handouts like Affirmative action but support efforts emanating from the grassroots level up.

How can women negate the metaphor of the crowing hen? Are beneficiaries of such intervention programs in a position to sustain interest in the programs? Have they proven or justified support for increase in resources to up the numbers? Affirmative action is useful in addressing some political and socio-economic inequalities arising from systemic discrimination. However, culture and all its elements must be assembled and recognized for their role and impact to properly decide on the best ways to address the prevailing gaps.

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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.parliament.gh/docs/>.

<sup>96</sup> This is explored further in the next chapter under analysis of data from the fieldwork.

#### 4.6 The place of culture in the analysis of women and power in Ghana

Ghana, as a nation-state has managed to stay within the dictates of United Nations' instruments and managed to be compliant in many instances. However, Ghana is multicultural and multi-faceted in terms of cultural norms. Even in the governance system, there is a duality of the national democratic dispensation and the traditional governance at the ethnic community level.

After the 1948 uprising in the Gold Coast a committee was set up to examine the causes of the uprising and make recommendations. The following year, a committee under Sir Henley Coussey, working on the recommendations of the Watsons committee, drew up a constitution for the Gold Coast which included the chieftaincy institution and argued that:

the culture of the Gold Coast was so rooted in chieftaincy that it would be disastrous if it was not found a place in the governance of the emergent nation. (Arhin Brempong 2006:29)

The independence Constitution Order-in-Council of 6<sup>th</sup> March 1957 “guaranteed” the institution of chieftaincy in accordance with customary law and usage, provided for regional assemblies, mainly with local government functions, and Houses of Chiefs in the regions.

This means that culture is guaranteed in the democratic dispensation through the chieftaincy institution.

As Arhin Brempong has expounded, the institution of traditional rule in a republic is a paradox. Ghana as a republic has equal citizens but traditional rulers in Ghana have subjects. (Arhin Brempong 2006:40). This duality also creates a gap in the workings and negotiations for space and agency within the political and social environment.

As illustrated above, Ghana as a nation state is doing very well and the women in Ghana seem well-placed according to the inequalities index and all the other indicators. That

whole effort at the state level was driven at the top by the top. It is not clear whether there were any efforts from the bottom (community level) up.

However there seem to be a gap with so many questions and uncertainties. Since Ghana has the duality of democratic governance and traditional governance, the various measurements and indicators tell half of the story – the democratic governance story. What is not yet told is the traditional institution story which will give the cultural dimension of the problem and possible solutions.

Whatever Ghanaians understand as national culture is probably the elements that bind or bring them together to work on achieving or reaching goals set by the international community.

Ghana has many ethnic groups with their own cultural norms and women in these communities have their own unique coping mechanisms.

While many struggle to demystify the gender power relations discourse in Ghana and how it transcends and works through to the rural community level, many at the community and rural level seem content with working with the realities they know as cultural dynamism and how it transcends all the dealing and behavior of women parliamentarians and how they carry out their mandates.

#### **4.6.1 General status of women in Ghana (Indigenous/Traditional/Cultural)**

In many Ghanaian communities, many factors establish how power, rights, status and other resources are allocated. These factors include descent, succession and inheritance, paternity and economic potential (Aidoo 1995, Prah 2004).

For a gendered analysis of some Ghanaian traditions, a glance at descent -- the patrilineal and the matrilineal groups -- gives a glaring insight. Ethnic groups of patrilineal descent such as the Ewe, Ga, Konkomba, Kusase, and Dagomba are more male dominated. Such

domination is even more pronounced in communities with Islamic influence such as the Dagomba and Gonja. Ethnic groups of matrilineal descent such as the Asante and many Akan groups appear to enjoy much more economic, social and political independence. The Akan ethnic groups in their various forms also exhibit a much better social cohesion due to kinship. Succession and inheritance which are also linked to descent are also linked to economic potential. There are many other ways of identifying gendered structures and the associated power relations in Ghana. Many women operate within the prevailing male hegemony at both the national and the community level. Women in most cases are employing differing types of negotiations or coping mechanisms to survive their space between the expectations of the democratic nation state and the demands of the indigenous system.

Many indigenous societies in Africa and many institutions have been developed around women and run by women. Therefore, a woman leading is not new in Africa, the basis was there, waiting for African women to evolve into the concept that the equal participation of women in politics and government is essential to building strong communities and a vibrant democracy in which women and men can thrive<sup>97</sup>. Although some scholars contend that agency and power of Akan women eroded somehow between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century (Manuh, 1991; Mikell, 1985), women expressing political mobilization and leadership are not abnormal but rather the norm. Hopefully this trend will gather more momentum and the visibility will translate to more women contesting and winning seats in parliament to represent more women.

#### **4.7 Tensions and Conflicts emanating from the gaps**

There are many issues arising from the obvious gap created by the tensions between the democratic governance structure and the traditional/cultural norms structure. Due to lack of historical basis and relevance for some of the government policies, the government is sometimes compelled to create solutions when problems arise. An example is the ongoing

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<sup>97</sup> According to [statusofwomendata.org](http://statusofwomendata.org). Accessed on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2016

argument by some civil society groups in Ghana that Affirmative Action should be used to increase female participation in governance.

#### 4.7.1 Addressing the governance participation gap

The President of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo had said,

Despite the majority being women in Ghana, not much political action had been witnessed in their push for greater inclusion in Ghana's political administration.

We are not seeing enough dynamism and activism on the part of those who are seeking. I am talking about dynamism where it matters...electing people to Parliament, controlling political parties because they are the instruments by which our societies make decisions.

We are talking about decisions, not wishes and hopes; we are talking about decisions that are going to make the difference.<sup>98</sup>

What the president of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo, said at the Women Deliver Conference in Canada was the prevailing sentiments among the political and bureaucratic classes and the general population of Ghana towards affirmative action programs. The President of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo, was expressing his frustration with lack of understanding demonstrated by the affirmative action program beneficiaries. He was illustrating his sincere frustration with the situation and the outcome of programs that do not seem to show usefulness or justification for sustainability and the resultant fatigue and resistance. The president of Ghana is not alone in this; in fact, he was just expressing the sentiments of many political observers. The late K. B Asante spoke about affirmative action, barely a couple of years ago, when he said 'Ghana does not need affirmative action to increase the number of women in parliament. Nkrumah allocated 10 seats for women'.<sup>99</sup> He was merely reminding us to take stock of what we have and assess what we have done with it. Ghanaians have been voting women to parliament, what do these women do when they get there?

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<sup>98</sup> President Akufo-Addo of Ghana at the Women Deliver Conference (wd2019) in Vancouver, Canada [www.wd2019.org](http://www.wd2019.org) Speech and additional comments cited at [www.myjoyonline.com](http://www.myjoyonline.com). Accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with K B Asante, La, Accra, Ghana on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017

What the President of Ghana was trying to communicate out of frustration was this:

The government and good people of Ghana have been sending women to parliament since independence. The numbers are not very impressive; there is a lot of room for improvement. But they are now at the table and should at least justify their inclusion.<sup>100</sup>

If the overarching goal of the Ghana National Gender Policy is to mainstream gender equity concerns into the national development processes by improving the social, legal, civic, political, economic and socio-cultural conditions of the people of Ghana particularly women (Ghana Gender policy, Executive Summary p. vii), then not much has been done with the cultural dimension of the gaps. The inequalities persist despite the many efforts to close the gap and the prevailing rankings of the IPU and the Gini/Palma ratio index. This is primarily because when policies get to the community and local level, it takes a life of their own. Who and what determine power and authority in Ghana? When, where and how can the various sub-cultures be integrated for a composite national culture to accelerate development?

#### **4.8 Summary of chapter four**

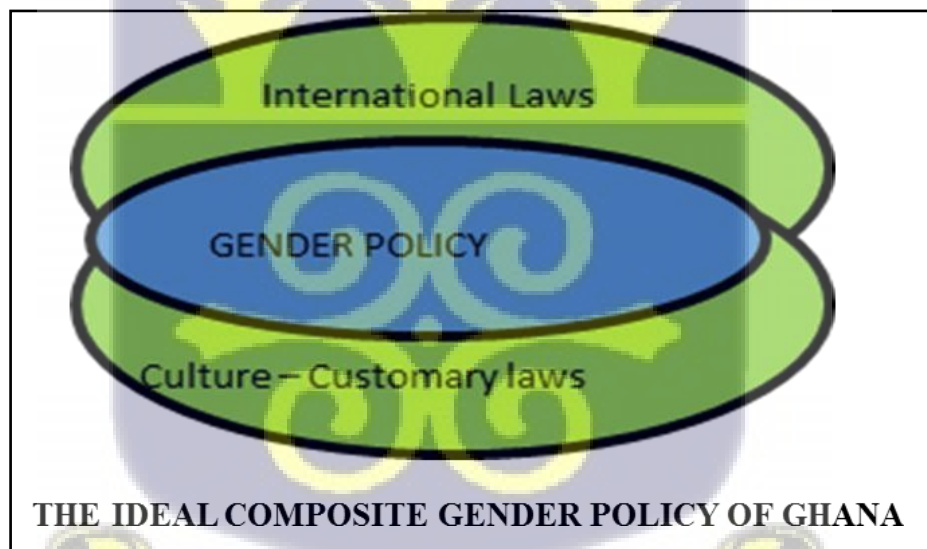
In this chapter I have attempted to give a general overview of the various roads to emancipation as defined by suffrage on three key continents. These distinctly different narratives provide the support and understanding of how they arrived at their constitution and the laws governing their various countries. The histories and roads traveled by the individual countries support the setting up of such laws. In this thesis about women and power, the critical questions are whose definition of power, and whose or which yardstick is utilized in measuring inequality? It is helpful to understand the origins of the struggles. In this chapter some of the pertinent issues are discussed in a compelling journey through the various agitations for women's suffrage in the United Kingdom, or Great Britain,

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<sup>100</sup> These are the general sentiments of political observers and lay people in the research population.

France, and the United States. This summary of the various roads to emancipation illustrates how instruments designed to measure power in different societies cannot be adequately useful in analyzing power in African societies (Oyewumi 1997, Swai 2003).

The various legal instrumentations: international treaties, regional commitments, global obligations, and bilateral agreements are all forms of laws and should be based on context and culture. But unfortunately, culture is excluded from the discussion. Law has always been seen as instrumental. At the same time, we talk about how cultural norms have been resistant to social change especially when gender relations are concerned. In that we need to use law to sort of push through. It is presumed that law and culture are oppositional, and it is only when law operates outside of its culture that it appears alien. My aim is to reposition how we live the law and culture in ways in which culture can empower law to act in instrumental ways.

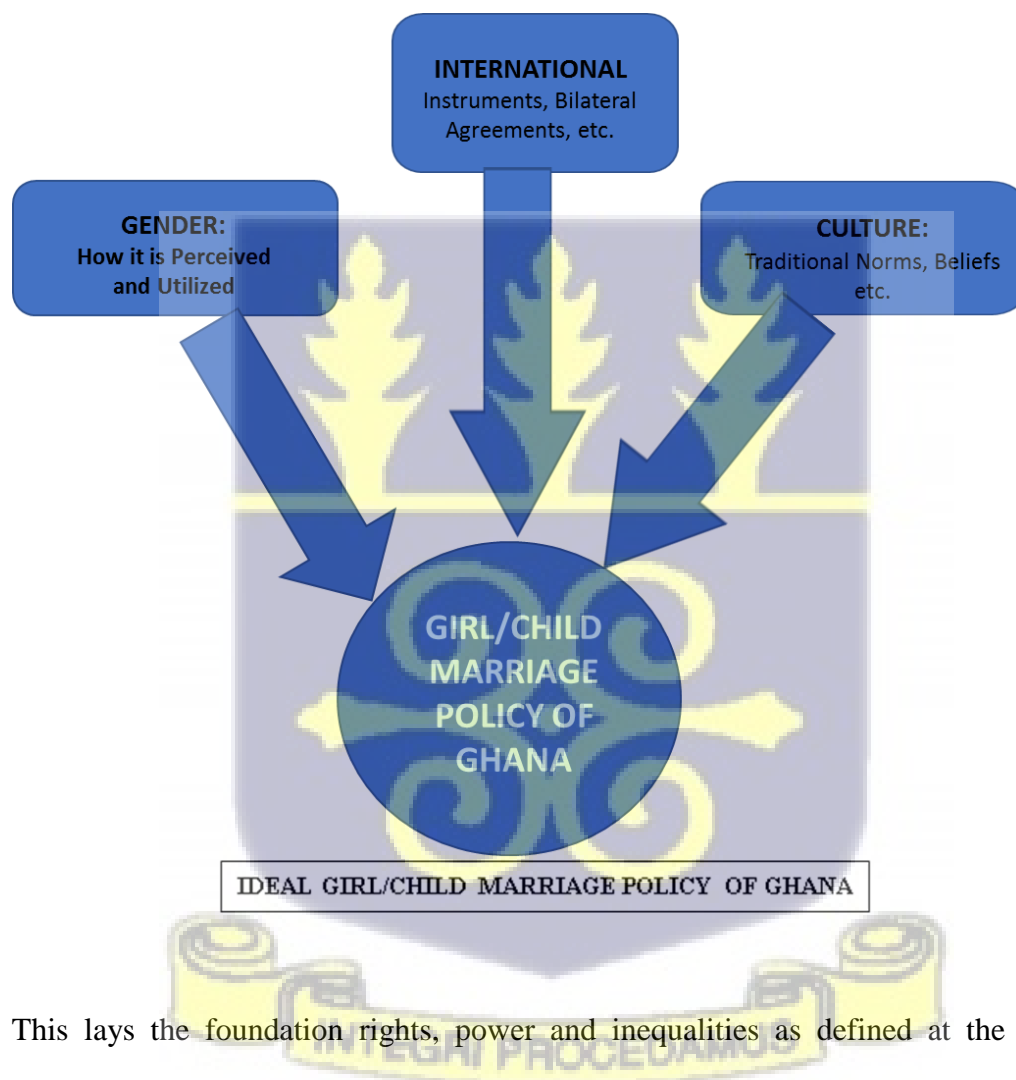


**Figure 5: The ideal composite gender policy of Ghana**

For example, Ghana's gender policy should be an integration of international and culture/customary laws. Similarly, a country's girl/child marriage policy should be a culmination of gender, law and culture as shown in the diagrams. It is by interrogating the

relationship between culture and law that we can find ways to use laws in ways that have resonance for the culture instead of moving laws that have been applied in other cultures that women are concerned and applying it here as if laws lack context or is neutral. Law is never neutral. Law is always an artifact of culture and law is a product of relations of power.

**Figure 6: Ideal girl/child marriage policy of Ghana**



This lays the foundation rights, power and inequalities as defined at the global level through the United Nations mechanisms and instruments. I have also covered the narrative

of Ghana's efforts to closing the inequality gap. I brought out the many efforts by the successive governments through the different periods in history from the colonial period through independence to the fourth republic. Using the parliamentary elections from 1960 to 2016, I analyze trends in the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) ranking of Ghana for a clearer understanding of how the status of women in any country is determined and how their level of power is determined.

While women in Ghana appear well placed by all the indicators, there is a gap between the stated goals, the expected goal and the actual IPU ranking. I have also discussed the duality of the democratic governance and the traditional governance which are both enshrined in Ghana's constitution: a duality which presents a paradox with many challenging dimensions. I have indicated that any analysis of power in Ghana should include the indigenous cultural system and its many other attributes. Culture is guaranteed and protected by the 1992 constitution of Ghana through the chieftaincy act. Under the Place of Culture in trends analysis, I question the space allocated to culture in the IPU indicators for ranking and discuss the gendered analysis of some Ghanaian traditions under patrilineal and matrilineal descent groups.

How has women's power been conceived and treated over time? What has occasioned any changes? Are the changes influenced by external ideas, or internal ideas, and are these changes considered positive? Finally, are these concepts - empowerment, and other related development tools - bringing the conception of women's power in the Akan polity close to the conception of women's power elsewhere or those contained in international instruments?

I have argued that there are two sides to Ghana's governance story: The democratic governance story as told by all the global measurements and indicators. Then there is the traditional governance story which is a cultural narrative. Are all Ghanaian women seem

drawn to this democratic governance story as a way of living out their empowerment? There are gaps created by the interface between democratic governance and traditional/cultural norms which needs to be addressed. This thesis is about women and power in Ghana as told from the community's standpoint. The next chapter is the analysis of data from the fieldwork and addresses many of the gaps and their corresponding questions and presented as the cultural narrative: the other side of the Ghana women and power story.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM FIELDWORK

#### 5.0. Overview

This chapter provides empirical analysis of women and power in an Akan community, (Kokofu) in Ghana. In 1918 Lord Frederick Lugard made this observation about the Igbo woman. ‘She is ambitious, self-reliant, hardworking and independent... she claims full equality with the opposite sex and would seem indeed to be the dominant partner.’ (Leith-Ross, 1939)<sup>101</sup>

These adjectives that described strong women provide us with a number of questions that are relevant to the discussion on African women. Questions such as ‘Do these words not describe powerful women?’ ‘How can a woman with such attributes be devoid of power or lack the ability to influence?’ Or is it a duality that is misrepresented or misunderstood? How do these women see themselves? Is it a paradox that they are coping with? The main objective of this study was to give Asante Kokofu women the opportunity to discuss power from their own standpoint.

#### 5.1 General overview and scope of analysis

There are initial questions that draw us to a research question, and in the process of research we end up refining our research question. Sometimes we come to a conclusion that is different than the one we set out to investigate. My research question originated from my interest in understanding women and power especially in the sphere or the realm of development.

The previous chapter offered the status of women and power in Ghana. The situational analysis of women and power in Ghana also shares what goes into the definitions of power

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<sup>101</sup> Leith-Ross, Sylvia. (1939) *African Women, a study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, with foreword by Lord Lugard. London: Faber & Faber. Published online by Cambridge University Press.

at the national level of governance. I argued that it is half of the story: the story from the national government viewpoint, at a level where the focus is Ghana in general and ‘inclusion’ or ‘exclusion’ is defined at convenience. While culture may not be an expedient category in an assessment at that level, traditional governance or authority is also enshrined in the constitution of Ghana and it has its own story to tell.

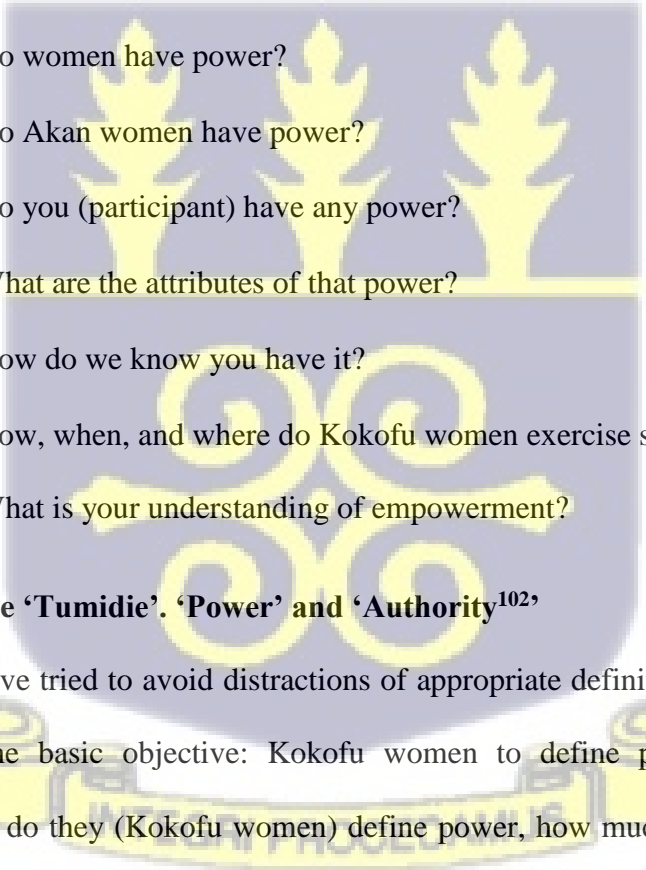
This chapter gives a bird’s eye view of the culture of the group studied (Kokofu women) and what informs their stand on their definition and notions of power. What makes Akan Asante Kokofu women who historically exhibited their agency in numerous ways (took part in wars) and still illustrate some powers, not fight for seats in parliament, the new battlefield? Kokofu Hema holds the title ‘Osagyefo’, carries a gun at public functions, and still own and administers her own lands, which are all illustrations of power. Is it because these women do not share the general understanding and notions of power or they do not believe that parliament is where they should be, even in this new era of democratic dispensation?

In Ghana, as stated earlier, there are two structures of governance; the national government and the traditional governance also called traditional authority. If we are to go by the indices of what externally appears to be empowerment, we will look at the presence of women in the national government and say that women are well placed, they have been empowered, and they can drive development. What has always been a paradox for me is that at the level of the traditional state when you frame questions like this, ‘Do women have power in Ghana?’ - The responses have always been to correct you that your questions are framed in error. ‘What are you asking us about?’ ‘We have always had power.’ This raises the important question of whether there is a disjuncture between how power is perceived in the traditional system and how it is perceived at the level of the national government.

Since the presence of women in the traditional system has a longer history, the objective of this study is to probe those understandings to see how then these indigenes' historic and cultural understanding of power may inform more broadly the discourse on understanding gender relations in Ghana especially Akan societies.

### 5.1.1 Focus of analysis

I sought to shed light on the Akan viewpoints which influence its members. There are three main focus group discussions, conversations with traditional practitioners as individuals and key informants, for this analysis. In all instances, the questions guide was read, and they were advised to have a general conversation along those lines of the interview guide. The questions were:

- 
- Do women have power?
  - Do Akan women have power?
  - Do you (participant) have any power?
  - What are the attributes of that power?
  - How do we know you have it?
  - How, when, and where do Kokofu women exercise such powers?
  - What is your understanding of empowerment?

### 5.1.2 'Tumi' ne 'Tumidie'. 'Power' and 'Authority'<sup>102</sup>

In this work I have tried to avoid distractions of appropriate definition of power, and kept my focus on the basic objective: Kokofu women to define power from their own standpoint. How do they (Kokofu women) define power, how much power do they have, and where, and when do they exercise power?

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<sup>102</sup> While 'tumidie' does not translate easily into 'authority'. In the Akan worldview when power is delegated, the office holder does not need another authority to exercise such powers. In Asante, power comes as part of an office and the authority to exercise any power is ingrained in the power.

If they have any power at all, how does anyone outside this community recognize it? How do they view political participation in relation to expression of power at the national level: to be seen and heard in order to impact policy and effect changes for development? Authority is not a clear Akan concept; rather power and the exercise of it are the focus of this study.

### **5.1.3 The place of culture in the discussion and understanding of power at Kokofu**

From the onset it has been clear that the concept of power in this work is driven by culture. Culture is generally defined as a way of thinking, feeling, believing consisting of patterns explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts.

A cultural ideology binds a group together enabling its members to maintain their identity and cohesion. The culture in one form or another, survives the lifespan of the individuals bonded together in a society at any point in time (Awedoba 2002:33)

Awedoba (2003) further explains that culture as a legacy is transmitted from older members to new members from adult to children since culture is learned, and societies have their ways of transmitting or inculcating their culture, parents and older kin may instruct new members. Thus, consciously and unconsciously the new and not so new members of a society assimilate culture and gain a certain intuition about the culture. The same authority adds that the transmission of culture is accompanied by sanctions which can be physical and non-physical.

Zimmermann (2015) defines culture as “the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and arts”.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has adopted a broad definition, stating that,

culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by (a human) as a member of society."<sup>103</sup>

The definition provides us with the unique opportunity to consider issues of identity and ethnicity especially among some Akan communities, especially Asante. For UNESCO:

If achieving sustainability is first and foremost about making an appropriate use of the planet's resources, then culture must be at the centre of our development strategies, since cultures frame people's relationship to others in their society and the world around them, including the natural environment, and condition their behaviours.

Development initiatives and approaches which take local conditions and cultures into account are likely to result in more context-sensitive and equitable outcomes, whilst also enhancing ownership by target beneficiaries. Integrating culture into development policies and programmes, therefore, fundamentally contributes to their effectiveness and sustainability.<sup>104</sup>

## **5.2 Etymology of Akan**

The next sub-components are dedicated to brief discussions on concept such as Akan concept of personhood, concept of the mind, womanhood, identity, ethnicity, kinship and a host of other concepts. I consider this important because such overviews will shed some light and understanding on the analysis of Women and Power in Akan (Kokofu) in Ghana

### **5.2.1 The Akan of Ghana**

The Akan constitute about 49.1% of the entire population of Ghana and inhabit two-thirds of Ghana's land space (Nkansa-Kyeremateng, 2008:26). An important characteristic of the Akan is the eight clan groups (Aduana, Bretuo ne Agona, Asakyiri, Asene, Asona, Ayokone Adako, and Ekuona ne Asokore). The Akan extend beyond the geographical borders of Ghana into the Ivory Coast.

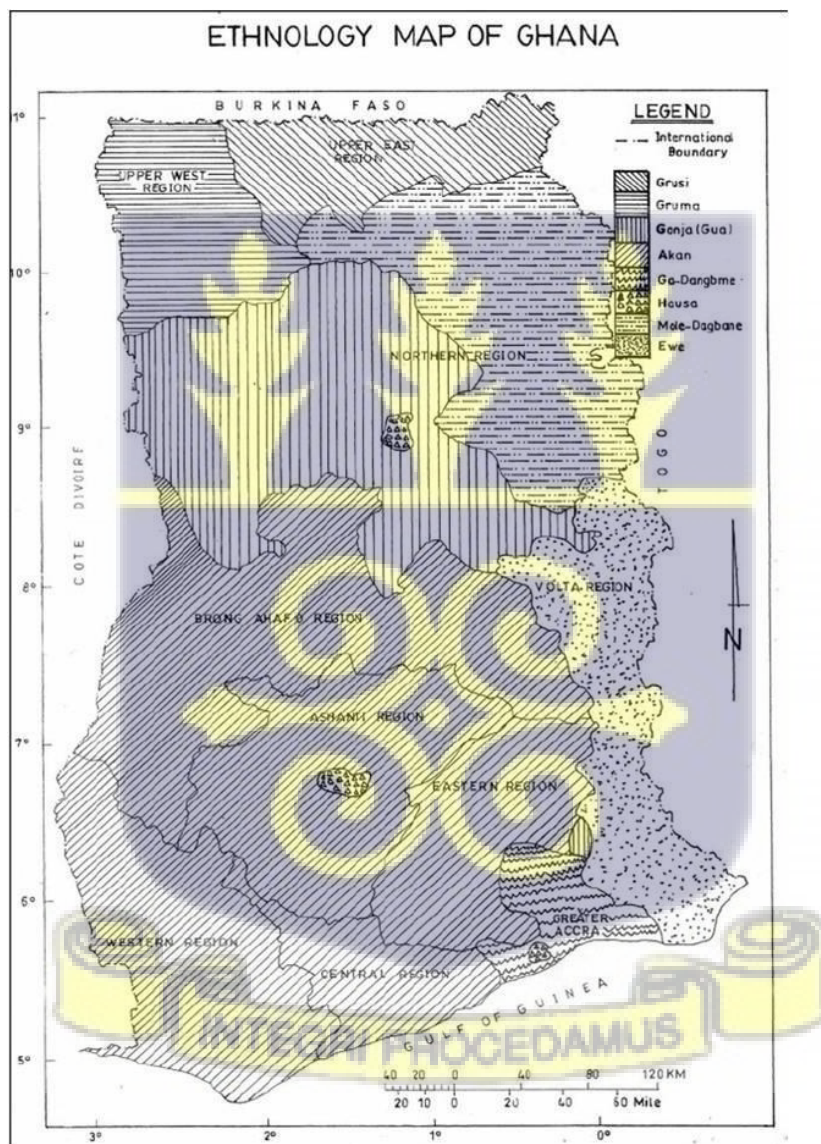
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<sup>103</sup><http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development/the-future-we-want-the-role-of-culture/the-key-ideas/>. Accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>104</sup> This quote is already cited in chapter four and is being repeated here for relevance and emphasis.

It has been variously established by scholars (Dupuis 1824, Meyerowitz 1951) that the Akan migrated from the North and Northeast into West Africa and the culture though not Negro-African in origin, could be classed as Libyo-Berber. (Danquah 1955)

The term Akan is said to mean a lot of things – it is the classification of a group and the language spoken by the group. There are specific cultures in Ghana that are also attributed to the Akan group. Examples of cultures attributed to the Akan are stools, kente<sup>105</sup> cloth and some other regalia.



**Figure 7: Ethnology map of Ghana**

<sup>105</sup> Weaving is done in almost all the regions and among all the ethnic groups in Ghana, but there is distinct difference between the Akan kente, Ewe woven textiles and woven textiles from the northern part of Ghana.

Meyerowitz (1958) discusses the Akan symbolism connected with the supreme deities, Kingship and Queenship (ɔhene neɔhemaa). Originally the basic concepts and organization of the state was the sacred institution requiring, above all an ɔhemaa who is regarded as the daughter of the moon, symbolizing the female characteristics of Nyame, the Supreme Being. As the ɔhemaa represents the mother-Moon-goddess, so the ɔhene represents the Sun god, son of the Moon. Meyerowitz describes the State as:

originally a confederation of seven matrilineal clans, representing the universe, populated as it is by seven heavenly bodies, the moon, the sun, and the five planets first recognized by the ancients.

Subsequent developments in various states though based on territorial and military expansion did not undermine the fundamental religious concepts underlying the State.

### 5.2.2 Geographical area

The Akan comprise of the Adanse, Asante, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Assin, Bono, Denkyira, Fante, Gomoa, Kwahu, Sefwi, Twifu, and Wassa. The Guan, Aowin and Nzima are classified as Akan in some writings (Nkansa Kyeremateng 2008:27) The Asante occupy south-central, Akuapem occupies the south-east. The Akan occupy the entire Ashanti region, parts of the Brong Ahafo Region, Eastern, Western, Central and Volta Regions. The Akan extends beyond the geographical borders of Ghana into the Ivory Coast to include the Anyi and Baule who maintain very strong cultural ties with Kumasi and Nsuta.

### 5.2.3 Akan language

The Akan language is classified as “Niger-Congo, Atlantic Congo, Volta-Congo, Kwa Novo, Potou Tano, Tano and central Akan.” (Savage, 1987) The language spoken by the Akan people is Twi. There are many dialects of Akan, but within Ghana, there are three distinct dialects of Akan. They are Asante Twi, Fante Twi, and Akuapem Twi. The

dialects



are generally mutually intelligible and understood by each other across the dialect derivatives. If there is a homogenous language in Ghana at all, it is Akan and all its variations.

Ethnologue – Languages of the world<sup>106</sup>, estimate that the EGIDS<sup>107</sup> level for Akan in Ghana is 3, which stands for wider communication. It also states that,

Akan is used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language differences across the region. Akan is represented by a large, colored dot. Purple = Institutional (EGIDS 0-4) — The language has been developed to the point that it is used and sustained by institutions beyond the home and community.<sup>108</sup>

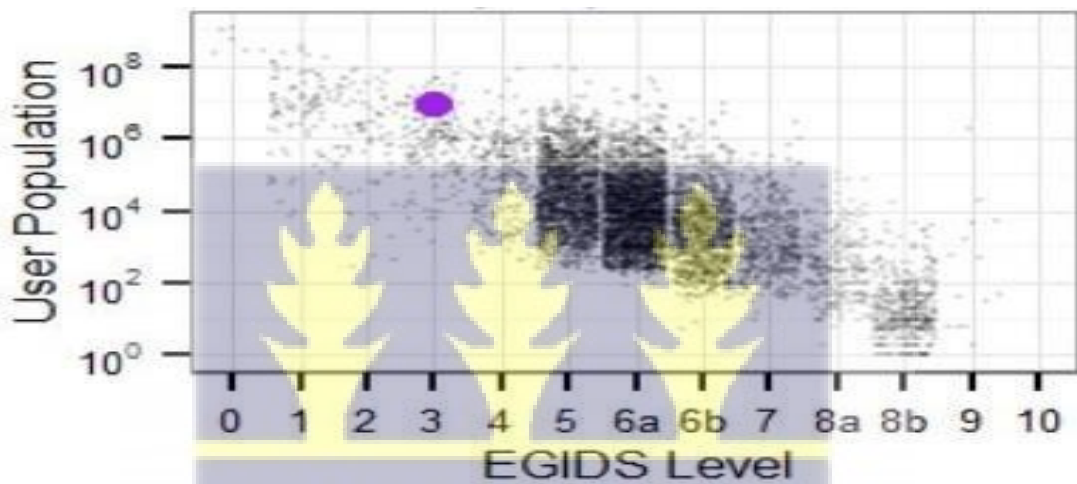


Figure 8: Akan language grid in Ghana

#### 5.2.4 Akan concept of personhood (Kanniba<sup>109</sup>)

To understand kinship and other internal norms of the Akan worldview there must be an introduction of the Akan concept of personhood. How the Akan view themselves is as important as how non-Akan view members of that group who hold or adhere to that concept of person. It also determines how other issues that are relevant to the ordering of society such as morality, ethics, knowledge and truth are analyzed. Beyond this explanation, every other concept is kinship-based and community driven.

<sup>106</sup> <https://www.ethnologue.com/cloud/aka>. Accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

<sup>107</sup> EGIDS stand for Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale. It is the tool used in measuring the stats of a language in terms of endangerment or development. <https://www.ethnologue.com>. Accessed on 21/12/2019.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Kanniba or ɔkanniba means child of the Akan.

The Akan person is made up of okra (soul), sunsum (spirit), mogya (blood), and nipadua (body). Onipa (human being or person) has a laudatory and a non-laudatory aspect of personhood. While your okra (soul), sunsum (spirit), mogya (blood), and nipadua (body) culminate in a human being, it is your progression in human achievement and status in a society as in fulfilling the social obligations that graduate you to personhood. (Wiredu 1966:156)

It implies that s/he has demonstrated ability through hard work and sober thinking to sustain a household and make contributions to the communal welfare. Moreover, the defense of the state against external attacks. (ibid:159)

The second part is linked with “obligations each individual has, and the level of completion leads to higher levels of personhood”. (ibid 160)

The concept of personhood in the Akan worldview simply means one is not born a person; physical birth is not enough but one works to graduate into personhood through various rites of incorporation to be fully integrated into the society. (Mbiti 1969:106). This personhood also compels one to graduate into womanhood or manhood. Agya Koo Nimo narrates these stages in a song entitled *Onipa Nkrabea*, which means *The Destiny of Man*.<sup>110</sup> Nimo (1973) records that.

there are seven major stages of development: Asukonoma (newborn to age two), Abofra (from age two up to five, very naïve and can even eat feces without knowing it is not proper food), akwadaa (from age five on to twenty), abrante and ababaawa (eighteen years of age to forty depending on your own ability to graduate to the next level), opanin<sup>111</sup> (beyond fifty), Abasiriwa (sixty through seventy years), and Akwakora and Abrewa (beyond seventy and also very mature in wisdom and mediation).

<sup>110</sup>*The Destiny of Man*- Track one of *Palm-Wine Music in the 21st Century*.

<sup>111</sup> While age gets most people to the level of opanin, most people get stuck until death. Some people also get pushed to opanin by ascription through ‘agudie’ and sometimes by achieving the status by excelling through the personhood process while under the required age. This is illustrated in the proverb ‘se wohunu wo nsa hohoro a, wone mpanin didi’, which means ‘if one masters how well to wash hands, one can partake meals with the elders.

There are expectations attached to each phase and the anticipated progression is considered to be innate. Sarpong (1975) also adds that a human being must consist of mogya, Sunsum, okra, hunhum sasa, saman, and Ntoro to be a bonafide person.<sup>112</sup>

The mogya, the principle of being is supplied by the mother while the Sunsum is sometimes referred to as the individualizing principle. It is the Sunsum that separates two humans by their character. The okra is from God and is the humanizing principle. It is also the principle of life (happy or sad), and when someone is overcome by excessive fright, the Akan say, 'ne kra adwane' meaning 'his soul has run away'. When the hunhum (spirit) leaves when one dies the okra goes back to God to be judged, then Sunsum becomes saman (ghost) which transforms into sasa – the protective principle. It is common knowledge in Akan belief system that anyone who does harm to anyone which result in death the victim's sasa will follow you until there is judgment. For example, if A murders B and think that all evidence is covered and secured, B's sasa will follow A everywhere to make sure that the truth is unveiled. B's sasa will push A to confess or push A to take his own life if there is refusal to confess.

(Agya Koo Nimo, alias Daniel Amponsah, at KNUST on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2019)

### 5.2.5 The Akan Concept of the mind

In the Akan Concept of mind, “the universality of one human family is based on the okra which is equal to all human beings at all time because it transcends the biological”. (Wiredu 1983:121) Okra is a quasi-material part of man “whose presence in the body means life and whose absence means death and which also receives the individual's destiny from God” (Wiredu 1995:133). Wiredu defines the okra as the ‘principle in a person, sunsum as the personality, and mogya as the blood transmitted through the mother that gives the person her clan and kinship. As background to the understanding of some of the etymological issues to be addressed, many scholars have contributed to the personhood discourse. And while some may not agree on the composition, (Gyekye, 1987; Wiredu, 1995; 1996), at least there is a consensus that there is an Akan concept of personhood (Sarpong, 1977; Nimo, 1982; Appiah, 1992), and an understanding of the okra, mogya and sunsum lays the foundation to understand kinship and matrilineality and power in Akan

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<sup>112</sup> Conversation between Agya Koo Nimo (alias Daniel Amponsah), and Peter Kwasi Sarpong - Retired Arch Bishop of the Kumasi Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, as narrated to me by Agya Koo Nimo on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2019 in his Office at KNUST.

society. There is also a general understanding that the Akan have a concept of the mind, which has been influenced by every period of their evolution: pre-colonial, colonial, and the postcolonial era. Understandably, none of these situations would be static, so in shedding light on these concepts, there is also a reflection on the changes overtime.

### 5.2.6 Ntoro and Nton

This is the foremost composition that makes the human being in the Akan worldview.

The nton is derived from one of the eight abusua through a person's mother and the ntoro from a person's father.

#### 5.2.6.1 The ntoro

They constitute the spiritual traits which are inherited through the father. Gyekye breaks it down as follows:

The twelve (12) Ntoro are inherited deities who animate govern and protect their twelve clans patrilineally. The Akan believe that the Ntoro does not die with the father. Instead, it is passed down to the man's children, or if the children are not alive, to his nephews and nieces. The father's Ntoro represents the being of the child until the child comes of age. At this point the Ntoro along with the Sunsum and Kra explains how one interacts in the world. The Ntoro is thus explained by Akan to be the father's characteristics and spiritual traits which can be inherited. Thus, "it is the cooperation of the father's Ntoro with the mother's blood (Mogya) Abusua which is believed to form the child and mold into the human being. (Gyekye 1995:63).

- 1) Bosompra (The Tough/Strong/firm)
- 2) Bosomtwe (The Human/Kind/empathetic)
- 3) Bosomakim (The Fanatic)
- 4) Bosompo/Bosomnkóteaa (The Brave/proud/courageous)
- 5) Bosommuru (The Respectable/distinguished)
- 6) Bosomkonsi (The Virtuoso)
- 7) Bosomdwerobe (The Eccentric/Jittery)
- 8) Bosomayensu (The Truculent)
- 9) Bosomsika (The Fastidious)
- 10) Bosomkrete (The Chivalrous)
- 11) Bosomafam (The Liberal/Kind/empathetic)
- 12) Bosomafi (The Chaste)

(Rattray 1923:45, Gyekye 1995:68)

The ntoro comprises the exogamous divisions to one of which every Akan belong. It is one of the two elements in every man and woman. (Gyekye 1995:69).

**5.2.6.2 The other element is mogya (blood) or Abusua** which comes from the mother.

The ntoro can be transmitted only by the male (father), and the bogya (blood), thus abusua (nton), can only be transmitted by the female (mother). And there are totems, taboos and specific rites associated with all the various ntoro. (Rattray 1923:45-49).

The Akan concept of the personhood, the concept of the mind and the various Ntoro are elements that influence Akan thinking and being and plays out in many public spaces. Most Akan may even argue that they do not subscribe to the details of these concepts, some may not even know the Ntoro, as some of them do not even know where their fathers come from or who contributed that sperm or Ntoro. For a people who put so much emphasis on the mother carrying the baby it is ironic that the makeup of the person includes the Sunsum and totems with taboos and various forbidden aspects. In Akan, there is so much emphasis on the mogya (the female/mother part) that they say

“medane se menua baa awo na me wofase ne no”  
All I care is that if my sister begets a baby, it is my nephew/niece”

(Translation)

Anaa se, or

“medane se me maame awo na menua ne no”

“All I care is that if my mother begets a baby, it is my sibling” (Translation)

In a sense, it does not matter who fathered the baby. So, it is interesting how many Akan know their Ntoro and the associated totems. Moreover, how many Akan actually graduate into personhood. Conversations with some of the participants illustrated my suspicion: most of them did not know their ‘ntoro’, but they all know the ‘nton’. However, there are many other aspects that illustrate Akan ways of thinking and knowing, including what is power and who is an adult/child and who is rich/poor, which are markedly different from the general Ghanaian population.

### 5.3 Themes

There are many concepts which can shed light for proper grounding of this analysis. A handful of them are discussed below as themes.

#### 5.3.1 Identity and ethnicity in changing Asante world

Central to the dynamics of chieftaincy and to the identity of every individual member of the Akan culture is the kinship system, which is matrilineal.

There is the need to look at both the nation-state and the traditional customary organized system at the community level when it comes to issues of identity. It is easy to see how most Africans especially Ghanaians collectively and individually cling to ethnicity as their foremost identity. Mama (2001) offers the reason that we seem to be seeking the integrity and the unity that identity or ethnicity implies and though we do not seem to be succeeding, we do not know how to progress beyond identity. Part of the reason is that “it relates to the contentious nature of the term in our upbringing, as a site of oppression and resistance” in some cases. (Mama 2001:1)

In speaking to the issue of identity I only intend to mention how it has been part of the Akan culture and not to offer any site that resembles resistance or even discusses any deterministic argument. Mama suggests that;

We do need to take matters of identity very seriously, not just as some kind of psychological artifact or cultural consumable, but as a matter of profound political and economic strategy. Identity is all about power and resistance, subjection and citizenship, action and reaction. I would suggest that rather than simply passing over identity in order to rethink power, we need to profoundly rethink identity if we are to begin to comprehend the meaning of power. (Mama, 2001:68)

In a sense, identity challenges us to rethink power. In the Akan worldview, it is the beliefs that distinguish a person or a group. Many of the Akan worldviews on identity (Kanniba) has changed overtime, with globalization and urbanization evolving and transforming the definitions of family and networks, ethnicity is taking a backseat. Surprisingly ethnicity is

becoming less fragmented while groupings are becoming more visible. In a sense “Asanteness” is rolling back and creating more room to make “Akanness” more visible. The only visible Asante is the Asantehene, while the Asante mention their hometown followed by “I am an Akan” (if necessary). This is because most people accept that Asante is a fragment of the Akan community which is much larger than Asante. Moreover, many Asante are becoming more comfortable with their current transnational credentials and mention their Akan-ness and Asante connections in nostalgia. Except for stool occupants none of the participants used Asante as their ethnicity. It was assumed that “Kokofu ne Asante ase.”<sup>113</sup> The ɔbaapanin, Abusuapanin and some key informants all used the word “Kanniba” whenever they spoke about concepts and worldview of the ethnic group, even in instances where they were referring to something predominantly Asante like how the traditional leaders and the elderly dress such as dansinkran.<sup>114</sup> Because while all Akan variations subscribe to certain ways an ɔhema or ɔhene should dress formally, the ‘dansinkran’ hair style is strictly enforced in the Asante kingdom, but quite liberally outside Kumasi. So, when a Kokofu Hema<sup>115</sup> talks of “Kanniba de, ɔw<sup>000</sup> wo fa wo ho te s<sup>0</sup> Kanniba<sup>116</sup>”. She is speaking to the Akan in Kokofu, not outside her jurisdiction. The statement lacks validity because Kanniba wears a two-piece to show her age and status; the rest of the attire is the adornment depending on geographical location and expediency such as gold or beads. Times have also changed and as I examined the dynamics, I witnessed many changes I have taken for granted. The new accessories market; a combination of gold and beads with other stones and metals make wonderful adornments and embellishments. This author cannot even name most of them because

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<sup>113</sup> Kokofu is the foundation of Asante (translation)

<sup>114</sup> The dansinkran is cutting and keeping hair short, wearing two-pieces of cloth in a layered fashion, and topping it with a pair of native slippers. But in modern usage, it is usually referring to the hairstyle alone. Even though it is rarely seen without the two-piece garment.

<sup>115</sup> In this instance, a Kokofu Hema refers to any female stool occupant at Kokofu, not the paramount Kokofu Hema

<sup>116</sup> ‘An Akan should dress appropriately’

they are new and very foreign, but they complement the festive colours of the traditional woven textiles and add their own twist and interpretations to the discussion of how an  $\square$ kanniba should dress.

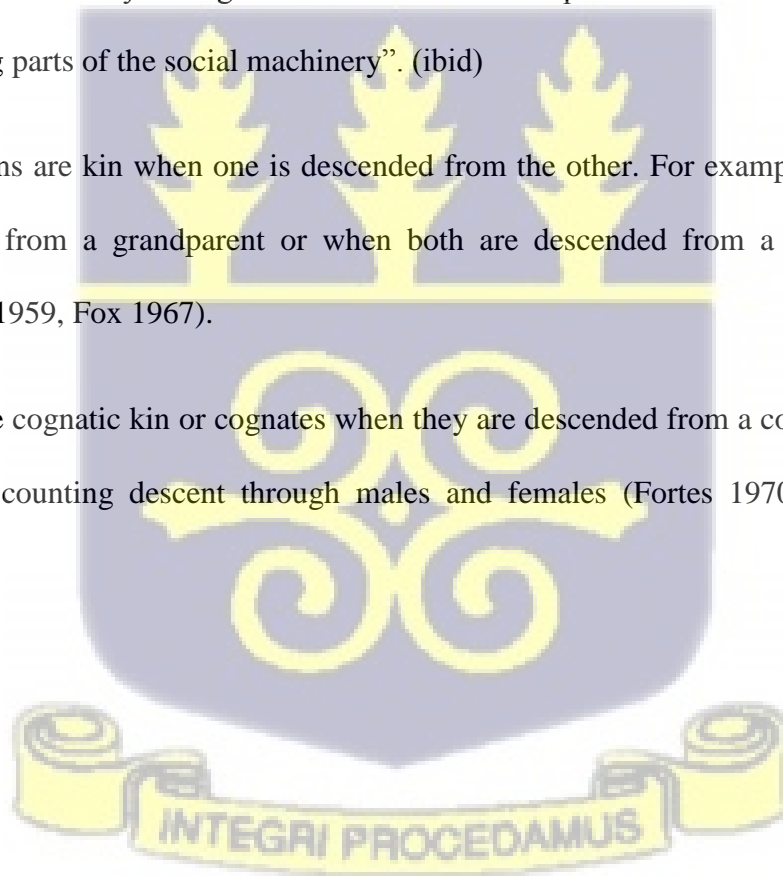
### 5.3.2 Kinship among the Akan in changing Asante world

As Radcliffe-Brown (1950) advised many years ago, “For the understanding of any aspect of the social life of an African people – economic, political, or religious – it is essential to have a thorough knowledge of their system of kinship and marriage. (pg 3)

The author looked at how kinship contributes to the working of the society, in other words how the system came about and the social function of the kinship system and concluded that, “it is an orderly arrangement of interactions of particular customs and are seen as functioning parts of the social machinery”. (ibid)

Two persons are kin when one is descended from the other. For example, a grandchild is descended from a grandparent or when both are descended from a common ancestor (Murdock 1959, Fox 1967).

Persons are cognatic kin or cognates when they are descended from a common ancestor or ancestress counting descent through males and females (Fortes 1970, Evans-Pritchard 1965).



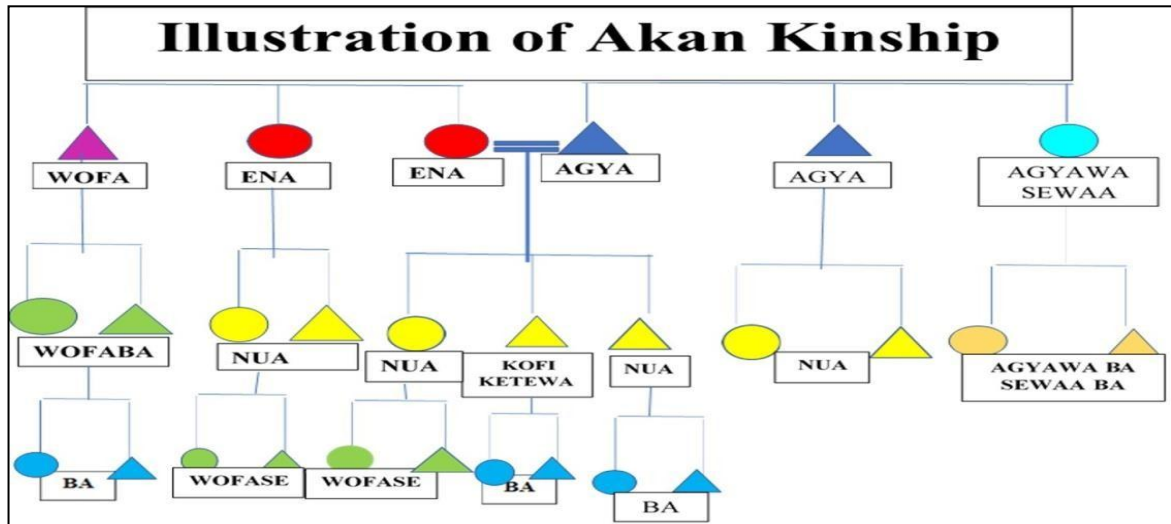


Figure 9: Illustration of Akan kinship

Radcliffe-Brown (1924) differentiates between the term ‘consanguinity’<sup>117</sup> and kinship as the difference between a physical and a social relationship. Consanguinity is a physical relationship and kinship is a social relationship. Kinship, therefore, results from the recognition of a social relationship between parents and children which is not the same thing as the physical relation and may or may not coincide with it. A kinship system thus presents to us a complex set of norms, usages of patterns of behavior between kindred. In a sense,

Every kinship system provides each person in the society with a set of dyadic (person to person) relationships so that he stands as it were, at the center of a narrower or wider circle of relatives (pg 54).

Evans-Pritchard (1940) studied kinship of the Nuer, Mary Douglas (1995) studied the Lele and Fortes (1969) studied the Tallensi. While the kinship establishes one's identity, it is the clan or lineage which reinforces and provides a division of the group into distinctly separate groups each having its own identity as explored in preceding discussions of Akan thought and worldview. In the above illustration of Akan kinship system, the two circles and their offspring continue the lineage. Ena (mother) and Agya (father) beget Kofi and

<sup>117</sup> Sometimes used as equivalent to kinship. But Radcliffe-Brown cautions against such dangerous usage. Citing the example of an illegitimate child, he explains that such a child certainly has a ‘genitor’ (physical father) but no ‘pater’ (social father).

two other brother and sister. Kofi's sister and his mother's sister's daughter will continue the lineage, until Kofi's sister and his mother's sister's daughter continues the lineage as nieces of Kofi. The members from Agya's side of the family: Agya's brother, Agya's sister and their children, while close relatives, are not part of Kofi's matrilineal kinship. The Akan, especially the Asante do not encourage adoption, but occasionally there are situations of long in-house membership that mimics an adoption. These are handled with care and the circumstances are handed down with lineage records by custodians to the next generation. Such relations are followed very carefully because their offspring can easily mix with the kinship and create a lot of confusion. Because like the Ivy, it takes only a century, but its roots stay firmly in the ground and the leaves, like the sweet potato leaves, spread like wild fire. The Akan especially the Asante believe that such integration should be avoided at all cost. There is a proverb which says that;

'se dufokye da nsuo mu kye a, entumi ndane denkyem'

It does not matter how long a wet log stays in the river; it cannot turn into a crocodile' (translation)

For the Akan, it does not matter how long you stay in their mist, at the appropriate time, they will smoke the person out. The Asante firmly believe that kinship is by blood alone and in cases where the lineage has a consecrated stool it gets much more complicated. This has been a source of conflict among the Akan since time immemorial and one major issue and source of stool conflict in Asante. There is the case of Nana Agyeiwaa Abako of Pease and the Kuntanase Banmu lineage stool. In that case two girls had been helping a woman who did not have any offspring girls. As time passed, the two women acted as her children and enstooled their children as chiefs.<sup>118</sup>

There have been other observations about kinship. Some lineages currently have three or four generations abroad. Some try to return dead bodies to Ghana for burial and traditional

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<sup>118</sup> The full story is attached as an appendix

funeral. However, there are some who have acquired group burial properties to continue the kinship abroad and there is a growing number who have not severed ties with kinship but just found new ways to define family and kinship as simply 'abusuafo'.<sup>119</sup> This is a very loose and detached affiliation with no obligation or responsibility. Urbanization and globalization seem to be having interesting effects on some of these concepts and definitions.

### 5.3.3 Womanhood and Motherhood

Womanhood and motherhood are concepts that are discussed in multiple ways in various publications. The general fascination with womanhood and motherhood by men, in general, illustrates the importance of women. Nyame<sup>120</sup> is often thought to be female and associated with the moon (Meyerowitz, 1958) while Onyankopon is considered the super divinity and considered male. The bible has at least 299 instances of motherhood, womb, and womanhood. The Quran has a whole Surah (IV) dedicated to women. Both books warn of duty towards the womb (Surah IV:1, Leviticus 19:3). Both books caution readers and the faithful 'not to neglect the Rock who begot you' (Deuteronomy 32:18). But these illustrate the spheres of influence which in many cases translate into power. Obviously, women's power throughout the ages and on various continents and in many communities and cultures has not been transformative enough to effect change in some women's lives.

Womanhood and motherhood are covered extensively in the fieldwork by women themselves. Womanhood is an evolving reality that graduates a girl into adulthood, and it is a journey of many phases including marriage, child birth, family management that

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<sup>119</sup> Abusua means extended family with a clear demarcation separating that from one's nuclear family of wife and children.

<sup>120</sup> Nyame means fulfilling. It is the Akan equivalent of God. It is usually qualified with the attributes of womanhood and motherhood.

builds the inner strength of a woman and develops her abilities to exercise her innate power (Sarpong, 1977:75).

Kokofu women see themselves as perpetual nurturers. Nana Adoma Serwa (aged 86) says:

ɔ̃baa deɔ̃, barima biara a ɔ̃wɔ̃ wo abrabo mu no yɔ̃ wo ba, wo nua barima, wo kunu, wo papa anaa se wo wofa. Awadie mu mpo no, nipa num yi nyinaa tena barima baako no mu. Onyame hyɔ̃ da bɔ̃ ɔ̃baa, yewo ɔ̃baa, barima deɔ̃, ɔ̃baa na ɔ̃yɔ̃n. ɔ̃baa deɔ̃, nteteyɔ̃ ne abayɔ̃n no ara na wowɔ̃ mu. ɔ̃yɔ̃ adwuma a wobɔ̃yɔ̃ akosi wo wuda. Efirisɔ̃ mmarimma hia nteteɔ̃ fri awoeɔ̃ kosi owuomu.

(Nana Adoma Serwa, Kokofu, 25 July 2017)

As a woman every man in your life is your son, your brother, your husband, your uncle and father. In marriage your husband is an embodiment of all these people, and they need nurturing throughout their lives. All these people manifest in your husband and you nurture him like you would nurture all the other four. Women are specially created by God. Women are born, men are made This is your responsibility until death. This is because men need nurturing from birth till death. (Translation)

Motherhood in Akan is the exercise of a woman's procreative duty and right to continue her lineage. No one doubts the power that a mother wields. A mother does not have to do anything but stay alive to wield such power. The Akan are clear about what constitutes motherhood. There is an adage that says,

Awoɔ̃ ye di no nantini aka, yenni no yenuaba  
Birth is by being touched by the afterbirth<sup>121</sup>, not your sister's child<sup>122</sup>  
(Translation)

The Akan concept of motherhood is very rigid as it has to include the transmission of blood to establish the Nton. This does not mean that adoption is not recognized. This rigid definition of motherhood is also not to be confused with 'mothering of all the men in a woman's life' or lineage. Mother and child relationships are very prevalent in cases of

<sup>121</sup> Afterbirth is the placenta and fetal membranes. Due to the mother's positioning during childbirth, the afterbirth always touches the mother.

<sup>122</sup> In the Akan kinship system, your sister's child calls you mother. The adage is saying that the fact that your sister's daughter calls you mother does not make you one.

orphaned sister's children. In such cases the boundaries are not so rigid, but in the case of a brother's children there are clear boundaries. As the proverb goes:

Se dufokye da nsuo mu ky<sup>ɔ</sup> a, entumi nnane denkyem<sup>123</sup>

If the rotten log stays in the water for a long time, it still cannot turn into a crocodile (Translation).

Asante women are very aware of their responsibility as the gate keepers of the lineage. This proverb means that if one is not from your womb, she/he cannot be sneaked into the family. However, the boundaries between mother and sister's child are not as rigid as the boundaries between mother and brother's child. In the latter instance, all other members of the lineage are vigilant to make sure that the brother's child will not usurp any lineage position.

### 5.3.4 Matriarchy and matrilineality in changing Asante world

These are concepts that are often used interchangeably but needs to be explained. While matrilineality and matrilineal are associated with matriarchy and matrilineal, matriarchy is about leadership while matrilineal is about descent.

#### 5.3.4.1 Matriarchy

This is a social system in which females hold the primary power positions in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of the property at the specific exclusion of males - at least to a large extent.

Crossman (2017) defines matriarchy as “a social system organized around the principle of mother-rule in which mothers, or females, are at the top of the power structure”. (pg. 7)

Crossman asserts that

There is no solid evidence that a matriarchal society has ever existed. Even in societies with matrilineal descent, the power structure is either egalitarian or dominated formally by the father or some other male figure. (pg. 7)

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<sup>123</sup> This proverb is previously explored under the subtitle **Kinship**.

The author admits somehow that matrilineal systems have a unique power structure which usually may have the appearance of male domination.

Ledgerwood (1995) and Davies (2010), have argued that “In order for a social system to be considered a matriarchy, it would need the support of a culture that defined women’s dominance as desirable and legitimate.” (Grossman 2007)<sup>124</sup> As if the prevailing general dispensation of male hegemony “has the support of a culture that defines men’s dominance as desirable and legitimate” (ibid).

Matriarchy –

- 1) A system of society or government ruled by a woman or women.
- 2) A form of social organization in which descent and relationships are reckoned through the female line.
- 3) The state of being an older, powerful woman in a family or group<sup>125</sup>

The second and third definitions above describe a matriarch but does not adequately describe the type of governance.

The Oxford English Dictionary define Matriarchy as

A form of social organization in which the mother or oldest female is the head of the family, and descent and relationship are reckoned through the female line, government or rule by a woman or women. (OED)<sup>126</sup>

The word “matriarchy is often interpreted to mean the general opposite of patriarchy, but it is not” (Eller 1995:161-162)<sup>127</sup> Eller’s point is very instructive. Matriarchs lead their descendants but when matriarchy is interpreted as the rule by a woman or women it misses the progeny aspect.

<sup>124</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/matriarchy-3026402> Accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2019

<sup>125</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matriarchy> Accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2019

<sup>126</sup> Oxford English Dictionary online. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matriarchy> Accessed on January 9, 2018

<sup>127</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matriarchy#Definitions,\\_connotations,\\_and\\_etymology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matriarchy#Definitions,_connotations,_and_etymology). Accessed on January 9, 2018.

It is known that social anthropology argued in 1924 that “the definition of matriarchy and patriarchy had logical and empirical failings .... [and] were too vague to be scientifically useful” (Kuzner, 1997)<sup>128</sup>

Matriarchy in all its form has not appealed to the Akan women. It has generally not been part of the Akan worldview and cosmology to be matriarchal, or for Akan women to be at the helm of state affairs even though they have the requisite power. In interviews with some of the Kokofu women, many references were made to “me mmarima” “mmarima no”.<sup>129</sup> There are many adages that inform broadly that the Akan womenfolk do not have a problem with men leading and they comfortably following. For example, proverbs like;

Akok<sup>3</sup> bedie nim adehye nso <sup>4</sup>te firi onini h<sup>5</sup>

The hen knows when it is morning, but she hears it from the cock (Translation)

However, it is known and understood in many Akan communities<sup>6</sup> that women own all the stool<sup>7</sup><sup>130</sup> and in fact

Abusua hye obaa ya mu

The family (lineage) is in the woman’s womb. (Translation)

(Gyau Kyem on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2017 at Bantama Palace, Kumasi)

Gyau Kyem narrates how women held all the powers in the beginning and delegated some to men when it became necessary for men to lead, to be able to fight off enemies and expand. Thus, Akan women want their men to succeed in their role as community leaders and are not inclined to undermine them with matriarchy.

<sup>128</sup> Lawrence A. Kuzner attributes this statement to A. R. Radcliffe-Brown for making this argument in 1924. Accessed at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matriarchy#Definitions,\\_connotations,\\_and\\_etymology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matriarchy#Definitions,_connotations,_and_etymology) on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

<sup>129</sup> Me mmarima means “my men” and mmarima no means “the men”.

<sup>130</sup> The stool is the symbol of power in the Akan worldview and thought.

#### 5.3.4.2 Matrilineality (matriliny)

This refers to tracing one's lineage through maternal ancestry and inherits property through the female line.

The English adventurer John Lederer (1672) seems to have been one of the first to describe a matrilineal clan system accurately in print. Referring to the Tutelo, an eastern Siouan tribe:

From four women, viz., Pash, Sopoy, Askarinand Maraskarin, they derive the race of Mankinde; which they, therefore, divide into four Tribes, distinguished under those several names... now for two of the same Tribe to match, is abhorred as Incest, and punished with great severity. (Tax 1955: 445)<sup>131</sup>

Some thinkers (Morgan, 1845; Murdoch, 1949), believe that early human kinship everywhere was matrilineal. This idea was further developed and incorporated into communist orthodoxy by Fredrich Engels (1884). In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Engels writes that humanity's earliest domestic institution was not the family, but the matrilineal clan.

Matrilineal cultures are on every continent: In America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. They are in Muslim communities and Judaism communities as well.

There are many societies besides the Akan of Ghana who still adhere to this matrilineal system. They are the Lele, found in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Yao of Malawi, the Bembe of Zambia, the Mosuo (near Tibet in the Yunnan province), the Minangkabau of West Sumatra in Indonesia, the Bribri in the Limon province of Costa Rica, the Garo in the North-eastern India state of Meghalaya, the Nagovisi in the west of North Guinea, the Tuaregs of west and north Africa, most Jewish communities and all

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<sup>131</sup>Cited by Knight, C. 2008. Early Human Kinship Was Matrilineal. In N. J. Allen, H. Callan, R. Dunbar and W. James (eds.), *Early Human Kinship*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 61-82

groups across the so-called “matrilineal belt”<sup>132</sup> of central Africa. Africans and Akan do not have a monopoly on matrilineal kinship systems. The Iroquois, as Marie Guyant wrote in as far back as 1654 ‘had female chieftains, with deciding votes’ (Bruneau 1998:106)

Meyerowitz (1956) captures the state with its political and religious concepts which provide the rationale for this study. For example, Meyerowitz records that:

from earliest times the  $\square$ hemaa ruled her state assisted by a council of headwomen from other clans and sub-clans (p.50).

Thus, the Akan social structure had women ( $\square$ baapanin, Abrewa,  $\square$ hemaa) at the center of everything including the political structure. It was warfare that made it necessary and expedient to put men in authority (Busia 1951, Akyeamong 1995). This does not contradict an earlier statement under Matriarchy that:

Matriarchy in all its form has not appealed to Akan women. It has generally not been part of the Akan worldview and cosmology to be matriarchal, or for Akan women to be at the helm of state affairs even though they have the requisite power.

Akan societies are matrilineal. Akan societies, Asante lineages and Akan Asante Kokofu lineages while they descended from their various clan matriarchs are not necessarily matriarchal. History places many Akan women at the battlefield long before Yaa Asantewaa and the 1900 uprising in Asante history. Some Akan women sometimes joined their warriors into battle (Meyerowitz 1956:54). Afowaa Dankonto of Domaa was captured at the battlefield (p.55); Bantama Framaa fought and beheaded the chief of Tafo<sup>133</sup>, Yaa Akoto of Kuntanase fought alongside Asantehene Osei Akoto Okoawia<sup>134</sup>. Amoanimaa,  $\square$ hemaa of Amakom (Around 1661 before Kwaman became Kumasi the capital and center of the Asante kingdom) fought a neighboring  $\square$ hemaa for a golden

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<sup>132</sup>“The ‘matrilineal belt’ is an area in Africa south of the equator where matrilineality is predominant. The Matrilineal belt runs as a diagonal from the Atlantic to the Indian oceans crossing Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique” (Holden, 2003)

<sup>133</sup> Fieldnotes: Interview with Kwame Gyau Kyem on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2017 at Bantama palace, Kumasi

<sup>134</sup> Fieldnotes. Interview with Kwame Gyau Kyem on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2017 at the Bantama palace, Kumasi

mortar. Women who had passed child-bearing age also fought in the rear-guard of the Asante army.<sup>135</sup>

As noted by Aidoo (1981), all Akan derive their genetically significant link from the matrilineal social organization. Descent is through the female line. It is through her blood (mogya) and womb and uterine (yefunu) that she bestows or transmits to her children their citizenship, rights to succession and inheritance.

Among the matrilineal Akan, where the position of chief or king is reserved for men, women occasionally occupy the highest positions as chiefs as an interim measure when there are no suitable male heirs or when there are crises, disputes, and conflicts. Examples are Nana Dokua of Akyem in the nineteenth century, Nana Ama Serwaa of Dwaben in Asante in the twentieth century and Abrefi Koto of Techiman in Brong Ahafo in the twentieth century. (Rattray 1923, Busia 1951, Boahen 1964). Chiefs (male stool occupants) can never occupy the female stool as the women do, and this is because the women own the stools, not the men so in the chief's absence, it goes back to the women.

#### **5.4 Kokofu women's notions and concept of power**

It has been said that the Kokofu stool was always occupied by women. Kokofu Hema is titled Osagyefo and carries gun at all public functions. As narrated by Kokofuhene, Barima Okogyasuo Offe Akwasi II, a key informant:

All these stools are female stools. Originally it was the women alone travelling with their stools on their back. All the Ayokofo<sup>136</sup> that travelled from Nyanoase (Asamankese) were led by women. The Teacher Mante area, is the original area of Akan settlement. We heard that some Akan groups had also settled at Bono, like Tekyiman. I don't know how their migration went. But as for us, our leader who led us was a woman, Ankyea Nyame. She had men but they were like her security men, and hunters. And she carried her stool on her back. She also travelled with her deity and its linguist. It was during the search for settlement that our great ancestress, Ankyea Nyame thought it wise to select a son to lead the whole

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<sup>135</sup> Fieldnotes. Interview with Barima Okogyasuo Offe Akwasi II - Kokofuhene on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018 at Kokofu.

<sup>136</sup> Members of the Oyoko clan

group with authority to guide and direct the hunters and security personnel. Similarly, Nsuta and Kuntanase were led by an ancestress Nana Yetaa. That is why when the stool become vacant, it is the woman who chooses a replacement. And in cases where there is no male to succeed, the  $\square$ hemaa continues to run things until she finds a suitable male (brother, son, or grandson). The Kokofu stool is the first Kumasi stool, the first few Asantehemaas are buried at Kokofu. After the transformation of Kwaman, into Kumasi the  $\square$ hemaa was still chosen from the Oyokofamily of Kokofu until very recently. The original mponponsuo<sup>137</sup> is still at Kokofu.<sup>138</sup>

#### 5.4.1 The concept of power

The concept of power emanating from the group discussions, key informants, and other participants.

Using the question guide, the outline of questions was read to the groups and participants and they were asked to just have a conversation to address any aspect they were comfortable with.

All the key informants, participants of focus groups and individual interviewees said that women have power; they have always had power though it is not always obvious to outsiders.

Èdeen na yefre no se tumi? Tumi ye Akan kasa anaa Asante kasa a ekyere se woaka asem bi a obi ntumi nyi ano; ekyere se asem a wokaae no, oibara ntumi nnane no.

Tumi ye aho $\square$ den a biribiara ntumi nsesa no. Na ad $\square$ n nti na y $\square$ se mmaa wo tumi? Mmaa wo tumi. Efiri awoe $\square$  mu ebese owuo mu, mmaa tumi nti biribiara si b $\square$ k $\square$   $\square$ w $\square$  efie. Enti y $\square$ n Akanman mu ha se yere si ade $\square$  a y $\square$ p $\square$   $\square$  nipa a y $\square$ rek $\square$ fa ab $\square$ si akonwa no so no  $\square$ firi  $\square$ baa fie.  $\square$ kyer $\square$  s $\square$  y $\square$ p $\square$  ade $\square$  afiri  $\square$ baa nky $\square$ n a seesei ara na yeahu.

(Mixed focus group discussion on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 at the Kokofu palace)

What do we call power? Tumi (Power) is an Akan or Asante word that means your spoken word cannot be challenged or changed.

Power is an ability that nobody can change. So why are we asking whether women should have power or do women have power? Women have power. Women's power is from birth to death. Because of women's power, everything is always calm at home. In this Akan kingdom, when a

<sup>137</sup> The main sword used for swearing allegiance by Asantehene and other paramount chiefs of Asanteman.

<sup>138</sup> Fieldwork: Interview with Kokofuhene Barima Okogyasuo Offe Akwasi II on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018 at the Kokofu palace.

stool becomes vacant, we ask the woman for a candidate. This is because it is easier to find things entrusted to women.

The discussion started with the general admission and recognition that Asante/Kokofu women have power. Many participants, mostly men, cited the power of women and how well she is endowed with all these powers which they (women) have generously delegated to their sons, brothers, and uncles.

They continued with the explanation that:

Ɔbaa na kanniba biara nim se ɔnona kuro no ye ne dea. Akonnwa biara wo Ɔbaa. Yen Asante ha nkonnwa; efiri Dikuro so ara kɔpem akeseɛ so, ɛw<sup>ɔ</sup> Ɔbaa.

(Focus group discussion, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018, Kokofu)

It is the woman that every Akan knows the town and the stool belong to. Every stool is for a woman. In our Asante region here, from the smallest stool to the biggest stool and all the other paramount ones, are for women. (translation)

As summed up by another participant,

Ɛno nti se akonnwa no to a na yeako bias ɔbaapanyin no anaase ɔhemmaa no a ɔwo kuro mu ho no se ma yen nipa na ɔmmra mme tena akonnwa no so na ɔnhwe koro no so mma wo (emma ɔbaa no o). Ɛnam se ɔno na yebisa no na yemmisa mfiri mmarima ho no, ɛno kyere se mmaa wotumi. Ɔno nsona “ɔpointe” se ‘mepɛ nipa asomasi’.

(Nana Obeng Dade, Gyasehene. Kokofu palace on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

That is why when a stool becomes vacant, we ask the woman to give us someone to come and look after the affairs of the state for you (the woman o). The fact that we ask women, not men, demonstrates the fact that women have power. And she is the one who points that ‘this is the person I want’. (Translation)

At this point, the researcher probed further with ‘but the candidate she appoints can be rejected’. This was followed by another round of explanations that they do not ‘reject’ her candidate, they rather plead with her to give them another candidate due to specific problems or concerns they have with the nominee. This was supported with:

Nka ɔbaa no nni tumi preko a, nka oyi maa oman no nona wawie nadwuma, na nso na onwie<sup>ɔ</sup>. Ye ɔƆan ko ne ho bio because tumi no a yede yii nipa no se ɔmmɛdi kuro no so no, ɔbaa na saa tumi no kuta no.

Enti obeyi nipa, na wayi nipa, na wayi nipa. Ekyere se kuro no ne dea.  
Tumi no, ne akonwa no a wo soso ho dae<sup>o</sup> no, ewoo baa.  
(Participant - 1st focus group discussion Kokofuhene's palace on 21<sup>st</sup>  
March 2018)

If the woman did not have the absolute power, her job of choosing a candidate would end once she nominates but it does not end there. We still go back to her, because the power used to choose a suitable person to lead the town still resides with the woman. So, she will nominate, and nominate until an agreeable candidate is found. This is because she owns the state and owns the stool he is dreaming of occupying. (Translation)

Kokofu women are known to be supportive of their husbands and men in general. Kokofu Ankobeahene Nana Adusei Appiah confirmed that:

Mmaa wo tumi a yede hwe sika so. Won de tumisem boa mmarima ma wo hwe sika yie. Mmaa hwe sika yie kyen mmarima.  
(1<sup>st</sup> focus group discussion. Kokofu palace on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

Women have the power to manage money and finances. They use the power they have as women (womanhood) to help men to manage the household finances. Women are better financial managers than men.

Interestingly, it was the male participants who continued to address the power of Akan women in the economic sphere. They cited the idea of saving for a rainy day as a woman's idea in the household.

#### 5.4.2 The concept of Abrewa<sup>139</sup>

That Abrewa is a mythological figure has become part of women and power discourse. It is alleged variously that Abrewa is a mythological figure albeit good with serious lessons for all kinds of negotiation situations. It is claimed that there is no Abrewa consulted anywhere; just the concept is used during stalemate or an impasse in a conflict resolution. (Assanful, 2013). It is suggested that "we are going to consult Aberewa" is actually a time out for a closed-door mediation" (ibid), and that "since the Nana Aberewa is a mythological figure, the people who are involved in the listening are human beings" (Ibid). However, Abrewa is not just a mythological figure; she is real and the most endowed

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<sup>139</sup> Sometimes spelt Aberewa. In cases where an author is quoted, the spelling reflects the original spelling.



lineages have them as zenith in the twenty-first century, as in the case of the Oyoko family at Kumasi Manhyia, in the person of the late Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem and Nana Ama Konadu II, the current Asantehemaa. This researcher met a few instances during this fieldwork when she was pinned down with the question, “So do people really consult Abrewa or is it just a wonderful idea?” The researcher had to divulge excerpts from a conversation with a confidential informant:

In 2003, during the deliberations for the nomination of a candidate for the Bantama stool<sup>140</sup>, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene consulted Abrewa, in this case Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem. It is alleged that there were eight contestants and the Asantehene already had a favourite candidate to be announced the following day. The night before that Asanteman council meeting, the Asantehene paid a visit to the Asantehemaa. After some deliberation, she suggested a candidate with a couple of reasons to support it. It took the Asantehene a couple of hours to appear before Asanteman that day and when he finally spoke, he simply said “Abrewa se yenfa akonwa no ema Kwadwo Asare.”<sup>141</sup> He did not even explain it because it was neither his idea nor his candidate.

In this fieldwork, the concept of Abrewa<sup>142</sup> came up and was cited numerously:

Asem ayere so dendeenden no yese yenko bisa Abrewa. Abrewa biara nni ho a ɔye barima. ɔye ɔbaa. Enti mmarima asem akyere so dendeenden no koraa no, ɔbaa na ye kɔ bisa no, na wama adwane se monkɔ ye no sei. Abrewa de akorɔkorɔ ne kasakoa kyere nadwen akyere yen. Na yabeka se ye ko bisaa Abrewa no, Abrewa asem a ɔka kyeree yen nie. Enti yere hwe se asem a ɔbaa no aka akyere mmarmima no wɔn bedi so. Eno ma asem no a ɔbaa no aka no eye tumi. ‘Di de maka no so’. ɔrehwe se mmarmima no bedi nea waka no so. Nti ɔman no mu nso no saa ara na ete, efiri afie afie mu kofa akuro akuro so, kosi amanhene so.

Nana Obeng Dade, Gyaasehene- Kokofu palace, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

When a case has reached an impasse, we decide to consult Abrewa. There is no Abrewa who is a male. Then she guides us as to how to proceed with reasons and they always work. She always urges strongly through a subtle and sympathetic dialogue that her instructions are followed, and they always work. She will say, “please do what I said.” And we always do. So that translates into power. This accelerates into the stools at the family kinship level, through the town (village) level, to the paramountcy level.

<sup>140</sup> Stool in this case stands for the office of the Bantama, which is the first General of the Kumasi Traditional council and the leader of the Asanteman army.

<sup>141</sup> Translation: “Abrewa says we should give the stool to Kwadwo Asare.”

<sup>142</sup> In the Akan worldview, Abrewa is the female counterpart of Akwakora. Abrewa is the oldest and wisest leader and head of the lineage.

Abrewa in Akan society is a combination of seniority, rank, and womanhood<sup>143</sup>. Abrewa literally means old woman. In the Akan religion and worldview, the only entity older, wiser, better endowed, more indispensable and more knowledgeable than Abrewa is Nyankopon (the omnipotent God). Abrewa is not a mythical figure<sup>144</sup> and there is an Abrewa in every Akan household: she may not be as old as our imagination will allow us to accept, but well-endowed with the requisite wisdom for custodianship and knowledge of her lineage. In some cases, and instances, the  $\square$ hema and the Abrewa and  $\square$ baapanin are fused together: As in the case of Nana Afia Kobi Serwaa Ampem – Asantehema, 1977-2016, and the current Asantehema Nana Amma Konadu II.

#### 5.4.3 $\square$ hema (Hema) (Ahema – plural)

The Akan believe that their ancestors traveled many distances before settling down and choosing who should occupy stools and continue leading. As Nana Birago narrated

Nananom<sup>145</sup> nkonwa hyehy $\square$  yakyi na y $\square$ hwehw $\square$  tenabea k $\square$ pem se ye be duruu de $\square$  y $\square$ te. Abakos $\square$ m mu no, nananom bi yi akonwa kum nkwadaa. Asona baapanin bi a na  $\square$ de n'abusua efiri Adanse  $\square$ ko Akyem kum ne ba de akonwa hy $\square$  nakyi, efiri se na w $\square$ ntumi emfa akonwa ne akwadaa nhy $\square$  akyire mbom. Mmaadwa ne akonwa panin. Barima biara a woforo akonwa no, behye  $\square$ hema yam preko pe. Wo wofa koraa wode akonwa ma no a, wofa beye wo ba.

(Nana Yaa Birago, Asenfi-Adumasa Hema)<sup>146</sup>

Nananom carried the stools on their backs while searching for a suitable place to settle. In many instances they secured the stools on their backs over infants. In one Asona case, the matriarch travelling from Adansi to Akyem, killed an infant to save the stool because she could not carry both on her back. The woman's stool is the senior stool. Any man who ascends

<sup>143</sup> The Akan concept of womanhood is derived from personhood. One evolves and graduate into womanhood, one is not born a woman.

<sup>144</sup> Sometimes referred to as Nana Abrewa, or Abrewa Difie (Difie means head of the house). Sometimes spelt Aberewa.

<sup>145</sup> Nananom means Ancestors. It is equivalent to 'our forefathers' in some cultures. In the Akan culture, Nananom is not gendered, though the emphasis is on women because of the matrilineal descent. In this context, Nananom refers to the matriarchs who traveled with their stools. It is only the women who carried the stools.

<sup>146</sup> Fieldnotes: Interview with Nana Yaa Birago at Senfi Adumasa on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2016. She was 102 years old and had reigned as the  $\square$ hema for over ninety years. Nana Yaa Birago is not just an Abrewa Difie, she grew up at Kumasi Hia (Hia is a section of Manhyia palace reserved for the king's wives and their attendants), and also married and lived in Kokofu which makes her relevant in this study: as both a bonafide Kanniba and a woman who knows and understands the ways of not just Asante women thinking but also Kokofu women's actions.

any stool through the woman's lineage becomes her child, part of her womb. Even if she gives the stool to her uncle, her uncle becomes her son.

Kwame Gyau-Kyem also intimated that:

ɔhemaa is the oldest institution in the Akan worldview. ɔhemaa's stool (mmaa dwa) is the akonwa panin (the most senior stool in the Akan world). Mmaa dwa na ɔwoo abandwa<sup>147</sup>. Not just biologically but the mmaadwa precedes the abandwa<sup>148</sup> in any purification and consecration rite.

(Kwame Gyau Kyem (Key informant) 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview at The Date Palm Hotel, Accra on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017)

ɔhemaa is the demonstration and symbol of matrilineage as it exists at every micro level in Akan society. It has been asserted that ɔhemaa being powerful is an anomaly (Farrar 1997); that assertion is misplaced. It is rather the norm in Akan society because the institution of ɔhemaa is the demonstration and illustration of power, and the fact that every Akan woman is not ɔhemaa does not mean they do not have the powers and authorities exercised by ɔhemaa. There is usually one stool per lineage so only one of the women can be called ɔhemaa, but all the women are potential heads of matrilineage- with potential fertile wombs, cradle to nurture and kitchen to feed sons, husbands, brothers, fathers and uncles.<sup>149</sup> In the nubility rites of the Asante girls, every girl is 'enstooled' ceremonially as part of the initiation, and the six-day confinement is referred to as 'The six-day Queen mother'.(Sarpong 1977:21) ɔhemaa is the symbol of any Akan matriclan elder woman. ɔhemaa is the institutional mother of the entire community. The position of ɔhemaa is enshrined in the constitution of Ghana as:

A person hailing from the appropriate family and lineage, has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or

<sup>147</sup> It is the female stool that gave birth to the male stool.

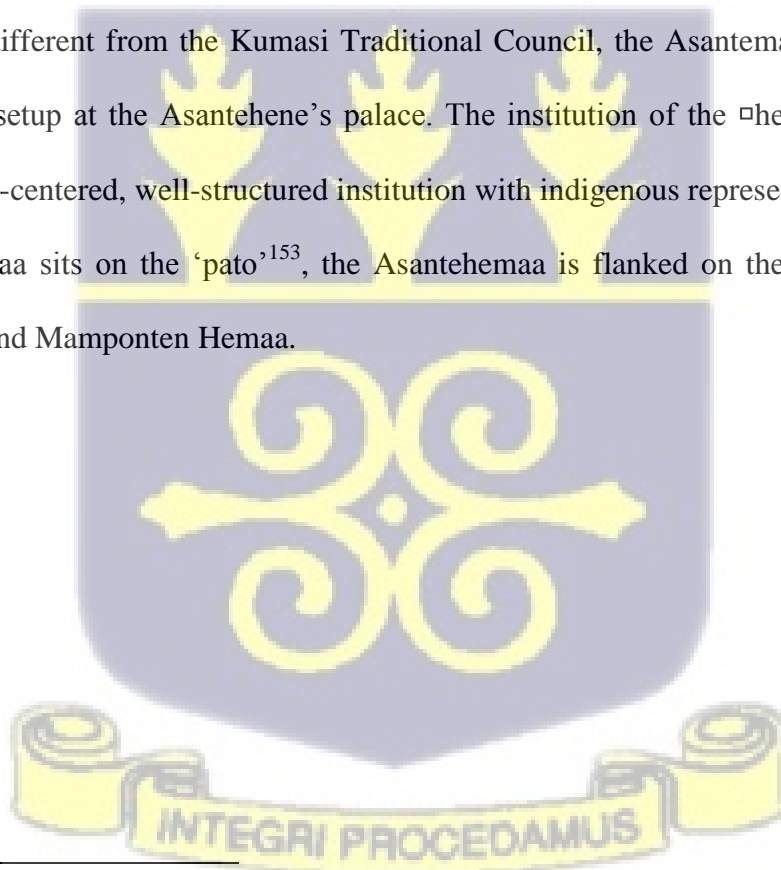
<sup>148</sup> Male stool/symbol of office.

<sup>149</sup> The very first thing that a girl receives during the Asante 'bragro' rites is a stool, which is a symbol and initiation into womanhood to an extent, not full personhood.

installed as a chief or Queenmother<sup>150</sup> in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage.

(The chieftaincy act, Article 277 of the 1992 Constitution)<sup>151</sup>

Though the institution is generally termed chieftaincy, its symbol is the “stool”, and it is the occupant, the chief who exercises powers delegated to him by the queenmother. It was this “delegated power and influence wielded by the chiefly natives of Gold Coast which compelled the colonial administration to adopt the policy of indirect rule” (Rathbone, 2000). In a sense, women’s power was not obvious to the colonizers; rather it appeared that men, especially chiefs, were very powerful so they decided to utilize them in their policy of indirect rule. Every  $\varnothing$ hemaa has a black stool with a court and an ‘ntam’<sup>152</sup> which start the judicial process. The institution also has an administrative structure which is distinctly different from the Kumasi Traditional Council, the Asanteman council and the horseshoe setup at the Asantehene’s palace. The institution of the  $\varnothing$ hemaa is matrilineal and mother-centered, well-structured institution with indigenous representations. When the Asantehemaa sits on the ‘pato’<sup>153</sup>, the Asantehemaa is flanked on the right by Kokofu, Kenyase, and Mamponent Hemaa.

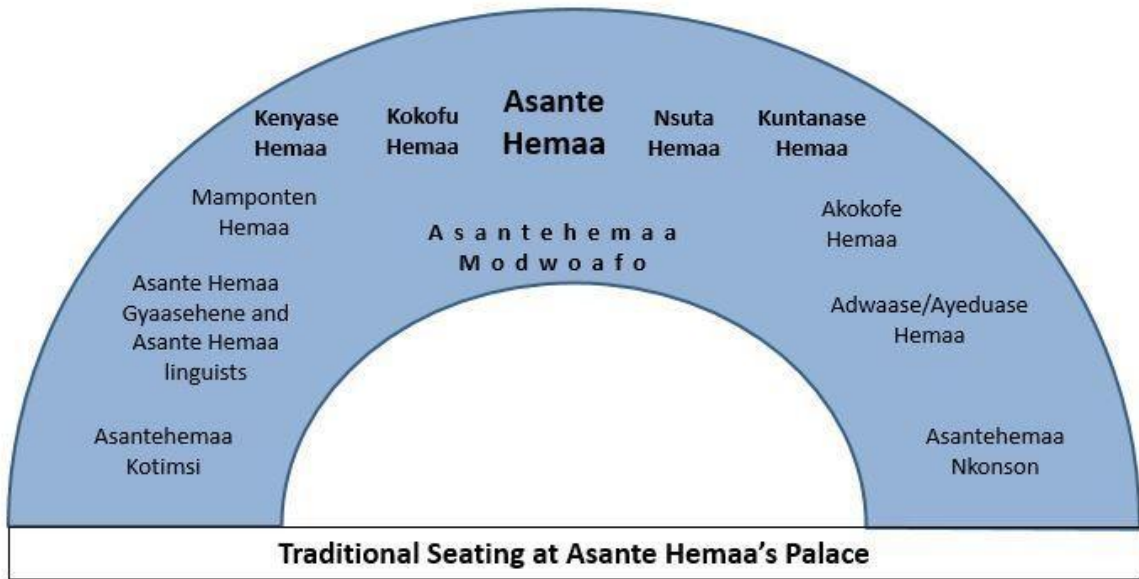


<sup>150</sup> Queen mother is not the equivalent of  $\varnothing$ hemaa in the Akan language. It is used in many previous writings and is accommodated here for want of a better word. Throughout this work, a chief, king or Queenmother ( $\varnothing$ hene or  $\varnothing$ hemaa) refers to the religious-political leader of an Akan ethnic group of people.

<sup>151</sup>The above definition is also reinforced by the chieftaincy Act 2008 sec 759.

<sup>152</sup> An ‘ntam’ is an oath which begins the process of litigation. For example, when person A swears the Asantehemaa’s oath on person B, a witness reports this to the Asantehemaa’s court or person A goes to the court to report and B is summoned to appear.

<sup>153</sup> ‘pato’ is an adulterated word for patio. It is a reception area in most traditional Asante homes where visitors are formally received.



**Figure 10: Traditional seating at Asantehema's palace at Manhyia, Kumasi**

Asantehema is flanked on the left by Nsuta, Kuntanase, Akokofe and Adwaase/Ayeduase Hema. When it is a state (official) 'sitting'<sup>154</sup> of the Kumasi Traditional Council, Asantehema is flanked on the right by Kenyase, Mamponen, followed by Asantehema Gyaasehene, and Asantehema Akyeamehene, followed by Kotimsi and Nkonson. The Asantehema is flanked on the left by the members of the Adako who are not of paramount status and belong to the Kumasi Traditional Council (Akokofehema, Adwaasehema), followed by Kotimsi and Nkonson.

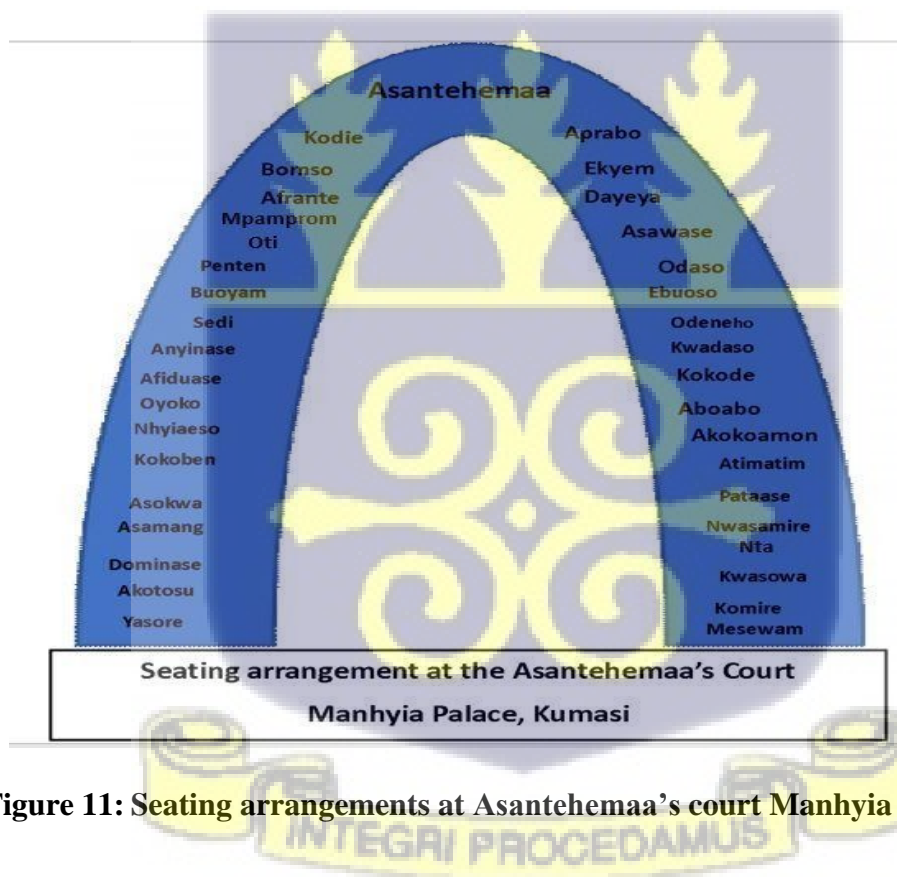
The security of the Asantehema is under the control of Adumhene: Currently headed by Bafuor Agyei Kesse, who oversees the day-to-day security of the Asantehema household. The coordination of the household and the court is under the Asantehema Gyaasehene<sup>155</sup>: The Gyaase<sup>156</sup> division is currently headed by Nana Adoma Serwa, who is also the current Dompoase Hema. She is the head of the household which comprises of Kotimsi,

<sup>154</sup> When Asantehene 'sits' in state for a pre-planned event or hearing of the Kumasi traditional council or when Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs meet at the Regional House, Asantehema also sits on her 'pato' formally flanked by her family members as described above.

<sup>155</sup> All high-ranking positions in the Asantehema's household have male titles, even though the holders are female. Examples are Gyasehene, Kyeamehene and Modwoahene who are all women.

<sup>156</sup> The Gyaase division comprise of the kitchen, logistics and all activities except security.

Nkonson, and mmodwoafo<sup>157</sup>. She attends to and delegates the day-to-day activities in the household, including the administration of the Asantehemaa's court. Asantehemaa has six linguists headed by the Asantehemaa Kyeamehene, Nana Konadu, who is also the Esresoheemaa. There are specific towns that are under the Asantehemaa's jurisdiction. These include Kodie, Bomso Afrante, Penten, Mpamprom, Buoyam, Sedi, Anyinase, Afiduase-Oyoko, Nhyiaeso, Kokoben, Oti, Aprabo, Ekyem-Dayeya, Asawase, Odaso, OdenehoKwadaso, Kokode, Aboabo, Akokoamon, Ebuoso, Atimatim-Pataase, Emuoso, Nwansamire, Atabiriso, Kwasowa, Nta, Komire, Mesewam, Asokwa, Asamang, Akotosu, Dominase and Yasore, among others.<sup>158</sup> Asantehemaa administers through the chiefs of these towns and many other administrative attendants.



**Figure 11: Seating arrangements at Asantehemaa's court Manhyia palace, Kumasi**

<sup>157</sup> Kotimso, Nkonson and Mmodwoafo are stool attendants, kitchen attendants and chambermaids in the Asantehemaa's household. These positions are also by ascription and lineage.

<sup>158</sup> These twenty-four towns are completely under the Asantehemaa. Their land cases and everything involving these towns does not appear before the Asantehemaa's court but goes straight to her in her living room or small private 'pato'.

Asantehemaa has a court with well laid down administrative structure. She is flanked on both sides by twenty-four chiefs (Adikro<sup>159</sup>) and their corresponding Mmaa- mpaninfo<sup>160</sup> representing twenty-four of her towns which constitute her council. There are many other regulars at the court who usually come to listen to deliberations to learn for their respective courts.

There are diverse cases coming to the Asantehemaa's court. They include stool land cases, succession, domestic and marital cases, and curses<sup>161</sup>.

As the apex of the matriline, the Asantehemaa makes sure that all rites relating to customs of atonement, purification and pacification are adhered and observed accordingly. Until a few months before her death, Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem II facilitated and discharged all her duties on 'dapaa'<sup>162</sup>. She remembered all the deities, stool sites, mausoleums, asonieso, and their requirements.

Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem II performed elaborate puberty rites (Bragro) for her attendants who become of age. There are always elders in the household who are delegated to guide the performance of those rites.

It is argued (Manuh 1986) that "only minor cases such as those about curses, domestic squabbles and minor boundary issues appeared before the Asantehemaa's court". This is a misconception because Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem's style of discharging her duties

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<sup>159</sup> Adikro is the plural of Odikro. Odikro is a subchief. In this traditional setting, they are Asantehemaa's Abrempon (Obrempon - singular), but considered 'Caretakers'. They report directly to the Asantehemaa.

<sup>160</sup> Mmaa-mpaninfo -

(m̄baapanin - singular) is the female counterpart of Odikro. This m̄baapanin is a stool occupant but lesser than an m̄hemaa in m̄tatu.

<sup>161</sup> A curse is an invocation intended to expose or punish a suspect. It is well known that curses emanate from many conflicts and in many cases hearing 'curse' cases bring out the actual conflicts and their origins.

<sup>162</sup> Dapaa is the day before Akwasidae or Awukudae. It is the Saturday before Akwasidae or the Tuesday before Awukudae. It is the day for cleaning and preparing for the cleansing, atonement and purification of stools on Awukudae or Akwasidae. On the Dapaa, the various stool attendants visit the m̄hene and m̄hemaa with a list of required items for the following day's activities.

was quite different<sup>163</sup>. She always felt that when two parties seek redress at a court, the process should not be rushed. In addition, the court should make disputants feel accommodated and heard. However, the Asante Hema always felt that issues about her land, her towns and her attendants need not wait for the court. She did not need the court to hear and act on those cases. The Asantehema treated land and boundary disputes with utmost urgency. She knew all her boundaries and could call the parties even on a Sunday to hear and adjudicate cases. She would just summon them to her living room on a Saturday or Sunday. Hear the two parties and tell them everything she knew about the land and boundary and tell the parties what she knew about both families. And as she concluded in one of those instances:

Wo baa kuro no mu dabɔn? Me na me de hɔ maa wo nana ɔe ɔnidi ho. ɔhye no nna hɔ. Nɔuo no ne hye. Mempa ɔaa, entra nɔuo no, mma me nte ɔho aɔm bio.<sup>164</sup>

When did you come to that town? I am the one who gave that land to your grandmother to 'eat' there. The boundary is not there. The stream is the boundary. I do not like that. Do not cross the stream. Do not let me hear that again. (Translation)

None of the disputants have ever returned to Manhyia with the same issues. Most of the cases that are heard on Tuesdays and Fridays are cases needing mediation. Those are also the cases needing witnesses and sometimes the Law Enforcement Agency to continue in case there is any element of criminality. They are also video, and audio recorded for the archives at Manhyia. From the Oti Case (2014) and Afrante Case (2015), Edited with examples, in the cases of Oti and Afrante land boundary cases. Oti Dikro lied about re-entering the land, the Asantehema sent people to investigate and when it was confirmed to be true, the Oti Dikro was destooled by Asantehema in 2014. Similarly, at Afrante in 2015, the Afrante Dikro sold land designated for stool carriers who were serving under Asantehema. When the case appeared before Asantehema, she urged the Odikro to get the land back by any means necessary. He quickly raised the money and paid the person he had sold the land to and returned the land to the family.

All paramountcies in Ashanti region have the authority to have courts. Most of the Ahemaa<sup>165</sup> have towns under their authority. They also have ‘ntam’ which starts the

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<sup>163</sup> This is to address an issue raised during her fieldwork. Around 1984 and 1986 Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem was the Asantehemaa. However, the current Asantehemaa, Nana Ama Konadu has been operating the court the same way.

<sup>164</sup> (Attributed to Asantehemaa Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem II by Gyaasehene Nana Adoma Serwa on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at Manhyia Palace, Kumasi).

<sup>165</sup> Plural for ɔhemaa

judicial process. Similarly, Kokofu Hemaa also has an elaborate court with attendants from the various towns which fall under her authority.

Close examination of the dynamics of power illustrates that Ohemaa in pre-colonial Akan exercised considerably more power than they did during colonial period and since (Wilks, 1975; Aidoo, 1981; McCaskie, 1995). Stoeltje in her writings noted that

Ignored by the British, despite Rattray’s observation that they could be important to the stability of society and by the newly independent state of Ghana, these women have survived the encounter with the West, still clear about their position in society. (Stoeltje, 1988).

Of all the positions of female traditional leadership, the most pervasive, well known, and widespread is that of the ɔhemaa. This status is rooted in the Akan matrilineal system. The position of the ɔhemaa (Plural =Ahemaa) in Akan communities fits into the leading role of women in the Akan worldview. All the eight clans of the Akan trace their origin from a putative ancestress. It has also been noted that “originally it was the ɔhemaa who was the overall leader of the community or state but delegated a male member of the lineage to act as ɔhene”. (Busia, 1951)

Her role in Asante and most other Akan communities is very crucial to traditional governance. The ɔhene and the ɔhemaa are the principal custodians of the heritage handed down by the ancestors.

In *Asante Queen mothers in Government and politics in the nineteenth century*, Aidoo (1981) takes us through a reconstruction of the history of the operational dynamics of their position and scope and modalities of their power within actual social and political processes.

While Aidoo's work is about Asante queen mothers, the point should be made that Asante is a subset of Akan and some generalizations can be made about most Akan Queen mothers. Furthermore, the point needs also be made that though most studies and writings have been about queen mothers, they have been made about Akan matrilineal heads and kinship system. Focusing on Ahemaa as a sign of Akan female authority, Stoeltje (1997) "explores the role from the perspective of performance, directing attention to actual situations and events and actual individuals". This form of leadership is characterized as 'a dual gender system by scholars, or one with gender parallelism' (Okonjo, 1976; Sudarkasa, 1987). Central to the dynamics of chieftaincy and to the identity of every individual member of the culture is 'the kinship system, which is matrilineal. A group adhering to a kinship system in which ancestry is traced through the maternal line'.<sup>166</sup>

The functions associated with the  $\square$ hemaa among the Akan are distributed and performed by varied role players in other ethnic groups in the country. They are distributed between mothers, sisters, wives, elderly women, and other selected women who have leadership qualities in each community.

#### **5.4.4 $\square$ baapanin**

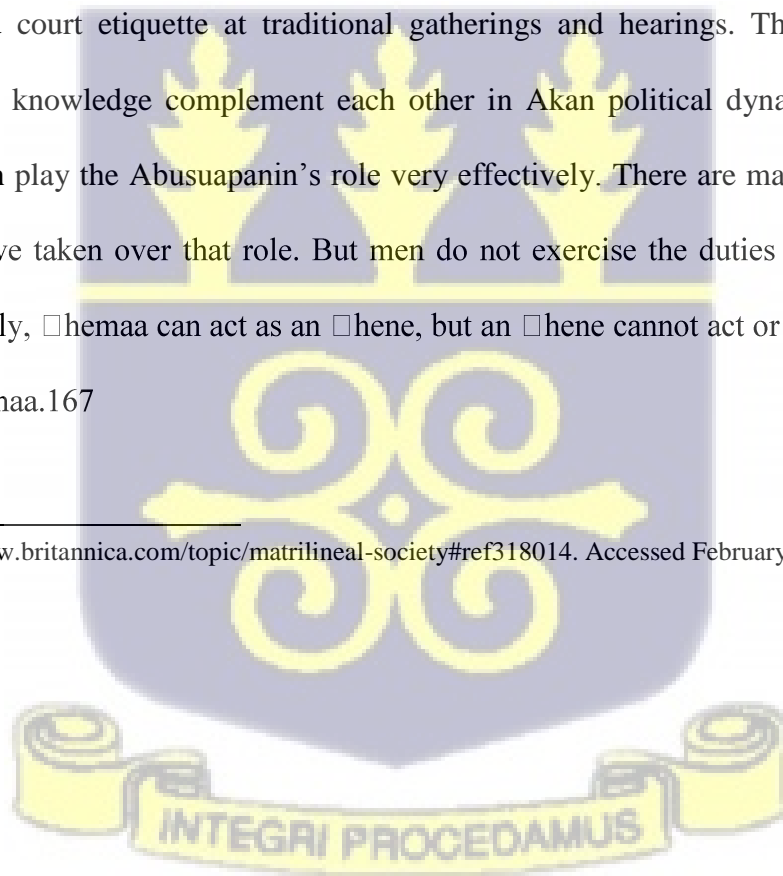
Each lineage segment in any Akan community usually has one notable old woman who is referred to as the  $\square$ baapanin ( $\square$ baa-female and Panin-elder) in case the lineage has a black stool, then that position is formalized as a title for the stool occupant. It is the  $\square$ baapanin position which graduates into the  $\square$ hemaa title for women on black stools of paramountcies of larger, more powerful, and elaborate lineages. The title of  $\square$ hemaa is

usually applied when the town chief is chosen from the  $\square$ baapanin's lineage. Most Akan villages and communities are headed by an Odikro and  $\square$ baapanin. The title of  $\square$ hene and  $\square$ hema are given if they are recognized as Abrempon, or paramountcy with towns under their jurisdiction, and not just merely because they occupy a black stool.

#### 5.4.1 **Abusuapanin – Administrative head of family for external relations**

Apart from the  $\square$ baapanin, there is also an Abusuapanin who is the lineage head or group captain. But the Abusuapanin does not become a chief. The Abusuapanin speaks for the lineage, but in consultation with the  $\square$ baapanin. Akan women tend to know about the details of kinship more than men. And the men usually know more about procedural details and court etiquette at traditional gatherings and hearings. These two forms of specialized knowledge complement each other in Akan political dynamics. However, a woman can play the Abusuapanin's role very effectively. There are many instances when women have taken over that role. But men do not exercise the duties of the  $\square$ baapanin. Occasionally,  $\square$ hema can act as an  $\square$ hene, but an  $\square$ hene cannot act or perform the duties of an  $\square$ hema.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>167</sup><https://www.britannica.com/topic/matrilineal-society#ref318014>. Accessed February 19, 2018.



#### 5.4.5 The institution of Abrewa, ɔhema, and ɔbaapanin

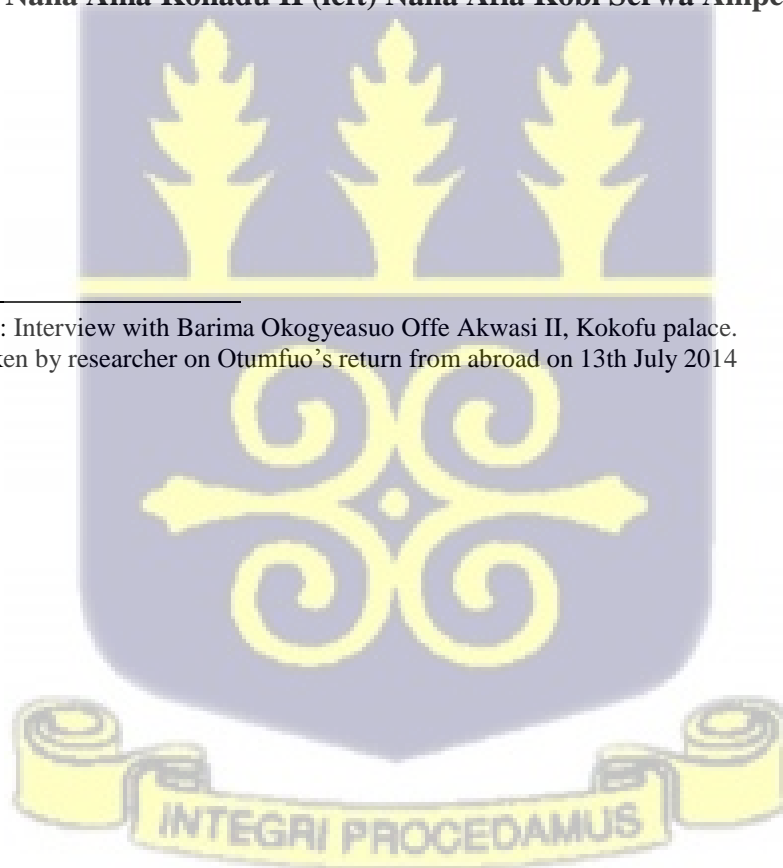
Occasionally Abrewa, ɔhema, and ɔbaapanin manifest into one body which is the ideal.



Figure 12: Nana Ama Konadu II (left) Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem II (right)<sup>168</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Fieldnotes: Interview with Barima Okogyasuo Offe Akwasi II, Kokofu palace.

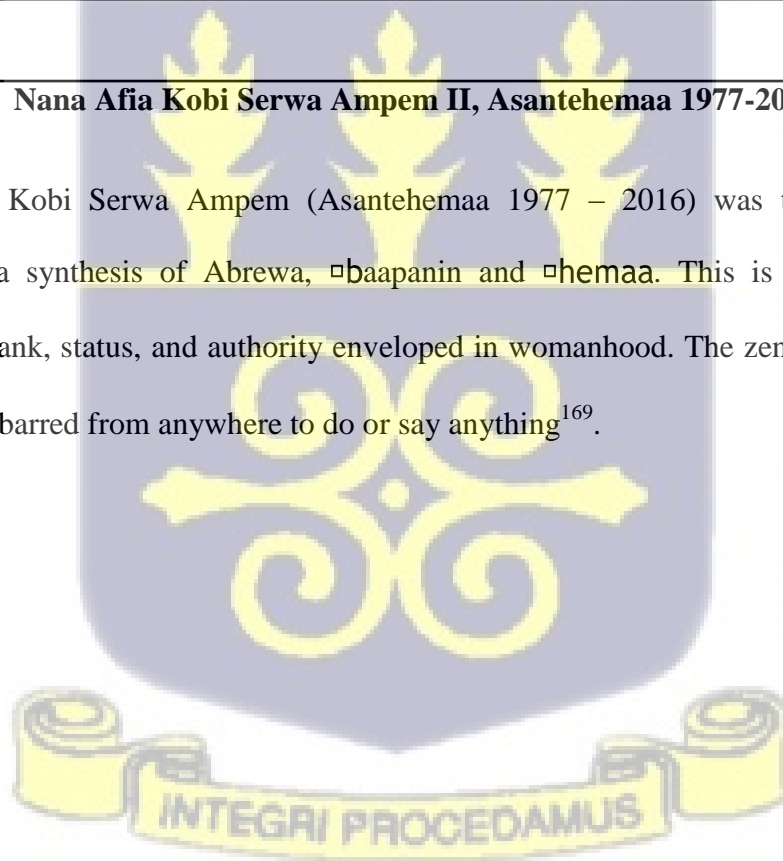
<sup>168</sup> Picture taken by researcher on Otumfuo's return from abroad on 13th July 2014





**Figure 13: Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem II, Asantehemaa 1977-2016**

Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem (Asantehemaa 1977 – 2016) was the quintessential  $\square$ hemaa- a synthesis of Abrewa,  $\square$ baapanin and  $\square$ hemaa. This is a combination of seniority, rank, status, and authority enveloped in womanhood. The zenith is the  $\square$ hemaa who is not barred from anywhere to do or say anything<sup>169</sup>.



<sup>169</sup> An example is menstruation, they can enter stool rooms and also pour libation



**Figure 14: Nana Ama Konadu II, Asantehemaa 2017-present**

As people saw Nana Konadu's choice and enstoolment as Asantehemaa in 2017 with fascination, they did not seem to appreciate these key concepts in the Akan worldview of power and leadership. Nana Konadu has also appeared as the ideal  $\square$ hemaa, a fusion of Abrewa,  $\square$ baapanin and  $\square$ hemaa, following her mother's footsteps. She was not chosen merely because she is the daughter of Nana Afia Kobi Serwa Ampem II, and the eldest sister of the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II. Nana Ama Konadu is the most senior female of the Oyoko royal family in Kumasi. Before her enstoolment, she was affectionately called 'Nana Panin', which means eldest Nana.

She led in funeral processions and sung dirges for the past thirty years. She facilitated naming ceremonies, and "bragro"<sup>170</sup>, she led funerals and purification rites and led the

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<sup>170</sup>Bragro is the female initiation in the Akan culture. This follows the initial menstruation of a girl.

royal house with the Abusua Panin in all matters needing the family's attention and leadership.

#### 5.4.6 When these positions are circumvented in the selection process

There are many instances where male occupants of a stool circumvent this harmony by choosing younger women as  $\text{m}^{\text{h}}\text{emaa}$ . In this case, everything becomes challenging to the populace and the family. As confirmed by Barima Okogyasuo Offe Akwasi II (Kokofuhene), a key informant:

Yes, women have power. They just need to understand their history, know their lineage and how to comport themselves. Problems arise when noticeably young women are selected for enstoolment. These young women are usually not well groomed for the position, cannot play the role of Abrewa due to lack of knowledge base on lineage and history. At such tender age they are also more likely to be restrained from many customary and spiritual duties due to the menstruation and other traditional barriers such as sexual intercourse on sacred days and periods.

(Kokofuhene Barima Okogyasuo Offe Akwasi II on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018 at Kokofu palace)

Any woman under the age of forty is

- Most likely still menstruating and therefore excluded from many stool room activities.<sup>171</sup>
- Seemingly young and therefore difficult for elders and general populace to approach as 'Abrewa'.<sup>172</sup>

The above issue was raised by other participants in the focus group.

Mmarimma no bi de mmaa dwa no ma nkwadaa s<sup>ne</sup>a  $\text{m}^{\text{b}}\text{y}^{\text{a}}$  a, won 'nk<sup>b</sup>isa Abewa'. S<sup>o</sup>  $\text{m}^{\text{b}}\text{y}^{\text{a}}$  a obiara mmisa w<sup>n</sup> bribiara, afei nso w<sup>n</sup> ny<sup>o</sup> nkonta mma obiara.

(Participant – mixed focus group discussion. Kokofu, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

Some chiefs intentionally give the female stool to children so that they do not have to 'ask Abrewa'. So that no one can ask them anything and they do not have to account to anyone. (Translation)

<sup>171</sup> This aspect will become very clear later in the analysis of why women as custodians need to be vigilant at their gates, especially to the stool room and any activities therein.

<sup>172</sup> Although many young women with such challenges have managed to fill the sandals of Abrewa over the years. For example, Nana Gyankama Difie,  $\text{m}^{\text{h}}\text{emaa}$  of Mampong was enstooled in her twenties.

In the above instances the participants added that while they are acknowledging that women have power especially through traditional avenues, they also cautioned that those avenues could be blocked or circumvented by a tweak in the selection process. In this instance when very young women are chosen as  $\varnothing$ hema, the idea of  $\varnothing$ hema as Abrewa is compromised. In addition to not being able to exercise their powers as Abrewa, the position of  $\varnothing$ hema has responsibilities and expectations which could be quite challenging to noticeably young women.<sup>173</sup>

Some of the men added that women should act on the powers not just to glorify themselves with their womanhood and the status and honour that come with it. They stressed that:

Na mmaa tumi no, esese  $\varnothing$ moye no sedef mmarima gye tumi a  $\varnothing$ moye no gee. Sen ma mmarima ye tumi? Barima tumi no suro bata akyire. Mmaa tumi no ye “let’s speak and go”. But there should be a minimum force a eye se “attache” to that power. Wote ho saa ara “mewo tumi, enye adwuma. Mewo tumi, enni nyinaso biara.” No. Esese wo tumi no eye adwuma.

(Nana Obeng Dade, Gyasehene - Focus group discussion, Kokofu, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

The women’s power, they should handle it the way men handle their power when it is delegated to them. How do men handle power? The men’s power is backed with fear. The women’s power is ‘let us speak and go’. But there should be a minimum force attached to that power. You just sit there, ‘I have power’. It will not work. No. your power must work. (Translation)

As argued by some focus group participants, ‘your power has to work’. Now the community is defining power and at some point, what that power does would probably help us understand their notions of power.

As a participant explained,

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<sup>173</sup>For example, Nana Agyeiwaa Paamu II,  $\varnothing$ hema of Tapa, was enstooled at the age of nineteen.

Efirise ɔwɔ tumi a Nyame de ama no. Eyɛ divine power; eyetumi a Nyankopɔn na ɔde ahyɛ mmaa mu sɛ wɔnhwɛ saa adeɛ no so yie mfa nhwɛ fie. Eno nti no, mma, in our economic life mu no nso no, wɔn wɔ tumi wɔhɔ paa ara.

(Nana Adusei Appiah, Ankobeahene- at the Kokofu palace on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

Because they have power given to them by God. It is divine power. It is God who endowed them with such power to be able to take care of the home. Therefore, women are very powerful in our economic life also. They have a lot of power there. (Translation)

Gyau Kyem also intimated that;

Yenko bisa Abrewa, first and foremost, and not akwakora. Also, in this polygamous society every man needs the permission of the first wife to marry another woman. Even when an Akan man is wedded, polygamy is allowed. But he needs authorization and she has to approve of the individual. She can say, it is okay to marry another woman, but I do not want this particular woman as part of this household. He cannot marry another woman without her permission or approval.

Women are particularly useful as spies during wartime, and even in peacetime during crisis or conflict. It was a woman who detected what Adinkra of Gyaman could not take (akyiwade<sup>174</sup>). Women are very effective as spies.

Example, in the case of Kwame Abe, the famous outlaw of Kumasi, it was a woman who tricked and killed Kwame Abe.

Another aspect of women's power is farming and production: it is woman who chooses what to plant, when to plant, how to plant and where to plant. The genius of plant rotation is a unique gift of woman. It is women who attend the crops till harvesting and do the harvesting. Stocking and preserving is also done by women.

It is women in the family who do the marrying even if you found your bride yourself. Women would do the background investigation of the bride's family, approve and go and ask her family for her hands. Because this is viewed as a union of two family, the women have to make sure that both families are compatible not just the two individuals.

In many Akan households, especially those without black stools, she is the mediator of in-house conflict; she is the only one who can tell where who is from.

(Gyau Kyem 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview, The Date Palm Hotel, Accra on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017)

Similarly another informant added that;

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<sup>174</sup> What one is forbidden to take.

Akan women build the most sustainable businesses in Ghana. It is not an anomaly in Ghana to find women who are running successful businesses, they do not show off or talk much, in fact many of them pass off their successes as their husband's. Most women in Ghana feel self-sufficient but just need men to complete the expected picture, because that is how we are raised. Akan women do not discuss 'tumi'. In fact, that is what would be out of character. Akan women go through great extend to cover up all the attributes of power in their lives. Akan women know how powerful they are. They know when and how to use tumi, and exactly where it would make the biggest impact. I know many of the Akan women you interview would be very uncomfortable deliberating on it but the much older women would probably share a few snippets. If you have noticed, most start-up businesses that fail are men's; the women's start-ups thrive sustainably. Men are not able to sustain businesses for many reasons. The richest people in Accra are those women at Makola. Most of the buildings at Kokomlemlle, East Legon and Airport residential Area belong to women. (Rev. Dr Joyce Rosalind Aryee)<sup>175</sup>

In most societies, children are closer to their mothers for obvious reasons such as biology.

However, it is more pronounced in matrilineal societies such as the Asante:

A<sup>o</sup>ante de<sup>o</sup> nkwadaa ka k<sup>o</sup> mame h<sup>o</sup> nti <sup>o</sup>ma mame no nya tumi be bree wo fie. Y<sup>o</sup>de y<sup>o</sup> ka<sup>o</sup>ab<sup>o</sup>buo <sup>o</sup>o n<sup>o</sup>amanp<sup>o</sup> mu <sup>o</sup>oduro, wo ni w u a wabu<sup>o</sup>ua a<sup>o</sup>a<sup>o</sup>. wo ne wo yere ne woma te fie baako mu n<sup>o</sup>o y<sup>o</sup>n fa wo nka abu<sup>o</sup>ua no ho. Nti no, worey<sup>o</sup> biribi koraa a, <sup>o</sup>b<sup>o</sup>duru mm er<sup>o</sup> bi koraa wone wo ba koraa w<sup>o</sup> h<sup>o</sup> na wofr<sup>o</sup> ne no aka<sup>o</sup>a a, ne m aame de<sup>o</sup> na <sup>o</sup>tie ky<sup>o</sup>n wo barima no a wo ne kin te<sup>o</sup> no.

(Nana Adusei Appiah, Gyasehene - Focus group discussion at the Kokofu palace on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

So, whatever you do after all, it comes to a time in your life things change. When you talk to your children they listen to their mother, and they always side with their mother. (Translation)

Enti mmaa no anka<sup>o</sup>a no <sup>o</sup>mo w<sup>o</sup> tumi efiri ab<sup>o</sup>de<sup>o</sup> mu, <sup>o</sup>deba awoe <sup>o</sup> mu, <sup>o</sup>de k<sup>o</sup> owuo mu no, mmaa tumi <sup>o</sup>w<sup>o</sup> h<sup>o</sup> pa ara.

Women are also very brave. A typical example given by an informant was the biblical story of the resurrection.

Bere a Yesu Kristo wuuee, na ehu ab<sup>o</sup> biara, <sup>o</sup>mo asuafo<sup>o</sup> no a na <sup>o</sup>mo ye mmarima a na <sup>o</sup>mo ben no pa ara no, <sup>o</sup>mo nyinaa awadawada ak<sup>o</sup>hye dan mu. Obaa na ek<sup>o</sup> hunu no. Mary Magdalene na ek<sup>o</sup> hunuu se Yesu as<sup>o</sup>re (Matthew 27; 46-49). Na enne eye me ya se ns<sup>o</sup>re no bi reka mmaa ahye.

(Nana Obeng Dade, Focus group discussion, Kokofu on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

<sup>175</sup> Fieldnotes: Rev. Dr Joyce Rosalind Aryee on 5th March 2017 at the Light and Salt Ministry in Accra.

When Jesus Christ died, everybody was scared. Everyone was fear stricken and was hiding indoors. It was a woman who saw it. It was Mary Magdalene who saw that Jesus had risen. (Matthew 27; 46-49). These days, it hurts to see some Christian churches trying to subdue women. (Translation)

Women are the bravest in the home. Even in cases where men are acting irrationally in the face of a burglary attack, if the woman in the house does not guide with caution, the man will just run out and get killed.

Women are extremely brave and sensible but;

Na deɛ ɛwɔ mu ne sɛ, ɛsɛsɛ yɛdi ɔmoni, na ɔmo nso edi ɔmo tumi no ni. Mmaa no bi, excuse my language, abuse of power. Ɔbaa kɔ nya tumi na sɛ nteasoɔ nni akyire a, maame ɛyɛ asefem. Yes, ɛyɛ asefem.

(Participant focus group discussion, Kokofu, on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

What should happen is for us to respect their power and for the women themselves to respect that power. What is disheartening is when women have power and it is not tied to any responsibility, it is really disappointing. (Translation)

#### **5.4.7 The role of women in harmful cultural practices**

Many of the participants, mostly men, raised the issue of how deep and profound women's power is expressed in this community. They emphasized that women control all stages and activities of life from birth to death. They assert that in fact most of these activities are initiated, facilitated, orchestrated, and sustained by women. The men claim that in fact, women are so powerful that they are able to hide behind the assumption that men are the ones promoting certain social vices. An example cited is girl/child marriage. While it is not very prevalent at Kokofu and its environs, whenever it occurs in this community it can be traced to the women. Women, the men claim are behind some of the social vices attributed to men. An example is in the case of teenage pregnancy and girl/child marriages as,

Mmaa koraa mperewa awoɔ ne awareɛ no a yeware ntɛmtɛm no, ne nyinaa yese mmarima na etare akyire. Enti deɛ mere yeyi no mere pɛ akyere

se...moaye ama mmaa aye mmɔbɔ wɔ baabiara. Nso ɔmo nye innocent saa. Ɔmo wɔ tumi pa ara a saa asem wei ɔmo pese etwa nne a, ebetwa.

(Focus group discussion, Kokofu, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

Women are behind all the various early marriage and teenage pregnancy issues usually attributed to men. What I mean is that it makes women appear pathetic and miserable victims. But they are not innocent like that. They are so powerful that if they want these social vices to stop today, they will stop. (translation)

Women do not have only the power to take care of the home, children and all the men in their lives; women also have the power to end many of the social ills. Women have the power over social ills such as female genital cutting, teenage pregnancy, and girl/child marriage. Women in most societies initiate, facilitate and sustain such practices. Most of the participants concurred that if women's power is acknowledged properly, they could be equally challenged properly to end all these socially harmful practices.

Mo nka nkyer<sup>ɔ</sup> mmaa s<sup>ɔ</sup>, yenim s<sup>ɔ</sup> mo w<sup>ɔ</sup> tumi a moka se akwadaa wei y<sup>ɔ</sup>mp<sup>ɔ</sup> s<sup>ɔ</sup> y<sup>ɔ</sup>de no b<sup>ɔ</sup> ma awade<sup>ɔ</sup> a ɔnnko awade<sup>ɔ</sup>, ɔb<sup>ɔ</sup> gyae.  
Mok<sup>ɔ</sup> kuro bi so a mo nhwehw<sup>ɔ</sup> mmaa no na mo nka nkyer<sup>ɔ</sup> won s<sup>ɔ</sup> 'Y<sup>ɔ</sup>ma mo emfie mienu, mprewa awo y<sup>ɔ</sup>p<sup>ɔ</sup> s<sup>ɔ</sup> egyae, ɔb<sup>ɔ</sup> gyae.

(Focus group discussion at Kokofu Palace on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

Tell women that we know you have the power. If you decide that 'this child, we will not allow early marriage'. It will not happen. It will end. When you go to the next town look for the women and tell them, challenge them that 'we give you two years we want teen age pregnancy to stop.' It will stop. (Translation)

## 5.5 Specific observations

Men and women, Akan and non-Akan, older (fifty-year-old plus) and younger agree that Asante women have power as evident in Kokofu and its environs. However, the reasons and evidence they pointed to were markedly different. The women sat in silence while the men spoke in the mixed group discussion. The men pointed to things women do in their daily lives. They pointed to activities that are easily verifiable and comprehensible. Many of the discussions were between men in the focus group. Women sat quietly through the exchanges agreeably. Most of the women suggested private discussions, some opted for

smaller all-female group discussion and still some requested for questionnaires to be completed at another time and place.

Certain themes appeared illustrating commonalities. In both group discussions, the Christian bible was quoted to support God's divine gift to women. In all cases they were clear about the difference between strength of women and power of women. In both cases, they constantly used Akan proverbs to support their Akan worldview, mostly to the agreement and approval of the other participants.

The women defined power in more detailed philosophical approach which needed a deeper understanding of their whole being to appreciate, albeit privately.

On the same question of what is power, and do you have any power at all?

Generally, all the participants (individuals, key informants) spoke adequately to the definition and notions of power. In the discussion they addressed the questions aforementioned: do Kokofu women have power? Where, when, and how do they express such power?

As showed by the contributions of the participants, they understood the uniqueness of Akan women, particularly Asante women. Interestingly, the women themselves did not answer the question, do you have power? And what are some of the attributes of your power?

In private and smaller group discussions, the women spoke for themselves and answered the questions they knew were addressed to them.

To answer the question do you have power, they looked at each other awkwardly, then

Nana Akua Abrafi started that:

Ye wo tumi. Ye wo tumi bebree fri tete. Ente se nea ebinom ma manfo dwene fa mmaa ho no. Mmaa tumi no nna adi tese mmarima tumi no. Na

nso mmaa ne mmarimm empere wo tumi ho da, yen mperee wo bribiara ho da. Yenim tumi a mmarima wo; eso, tere, ko se nea ye ma kwan.

We have power. We have always had power, lots of power. We are not as powerless as they make us look. We may not be visibly as powerful as men, but we have never competed with the men for anything. We know the power they have; it is as big and as far as we allow it to be.

(All women focus group discussion at Kokofu on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018)

The researcher asked why most of the pictures and edifices at Manhyia and Kokofu are about the Asantehene and Barima Kokofuhene. The researcher got a typical lecture from the group as:

There are many things some of us should explain to you. Nana you should know some of them but maybe because of school you have been away from home or did not pay attention. All these men are your children. Every Akan woman has a responsibility when it comes to men. Men are very fragile and should be nurtured throughout their lives. Every man in woman's life is at a certain state in development needing critical nurturing: from son to brother, husband to uncle to father. Every kanniba knows that your husband embodies all these characters, with the right focus you can deal with these characters whenever the need arises. As the nurturer (nurturing is not servitude) a woman should bear in mind that nurturing is perpetual.

(Nana Adwoa Akyiaa – focus group discussion, Kokofu, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018)

Researcher probed further with the statement

“mate se Patricia Appiah-Agyei wo parliament. ɔno kyerɔ sɔ ɔwɔ tumi anaase ɔno mma no tumi?”

I have heard that Patricia Appiagyeyi is in parliament. Does it mean she is powerful or does that give her power? (Translation)

This was met with calm but defiant,

Enti edeɔn? Hwan na ɔsoma no? Dien na ɔreye wɔ hɔ? Se yeatete yen mmarima no yie; yen mma marima nom, nua mmarimma nom, ne yen wofanom no yie a, eho nhia se ye bedi wɔn akyi akɔ akono foforo yi; parliament. Se yeatete wo yie a, enna wonim nea woreye wɔ fie a, enhia se baabi a wo wahye ne nkuran bebiree da biara wo rekasa woye barima a eburu, woye barima a eburu no, baabi a ɔrekɔ akɔsɔ ne ho ahwe no na wo akɔtena hɔ reye judge, na kyere se wo koraa, kyere se wonni awerehyemu wɔ ne mu. Enti se watete no yie wɔ fie dea, deɔ woye biara eno na ɔrekɔye wɔ parliament hɔ, enhia se wobɛ wɔ hɔ.

(All female focus group discussion at Kokofu on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018)

And so, what? Who sent her? What is she doing there? If our sons, brothers and uncles are nurtured and trained properly, we would not need

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to follow



them to the new battlefield, parliament. They will go with all our trust and confidence. Do we need to be there to see how they shoot or conquer the enemies as judges? That undermines the many years of nurturing: Unless you have no confidence in him. So, if you have nurtured him well at home, he will go to parliament to do exactly what you want, you do not need to be there. (Translation)

Some of the women in private discussions intimated that:

Asante women do not exercise power publicly. Akan women seldom complain about their men publicly. If it is about family land the  $\square$ baapanin will privately discuss it with him, then call all the elders in the lineage and discuss it with them, then the men will take it up and have a further discussion with him if necessary. If a young woman has a problem in her marital home, she first discusses it with her grandmother who will take it up in many quiet visits until the issues are resolved.

If an  $\square$ hemaa is not happy about how the  $\square$ hene is handling things, she will first discuss it with him privately then report it to Abusuapanin about the concerns

1. If he is being greedy and ignoring her – (Didigya)
2. If he is not handling stool regalia and treasury properly
3. If  $\square$ hene or the stool elders are overstepping boundaries into hers.

Well women do not just complain. They act rarely but when they do, it is felt everywhere, and they always get their way. There are many examples: like the Kumawu Hema's case. The king makers thought they could harass her into accepting their candidate. It went through everything and finally in front of Asanteman, she had the last word. Her candidate is now the Kumawuhene. In the Bekwai case too, the  $\square$ hemaa, Nana Pinamang, complained to Asantehene that the Bekwaihene Nana KarikariAppau was not steering state affairs properly and was not treating her well at all. The Asantehene asked Kokofuhene and Juabenhene to look into the matter. They advised the Bekwaihene to give her all she asked for. Nana Apau, the Bewaihene did not oblige and he died shortly after that. There was also another case at Akwamufie about a stool candidate. The king makers enstooled a chief for Akwamufie against the  $\square$ hemaa's will. The  $\square$ hemaa, Nana Afrakoma II took it to court that she had the power to nominate and they had taken that away from her. She refused to recognize Mr. Kyeremateng as the  $\square$ hene of Akwamufie. At some point, she received a letter to come to Kumasi (at the request of Otumfuo) for mediation but she refused. Mr. Kyeremateng eventually died in 2012. I heard that Afrakoma took over everything. He was laid in state at the  $\square$ hemaa's house, mourned as a royal but buried as an ordinary royal not as an  $\square$ hene of the Akwamufie state. So, it took over twenty years but the  $\square$ hemaa, Nana Afrakoma II won and immediately enstooled her son as Odeneho Kwafu Akoto V, the paramount chief of Akwamufie. Part of the royal family went to court that Nana Afrakoma II did not involve them in the selection and installation process. The case went from the Regional House of Chiefs to the National House of chiefs through all the appeals processes and they

lost. Akan women have a lot of power, they just do not exercise it publicly.<sup>176</sup>

(Nana Adoma Serwa-All female focus group, Kokofu, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018)

All the female participants spoke in terms of having the ‘power to do something’ in contrast to ‘power over someone or something’. Kokofu women spoke of gifts from God that includes a womb and the ability to reproduce.

Some defined power by the number of their children and still some defined power as being a potential matriarch whose children will inherit everything and continue with the matrilineage. In listing the number of their children, they made it clear that the women are of paramount importance even though the men are needed to take care of their nieces and nephews.

Mmaa bi nom de mma ana ekyere won tumi. Efiri se wo mma ana edi wo ade etoa awoo ntoatoaso so ema wo ase tre,

(All-female Focus group discussion at Kokofu on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018)

In the mixed focus group, a couple of months earlier, the men had discussed it and wanted to know how the women would discuss the issue of who sits who on which side? The men had arrived at a consensus that it is women who put men on their right-hand side. But they (the men) cited communication as the reason because the left ear hears better than the right ear. While both men and women agree that it is women who sit men on their right side, the reason is markedly different. They said that:

When women put men (son, brother uncle) on the stool, and sit them to their right it is the ultimate illustration of delegated authority and demonstration of confidence, trust and faith in the conferring and delegating the role as a leader. In a sense, it is not men who put women on their left; it is rather women who put men on their right.

(All-female focus group discussion at Kokofu on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2018)

The bible was cited to illustrate that it is a superior who sits someone to their right after delegating power and authority:

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<sup>176</sup>Finally, the main plaintiff, Love Adjo Som, went to Akwamufie on an Akwasidae in July 2019 and asked for pardon and a family truce. She has since withdrawn the case from the National House of Chiefs.

Bible mu, adee a esom Nyame bo no ena de tena ne nsa nifa so nti obaa no n'ede barima no tena ne nsa nifa so.

(Participant – Focus group discussion at Kokofu on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2018)

At Kokofu, a ninety-five-year-old woman, Obaapanin Akua Amankwaa brought this home by singing the analogy of the biblical trinity:

nyɔ na, ba, ne akonwa.

Na na de ne ba tena ne nsa nifa so,

te sɔnea Onyankopon de ne ba Yesu Christo tenaa ne nsa nifa so no.

(obaapanin Akua Amankwaa, on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 at Kokofu).<sup>177</sup>

It is mother, son, and the stool.

And mother sits her son on her right

as God sat his son Jesus Christ on His right (Translation)

It is also interesting to note that Akan men do not sit on stools; they rather sit on asipim<sup>178</sup> so if the symbol of power and authority is a stool then it is a delegated authority. Even in death, when a chief's stool is 'blackened' or 'consecrated' it is still a perpetual delegated authority and power.

Kanniba biara nim se wo pundwa anaa se akonwa tumtum na ekyere wo tumi,

Enso asipim so na barima tena wo badwam.

(obaapanin Safowaa-Nkagyaamu on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 at Kokofu)<sup>179</sup>

Every Akan knows that it is the consecrated or 'black stool that determine your power, but it is on a four-legged chair that men sit in public. (Translation)

Womanhood in Akan is a perpetual mutation of matrilineage. Woman put her son on her right hand as God did with Jesus – to boost his morale and make him feel powerful, which is a sign of utmost delegated authority.

<sup>177</sup> Fieldwork: Interview of Adumanya Baapanin Akua Amankwaa on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 at Kokofu. I am sure this does not illustrate the impact of Christianity on Akan thinking. In fact, there are other instances where other arrangements have been likened to the biblical trinity. For example, there is another view that Nyame is female and considered supreme, Nyankopon is male and considered a superdivinity, then there is a third ultra-divine element, Odomankoma, that binds itself with Nyame and Onyankopon into one absolute. "Deities of the Akan Religion". *World Eras*. . Retrieved October 02, 2019 from Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/deities-akan-religion>. O a lighter note, the Ahenemma (princes) at the Manhyia palace in Kumasi are known to share the expression "Agya, ne nemma, ne sika dwa", which means "The Asantehene (their Agya), his sons and the Golden Stool".

<sup>178</sup> Asipim is a regular four-legged chair

Every woman is a perpetual nurturer throughout the various stages of a man's life – son, brother, uncle, father, husband.  $\square$ hema is the base and beginning of the Akan lineage.

Power and authority both reside with the  $\square$ hema.

Abusua hye obaa yam

The family resides in the woman's womb (Translation)

It is the woman who nominates and by so doing delegate some of her power and authority. In the beginning Akan women had all the power. Somewhere along the line, when it became expedient to give men authority to wage war, and defend territories, the power shifted to men and women relegated to the background a bit, to give men the needed space and visibility to exercise their authority. So, it came to be that when women nominate a candidate for a stool, power and authority is shifted to the chief.

(Gyau Kyem at the Bantamahene's palace in Kumasi on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2016)

### 5.5.1 Menstruation, Initiation and Procreation as sites of Power

Women's powers are twofold: one is connected to procreativity (giving birth). The other is about women's spiritual and socio-political power.

For men, the mystery of how procreation happen and their inability to even understand it, is embodied in the ambivalence of menstrual blood. In menstrual blood there is ambivalence because there is an appreciation that 'tumi' (power) resides in it. In Akan it is believed that in some cases one needs to dirty<sup>180</sup> oneself to properly cleanse or atone.

There is 'tumi' residing in menstrual blood to the extent that it is avoided. It is avoided because it competes with other 'tumi'. Tumi resides in menstrual blood to the extent that when there is the need to raise the level of some tumi, menstrual blood is used. And it is not because menstrual blood is dirty. But it is because menstrual blood is associated with the power of procreation. It is an ultimate form of power. Menstrual blood has potency: "It symbolizes both danger and power". (Douglas 1966:95). Menstrual blood is sometimes regarded as the potential human being who did not survive, an unborn nonhuman with a

<sup>180</sup> Because menstrual blood is misunderstood as unclean it is used to 'dirty' oneself to ensure proper atonement or cleansing. But on the contrary, it is the 'tumi' in it that assures atonement.

malevolent spirit. When a woman does anything with the vagina it is not because of menstruation as a taboo, it is because the whole body itself is the site of power (Grillo 2013, Douglass 1966). Grillo writes,

In West Africa ‘power associated with sexuality and reproduction is especially strong, and potentially dangerous [but] ...female genital power is especially potent. To some degree all women, by virtue of their reproductive capacity, bear an innate power in keeping with the creative force of divinities and the sustaining blessing of the ancestors. Elderly women, beyond childbearing age, have a greater capacity yet; as the living embodiment of the ancestors, revered as the guardians of the moral order, the ‘Mothers’ play a critical role as its sustainers. Like the ancestors, they are the channel of life-sustaining blessing and may also affect the most potent of curses, making appeal to the spiritual locus of their power, their sex (Grillo, 2013:3)

The female body as the site of power is understood by many women, both Akan and non-Akan, both male and females. Men do not particularly try to understand it but have some ideas about it. Women on the other hand are made to understand and cultivate it. Girls are socialized to be cognizant of their powers and uniqueness throughout childhood until puberty when they are formally made to understand their powers through the nubility rites: The period is termed ‘nansia Hema’<sup>181</sup> (Sarpong 1977:79). This is a period when the initiand is no longer a girl, but not yet a woman. The initiation starts with the initiand being lowered onto a white stool three times. In the Akan worldview it symbolizes the girl’s introduction to adulthood, and womanhood. In the Akan world and specifically among the Asante where a girl’s sex organ is seldom discussed and never called by its part name (ɛtwɔ) by its owner, it is formally introduced to initiand as ‘tano’<sup>182</sup>, ‘bosom kese’<sup>183</sup> or ‘agyapade’<sup>184</sup>. The female reproductive organ is a ‘bosom’ and very sacred as echoed by many of the female participants. As Obaapanin Adwoa Dentaa confided, on how to develop a spiritual bond with it:

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<sup>181</sup> ‘the six-day queenmother’

<sup>182</sup> fetish

<sup>183</sup> Great god

<sup>184</sup> treasure

Wo dware a hyeda bo no nsuo saa, na wo kasa kyere no. se wo kunu, woba, anaa se obi atan wani a ka kyere no. wotwe ne wo suman. De<sup>o</sup> gyeara ne nsuo ne k<sup>te</sup>. N'aduane ara ne nsuo, nsuo no ara nso siesie no, te noho.

(Obaapanin Adwoa Dentaa of Nkagyaamu on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 at Kokofu.)

When you bath, intentionally throw a lot of water on it. Then talk to her. If your husband, your child, or anybody is making you miserable, just tell her. She (your vagina) is your deity. All she takes is water and the penis. Her food is water. It is the water that keeps her clean and in harmony. (Translation)

Not only is the mystery of procreation deeply feminine, it is also very spiritual. At the act of delivery or childbirth only women are present in most cases, to welcome you into the world<sup>185</sup>. At every moment when a person is moving socially (what anthropologists call rites of passage), it is constructed by women from birth to death. (Thomas, 2003; Chinweizu, 2005; Steady, 2011). All these activities make women very powerful though not openly flaunted or discussed.

### 5.5.2 Women, Stools, Ancestors and Deities

The link between women and ancestors is the spiritual link through stools and deities: Sunsum ne agudie mu tumi.<sup>186</sup> As matrilineals, it is the women and the stools, which brings ancestors and deities together in a relationship that is very profound. In many old Akan towns, the chief's palace is across from the deity and adjacent to the stool house at the entrance of the town. Examples can be found in Akwamufie, Kokofu, Kumasi Adum, and Senfi Adumasa in the Ashanti region. Similarly, the deities<sup>187</sup> of families and lineages and the women usually reside together. That is what 'grounds' the family or lineage as

<sup>185</sup> This is still the practice at Kokofu. Currently there are male Ob/GYN and other family members who are allowed into the delivery chamber.

<sup>186</sup> Spiritual and socio-political power.

<sup>187</sup> There are private and public deities. Some deities such as Tano, Kwaku Fri, Tigare, and all the river deities are open to public consultation. But there are private deities whose names are only known to custodians and members who have matured into personhood and womanhood in the lineage and are close to kin.

‘Agyinae’<sup>188</sup>. There is a sense in which the success of the family in both material and spiritual terms are enshrined in this Agyinae. The woman head in the person of the  $\square$ baapanin or  $\square$ hema is the one who chooses the rightful heir to the stool. It is not about gender. It is the woman as the foundation of knowledge, and as the repository of knowledge. The woman is the one safeguarding everything about the lineage, for the lineage. So, women’s power is both biological and spiritual. The power of reproduction is biological and socio-political. And it is linked both to awareness that what they do is both biological and material. That is why when people feed or serve the stool deities for a while, the loyalties of the stool deities become compromised or diverted. It is for the women to make sure this does not happen. And as confirmed by a key informant,

S<sup>o</sup> wode ade<sup>o</sup> hy<sup>o</sup>  $\square$ baa nsa na wop<sup>o</sup> a, wo hunu  
(Gyaasehene – Kokofu Traditional Council, Kokofu on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

When you put things in the custody of a woman it is easier to find it  
(Translation)

That is why Akan women are entrusted with most of the avenues to power.

### 5.5.3 Place of women in an oral society

Even though African societies have become literate people, in terms of matters of power, Akan generally and Asante society, remain an oral society. The most pertinent and important power issues are not discussed or written on paper. Certain matters are discussed at dawn. So, a quick glance gives the appearance that the educated women are rising and appear to have power over certain things, but that form of knowledge associated with the social and spiritual reproduction of the lineage is entrusted to women: not just women, but women who are close to kin. It is their awareness of their centrality or the fact that they are indispensable to the functioning of the lineage (which means everything to the

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<sup>188</sup>Agyinae is a tree (Nyamedua) planted at the entrance of many old Asante ancestral homes. The  $\square$ baapanin

University of Ghana <http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh>

and abusuapanin cook and pour libation on it at some intervals or on sacred days or at the request of some members of the lineage for protection, spiritual intervention and intercession on their behalf.



family) in many integral ways. That is what makes them reluctant to compete with men or challenge them in any arena of life. That is why Adwoa Adabo<sup>189</sup> says

Mmarima nyinaa ye mer<sup>o</sup>. W<sup>o</sup>n hia abayen ne ntete <sup>o</sup>fri awo<sup>o</sup> kosi owuo.

All men are very fragile; they need nurturing from birth to death, throughout their lives. (translation)

Whereas authority in the realm of men is conveyed by men to men, Awo says<sup>190</sup>

Mmaa tumi fri Nyame ho

Women's power is from God. (Translation)

Tumi ne se wogyina wo nan miennu so. Emmaa w<sup>o</sup> tumi beree. Nwumma ak<sup>o</sup>se a

<sup>o</sup>w<sup>o</sup> A<sup>o</sup>antemanmu bebree <sup>o</sup>y<sup>o</sup> mmaa na abue, na w<sup>o</sup>an hw<sup>o</sup> fie ka ho. Tumi a <sup>o</sup>mmaa w<sup>o</sup> no efiri Nyame h<sup>o</sup>. Saa na Nyame b<sup>o</sup> y<sup>o</sup>n. Na efiri awo<sup>o</sup> ntoatoa<sup>o</sup> mu ara. Kanniba baa biara nya ne ky<sup>o</sup>fa fri <sup>o</sup>aa awo<sup>o</sup> ntoatoa<sup>o</sup> yi mu, na afei <sup>o</sup>uahunu ne abak<sup>o</sup>m a <sup>o</sup>ka ho nyinaa, ne efie agyapade<sup>o</sup> ne mpempenade<sup>o</sup> nyinaa <sup>o</sup>k<sup>o</sup> mmaa h<sup>o</sup>.<sup>191</sup>

Tumi (Power) is standing on your own two feet. Women have a lot of power. They run the best businesses in Asanteman mu and still take care of the home. The tumi that women have is from God. He created us that way. And it is passed on through the lineage. Every Akan woman, apart from the passed down heritage and custodianship of the lineage history, she is also entrusted with the family wealth and fortune. (Translation)

Women know that, men know that, and the evidence is there, it is the mystery of procreation. (Grillo, 2013)

One of the most powerful verbs in Asante Twi is 'di'. In many of the examples of the verb you find women at the core; di ade, di tw<sup>o</sup>, di aduane, di akonwa. 'Di ade' means 'to inherit property' which is facilitated by women. 'Di tw<sup>o</sup>' means 'have a sexual intercourse involving a vagina'. 'Di aduane' means 'eat food' which is almost always prepared by women. 'Di akonwa' mean 'to inherit

<sup>189</sup> Fieldnotes- interview on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at Kokofu palace.

<sup>190</sup> Fieldnotes: Interview with Awo (Mrs Vida Nsiah) at the Opoku Ware Secondary Technical Institute on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017 in Kumasi. Awo is a seventy-two-year-old woman originally from Akwamufie and currently an <sup>o</sup>hemaa at Kokofu Asaaman. She owns and operates an academic institution in Kumasi.

<sup>191</sup> ibid

a 'tool' which is also facilitated by women - be it the paramountcy, town, clan, or family stool.

In the end, after all the interviews and discussions and interactions with all manner of people on this topic of women and power in Africa, specifically Kokofu and its environs, I have come to realize that at the level of the lineage, at the level of traditional structures of authority, women's power is linked to procreation or biological reproduction. These are the sources and sites of women's power, but it is seldom discussed. In addition, power has always been associated with mystical and spiritual undertones because of the mystery of childbirth, which is also associated with 'baatan and Abadae'.<sup>192</sup> Childbirth is something that men hold in awe to the point that they deify the female reproductive ability.

But at another level it is also about material power or specifically socio-political power. The statement of the 'hema choosing the 'hene, the Abusuapanin leading the family, 'baapanin being at the helm of the lineage have all become so trite that they are not probed adequately. Is it just a matter of knowing the genealogy of the lineage? But it goes deeper because as I interrogate, the first becomes connected with the second. So here it is about social reproduction. The first one was about biological reproduction connected to spiritual power. This is about social power connected to political power in the material realm. But the two are in conversation because of the importance of blackened stools and ancestral deities. They see to the social and material welfare of the lineage.

Women are the custodians of knowledge. Knowledge associated with power is often passed orally through the lineage structure as opposed to knowledge that can be passed in writing. The 'baapanin and 'hema are made the custodians because such knowledge is not for the consumption of the entire lineage. It is handed over to those who are custodians

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<sup>192</sup> Motherhood and womanhood

of knowledge in terms of the lineage structures of power. Choosing the one who ‘sits on the stool’<sup>193</sup> comes from the understanding that when the wrong person sitting on the stool can deviate spiritual and political power away from the lineage. An Asante adage says that

Obosom a ohwe wo agyinae, ena ye ma no badwan

It is the deity that takes care of your ‘agyinae’ which gets the fattest ram.  
(Translation)

Similarly,

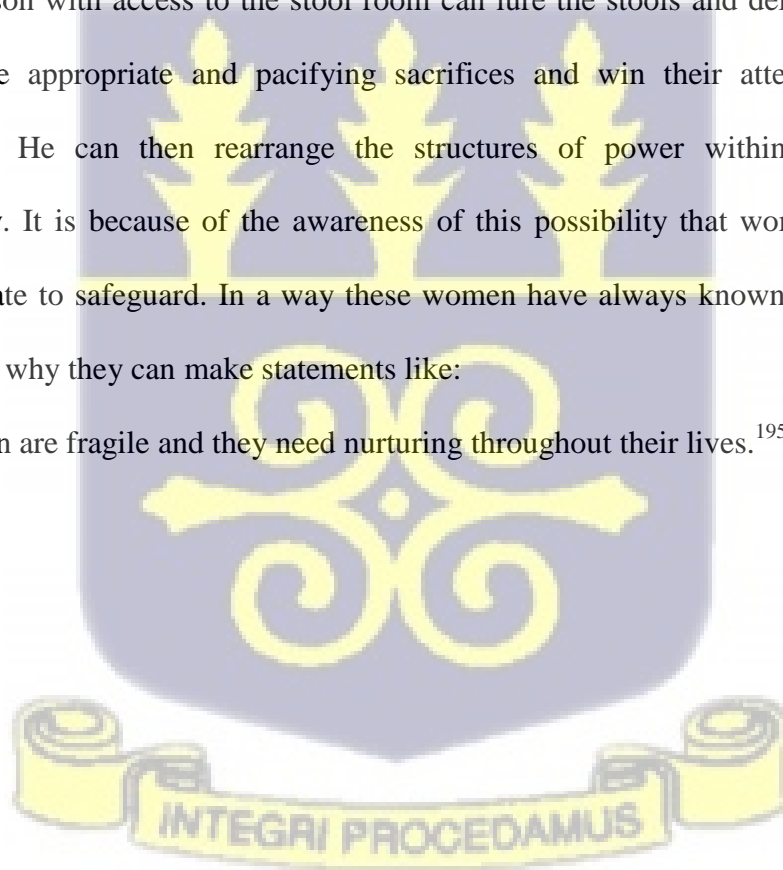
Kontronfi se “wohye m’afono mu a, ena meyi asempa kyere wo”<sup>194</sup>

The monkey says, “if you put food in my cheeks, I also reveal wonderful things to you” (Translation)

Obosom’s desire for devotees and attention makes them open to seduction. Meaning, a wrong person with access to the stool room can lure the stools and deities with attention and all the appropriate and pacifying sacrifices and win their attention and loyalty eventually. He can then rearrange the structures of power within the lineage and community. It is because of the awareness of this possibility that women are entrusted with the gate to safeguard. In a way these women have always known they have power.

And that is why they can make statements like:

Men are fragile and they need nurturing throughout their lives.<sup>195</sup>



<sup>193</sup> ‘sitting on the stool’ in this case is not the physical concept of sitting. In this case, it is ‘occupy’ an in ‘the person who is in office. It is similar to ‘the person on the throne’ or the ‘reigning monarch’ in other cultures.

<sup>194</sup> Also catalogued by Rattray#82; Christaler as#1720

<sup>195</sup> Adwoa Adabo and Nana Yaa Birago, AsenfiAdumasa hema. Interestingly, they made the same statement but on separate dates and at different places.

This also led Nana Obeng Dade (Kokofu Gyaasehene) to state that,

Women have power. Women control all the processes of human development from birth, through adulthood to death.

This fieldwork speaks to the present but there are historical flashes of how this happened. Kokofu is known as 'Asante ase'<sup>196</sup>. Kokofu was a matriarchal society until the advent of territorial expansion when the matriarchs needed men to fight or ward off intruders and traders and expand their territories. This required them to delegate powers to enable the men to lead. Then during the reign of King Osei Kwadwo (1764-77)<sup>197</sup>, Asante embarked on a very sophisticated bureaucratization project which eclipsed the role of women (Wilks 1966). This bureaucratization continued during the reign of Osei Kwame (1777- c.1801) which was sustained and expanded by Osei Bonsu (c1801-1824). This bureaucratization created an administrative class of literally all male office holders who were also given authority to execute certain state functions (Wilks 1966). The basis of authority ceased to be purely by ascription or by inheritance alone (Hagan 1977: 44). This new development did not consciously push women back, but created a façade over the position of women and their one particular avenue to substantial power. While these new offices and their newfound authority distinguished them from ascribed or hereditary chiefs, the female positions continue to stagnate. The reasons are quite evident: almost all the newly appointed office holders would be males so as the population of men grew in leaps and bounds, it naturally eclipsed or diminished the visibility of women. By 1894 it had gotten to a point where writers like Rattray would not easily find women anywhere to talk to. The male hegemony that found its way into the Akan traditional system during the colonial era, found an existing foundation<sup>198</sup> of bureaucracy and a healthy and well-established belief

system to build on. Then the colonial administration found a partner for indirect rule.

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<sup>196</sup> The root or foundation of Asante. Even when part of the family moved to Kwaman (later renamed Kumase), Asante Hema was elected from Kokofu and resided at Kokofu.

<sup>197</sup> Hagan (1971) has argued that it was actually initiated during the reign of Opoku Ware and Osei Kwadwo

merely followed the direction of the reforms  
<sup>198</sup> Culture of delegated authority\*



Women in Kokofu still hold their office and their power, confident in all their ascribed duties. Women in these societies are not part of the administrative offices that have been added on since 1764 or probably before but they have held on to their ascribed powers. Women did not lose any power, neither did any power change hands or was taken over by any office holder, but as the male office holders with authority, administered by the Asantehene himself keep growing even today, the womenfolk office, would continue to look smaller and smaller.

When women begin to talk about power, it is through attributes, characteristics and elements like children and the fact that they have the ability to sustain the lineage. So, for women it is in their interest to protect and sustain what they have produced, including men. The reason why the women participants did not say anything in the mixed focus group was partly because in their minds power discussions undermine their role as nurturers. Most of these women have the conversations as ‘we are more powerful than men, we just want them to feel and think they are powerful’ as opposed to ‘men have some power and we have our own’.

#### **5.5.4 The three categories of Asante Kokofu women today.**

When an Asante Kokofu woman travel and return home with enormous wealth, she has done well for herself but that is not what is expected. What is expected is the social fulfillment: a social reproduction. This speaks to Asante women understanding of power. This is again speaking to social reproduction and biological reproduction. The knowledge about lineage and how the lineage is socially reproduced and sustained by word of mouth since Akan is generally an oral society. This analysis started with the discussions on some key Akan concepts: there are Akan concepts of personhood and mind and womanhood, which guide an  $\square$ kanniba in general thought processes. This does not mean that every  $\square$ kanniba or Asante will go through all these processes, graduate to personhood/womanhood and make many informed decisions based solely on these

notions. The Asante Kokofu women share the definitions and notions of power put forth by the participants. However, not all of them share all the attributes and would therefore experience the traditional powers differently.

What have emerged are three categories of women who expect power and prestige from this traditional avenue but will experience it differently because it is based on proximity to kin:

- The beneficiaries are those at home or close to custodians and kin. As noted earlier, Asante is still a very oral society, discussions and notions of power are handed down from custodian to those close to home or proximity. Therefore, those who feel powerful are those close and knowledgeable of kinship. The forms of knowledge that have been discussed all have reproduction at the center of the lineage. These are passed on within circles of intimacy. Staying close to kin develops trust and certain critical information is passed on when custodians deem fit. This is unlike the non-traditional system where social mobility is based on education. The non-educated and least educated are the ones confident about power and their social status. This is the group, from which a couple of women confided that even if the doors to parliament were left ajar, not too many Kokofu women would enter.
- Ironically those who focused on academic and professional achievements are those who pushed away from the lineage. This group is the upwardly mobile but away from kin and the avenues to traditional power. Engaged from an external perspective, those who look like they should be empowered courtesy of education, are those who have moved from the traditional understandings of knowledge and power. Thus, when you look and say they need to be empowered, there is a sense in which you are addressing the ones who have pushed away from their traditional power. The irony is that those who are perceived to be socially mobile feel disempowered. One would think that the educated women with all the social

trappings would feel empowered, but they are the ones complaining that they are not heard/listened-to and need to be empowered politically. If this group is identified as victims, then it is one's gaze and perspective that has defined it as such.

- Then there is a third category of women who are very educated, successful, and well-traveled. They have come to be cognizant of these two categories of women. They are very close to their kinship network and have stayed close to the lineage and the matrilineal powers without any serious breaks. These are the women who understand the first two categories of women very well. They are the women who comfortably swing through these corridors and do not find the need for empowerment or affirmative action. As one key informant explained:

Tumi is the influence on people. Women have a lot of power and it is from God. It is fostered through procreation, sustained through the umbilical cord and reinforced through breast milk and breast feeding to lay all the right foundations. For example, if Nana Addo's mother were alive today, he would have deferred so much to his mother, even though he is the president of the land. So, you might have noticed that he is the president but the most influential person in his life is his mother.

It is not an anomaly in Ghana to find women who are running successful businesses they don't show off or talk much; in fact, many of them pass off their successes as their husband's.

Most women in Ghana feel self-sufficient but just need men to complete the expected picture, because that is how we are raised. If you have noticed, most start-up businesses that fail are men's; the women's start-ups thrive sustainably. Men are not able to sustain businesses for many reasons. The richest people in Accra are those at Makola market. Most of the buildings at Kokomlemle, East Legon and Airport residential area belong to women. It is not everything so called modern that reflects reality. So, what is reality in terms of our social demographics and ethnology? Because there is a matriarch in every ethnicity in Ghana even among the patriarchal groups. There is a matriarch who plays a very leading role.

(Rev. Dr. Joyce Rosalind Aryee at the Light and Salt ministry Office, Accra on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017)

So, when we want to place women at the center of development how do we reconcile these two?

How do we get these two extremes but equally important stands together? There is a clear contradiction that needs to be reconciled:

There is a group who is very comfortable with the traditional avenues of power and prestige; this is the group whose members say that even if parliament is left wide open, they will not enter. It is the members of this group who still believe that they are perpetual nurturers and should stay away from parliament. They admit that parliament is the new battlefield, but women should not be there watching how their men (sons, brothers, husbands, uncles, and fathers) face the enemy in the new frontier. Then there is the second group above who feel disenfranchised and need political empowerment.

Similarly, power, as the fieldwork has shown is what power means and does and is very relative.

Power in the Akan worldview is much deeper than the number of women office holders in typical male corridors or arenas of power. So, this thesis has evolved to include another objective: to bring these two perspectives together: the national level where we look at matrix and specific indicators to make sweeping statements about women and this quieter, understated but confident assumption of power? What will be gained by bringing these two conversations together?

At this juncture, Kokofu women have shared their notions and understandings of power. of power. If nothing else is obvious about the kinds of power they have, it is clear that they have the power to initiate, facilitate and sustain girl child marriages in the community. This discussion was initiated by some of the men who felt that civil society have it wrong in thinking that men prefer child brides and seem to be the force behind such practices. As

the conversation evolved it became clearer that many of such incidents are actually initiated and orchestrated by women. This also means that with that same power they can end these practices if they decide to do so. This will minimize and eventually end these social ills. In so doing community level development will accelerate. This deduction looks simplistic but deserves a trial.

This thesis started as a journey to explore clearly what constitutes power and how Akan women in the Asante polity of Kokofu understand and use power.

The assumption has been that if your International Parliamentary Ranking (IPR) portrays your country as having gender equality implementation challenges, then your women have little or no power and need to be empowered. In this instance, political empowerment in the form of affirmative action has been suggested in Ghana's case. In response, many have asked for a clearer explanation and justification for it. In this field work many participants also wondered about the efficacy of such an approach. Prof. Adu Boahen cautioned,

It is wrong to leave these young women to struggle and compete with men. The notion that more women should be in parliament to change policies is a very foreign approach to governance. There should be 'free will'. No woman should be compelled to clamor to be in parliament to compete to be statistically relevant and equal, but should do so, be encouraged to do so because she has all the attributes and requisite skills as a competent representative. Then we can all say

'It is in you. Nana Yaa Asantewaa, wo tu sa! Se ekoo foforo a aba ne parliament a, Obaapa ko, na ye di wo akyi'

(Recorded discussion with Prof. Adu Boahen on December 12, 2011 at the University of Cape Coast History Department.)

It is in you Nana Yaa Asantewaa, you waged war. If the new war is being fought at Parliament, then good woman fight, we are behind you (Translation).

Professor Adu Boahen was cautiously optimistic when he pointed out that

"Many ordinances were triggered by the actions of Yaa Akyiaa and Yaa Asantewaa" but predicted that:

If the womenfolk in Ghana's parliament is going to increase it will likely come from Akan communities because they have agency

and autonomy. If the perceived status of women in Ghana is going to change, it will be from women themselves. If the perceived social ills (Female genital Cutting (FGC), widowhood rites, child marriage, witchcraft) against women are to change, it will be initiated, sustained, and modified or totally eradicated by women.<sup>199</sup>

This was echoed by another key informant as follows:

I achieved everything I have on merit. I was raised in Kumasi where it is the norm to excel in everything you do as a woman. I schooled and worked for a while and then I applied for this position. I was told that I was the most qualified and when I saw the list of the shortlisted names, I knew I was the most qualified. What is the sense in instituting affirmative action for things we are already achieving based on merit? That only cheapens the criteria and standard that we set as a country. Affirmative action or political empowerment and in fact any form of empowerment is misplaced in Ghana because we do not need it. That is not to say we do not need help. Empowerment assumes a void and that void should be discussed critically to be addressed properly.

(Rev. Dr. Joyce Rosalind Aryee on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2017 in Accra.)

However, a matrilineal society may not necessarily be matriarchal as men govern the society and manage property. In the Akan society for example, both men and women acknowledged the appearance of such an arrangement but quickly explained it as a perception which is understood by many.

But in defining and discussing matrilineal women and power, this study also recognizes the reality that societies which trace descent through the mother are not necessarily societies under women's control. Are the matrilineal kinship bonds mimicking the practice of matriarchy except for the context and form used in exercising power?

Ohema is the demonstration of matriarchy because it exists at every micro level in all Akan societies. The argument that Ohema being powerful is an anomaly (Farrar, 1997), is due to lack of insight. It is rather the norm in Akan society because the institution of Ohema is the demonstration and illustration of that norm. And the fact that every Akan

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<sup>199</sup> Recorded discussion with Prof. Adu Boahen (deceased), on December 12, 2011 at the University of Cape Coast History Department.

woman is not Ohemaa does not mean they do not have the powers and authorities exercised by Ohemaa.<sup>200</sup> There is usually one stool per lineage so only one of the women can be called Ohemaa, but all the women are potential matriarchs- with potential fertile wombs, cradle to nurture and kitchen to feed sons, husbands, brothers, fathers and uncles.

### 5.6 The collective perception of Akan women's power

The collective perception of Akan women's power is also very evident through the medium of proverbs and songs. There are many Akan proverbs that participants evoked into the discussion every now and then to support their worldview of power and authority. Proverbs are part of Akan discussions and deliberations. Proverbs are used specially to drive certain ideas home and make the expression fit into the context. Proverbs are defined as truths based on common sense and packaged in a way that transports the gist of a discussion in a very swift manner. Lord John Russell described proverbs as 'the wit of one, and the wisdom of many'<sup>201</sup>. The famous paremiologist, Wolfgang Mieder describes proverb as,

a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth morals and traditional views in a metaphorical fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation (Mieder 1993:24)

Proverbs are the knotted pieces of speech which propels the speech to exactly where it should land. In Asante parlance 'Ebe ne kasa mu abo hemmaa.' (proverb is the foundational bridge of a speech) (Agyekum 2005). Se ɔbɔ nka asɔm ho a, enwie dɔ yɔ (a speech devoid of proverb is tasteless.)

Yankah (1989) defines proverb by its uses, as in 'me de bo asem po' (I use it to tie a knot around discourse), 'me de si asem so dua' (I use it to hoist a tree on speech) (p. 328).

<sup>200</sup> The six days confinement for girls' nubility rites in Asante is often referred to as 'six-day queenmother'. The girls are enstooled as part of the ceremony.

<sup>201</sup> [www.forbes.com/the-nature-of-proverbs/html](http://www.forbes.com/the-nature-of-proverbs/html). Accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2019.

Proverbs are used in other communication such as drumming, clothing and emblems on regalia (linguist staff and umbrella tops).

Proverbs are used in drumming, clothing and regalia to communicate specific sentiments. While some, such as drum language are very sophisticated, the proverbial clothing and the finial on linguist staff and umbrellas are quite known and understood by many Akan, and many outsiders. For example, *the hen and the cock* symbolize power, though the context may determine the sentiment being communicated. Similarly, *the egg in a hand* represents the fragility of power, however the context will determine the sentiment being communicated. When proverbs are used in clothing such as the Adinkra cloth, the symbols speak volumes and they are generally understood. For example, a subject cannot wear a kente cloth or an adinkra cloth with the *tikro nko agyina* (one head does not constitute a counsel) to his boss' gathering or office<sup>202</sup>. Similarly, the linguist who is heading a traditional delegation to a formal traditional event cannot be holding a staff adorned with *the egg in a hand* finial unless he is sure of the context and what his 'wura' (boss or superior) wants to communicate to the host or gathering.

As a philosophical slogan many Africans especially Ghanaians, and specifically adult Akan utilize proverbs for want of a better word, or to sum up their views in a discussion.

In this work many participants struggled with ways to communicate certain feelings about the topic, in many instances the expressions were not forthcoming and proverbs were met with approving nods from other participants. It was envisaged that the fieldwork would find its relevant proverbs to complement the discussions, but in the end, enough had been documented in their own context.

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<sup>202</sup> The wearer could be found in contempt for communicating that someone is a tyrant.

**5.6.1 Tumi te sɔ kosua – Power is like an egg<sup>203</sup>**

Power is like an egg and should be handled with great care. If you don't hold it firm enough it might fall and break and if you hold it too tight it will break in your hand. It is all about balance in the administration and exercise of power and authority.

**5.6.2 Akoko bedie nim adekye enso otie firi onini ano<sup>204</sup>**

The hen knows when it is morning but she hears it from the cock (Translation)

Asante women know they own the stool that any male occupy. They believe that as the nurturer it is their duty to give the man ample room to grow and command as a leader. So yes, as hen she can also crow and even without crowing, she knows that it is morning.

Asante women are also saying through this proverb that:

Whatever room is created for him to exercise power and authority, he knows and understands that it is a delegated authority.

(All female focus<sup>o</sup> Group at Kokofu on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018).

This aspect of man and woman knowing their roles and boundaries is not uniquely Akan or Asante. In *When hens begin to crow*, Tamale (2000) reminds us of the consequences of women not developing agency and ability to take part in governance from the grassroots up instead of empowerment through state intervention from the top. As discussed above, some of the male participants pointed out that Asante women run and control everything from birth to death. The women also admit that men are fragile and as perpetual nurturers, they have to always create room for their men (sons, brothers, husbands, fathers and uncles) to thrive. Women (hen) know how to crow and when it is time to crow, they just defer it to men to allow them to feel purposeful and useful.

In this context, Asante women know how to get to parliament, but most of them will not go even if the doors of parliament were left ajar. It has been said that

<sup>203</sup> Also discussed by Yankah (1995:38) referring to power as discussed above.

<sup>204</sup> Rattray 210; Christaller 1664

If the womenfolk in Ghana's parliament are going to increase it will likely come from Akan communities because they have agency and autonomy. If the perceived status of women in Ghana is going to change, it will be from Akan women. (Adu Boahen, 2011<sup>205</sup>)

If perceptions are to be used to determine whether women in Kokofu have power and what kind of power they have, it will be erroneous and misplaced. It will be erroneous because unless Kokofu women themselves share what kind of power they have or share their notions of power, anyone outside that community can assume incorrectly that women in the Asante town of Kokofu have little or no real power.

### 5.6.3 **ɔbaa to tuo a, etwere barima dan mu**

If a woman buys a gun, it rests in a man's room (Translation)

### **ɔbaa nwene kyem a, etwere barima bo**

When a woman weaves a shield, it rests in a man's bosom (Translation)

Asante Kokofu women are very confident that when they give their gun and kyem to men to use, it does not mean they do not know how to use them. History tells us that Asante women, especially Osagyefo Kusi Amoah of Kokofu, are not new to guns and shooting, she fought in many wars. She bought the guns that Kokofu men used in many wars. This is what earned her the accolade *Otoatuo*, which means 'one who buy guns'<sup>206</sup>. The gesture is to boost the morale of their sons, brothers, and uncles. They know that the men know that the women can use the guns if need be. Similarly, if a woman weaves a shield and gives it to a man to keep it is not because women cannot throw shields but it is because in the traditional procession it is men who throw shields to exhibit their prowess and artistry.

### 5.6.4 **Apɔsɔ yɔ kɔse a, ɔyɔ ma dufokye**

If the woodworm gains weight, it is the rotten tree that benefits (Translation)

<sup>205</sup> Discussion with Prof. Adu Boahen (University of Cape Coast) about my PhD topic on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2011 on campus. Repeated for emphasis.

<sup>206</sup> Field notes: An interview of Nana Adu Brempong Kagya II, Benkumhene of Kokofu Traditional Area.

The rotten wood is always picked on by anything in the forest, at least the woodworm is softer and cushiony. So, if the woodworm gains weight it becomes softer for the rotten log. In this context Kokofu women are saying that whatever men do, they do for the benefit of women. As demonstrated in the lyrics of a folksong. The women are singing that

Whatever men do, they do for women,

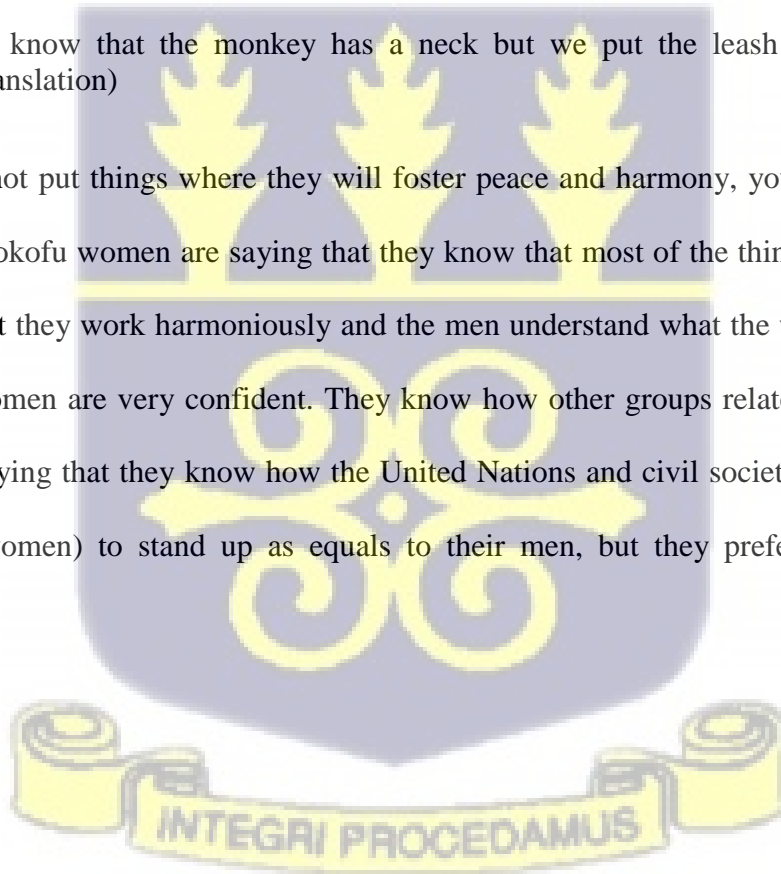
If the Asantehene goes abroad, he goes because of women<sup>207</sup>

The body language of the women in the video also speak volumes, it appears proverbial as the lead singer makes certain gestures with her thumb to the crowd.<sup>208</sup> The chorus which is sung merrily by all the women appeared and sounded subliminal to the rest of us<sup>209</sup>.

### 5.6.5 Yenim se kontronfi k'n wo h<sup>1</sup>, na y<sup>1</sup>de ahoma s<sup>1</sup> n'asene<sup>210</sup>.

We know that the monkey has a neck but we put the leash around the waist  
(Translation)

If you do not put things where they will foster peace and harmony, you will always reap conflict. Kokofu women are saying that they know that most of the things they do are not obvious but they work harmoniously and the men understand what the women do. Asante Kokofu women are very confident. They know how other groups relate to their men and they are saying that they know how the United Nations and civil society would like them (Kokofu women) to stand up as equals to their men, but they prefer being perpetual nurturers.



<sup>207</sup> Mmaa in this instance refer to all the women in the Asantehene's life: his sisters, his mother, his wives, his children, his nieces, and his kinship and lineage women.

<sup>208</sup> The rest of the song is inaudible but the emphasis here is the body language. Video is included on the accompanying CD as an appendix.

<sup>209</sup> The researcher returned to the Asantehemaa's court a couple of times after the recording to get someone to demystify the chorus but they kept laughing though no translation was offered. The lead singer has since died and the Modwoahemaa has also died.

<sup>210</sup> This proverb is also catalogued by Rattray as number 83. It appears in Christaller as number 2343

To make it clear that Asante Kokofu women have power, and to emphasize that in fact the female power came first before any other power, some of the key informants cited the proverb:

**5.6.6 Edware foe ansa na nsuo be to**

The bath house was wet before it rained

It is the woman that begets the man.

The woman was already there with her power and her stool before the man came. Along that same line, they cited

**Abodwese betoo Eninton nwii**

The beard came to meet the eye brows on the face

The eye brow is older than the beard

Kokofu women are not the least disturbed about men taking advantage of the powers and authority delegated to them by women. Kokofu women are confident and relaxed because they know their place and also know that the men also know that their power originates from women.

When men addressed the issues surrounding some social and cultural practices like girl/child marriage, the following proverb was cited:

**5.6.7 Konkontiba na odane aponkyirani<sup>211</sup>**

It is the tadpole that matures into a frog (Translation)

In other words, it is a girl that matures into a woman

This proverb was not cited by women. Rather, it was some men in the focus group discussion who claim that it is the thinking of some women in the community who initiate

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<sup>211</sup> Also cited in a song by Bice Osei Kuffuor popularly known as Obuor, a Ghanaian musician. This particular track Konkontiba, made him popular and there was no public outcry against its meaning or interpretation. Obour, who is the President of the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA), dominated the airwaves, topped charts and bagged awards including Ghana Music Awards for “Konkontiba”, one of his biggest career hits.

and sustain child marriage and teen pregnancies. They said that men have been blamed for a long time for such practices but it is women who approach well-to-do-men with such explanations:

That a girl is like a green mango, it needs to be plucked and nurtured to maturity. Like the tadpole awaiting maturity into a frog.

Though not very prevalent in the Akan communities in Ghana, child marriage is generally on the rise according to UNICEF-Ghana.<sup>212</sup>UNICEF SIMPLE STATS 2015 show that:

In Ghana, 1 in 4 women (27%) married before the age of 18. (MICS, 2006 & 2011)  
Child marriage increased nationwide by 1.1% between 2006 and 2011 – 25.9% to 27%.

Current data (DHS 2014 & MICS 2017) show that while the practice is found across the country and not confined to the north of Ghana as in previous studies (MICS 2006 & MICS 2011), there have been steady decline in prevalence generally but a rise in the coastal regions of Ghana. Ghana currently shows a decline from 27% in 2011 to 24% in 2017.

The men in the focus group discussion made it clear that women know they have all kinds of power, including power to initiate, facilitate and stop child marriage. They acknowledged the powers that women have and argued that,

If women decide to stop girl/child marriage, widowhood rites and other similar gendered practices, it will end instantly.

(focus group discussion at Kokofu palace on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018).

The women in the group did not react but did not appear disturbed by these accusations. However, after the discussion and when the recorder had been turned off, a couple of women approached the researcher and restated this proverb. This means that they understood the discussion, they just did not want to engage the men. It also means that they wanted to evoke culture and context. One of the women tried to explain that in Akan society a girl is a woman at fourteen years of age. They really think that men should get

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<sup>212</sup>REALLY SIMPLE STATS: the UNICEF GHANA internal STATISTICAL bulletin 2015

these girls younger and keep them for maturity, an elderly women explained that a mother feels burdened from the time a girl matures into adulthood with menstruation and the celebration of the puberty rites. The mothers are afraid that the girl could get pregnant and bring shame and hardship to the family so they pray that someone would come along and ask for the girl's hands in marriage. This is illustrative of the contradiction and disconnect between the UN concept of age (anyone below 18years) and the socio-cultural understanding of age and maturity. The maturity of a girl in the Ghanaian context can be defined by age, responsibility and physiology or biology. The concept of a child can be defined socio-culturally, chronologically, and legally. Policy makers in Ghana need to find a way to reconcile the legal age and the customary ripe age according to one's ethnicity, for coherence and compliance to policies.

#### **5.6.8 Kontronfi na neyere awu, ena w'agya atimum. Aserewa, efa wo ho bɔn?**<sup>213</sup>

It is the monkey who has lost his wife and he has decided to let his hair grow indefinitely to demonstrate his grief. You finch (little bird), what is your business in this? (Translation)

Literally meaning, if a hairy animal has a hair issue and anyone wants to interrogate it should be at least an animal with hair not a bird. It would not cause a bird any embarrassment or shame.

The context is cultural meanings and understandings of power and its relations. The participants were wondering who wants to know what kind of power they have. By this proverb they are communicating that their cultures are quite different and as such they approach things differently but achieve the same or comparable results. In a sense the monkey and the bird probably both mourn, but very differently. Kokofu women know and understand their men as children at various stages of development needing nurturing. Part

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<sup>213</sup> Catalogued in Rattray as number 88 and uses the bush-buck as the intruding outsider. Catalogued by Christaller as number 1445.

of their mothering strategy is to make the men feel powerful and strong, even if it is just a façade and makes the women appear weak and powerless.

Nana Afrakoma II, Akwamufie Hema during an interview asked the media why civil society, mostly western women keep telling African women to measure whatever they do and expect numeration. She said they (non-Akan) and white people keep telling us how weak and powerless we are. In a sense, power is context and perception relative, so using someone else's yardstick to measure happenings in other communities is inappropriate.

The Akwamufie Hema, Nana Afrakoma II wonders,

Why is everybody outside Africa trying to tell us what power is and where to look for it? They say that if they can't see a lot of women in parliament it means we have no power so they come into the country to show us what power is, where to find it, and how to use it. We have always had power and we know when and how to exercise it. I am pleading that they try to at least understand our culture. They will appreciate that we do not exercise the power from parliament, but we effect change at the grassroots level.<sup>214</sup>

Joyce Aryee, a key informant, also cautions that we should have policies that resonate with our culture and we can relate to".<sup>215</sup>

The late Professor Adu Boahen (UCC) also advised that "we should not pressure women to be statistically relevant because like two rivers at a confluence, each knows its way to the sea".<sup>216</sup>

Finally, Nana Afrakoma II adds:

we know who we are, what is expected from us and our responsibilities. So, stop pressuring us with workshops to tell us who you want us to be. We have been playing our roles since time immemorial  
(Nana Afrakoma II, Akwamufie on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2015)

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<sup>214</sup> Field notes: Interview with Nana Afrakoma II, Akwamufie hema, Recorded by the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), on the occasion of Homecoming of the Akwamufie Traditional Area on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2015. Copy of video attached as an appendix.

<sup>215</sup> Field notes: Interview with Dr Joyce Aryee on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017 in Accra at the light & Salt ministry Office.

<sup>216</sup> Fieldnotes: Interview of Professor Adu Boahen at University of Cape Coast on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

### 5.7 Prevailing paradoxes and contradictions

At the start of the fieldwork many people pointed out contradictions to be investigated. The issue was raised because many Ghanaians, while they believe that some women in Ghanaian society especially the Akan have power, they also note how these women present themselves or are presented publicly as contradictory.

1. People wanted to know why women, especially the  $\square$ hema sits behind and to the left of the  $\square$ hene in public, on a much smaller and obscure stool.

Answer<sup>217</sup>:  $\square$ hema sits a few steps back on the left of  $\square$ hene. The explanation given is that it is the woman who sits her man (son, brother, uncle grandson) on her right, as God did with Jesus Christ, his begotten son. This is discussed elsewhere in this chapter. The contrasting size of the stool is to enhance the position of the  $\square$ hene and boost his morale. As nurturers, Akan women are always mindful of their goal as sustainers of the men in every conceivable way.

2. Some wanted to understand why Akan women walk behind the men in a procession.

In most Akan or specifically Asante procession the men lead the women.

Answer<sup>218</sup>: In almost all Akan communities, men always lead in a procession except when a woman is leading by way of introduction of the group following her. In a traditional procession, the male stool with regalia lead followed by the  $\square$ hene, then the female stool with entourage follows before the  $\square$ hema. The 'mmaa dwa'<sup>219</sup> is the oldest, so the last in any procession. In any traditional Akan lineal procession, the less valuable regalia are in the front, the least important retinue/entourage precede the most prominent figures.

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<sup>217</sup> Answer given by Nana Tromoo Kwagyan II and Nana Tiwaa Mansa of Kokofu.

<sup>218</sup> Answer given by Barima Okogyasuo Offe Akwasi II, Kokofuhene.

<sup>219</sup> The Female stool

3. Some people wanted to know why women cook the meals for the consecrated/black stools but are not allowed in the stool rooms.

Answer<sup>220</sup>: The stool house is private with some restricted areas. The Soodohene (a male stool house butler) oversees the stool house and handles most of the cooking at the stool house. Not all persons are allowed into the stool houses. The  $\square$ baapanin of the lineage, who is usually over the age of sixty and usually post-menopausal attends to some housekeeping businesses at the stool house. Only the  $\square$ hemaa has access to the stool room. The issue of the menstrual blood is explained elsewhere in this thesis. In almost all cases, the lineage head, in the person of  $\square$ baapanin or  $\square$ hemaa is usually beyond menstrual years and not barred from any of these ceremonies.

### 5.7.1 Paradoxes in the Akan culture

There is a parallel running through some of the military ranking and kinship systems as the example below illustrate. Among the Akan, the Asante have a duality of matrilineal and patrilineal inheritance. Asante is also a fusion of Akan family membership based on kinship and matrilineality and a political structure and rank which emanate from foundational structures and Asanteman confederacy membership. All Asante paramountcies have an Akwamu and Kontire divisions, which are patrilineal. So, discussions of power in general are obviously male dominated. In the past, both Akwamuhene and Kontihene have sought counsel with Nana Afia Kobi Serwaa Ampem. This means that the Asantehemaa acts as surrogate Abrewa to some of the patrilineal stools in Kumasi while Kokofuhemaa also plays surrogate Abrewa to the Akwamuhene

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<sup>220</sup> Answer given by Barima Okogyasuo Offe Akwasi II, Kokofuhene.

and Kontihene of Kokofu<sup>221</sup>. However, times have changed and relations are also evolving and these dynamics need to be studied for a much deeper understanding of patrilineal enclaves within matrilineal societies. This has further been complicated by the rise of Asante bureaucracy, which was initiated by Nana Osei Kwadwo, which was continued and sustained by Nana Osei Kwame and Nana Osei Bonsu between 1764 and 1824. (Wilks 1966:216) These were administrative offices which the Asantehene created as mostly gifts, but some were according to expertise of the recipients. Up until the time of Osei Kwadwo (1764 – 1777), the basis of authority was purely by ascription. Wilks quotes Bowdich as writing that ‘the aristocracy in Ashantee always acquired this dignity by inheritance only’. (Bowdich 1821:54, Wilks 1966: 216). Over the years, Asantehene<sup>222</sup> also created specific “stools that could be transmitted patrilineally” (Awedoba 2002:100). These are stools for his sons from Ayete<sup>223</sup> (stool wives), non-royals, or just as gifts and rewards. These include Kumasi Apagya, Kumasi Kyidom, Kumasi Akyempim, Akomfore, and Atipin stools. All Akan stools fall into two basic categories of Egudie (ancestral stools) and Abodie (created stools or office). The egudie or ancestral stools are those belonging to lineages and mostly consecrated or ‘blackened’. The abodie or somdwa are mostly administrative stools created as a reward or created to utilize the skills of the office holder (Wilks, 1966; Hagan, 1971).

This trend continued and as recently as within the past few decades Otumfuo Opoku Ware II created the ‘Nkosuo’, ‘Abofo’, and the ‘Dwanetofo’ stools. Otumfuo Osei Tutu II has also created the ‘Kantinka’ and ‘Busumuru’ stools for two distinguished Akan men. The

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<sup>221</sup> This has been the norm and the current Kokofu Kontihene attest to this role play. But the current Kokofuhemaa, Osagyefo KisiwaaMuaBaayie is comparatively young (59years) and lives outside the country a good part of the year. This poses a challenge even if the chiefs wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt as ‘Abrewa’.

<sup>222</sup> In this instance Asantehene stands for all occupants of the Golden stool to date.

<sup>223</sup> Ayete simply means stool wife. They number about three thousand three hundred and thirty-three wives from specific lineages throughout the Asante kingdom. (Bowdich 1821)

Kantinka was created for Dr. Donkor Fordwor and the Busumuru was created for the late Mr. Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General.

The Asante bureaucratic system is a mixed structure of a hereditary with an overlay of a political system where membership to the confederacy is mostly based on military rank in the Asanteman council structure, then glazed with an administrative layer of office holders with authority to administer specific directives for Asantehene and Asanteman. In this mixed system, inheritance or accession to the stool is based on paternal lineage, except the first layer which is purely by ascription. For example, the Bantama, Adum and Asafo (Kontire, and Akwamu) are patrilineal. Occasionally, the duality becomes more glaring through some marriages. For example,

The current Bantamahene Baffour Owusu Amankwatia is the son of Baffour Owusu Asare IV and  $\square$ baapanin Yaa Manu, a royal of Mamponthen. He could have become the Mamponthenene or Bantamahene. Rather, he was given the Bantamahene while his maternal senior brother from a different father became the Mamponthenene.<sup>224</sup>

### 5.7.2 Asante and inheritance

There have been many misconceptions about Akaness and matrilineal inheritance. Matrilineal inheritance is through mother or uterine but does not exclude male beneficiaries. Men inherit from mothers but cannot bequeath such inheritances to their wife and children. For instance, if a mother has four children, three girls, and one boy, her property is divided into four after her death. The son can enjoy his share with his family (wife and children) but on his death, such property goes back to his siblings not his wife and children. On the other hand, whatever he acquired outside of that goes to his wife and children.

Matrilineal Akan manage the existing property of land, farms, houses, and such family (Abusua) estates. In many cases, every member of the lineage has an abode in such a dwelling and they are managed and maintained by the  $\square$ baapanin whilst the Abusuapanin

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<sup>224</sup> They are currently both chiefs of the Kumasi Traditional Council

is in charge of all ensuing litigation with the  $\square$ baapanin as the principal witness. Most families do not leave the family without “Abusua fotuo”<sup>225</sup> for incidents such as family debt and funeral expenses which are also managed by the Abusuapanin.

### 5.8 Akanness in the twenty-first century

The pristine communities where kinship and other concepts can easily be seen and studied are dwindling, replaced by members who currently reside in the communities with an acute sense of researchers seeking to produce knowledge and what kind of value they may add to such a project. Kokofu remains one of the few Asante communities where kinship and other elements of Akan polity can still be experienced and studied. As people move and mingle with other ethnic groups it should be anticipated that the Akanness will start to dissipate or fade. In the Akwamu case, Akwamu is bordered on all four sides by patrilineal groups from Anlo. The Akwamu traditional council itself has towns and members from the Volta region. The Akwamu definition of power and womanhood is markedly different from the definitions from Kumasi and Kokofu. While Akwamu women blamed envy and jealousy for lack of support for female parliamentary candidates, Asante Kokofu women dismissed the whole idea of women vying for parliament as unnecessary and misguided avenue for power.

Globalization has already shown its transformation on degrees of ethnicity, as many Asante and Akan indigenes comfortably call themselves transnationals or global citizens. Marriage is also rearing its head in the definition of kinship and family. The three categories of women, discussed under section (5.6.4) will keep representing the new dynamics but with interesting twists. There are many glimpses of the impact of Christian influences throughout this period at Kokofu but not captured due to time constraints. A dedicated ethnographic study will bring out such nuances and the effect of geographical

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<sup>225</sup> Family treasury or purse. In most cases it is revenue from real estate rentals or farmland leases.

location on the degree of ethnicity as people keep moving further and further away from ethnic and kin enclaves into more globalized and secular locations and spheres.

### 5.9 Emerging theories and models

Theories and models for socio-cultural and economic development have emerged. This thesis identified the need for a model for socio-cultural development. I chose standpoint because it is an authority rooted in the individual's knowledge (perspective): Asante ~~Kofu~~ women's notions and definition of power. As stated in chapter three, the aim was not to impose any pre-ordained concepts but to allow meanings to emerge from the data. The researcher became the primary tool for Asante Kokofu women to share their notions of power. While it is understood by many that power is relative, analysis of power in society should include culture. (Bourdieu, 1986). The concept of Abrewa and  $\square$ hema emerged as the most prevalent in this study. While the concept of Abrewa has been awed and mystified in some instances, there is a proliferation of  $\square$ hema throughout Ghana even in communities which do not share other aspects of the Akan culture, such as market spaces. The two concepts have thus emerged as models for socio-political development and leadership. Habitus is very helpful in explaining this phenomenon. Abrewa appears very expedient in many settings where the demands of the current democratic governance conflict with cultural understandings of development and there is need for mediation. In situations where Abrewa is not part of the institutional framework, the convenience of the myth and reverence for the concept is invoked, and it works in many instances. In exploring the intersection of knowledge making and custodianship, Abrewa appears as an ideal model for conflict mediation and resolution.

There are few models in the knowledge gap in the new and emerging approaches to reconstructing cultural antecedence in women studies, these models for leadership can be used as a prism for viewing changes in women's lives.

Ɔhemaa is currently found in every locality in Ghana and as the proliferation continues it is also changing how the concept is even seen at its origin. This phenomenon has propelled the discourse on Akan women and power (a fringe conversation) to traditional notions and understanding of power (a mainstream discussion).

### 5.9.1 Bourdieu's Habitus is very helpful in explaining these models

Abrewa and Ɔhemaa are powerful due to their origins and sustainability in kinship. They are “culturally and symbolically created through socialized norms or tendencies that guide behavior and thinking” (Navarro 2006:568). The Akan “society has become deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them” (Wacquant 2005)<sup>226</sup>

**Habitus** thus demystifies many aspects of the phenomenon. It is shaped by past events and structures and conditions our perceptions. In this study it was very critical to bring out aspects of Akan concepts of person and concept of mind to understand why an Asante woman in Kokofu would only define her power in terms of her disposition as a nurturer of all men in her lineage, and custodian and sustainer of her matrilineage. Bourdieu (1984:170) shows that it is such structures and histories that condition our perceptions that unconsciously create and reproduce habitus.

### 5.9.2 Bourdieu's concept of Capital is very useful here.

His definition of Capital is beyond the material asset. This can be social, cultural, or symbolic capital, where;

cultural capital plays a central role in societal power relations as this provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy as classes distinguish themselves through taste (Gaventa 2003:6)

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<sup>226</sup> Already discussed in chapter three (3.3.7) Repeated here for emphasis and relevance.

The cultural capital in the case of Asante Kokofu women is chieftaincy and kinship avenues of power. These are inscribed in people's minds through cultural products like cultural concepts and specific rituals and methods of classification.

### 5.9.3 Bourdieu's idea of **Fields** also shed additional light on these models.

A field is "a network, structure or set of relationships which may be intellectual, religious or cultural" (Navarro 2006:18)<sup>227</sup>.

The power people experience often depends on their field. In other words, establishes the foundations of the model depending on the context and environment, then cultural capital and field determine how much power commanded by the women in private or public sphere. The concept of capital and field makes the two concepts of Abrewa and ɔhemaa very mobile and easy to replicate which explains the current trend of proliferation all over Ghana and other parts of the world especially in the Diaspora.

### 5.10 Summary of chapter five

In the earlier chapter I sought to establish the duality of Ghana's disposition: a democratic national government with a traditional governance system. I concluded the chapter as the story from one of two sides: The democratic national governance. In this chapter I have tried to explain the importance and relevance of culture in the discussion of women and power in the Akan society. I have defined Akanness and the elements that make an individual an ɔkani or Kanniba. The Akan definition of a person; okra, sunsum, and mogya are defined, as well as the nton and Ntoro which come together to make the person. The personhood in Akan world is also explained under the section on Akan cosmology which climax into kinship and moves into definitions of Matriarchy, and matrilineage. The understanding of these concepts is key to notions of power in Akan worldview. The concepts of Abrewa, ɔhemaa and ɔbaapanin are explored to support the analysis of the data from fieldwork. The data collected makes it abundantly clear that Kokofu women

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<sup>227</sup>Bourdieu and 'Habitus' \_ Understanding power for social change \_ power cube Downloaded on 2/1/2018

have power, though exercised differently. The kinds of power Akan women have become much clearer for their utility in specific contexts and illustrate how they can accelerate development. The chapter concludes with some paradoxes in the Akan culture which poses challenge and other challenges due to urbanization, globalization, and education. The notions and definition of power from akan Asante Kokofu women's standpoint are presented as key findings in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 6.0 Overview

This chapter concludes the study of women and power in Asante Kokofu from the women's standpoint.

This thesis moves the discourse on women and power from prevailing notions of women's powerlessness to cultural notions of power and authority which brings the discourse closer to alternative ways and understandings of power in different contexts and actions of women.

- The premise of empowerment as a development tool is flawed because it assumes powerlessness.
- What this thesis claim, is that some women in African society exercise power in multiple ways that are difficult to acknowledge, or recognize when the tools designed to study Western societies are used to measure any phenomenon in African societies.
- Some women in some African societies, specifically Akan Asante Kokofu women in Ghana, have power though understood and exercised differently.
  - Indeed, Akan Asante Kokofu women in Ghana have power as demonstrated in this study.
- Power in the Akan worldview is much deeper and more complex than the number of women office holders in typical male corridors or arenas of power such as parliament
- The preceding analysis on the **Status of Women in Ghana** (Chapter four) also proves that there are two sides to the Ghana women and power story, which further

proves that there are differing notions and understandings of power conceptualization. Examination of both operationalized concepts reveal a gap which is very rigid. What is fueling the gap and disjuncture is the fact that both approaches to governance are recognized and enshrined in the constitution of Ghana.

- This thesis has evolved to include another objective:
  - To bring these two perspectives together: the national level where we look at matrix and specific indicators to make sweeping statements about women, and this quieter, understated but confident notions of their own powerfulness.
- Having been privy to both sides, I argue that not much can be accomplished towards equitable sustainable development without bringing these two conversations together.

It starts with recognizing the problem and acknowledging the gap created by the problem.

The various legal instrumentations: international treaties, regional commitments, global obligations, and bilateral agreements are all forms of laws and should be based on context and culture. But unfortunately, culture is excluded from the discussion. Law has always been instrumental. At the same time, cultural norms are suspected as resistant to social change especially when gender relations are concerned. In that we need to use law to sort of push through. It is presumed that law and culture are oppositional, and it is only when law operates outside of its culture that it appears alien. My aim is to reposition how we live the law and culture in ways in which culture can empower law to act in instrumental ways.

In this chapter the research objectives are reviewed, and the major research findings discussed. The contributions of the thesis to knowledge practice and methodology are

discussed. Potential avenues for further research and the limitations of this study are also discussed.

The study sought to investigate what kind of power Asante Kokofu women have through their definition and notions of power. This was conceptualized into five main questions:

- Do Kokofu women have power?
- What kinds of power do Kokofu women have?
- Why do Kokofu women believe they have that kind of power?
- What are the sources of Kokofu women's power?
- How do Kokofu women use or exercise power?

These five questions were articulated into six objectives.

### **6.1 Review of objectives**

The main objective of this study: To clearly explore the Akan (Asante) Kokofu women's notion and understanding of power from their own standpoint. The study sought to achieve that by interrogating six related categories of objectives.

The preceding chapter, (the analysis of data from fieldwork), has articulated what demonstrate that women in Kokofu have shared their understanding and notions of power by defining power from the Akan worldview. From the interviews the key to deciphering their understanding and notions of power is the understanding of the concept of personhood and womanhood in the Akan worldview and cosmology. Kokofu women confide that they have power. As showed below, in defining their mode of power under objective 3, their focus is on 'power to' which is their ability to do certain things. As opposed to 'power over' people or things. Power Over is the most popular conception of power in western philosophy, political science, and popular culture is straightforward and

understood as ‘power over’ others or over things. Power over is about control and dominance which tends to make some people powerless.

**Objective 1. To identify and frame the elements that makes up the notions of power in the Akan Asante polity of Kokofu.**

This objective has been dealt with in detail in the previous chapter. The elements include Akan concepts of power, womanhood and the mind and other related cultural codes.

**Objective 2 To ascertain whether Kokofu women have power.**

- There were interviews of women and men in and outside Kokofu. Key informants and traditional leaders in Kokofu shared their knowledge on what the community perceives as power. Women who are indigenes but live outside Kokofu also shared their knowledge on the subject of women and power as members of the community of Akan women of Kokofu and as members of the larger society of Ghanaians in general. Kokofu women have demonstrated and established satisfactorily that they do have power and have had power before, during and since colonialism. To show that they have power:
- They shared their historic antecedents and ongoing custodianship and available positions of power.
- Kokofu women have also intimated that their powers are not always obvious because as perpetual nurturers, their goal is to always make their men (sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, and uncles) appear more powerful and more prominent, even though the men themselves know that whatever power and authority they have is delegated by the women.

**Objective 3 To show and examine the kinds of power Kokofu women have.**

- The kinds of power Kokofu women have was thus documented and analysed in the previous chapter. Both the tangible and intangible evidence have been shared, verified and documented. Kokofu women pointed to the evidence of their power:
  - Their ability to menstruate and procreate
  - Their ability to sustain the lineage
  - Their ability to nurture men in the lineage

**Objective 4 To investigate the sources of Kokofu women's power.**

- Kokofu women claim that the source of their power is God.
- Kokofu women have also intimated that social and political aspects of their power is obvious to men because of the reproductive (biological) and nurturing (social) aspects of it, but there is a spiritual aspect of it which is not as tangible as the biological and social aspects of the power.
- The source of their power is also innate and spiritual, but not witchcraft.

**Objective 5 To analyze how Kokofu women use/express power**

- I analysed collected data and supplemented that with analysis of their social interactions and incidents shared by key informants
- Kokofu women cited that men are fragile and needs constant encouragement and support so in their utilization of power they try to stay behind men and appear less powerful.

**Objective 6 To articulate the cultural/traditional understanding and notions of power.**

This objective was to investigate whether there is a general sense in which Kokofu women's power is known and understood. To accomplish that, eight proverbs are reviewed for their relevance and efficacy to the discourse and context. To ascertain

whether or not Kokofu women have power I looked at some of the symbols and indicators and verified their meanings from other informants.

- This spiritual aspect is deeply rooted in the Akan concept of personhood and womanhood as discussed in chapter five under same sub-headings.
- Kokofu women mentioned various sites of power which include the entire female body and the ability to procreate, in addition to known symbols like the stool, gold studded slippers and a gun as part of the Kokofu Hemaas' regalia.

## 6.2 Major Findings

- Kokofu women have power by their own understanding and notions of power
- Women in Kokofu do not share the national definition and notions of power.
- There is a disconnection between the official (national democratic governance level) and the cultural (traditional governance or community level) on what constitutes power and where, when, and how to get or exercise power.
- Women in Kokofu fall into three distinct categories:
  - Those close to kin and are or will eventually enjoy the cultural avenues of power with little or no formal education and have stayed close to kin and custodians.
  - Those who focused on academic and professional achievements are those who pushed away from the lineage and away from cultural avenues of power. This group is the upwardly mobile but away from kin and the avenues to traditional power. They assume automatic empowerment through education. They are those complaining about needing empowerment
  - Those who have received advanced formal education, remarkably successful and well-traveled. They have come to be cognizant of the first

two categories of women and understand them very well. They are remarkably close to their kinship network and have stayed close to the lineage and the matrilineal powers without any serious breaks. They are women who comfortably swing through these corridors (their own achieved avenues to power and cultural avenues through kinship), and do not find the need for empowerment or affirmative action

- In the history of Kokofu, no woman has contested for parliamentary or local government elections, though women in Kokofu have shown that they have power, have always had power, and currently enjoy the same powers they were endowed with by ascription.
- This study also found out why women in these societies do not contest for positions which are usually dominated by men such as parliamentary seats.
- This study also uncovered that Kokofu women (living outside Kokofu), do not usually rally around women who contest for political power and seldom vote for women who contest.
- Another major finding is that Asante society is still very gerontocratic: age, and rank still order the society
- Spirituality is still relevant to contemporary Asante notions of power. Spirituality in Akan notions of institutional power has previously been covered by McCaskie (1992) and general women's spiritual power has been covered by Akyeampong (1996). But both authors covered spirituality from the institutional and general use of such powers. What my study has unveiled is the explanation and insight from the women themselves: the innate and mystical powers women are endowed with. This spiritual power is not witchcraft as McCaskie (1992) suggests but can only be experienced and known when it is admitted by owners and custodians and orally shared.

- Children are highly valued (procreation) by the elders of the lineage whose influence in the community depends to some extent on their numbers, therefore organization of lineage and kinship remains important in Ashanti social life today.

### **6.3 Contribution of the thesis**

This thesis has found an indigenous model for development in the concept of Abrewa.

The institution of  $\square$ hema also emerged as a model for socio-cultural development.

This thesis declares major contributions to knowledge, practice, and methodology as elaborated below.

#### **6.3.1 Contribution to practice of research**

- My empirical contribution is exposing the gap between the general definition of power as articulated at the national governance level and the cultural/traditional understanding and notions of power at the community level in Ghana.
- In identifying the existing gaps, I have also identified some of the ways to engage the two sides to fill the gap.
- I have shed light for a deeper understanding of traditional/cultural notions and understanding of power from Akan Asante Kokofu women's standpoint.
- My contribution is also the dialogue I bring into the conversation with the structures of the modern state and what could be gained from that conversation. - this thesis propels the discourse on Akan women and power (a fringe conversation) to traditional understanding and notions of power (a mainstream discourse).

#### **6.3.2 Contribution to Methodology**

Akan, specifically Asante, is still a very gerontocratic society and because they still lean on the Akan definitions and concepts of personhood and concept of the mind, they are comfortable sharing information with equals. This study was done by a sixty-year-old female who the interviewees and informants considered as an equal. These same people

were approached in 2005 about the same topic and the reaction was quite different then. They were either busy or could not understand what I expected them to say or do. The method employed in this study was more of peer-to-peer discussions on prevailing issues. Some women even came to my house to open up about the spiritual and metaphysical aspect of women's power. Ethnic and cultural studies should be encouraged where and when the researcher can fit into the space of the enquiry.

### 6.3.3 Contribution to Knowledge

- This thesis contributes to knowledge production of historiography of women and power. This study moves the discourse on women and power from prevailing notions of powerlessness to cultural understandings of power.
- This thesis uses women's own voices to share their own understanding of power, while earlier studies (Aidoo 1981, Stoeltje 1995, Allman 2000, and Clark 1984) mostly pointed to activities of women and analysed the contents for agency. While such approaches are not necessarily wrong, the gap in the definition of power and the instrument (yardstick) used are not shared.
- This is the first time that women of Kokofu have been studied exclusively for their notion and understanding of power.
- This study has also illuminated many Akan concepts which need to be studied further: the institution of  $\square$ hemaa is the oldest Akan institution. This institution has proliferated throughout Ghana to even non-Akan communities where there are Ahemaa<sup>228</sup> at various markets of different categories.
- There is no earlier study of  $\square$ hemaa which probe into its intricacies and elements as a model for sustainable development and leadership.

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<sup>228</sup> Plural for  $\square$ hemaa.

- Abrewa has also permeated into many non-Akan non-matrilineal communities as a viable concept and model in mediation and negotiations.
- Patrilineal enclaves in matrilineal communities have been exposed and need to be studied further.

#### **6.4 Research limitations**

This study is limited in scope and applicability due to its limited gaze of age category. Even though the study is about the present situation in Ghana, it can only be applied to an extent. There were a few hurdles which limited how far or how deep the study could be advanced. There were time and budgetary constraints.

It takes time to develop rapport and gain participants trust and confidence. In some cases, most participants were familiar with the researcher, but to maintain ethical distance during the two-year period, imaginary boundaries needed to be set. Initially the researcher did not have that, and it cost a lot of time because the researcher assumed that familiarity would be an advantage, but it did not. At the next appointment, the researcher read the questionnaire and started recording, which saved a lot of time.

#### **6.5 Challenges**

Workshop fatigue syndrome as a foreseen challenge: The impact of workshops which indoctrinate girls and women on western standards and expectations, have eroded the Akan woman's cultural capacity to genuinely define power from their own standpoint. This was not noticeable in the group discussion at Kokofu since the very young (up to fifty years old) excluded themselves. But some women in individual conversations asked for compensation with the expectation that women's empowerment NGOs usually reward participants for giving certain responses.

## 6.6 Recommendations and Potential avenues for further research

There are still many pertinent questions which are beyond the scope of the current study.

These include:

- How has women's power been conceived and treated over time?
- What has occasioned the changes if any? Are the changes influenced by external ideas or internal ideas?
- And do we consider the changes positive?

Patrilineal enclaves in matrilineal communities need to be investigated for the harmony or conflict they can generate.

Kokofu women kept defining Parliament as 'Akono': the new Battlefield. If their understanding of power at least recognize parliament as a frontier, research into its relevance into their definition and understanding of power would enhance sustainable development in Ghana.

## 6.7 Personal reflection

This chapter concludes the study of women and power in Ghana of the Kokofu case. In this chapter, the key findings are presented, in addition to all the achieved goals.

The above clearly show that Akan Asante Kokofu women have power which they exercise in multiple ways. This study also debunks the prevailing notions of women's general powerlessness. This study shows that powerlessness is just a perception in some cases and an intentional façade in other instances such as the studied population. In Ghana powerlessness is a paradox in the sense that the women themselves can change that perception overnight by getting rid of some of the outmoded taboos, customs and practices such as child marriage. But it seems that older women find it as a utility in gerontocracy because it keeps the younger generation at bay, in their place. By this study, women's

power is captured and articulated properly, and not left to assumptions of weak, powerless victims.

This study shows that if women in Ghana are not clamoring to be parliamentarians it may well be that they do not agree with civil society that parliament is where power is gained or/and distributed. I hope that this study will encourage different methods of measuring power in different contexts to accommodate the realities in the local context.

## 6.8 Final thoughts

I believe that sustainable development could come from acknowledging and supporting women's knowledge and allowing them to tell their own story in their own way while claiming their rightful place in society. The government of Ghana need to acknowledge and incorporate cultural norms in development thinking. Akan and Kokofu women need to understand that they have had their powers from 'tete' (since time immemorial). But the times have changed, and the current democratic dispensation require that they represent themselves at the table to participate in the national governance. Kokofu women need to utilize the same enthusiasm they exhibit in traditional matters to take space or make space for women at the national level, for example, in parliament.

## 6.9 Concluding Reflection on Empowerment

Empowerment, as I declared at the end of the introductory chapter, is beyond the scope of this research. As I stated:

The discourse on empowerment deserves its own space and forum and does not fit into the scope of this study beyond the necessary mention of 'women's empowerment' in this introduction.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Repeated here for emphasis.

If Asante Kokofu women had said they had little or no power, it would have been necessary to move the inquiry further. Empowerment is still an ongoing development tool, and this study clearly identifies a gap in the discussion which should be further investigated: If empowerment is still a useful development tool, then who determines the type of empowerment to be employed without dislocating recipients or beneficiaries?

### **6.10 Epilogue**

Kinship still has a way of subordinating women through conjugal dependence and marriage, but women still have avenues to many forms of power in Ghana especially among the Akan, and particularly among the Asante Kokofu women.

Increased bureaucratization of traditional offices, urbanisation, westernisation, and industrialisation have eclipsed the traditional and cultural avenues (ascription) to power for women. This current disposition has given the appearance of “covert gynocracy” which continues to operate in the modern dispersed community. (Bartle 1982:21)

The aspiration to achieve a complete economic, social, and political equality between women and men has been going through a gradual and varied realization. While women in some societies are still expected to cook, clean, and attend to children and family, some in industrial societies are compelled to join the labor force out of sheer economic necessity. In addition, it has been noted that as the economic status of women and their independence rises, certain social changes also take place: for example, among women in industrial societies and urban dwellers in non-industrial societies’ birth-rates decline and divorce rates also escalate. Women also tend to delay marriage as economic and social status change.

These three interdependent factors (economic, social and political) promote equality, but in varying degrees since the rate is dependent on the strength of traditional and religious

sentiments and the society's image and definition of family, the importance of woman as the bearer of children and their indigenous definition of power. Emancipation has been growing steadily around the globe, but the process has not been automatic. In societies with less pronounced traditional family values such as New Zealand and Australia, suffrages were offered much earlier. However, New Zealand and Australia do not appear at the top of the IPU listing. The examples of New Zealand and Australia, countries with less emphasis on traditional values may be viewed as countries more likely to emancipate and develop. I make the counter argument that rather, it is the countries with strong traditional values, whose constitution and laws reflect their history and evolution, which are more likely to have men and women naturally and explicitly enjoying equal freedoms.



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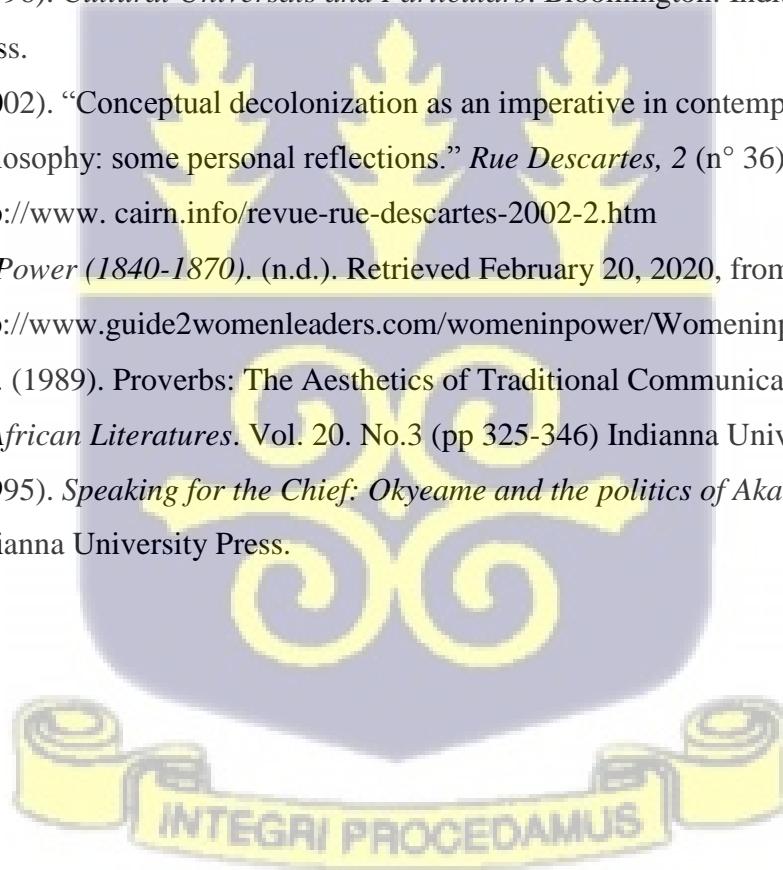
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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: Protocol Consent Form**

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

Official Use only





Protocol number

**Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH)**

**PROTOCOL CONSENT FORM**

**Section A- BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Title of Study:	WOMEN AND POWER IN AFRICA – The Case of the Akan state of KOKOFU
Principal Investigator:	REBECCA SERWA AKOTO TANDOH
Certified Protocol Number	

**Section B– CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**General Information about Research**

My name is Rebecca Tandoh. I am a PhD student at the Institute of African Studies (IAS), University of Ghana. I am interested in finding out about the definitions and notions of power from Kokofu women. The study involves research, and I will have a short discussion with you and a group of other people. In order to be sure that you are informed about being in this research, I am asking you to read (or will be reading to you) this Consent Form. You will also be asked to sign it (or make your mark in front of a witness). I will give you a copy of this form. This consent form might contain some words that are unfamiliar to you. Please ask me to explain anything you may not understand. The purpose of this study is to give this community the opportunity to describe their notions and definitions of power. To ascertain whether general definitions are applicable in this community. This is an ethnographic study and we are going to have conversations. You should be comfortable with what you share. There is no set structure but there is an outline that will guide our conversation.

If you agree to be in the research, you will be interviewed for about 40 minutes. I will have a conversation with you about women in general, and not about your own particular situation. I will record the conversation between us on tape and will take some notes on paper. I will not be conducting any medical exams or tests. In all, about 40 women and men will take part in this research.

**Benefits/Risk of the study**

The things we discuss, combined with responses from other men and women will help us understand our political participation and inform development initiatives and interventions for women and society in general. I do not think that there are any risks associated with participation in the study.

### **Confidentiality**

I will protect information about you and your taking part in this research to the best of my ability. Your research records will be kept securely locked up at the Institute of African Studies. Your name or address will not be recorded in your questionnaire and you will not be named in any public communications, documents or reports. However, some students and researchers of the Institute may sometimes look at your research records. Thus, either you or your representative will be signing or thumb printing a written consent form, which will authorize such access. Biographical data will be kept confidential except in cases where participant agree to be quoted for emphasis.

### **Compensation**

There is no compensation package either in cash or kind available for participants who participate in the study. However, if you agree to the interview, lunch will be provided at the end of the interview.

### **Withdrawal from Study**

You are free to decide if you want to be in this research. Your participation is entirely voluntary. In the course of the discussion, you may choose not to answer a question or even stop the interview altogether. If you choose to stop the discussion, all the responses you provide will be deleted from the study. Your decision will not affect any service(s) and benefits you would normally receive. Either you or your legal representative will be informed as soon as is possible if information becomes available that may be relevant to your willingness to continue participation or withdraw from the study. While this study is anticipated to be an on-going discussion, researcher may terminate study when adequate information has been collected.

### **Contact for Additional Information**

After our interview, if you have any additional questions about this research or any concerns regarding the study you may contact me, Rebecca Tandoh. 0244 940 867 or [beckytandoh@gmail.com](mailto:beckytandoh@gmail.com) / [rsatandoh@st.ug.edu.gh](mailto:rsatandoh@st.ug.edu.gh) or Dr. Edward Nanbigne. Institute of African Studies. P. O. Box LG75 University of Ghana-Legon [nanbigne@gmail.com](mailto:nanbigne@gmail.com) or 024 465 0661

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study you may contact the Administrator of the Ethics Committee for Humanities, ISSER, University of Ghana at [ech@isser.edu.gh](mailto:ech@isser.edu.gh) / [ech@ug.edu.gh](mailto:ech@ug.edu.gh) or 00233- 303-933-866.

### **Section C- VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT**

**"I have read or have had someone read all of the above, asked questions, received answers regarding participation in this study, and am willing to give consent for me, my child/ward to**

participate in this study. I will not have waived any of my rights by signing this consent form. Upon signing this consent form, I will receive a copy for my personal records."

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Volunteer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature or mark of volunteer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**If volunteers cannot read the form themselves, a witness must sign here:**

I was present while the benefits, risks and procedures were read to the volunteer. All questions were answered and the volunteer has agreed to take part in the research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research have been explained to the above individual.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person who Obtained Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**Appendix B: Question Guide – FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (English)**

**Women and power in Africa – The case of the Akan state of Kokofu**

Name ----- Sex M/F Age-----

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_ Education \_\_\_\_\_ Residence \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTES:**

---

1. What is power? How do you define power?

.....  
.....

2. What are the attributes of power?

.....  
.....

3. What makes someone powerful?

.....  
.....

4. What is your notion of power in relation to womanhood?

.....  
.....

5. Do Akan women have power? Yes/No Please explain

.....  
.....

6. What makes a woman powerful?

.....  
.....

7. How do Kokofu women usually express power?

.....  
.....

8. How do Akan women express power?

.....  
.....

9. What are the sources of Kokofu women's power?

.....  
.....

10. Please, do you have any kind of power? Yes / No  
Please describe it

.....  
.....

**Question Guide – FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (Twi)**

**Women and power in Africa – The case of the Akan state of Kokofu**

Name ----- Sex M/F Age-----

Ethnicity\_\_\_\_\_Education\_\_\_\_\_Residence\_\_\_\_\_

**NOTES:**

---

1. Tumi koraa, ene dien? Tumi nkyerease ne sen?

.....

2. Tumi ahye nso die bi ne den?

.....

3. Dien na ema obi ye tumifo?

.....

4. Se ye ka tumi wo mmaa fa mu a, ne ka ne sen?

.....

5. Nti Akanfo mmaa wo tumi ana? Aane/ Daabi Kyerekyeremu

.....

6. Dien na ema obaa ye tumifo?

.....

7. Sen na Kokofu mmaa kyere tumi?

.....

8. Sen na akanfo mmaa kyere tumi?

.....

9. Dien mu na Kokofu mmaa tumi firi ba?

.....

10. Me pawo kyew, woara ankasa wo w<sup>o</sup> tumi bi ana? Aane/ Daabi

Kyer<sup>o</sup>kyer<sup>o</sup> mu. ....

.....