

Female Masculinity, a Question of Identity Construction in Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman*

KODJOVI Kangnivi

Maître assistant
Université de Lomé
France

Abstract

The struggle in the favour of women has given some results which are to some extent debatable. So, it is in this vein that this article offers a new directive of the struggle for women's rights and offers thereby some elements that feminism needs to take into account for the effectiveness of its struggle. That is, this struggle goes beyond gender realities to bear identity marks.

Key words: interest, human being, identity, masculinity, female and male.

Résumé

La lutte pour l'épanouissement des femmes a donné des résultats qui à mon avis sont discutables. C'est donc à la lumière de ce constat que cet article se veut d'apporter une nouvelle directive de la lutte pour les droits des femmes et de proposer quelques éléments que le féminisme pourrait utiliser pour l'effectivité de sa lutte. En d'autres termes, c'est une question identitaire qui va au-delà des réalités du genre.

Mots clés : intérêt, être humain, identité, masculinité, féminin et masculin.

Introduction

Literarily, the twenty-first century has mostly portrayed women as victims of male's societal regulations and laws that do not favour their rights – the acknowledgement of women's skills, their competence and their dreams or desires – hence their bottom position in many fields in the world. The debate in favour of women encourages men, on the one hand, to give women much attention and consideration. On the other hand, men are called upon to adjust and redefine the societal laws which are patriarchal. This struggle is violently led on literary field by radical feminists who even exclude men's participation and contribution accusing them of being incapable of feeling what a woman can feel as a female being. But it seems this wing of combatants forget that “a person is never born a man or a woman but becomes one or the other because the person has accomplished performance that the society identifies with a specific gender.”¹ Differently put, the accusation leveled against men as monolithic entity is not fair and needs to be revisited. What is more deplorable is the conception those who take it their responsibility to defend women's rights have of men as human beings. As far as I am concerned, human being, without distinction of sex or whatever, is to some extent by nature egoistic and selfish in terms of interests. This means that by nature humans do not give up their privileges or interests if they are not forced or obliged by their fellows or other forces. This said, the struggle women have launched seemed to portray men out of their essence –egoism and selfishness – as human beings. Men are called upon by these women and their defenders to give respect, consideration, equal rights and opportunities to women because it is said the established laws are not in their advantage. I do agree, but the debate and the combat should not overlook this human nature which is common to everybody without exception. In my viewpoint, the struggle has been conducted only on surface structure while the deep structure –human egoistic and selfish nature –seems to be in total neglect. The question that is ignored by many of the scholars who defend women's rights is: would women not behave alike if they were in men's shoes? The different answers –yes/no –to this question show that the debate should not only concern sex and gender although they were the surface structure elements that sustain men's attitudes, but rather it should tackle the interests or advantages that are at stake.

¹ Rangira Béa Gallimore “ ‘Ndabaga’ Folktale Revisited: [De]constructing Masculinity in the Post-Genocide” Rwandan Society” in Helen Nabasuta Mugambi and Tuzylina Jita Allan eds. *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*, UK: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited, 2010, p.53, pp.50-65.

In other words, the question of women's rights is rather their refusal to continue accepting the wrong identity – weak sex, housekeeper, inferior, less intelligent to mention but a few – men have given to them for long time.

My aim in this article is to look at the struggles of women for their rights as a tool they use to build their own identity. In other words, I intend to discuss how power, an identity mark in patriarchal societies, has become the target of women who refuse the identity men so far shaped for them by taking part themselves in everything that concerns them as full human beings, for

a person's identity is at any one point of time determined by their present perception of the self, by their perception of the current views of other people, by their relationships and their role in society, and through the influence of internalized images of the self and others from the past²

This is in fact my contribution to this struggle since Ama Ata Aidoo orders “every woman and man should be a feminist –especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of our land, its wealth, our lives, and the burden of our own development.”³ This objective is achieved using Efo Kōdjo Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman* as the primary source of my analysis. Feminist and patriarchal approaches are the literary theories that are used as methodological tool in this article. My analysis follows the plot of the story to show how the different characters gradually build their identities as the plot progresses.

I would like to start this work with postulate which summarizes to some extent the lot of women and the effort made to redress the situation on their behalf:

Women were rarely remembered as individuals, even when they did something memorable. They were nameless, undifferentiated, undistinguished, and undistinguishable... Numerous mechanisms, moral and legal, have developed to render women relatively unwilling or unable to leave or to change either the institution of the family or the particular family of which they were a member...In the family, the parameters of a woman's behavior were set, her undifferentiated nature reiterated, her relationships with men defined her subordination taught, and her deviations controlled.⁴

Women in general and the female writers in particular have started complaining about these portrayals showing them as victims that need sympathy if not assistance from men their oppressors and victimizers. Their victimization is blamed on men's violence (physical and psychological), maltreatment, oppression, aggression, neglect, exploitation, and abuse, to mention but a few. But Mawugbe in his play has shown his readers new women who bear male features. That is, what have been so far reproached to men is now displayed by the women the readers come across in this play because they want to overthrow what was established in many traditions as “natural sexual identity”⁵. This portrayal in the play gives credence to Ken Walibora Waliula's stance when he sees it important “to state at this point that although masculinity has something to do with what it means to be a man or manly, it does not preclude the possibility of females exhibiting masculine attributes.”⁶ But beyond these apparent characteristics attributed to gender, I rather consider them as identity features that pepper any social and gender classification. The case of Nana Yaa, the sister of the king in Efo kōdjo Mawugbe's portrayal, exhibits an aspect of this masculinity though a woman in her conversation with her guard:

Nana Yaa: (*suddenly getting furious*) Look here! Must I keep reminding you that each time you talk to me you ought to go down?

Okyeame Bonsu: I forgot...

Nana Yaa: You what?

² Wesley Carr, *The New Dictionary of Pastoral Studies*, Great Britain: Grand Rapids Michigan, 2002, p.166.

³ Anne V. Adams, *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo at 70*, UK: Ayeibia Clarke Publishing Limited, 2012, p.9.

⁴R. Emerson Dobash – Russel Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, New York: A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc; 1983.p.33.

⁵ Kelley Griffith, *Writing Essays About Literature*, United Kingdom: Wadsworth, 2002, p.144.

⁶ Ken Walibora Waliula, “Staging Masculinity in the East African Epic” in Helen Nabasuta Mugambi and Tuzyline Jita Allan eds. *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*, op.cit. p.14, pp.13-23.

Okyeame Bonsu: I mean I almost did... I am sorry.

Nana Yaa: (*Sternly*) Next time you forget, I shall hand you over to the executioners to take care of your head so you don't forget anymore.

Okyeame Bonsu: (*Prostrating himself before Nana*) Before you, Her Royal Highness, I shall make the ground my sleeping place and wake up only when you ask me to do so.

Nana Yaa: you'd better (...) now tell me⁷

Oral violence is effectively displayed by Nana Yaa in the above quote. Despite the fact that she is from the regal family which requires others to show her great respect and consideration, she exaggerates a bit. Had it come from a man to a woman many people would quickly draw the conclusion that she is being violated, brutalized and oppressed. In other words, such an attitude will be referred to as a patriarchal predisposition giving men such a right to speak so to a woman. At this level, Nana Yaa overuses her authority on her guard by despising him. But she feels happy by reducing him to a slave who "would make the ground" his "sleeping place and wake up only when" she orders him to stand up. But her reaction towards the guard is the result of the relation that exists between her and the king, her brother. That is, her interests seem to be challenged whenever she smells her brother's presence or message. So, she is just trying to protect her interests and whatever stands against her needs to be dealt with accordingly. So in this particular circumstance, it is no more the sex or the gender which is speaking but rather her essence as human being and her desire to build her own identity as Zagorka puts it: "individual identity comes about when a person learns to differentiate oneself from the environment and consciously to re-evaluate tradition, becoming thereby an independent and autonomous individual."⁸ The reaction of Nana Yaa unfolds its full implication when it is read against the plot of the story. The protagonist, Nana Yaa and her junior brother are invited by their mother the queen who wants to bestow upon them her last blessing before joining her ancestors, but Nana yaa, the elder declines what she is given as the ruler of some five cottages while her junior brother is given the whole kingdom. The tone of her answer to the mother's proposal says it all: "this is nonsense! (...) it is almost unacceptable to me/, mother, if this is what you call an honour,/ then may I beg to be dishonoured immediately(ICW:18)." Occurring in African context, it is a great disobedience to the mother as a queen. The gravity of the daughter's action is well perceived in its context –when the queen is dying. In Africa the belief holds that whatever is said by a dying person should not be refused, but the daughter's desire to succeed her mother has blinded her to a point where tradition means nothing to her at that very point just because she wants to be identified with power as her new female identity. Her response, beyond refusal bears insults and injuries to the queen and the community on the whole. But she is right since the elders of the community justify the queen's proposal, using traditional laws as a reference; she then observes that "then you have to convince me that my/ mother, the Queen mother, is a male (ICW: 19)". Her point sounds reasonable at this level; if she is refused the right to succeed her mother only because of her sex, then what did the tradition say the time her mother was to be enthroned a queen? It becomes clear that the problem at this level is not the tradition but the people who are supposed to implement such traditional laws. As a clever woman who knows her interests, she does not want to just undergo and react but rather to act and prove wrong the elders' arguments.

Nana Yaa: (...) I see... I'll tell one thing. If the customs and the political history of this kingdom are silent over what offices a woman can hold, or the role played by women in the struggle to free ourselves from the domination of the Akwamu, especially the courage and bravery displayed by our mother in our last war against the slave raiders from the north, it only proves one thing.....

That the customs and history of this kingdom were written by men. (The men cheer) the most cowardly of the human species... and the most myopic and glory-loving yet very lazy creatures Odomankoma ever moulded, perhaps by mistake. (ICW: 20-21)

Nana Yaa's viewpoint in the above postulate shows women the true way of their liberation.

⁷ Efo Kōdjo Mawugbe, *In the Chest of a Woman*, Koumashi: Isaac Books & Stationery Services, 2008, p.7. (subsequent quotations from this play will use :ICW followed with the page numbers)

⁸ Zagorka Golubovic, "Models of Identity in Postcommunist Societies" in George F. Mclean and Zagorka G. eds. *Models of Identity in Postcommunist Societies*, Washington: Library of Congress Cataloguing-in- Publication, 1999, p.27, pp. 25-39.

That is, women should not beg men to give them equal opportunity or right. Steve Biko, talking about their fight in South Africa against white domination would say: “we must learn to accept that no group, however benevolent, can ever hand power to the vanquished on a plate.

We must accept that the limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”⁹ What must be done, as it transpires in the quotation, is that women should act according to their interests and mobilize all their energy to protect and defend them at all cost. Differently put, it is only when men’s interests are jeopardized that they will surrender and recognize women’s claims. This must be done, if need be, by violating the established laws men use to judge and declare unfair women’s actions and deeds: that is men’s wrong identification of women. The protagonist’s interest is to become the queen over the whole kingdom and she is ready to do everything to achieve it because the problem of “identity as about finding a role ... [is] an important prerequisite for entering into close relationships”¹⁰. In her determination, she fights with elders and, is about to kill one of them if her mother, the queen does not intervene to stop her: “no. stop it!/ my daughter, stop where you are/ go not further./ Spare an old woman the sight of blood at her/ last hour./ Paint me not a red picture of my last few/ moments on earth. (ICW: 24).” Here, her behavior shows her assertiveness and courage to stand firm without fear regardless of the consequences that may result from her confrontation with the elders. These old men are not ready to accept the protagonist’s claim of her rights or rather her new identity because, as Robin Lakoff puts it, it is easily admitted “that men are more comfortable with power than are women; that it is right and natural for men to seek and hold power; that for a woman to do so is strange, marking her as un-feminine and dangerous.”¹¹ And this challenge of hers has forced the queen to recognize the protagonist’s right and has as well obliged the elders not to dare refuse the change that must calm her so as to restore peace in the kingdom as she reports it in the following lines:

That my brother be king after her,/ But after him, any of us who first brings
forth a/ son,/shall have that son ascending the stool after/ Kwaku Duah.
Even though customarily it is the nephew who/ ascends a throne/ due to the
matrilineal inheritance we practice./ My mother, for once, set the custom
aside./ She also had my name changed from Serwaa/ to Kyeretwie/Yaa
Kyeretwie./Yaa, the leopard tamer. (ICW:26)

This quote constitutes the focal point of all the protagonist’s actions where her determination takes root fully. This pronouncement of her mother before her death conditions then the rest of the protagonist’s conviction to have the stool for his children whatever the consequence, for she is aware of the fact that after her death her children’s identity would change, especially the female ones. And as the story continues, her assertiveness helps her clear the way for the achievement of her desire even against nature. This means that she is ready to defy her dead mother’s statement if ever she happens not to be the first to have a son who should inherit the stool. Surprisingly enough, neither she nor her brother, the king, has succeeded in giving birth to a son. As result, both start developing strategies to win the stool. So once again, beyond gender and sex, it is rather the interest of identification with power which every one of the two characters –female and male– is trying to defend because “man will always try to identify with one or several groups, which implies a choice of reference groups and a rejection of others”¹². For Nana it is the rejection of her identification with female category while her brother wants to maintain his belonging to male group. The two characters want to define their identity in their community. In this machiavellic¹³ atmosphere, the protagonist is the first to succeed in achieving partially her goal by hiding her daughter’s sex from everybody: “... I quickly took steps to hide your true identity/ so that you could succeed your uncle Kwaku Dua when he died (ICW: 27).”

⁹ Steve Biko, *I Write What I like*, United Kingdom: African Writers Series, 1978, p.90.

¹⁰ Erikson D., *Identity and the Life Cycle*, New York: Norton, 1994, p. 167.

¹¹ Robin Lakoff, “Language, Gender, and Politics: Putting “Women” and “Power” in the Same Sentence” in Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff eds. *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 161, pp161-178,.

¹² Byaruhanga Rukooko Archangel, “Social identity and Conflict: a Positive Approach” in Jaroslav Hroch, David Hollan, George F. Mclean eds. *National, Cultural and Ethnic Identity: Harmony beyond conflict*, United States of America: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 1998, p.68, pp.55-73.

¹³ Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Prince*, London: Harper Press an Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2011.

For this plan to work there is a price to pay and she is ready to pay it by all means because she believes as she convinces her daughter “nobody has an absolute right to anything in this/ world./ you are going to fight to capture the stool, my/child./ you have a right to it just as anybody (ICW: 27).”

This means that everybody, whether man or woman, needs to fight for his/her interest. This is more a call for women to revisit their struggle for identification with positive values, because men are only defending their own privilege. But Nana Yaa knows what she is plotting with her daughter is very dangerous and if the community discovers later her sex while she is a king, she “shall be made to pacify the gods with” her blood.

Her courage is as strong as stone and nothing moves her, for she is aware that nothing venture nothing have. She does not think like Richard Rorty who believes that we cannot escape the tradition to which we belong or “step outside our skins”¹⁴. The attitude of “risk-taking”¹⁵ Kofi Anyidoho uses when talking of oral performance in African context can be applied to Nana Yaa as a determined woman in this patriarchal society. Through Nana Yaa’s portrayal, the playwright is suggesting a new stratagem for women. In other words, the fight in favour of women by women or their defenders needs to go beyond mere denunciations and complaints. Women must bring men to know that it behooves them to acknowledge women’s rights and the change of societal laws. In such a situation both men and women will keep vigil as far as advantages, interests –identities – are concerned. However, to make pressure on men and on their society on the whole to change the established laws that identify negatively women, they must not be desponded by the views of men upon their actions because their viewpoints are always biased. Nana Yaa, the protagonist has gone too far to commit crime in the building of her new identity as assertive and courageous woman. The last conversation she has with her daughter before her departure to be trained as a king in the uncle’s house reveals her exaggeration in deeds:

Nana Yaa: (thoughtfully) ... My child, do you know how many people had to /lose their lives just to keep your true identity/hidden from the public?/ Do you know that I had to poison your father/ because at a point he couldn’t bear it any longer/ and swore to tell the world you were girl?

Owusu: what?/ you mean you...

Nana Yaa: yes, I had to do it./ The midwife who stood by my bed/ when I was in labour and supervised your birth/had to lose her tongue for fear she might/squeak [sick]

Owusu: The gods forbid...

Nana Yaa: she is that dumb nurse who serves you./Many servants in the palace who seemed a little/ bit suspicious and inquisitive about your sex/ were quickly eliminated or sold into slavery./ And I had the singular satisfaction of dispatching the Chief Executioner myself.... (ICW: 28-29)

Right away, it is not acceptable to kill a person for any advantage or whatever; but the analysis of the factors that push the protagonist to behave so, leads to blame as well the society in which she is living. That is, she is so silenced, neglected and oppressed that she can no longer contain herself in front of this situation. Differently put, she is fed up with these negative and wrong identifications which give her the bottom place in the society. And, as Adolf Hitler puts it “in order to eliminate conditions recognized as deadly we must have the courage to make and carry out decisions which contain dangers in themselves.”¹⁶ Far from supporting her act, I think women need to have the protagonist’s courage and determination to face some situations so as to claim their right and build their identity. Donna M. Gollnick and Philip C. Chinn would remark that women’s fight for “equal rights will lead to the disintegration of the nuclear family unit”¹⁷ if men do not readjust their identification of them. Fear has disappeared from the heart of the protagonist because of her firm understanding of the patriarchal system functioning.

¹⁴ Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and others, Philosophical papers*, volume 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 175-176.

¹⁵ Kofi Anyidoho, “Poetry as Dramatic Performance : The Ghana Experience” pp.41-55, in Richard Bjorson, Ed. *Research in African Literatures* (The Ohio University: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp.43-44.

¹⁶ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler’s Secret Book*, New York: Groove Press INC, 1983, p.40.

¹⁷ Donna M. Gollnick and Philip C. Chinn, *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society*, New Jersey: Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, 2012, p.128.

For her “if there is anything men fear in this world it is a woman who is a WOMAN!”, that is “a woman who accepts challenges./a woman who can shout back when a man shouts./ a woman who is all out to give the command like/a man./ rejects absolutely the definition of the word feminine to mean home-oriented, passive, needing-to-be- guided-and-protected... (ICW: 31).” With such a mental predisposition, one can better appreciate all the crimes she commits just to allow her “supposed son” to be identified with the stool.

To make it clear, these crimes are the results of “female power in motion” and her “absolute” rejection of male domination and identification. As dangerous as it sounds, her behaviour is the fruit her society has harvested for not treating its dwellers equally in terms of opportunities and rights.

This situation seems to be the concern of Anthony Giddens when he observes that, “individuals feel bereft and alien in a world in which they lack the psychological supports and the sense of security provided by more traditional settings”¹⁸ So, the more men would hold on their privileges, the more women should be determined to push away all the stumbling blocks on their ways regardless of the implications their acts may have on society for, as Toch Hans puts it: “violent acts, and violent interactions, do not make sense when viewed in isolation”¹⁹. And as Nana Yaa continues with her daughter, her logic is that female power “seeks to break not only the bonds of customs,/taboos and antiquated traditions to which women are chained,/ but also deals a heavy blow to that age-old myth of male chauvinism (ICW:32).” While mirroring in this woman’s actions men should have enough courage to draw this conclusion: this is what we have made of her as human being. The long silence and oppression under which women have been put will certainly lead to such atrocities if change is not brought urgently to the established laws which for the meantime favour only men; and men need to bear in mind that “ego-identity is achieved when a person becomes capable of making a distinction between heteronomy and autonomy, i.e. when he is capable of seeing the difference between traditional norms and those which are justified by principles [of men]”²⁰. To women, the protagonist is showing the way: have goals or objectives –interests and advantages –and be ready to defend and protect them by all means as Nelson Mandela puts it during his fight against Apartheid:

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against White domination and I have fought against Black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.²¹

The readiness to sacrifice one’s life for an ideology one believes in must be the leitmotiv of women and the defenders of their cause, for one does not beg to be freed or respected but rather one must fight for it. In other words, women need to bear in mind that “nature itself is hostile and indifferent to vulnerable mankind and that a person is best when struggling against his/her individual nature and society –fighting for life.”²² Nana Yaa the female protagonist understands this and is ready to die for it if one takes into account all the risks she has taken throughout the play. Firstly, she engages in armed battle with elders where she nearly kills one of them and after all the people she murders to protect her daughter’s identity. Even when her “fake son” is about to join her brother the king, she continues exerting violence on the messengers of the king fearing that they might discover something about the mystery she creates around her daughter. Before their departure, her farewell words to them sounds more manly and more violent than usual, “but if you should say that which you are not/ supposed to hear but have heard,/ and that which you must not see but have seen, / I swear by the death that killed my mother/ that I shall drink palm wine from your skull (ICW:35).” Knowing well the sister of the king the messengers have not doubted her nuisance and of course, they keep mum over whatever they might have seen or heard in her house.

¹⁸ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and self-Identity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, p.39.

¹⁹ Toch Hans, *Violent Men: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Violence*, Chicago: Aldine, 1969, p.6.

²⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, London: Heinemann, 1979, p.87.

²¹ Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, USA: Heinemann Educational Books, 1963, cover page.

²² Mapako, Petros Felix and Mareva, Rugare, “Vulnerability of Mankind: An Existentialist (Philosophical) Interpretation of Charles Mungoshi’s Selected Literary Works” in *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, Volume 3, Number 7, 2013, pp. 1557 – 1571, p.1558.

Nana Yaa is the paragon of female masculinity in the sense that she is setting up a new cultural dimension that should give chance to women for new identification as full humans despite her exaggerations at a point. Her viewpoint on the notion of power as she soliloquizes toward the end of the first leg of the play reveals well her inner resolution:

Nana Yaa: ye spirit above
 May you let me live to see the
 Successful end of the wheel of change
 I've set in motion. A wheel of change that shall
 leave all Men convinced that,
 in the chest of a woman
 is not only an extension of the breast and a
 feeble heart
 but a flaming desire to Possess and use Power (ICW:35-36)

Since power is what dictates the course of events, she is right to desire power and use it on behalf of the long silenced and oppressed class –women –of the society. And to achieve her goal her daughter has been her means. As mentioned earlier in this article, her brother, the king, is also planning to make his daughter become the husband of his nephew. The moral reproach that can be leveled against the protagonist's actions and behaviours as far as her interest is concerned can be leveled as well against the king who does not consider the implication of his intention. I mean incest. So, if men overlook the traditional laws and regulations to satisfy their desire and maintain their identity marks, why do they expect women to respect such laws and morals of their society that give wrong identity to them? But this is not an apology for immoral behaviours, but a call for respect of the agreed laws by everybody without exception. But if there should be a violation of a particular law on behalf of whosoever, then, let it be the same for everybody so as to avoid discrimination and its corollaries. These aftermaths are what must be eliminated by women as the quotation below shows it:

to raise the question of identity is to re-open the discussion on the self/other *relationship in its enactment of power relations*. Identity as understood in the context of a certain ideology of dominance has long been a notion that relies on the concept of an essential, authentic core... that requires the elimination of all that is considered foreign or not to the self.²³

The emphasis on the words “relationship in its enactment of power relations” is mine to show the relationship that exists between power and identity as women see it as well. Men define women's identity because of the power they have to control these women who, in this play, develop new understanding of patriarchal institutions as being against their rights. This quotation highlights as well women's awareness of the fact that to define their own identity, the “elimination of all that is considered foreign” to them is not to neglect. The protagonist of this play understands this very well and tries hard to eliminate all the stumbling blocks on her ways as it is already shown. In addition to her, the other character who ventures constructing her own identity is the protagonist's cousin Ekyaa. These two women want to debunk male chauvinism at the grass roots level – children early education – whereby the female roles are clearly stated. The limit is already put right away on the female child and she only grows to discover it as normal course of events in her life. One important trait that proves her good attitude is submissiveness to male authority whatever the case. However, in the play under study, the playwright debunks this submission of women to male power. Interestingly enough, the portrayal the reader discovers from the relationship between the king and his daughter is of a greater importance as far as women's identity is concerned. Everything in the story concurs to conclude as the feminist scholar and activist Charlotte Bunch wrote that “... women's rights are not classified as human right”²⁴. This means that, apart from the protagonist's showing of masculinity in different ways –oral, physical and psychological violent; disrespect and neglect, there is Ekaya, the king's daughter who is being lured by her father to get pregnant by her cousin, the “supposed son” of Nana Yaa.

²³ Minh-ha T. Trinh, “Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference” in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufi, and Ella Shohat, ed. *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997, p.415, pp. 415-19.

²⁴ Charlotte Bunch, “Women's Rights as Human Rights: Toward a Re-Vision of Human Rights”, *Human Rights Quarterly* 12 (4), 1990, p.486, pp.486-498.

I ostensibly brought him here under the pretext of studying the art of kingship, but the real reason is for you to win his heart forever. That way, when he succeeds me as king, you shall be his wife, a queen. That is the hidden political angle to the whole enterprise. (ICW: 49)

So, this intention of the king is to find for his daughter her husband just to make sure the kingship remains within his family, is an attempt to use his daughter to quench his desire for power. Additionally, the daughter is here taken as tool that the father is free to manipulate anyhow for any purpose. As result, she is not considered as a full mature human being who knows what is good for her. Her identity is what her father decides for her. But having failed the planned goal of her father she falls in love with another man against her father's will.

Knowing very well that the consequence of such an action is nothing but death, she is determined to save herself through lies and disobedience. She too, like the protagonist, has put men or the society in difficulty where change is obliged to occur. She does not want to fit into the identity her father has of her. Her resolution to obey no more any law is, first of all, tangible in the answer she gives to her father, the king when she is questioned to reveal the author of her pregnancy. It is both an insult and a warning as it transpires through her words as follows: "if you were not my father/ I would have spat into your face or hurled this stool at you" (ICW: 73). The king to whom everybody in the kingdom owes respect and veneration is here denigrated and looked down upon by her own daughter who has lost any sense of respect to her father because of his evil plan towards the stool whereby his daughter is used as not having any identity. She has understood that her father wanted to use her not as a full human being having a personality but rather as a tool to achieve his greedy manly desire. A sort of awareness has dawned on her that her freedom and dignity as a woman is being jeopardized in the name of men's will to have power and use it. She does not want to bear the identification men give to her. So, with this consciousness she sees nothing valuable in her community which is failing her rights. She persists and means business when later on she reiterates to the king, "will you take your hands off me?/ I am going to tell you nothing./ you can do your worst" (ICW:74). And of course the king does his worst by bringing his daughter to be judged and afterwards be executed according to the customs. So in front of such a danger, as a woman she does not hesitate to lie so as to implicate her cousin because she knows he is favoured by the tradition to enjoy certain privileges as a man while the same tradition is being used to blame her.

Owusu: you lie! I am not a ...
Oh ... mother!

Ekyaa: And you stand before an august gathering trying to disgrace me through and through. Oh men, I never knew men could be so ungrateful after all that women give them. (ICW: 84)

Her accusation is a revenge against male domination and identification which must change because she knows he –the author of the pregnancy –is not going to survive since it is illegitimate act vis-à-vis the honour of the king's family. Her intention is to kill the future successor of her father because apart from her cousin, there is no legal and legitimate person to succeed her father at his death if it is not she herself. Her concern in this lie is not the death of her cousin, but the male structure in which she is growing up. That is why when later on she discovers that the cousin is rather a girl disguised on the demand of her mother, she feels so sorry that she swears:

If she should die any day
I swear by the great triple oath of our fathers that my soul depart from my body after her that same day. Let the Spirits and the elders of the kingdom grant this wish. (ICW: 92-93)

She swears in this excerpt because she realizes that the "man" she is aiming to destroy is rather a girl like her, who does not deserve such a death penalty. She realizes she misses her target, the "man" in particular and the society at large. The evidence that traverses her oath is the fact that her cousin does not participate in the traditionally assigned role to her as a woman. Her groan in the arm of the cousin testifies to this: "yes, you'll forever be part of me/ and I, ever and ever part of you./ I cannot watch you die!/ We are sewn together/ though no thread or string do we see./ there is a chord so strong/that binds your heart to mine/no one can see it./ nobody can touch it/for it is not for the hands to hold/ but you and I can feel it/because it meant to be felt." (ICW: 93). The thing that binds them together is nothing but the traditional laws and regulations that wrongly identify women.

Iris Berger refers to this deplorable situation in his article “African Women’s Movements in the Twentieth Century: A Hidden History” as “women’s common bond as mothers, the primary identity ...”²⁵

So, her lie is to bring about a change that the community had refused when Nana Yaa, the protagonist has claimed her right as a legitimate successor of the queen mother. That change is the arrival in power of Ekyaa, the princess. Such a dispensation goes in line with Okyeame Boateng who admits finally that “the customs were made not by gods,/ they were made by men and therefore/can be unmade by men (ICW:94)” in the advantage of all without discrimination. So through these two young girls –Ekyaa, the princess and Owusu, the disguised cousin – the question of female identity in patriarchal societies has taken a new shape.

Nana Yaa, the protagonist and Ekyaa, the princess have paved the way for female rights and exhibit excessively female masculinity toward women’s liberation as a result of closer scrutiny of their tradition. Their vigilance is acknowledged by Francis Fukuyama in his statement “those who pay attention to the community may become the most efficient”²⁶ in whatever they want to do with or against such community. These two female characters through their skills and determination have forced the hands of men who end up adjusting the traditional laws to correct the wrong identity given to women. Even if the two characters have not finished building their identity before the play ends, they constitute a role model for women and particularly African women who are lagging behind as far as their survival is concerned as full human beings.

Conclusion

The analysis I conduct in this article concerns mainly the attributes longtime associated with men as the result of some patriarchal laws and regulations that are in their favour. In this play under study, the female characters are not just women undergoing the rigor of their traditional laws, they are rather assertive, determined and unyielding people who want to build new identities of themselves. Nana Yaa and Ekyaa are the paragons of female masculinity who reject their traditional roles and men’s identifications for them. Their portrayal is the showcase of women’s struggle for their liberation and rights. What is the hidden message in their depiction is a call for women to identify their objectives or interests and defend them by all means and to never consider their wrong as the “natural state of affairs”²⁷. As for feminists or the defenders of women’s rights, these two female characters are showing the new strategy women need for their effective fight. That is, men should not be dealt with without taking into account their real human nature as selfish and egoistic beings that would not easily give away their privileges. The struggle for the rights of women should go beyond mere denunciation of men’s maltreatments to focus on women’s interests and their defense. In other words, how to help women construct their own identity as is the case of the protagonist and Ekyaa. This work takes the example of these two female characters to offer a different interpretation of what is so far referred to as women’s struggles for emancipation. It is the result of this work to point out that women are fighting nothing better than a redefinition of their own identity in total disrespect of men’s conception of them.

Bibliography

1-Corpus

Mawugbe, Efo Kodjo, *In the Chest of a Woman*, Koumashi: Isaac Books & Stationery Services, 2008.

2-Books

Adams, Anne V., *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo at 70*, UK: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited, 2012.

Anyidoho, Kofi, “Poetry as Dramatic Performance: The Ghana Experience” in Richard Bjorson, Ed. *Research in African Literatures*, The Ohio University: Indiana University Press, 1991, pp.41-55.

Berger, Iris, “African Women’s Movements in the Twentieth Century: A Hidden History” in *African Studies Review*, volume 57, Number 3, December 2014, pp.1-19.

Biko, Steve, *I Write What I like*, United Kingdom: African Writers Series, 1978.

Bunch Charlotte, “Women’s Rights as Human Rights: Toward a Re-Vision of Human Rights”, *Human Rights Quarterly* 12 (4), 1990, pp.486-498.

²⁵ Iris Berger, “African Women’s Movements in the Twentieth Century: A Hidden History” in *African Studies Review*, volume 57, Number 3, December 2014, p.8, pp.1-19.

²⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *Sudar Kultura (Proverenje. Drustvene vrline i stvaranje prosperiteta)* translated as *Trust: Social Virtue and the Creation of Prosperity*, Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva: Belgrade, 1997, p.42.

²⁷ Slobodan Samardzic, *Prinudna zajednica i demokratija*, Belgrade: Institut za evropske studije, 1994, p.53.

- Byaruhanga Rukooko Archangel, "Social identity and Conflict: a Positive Approach" pp.55-73, in Jaroslav Hroch, David Hollan, George F. Mclean eds. *National, Cultural and Ethnic Identity: Harmony beyond conflict*, United States of America: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 1998.
- Carr, Wesley, *The New Dictionary of Pastoral Studies*, Great Britain: Grand Rapids Michigan, 2002.
- Erikson D., *Identity and the Life Cycle*, New York: Norton, 1994.
- Fukuyama, Francis, *Sudar Kultura (Proverenje. Drustvene vrline i stvaranje prosperiteta)* translated as *Trust: Social Virtue and the Creation of Prosperity*, Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva: Belgrade, 1997.
- Gallimore, Rangira Béa, " 'Ndabaga' Folktale Revisited: [De]constructing Masculinity in the Post-Genocide" Rwandan Society" in Helen Nabasuta Mugambi and Tuzyline Jita Allan eds. *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*, UK: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited, 2010, p.53, pp.50-65.
- Giddens, Anthony, *Modernity and self-Identity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.
- Gollnick, Donna M. and Philip C. Chinn, *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society*, New Jersey: Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, 2012.
- Golubovic Zagorga, "Models of Identity in Postcommunist Societies," in George F. Mclean and Zagorga G. eds. *Models of Identity in Postcommunist Societies*, Washington: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 1999, p.27, pp. 25-39.
- Griffith, Kelley, *Writing Essays About Literature*, United Kingdom: Wadsworth, 2002.
- Habermas, Jürgen, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, London: Heinemann, 1979.
- Hans, Toch, *Violent Men: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Violence*, Chicago: Aldine, 1969.
- Hitler, Adolf, *Hitler's Secret Book*, New York: Groove Press INC, 1983.
- Lakoff, Robin, "Language, Gender, and Politics: Putting "Women" and "Power" in the Same Sentence" in Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerholff eds. *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp161-178.
- Machiavelli, Niccoló, *The Prince*, London: Harper Press an Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2011.
- Mandela, Nelson, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, USA: Heinemann Educational Books, 19673.
- Mapako, Petros Felix and Mareva, Rugare, "Vulnerability of Mankind: An Existentialist (Philosophical) Interpretation of Charles Mungoshi's Selected Literary Works" in *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, Volume 3, Number 7, 2013, pp. 1557 – 1571.
- Rorty, Richard, *Essays on Heidegger and others, Philosophical papers*, volume 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Slobodan, Samardzic, *Prinudna zajednica i demokratija*, Belgrade: Institut za evropske studije, 1994.
- Trinh, Minh-ha T., "Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference" in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufi , and Ella Shohat, ed. *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997, pp. 415-19.