

Gender Roles in D. E. K. Krampah's *Mbofra Mfa Adwene*: A Feminist Critique

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Abstract: Literary writers have always been influenced by their environment. They consciously or subconsciously include society's take on gender issues in their writings. In many societies, males and females are assigned different roles based on their gender, which they play in consonance with their age limits. Literary writers tend to hide behind language to portray gender stereotypes in literary works. For some time now, feminism has been a well-used literary criticism approach. It has been used as a tool to criticize gender roles, especially the representation of women in literary works in general. Feminist literary critics argue that the representation of women in most literary works shows a large equality gap between males and females. These inequalities are often measured in literature by diction, characterization, setting and other rhetorical devices. Substantial data in the literature show that whereas male writers often write to present the position of women in society and their social expectations, most of which are related to marriage, female writers accordingly, present the different female responses to these social norms and the objection of the position of women in society. Following these trends of analysis, this paper analyzes the kind of gender roles that some Akan male writers assign to their male and female characters to ascertain whether males and females are indeed presented as equals in literary texts. The paper adopts a radical feminist approach to literary criticism and analyses D. E. K. Krampah's novel, *Mbofra Mfa Adwene*(1970).

Keywords: Gender, Feminism, Radical Feminism, Ghanaian Culture, *Mbofra Mfa Adwene*, Feminist literary criticism

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

This section provides background information about some key terms that apply to the paper. Concepts like literature, gender and gender roles are conceptualized for the purpose of this paper.

There is no set-in stone definition of literature. To Culler (2007), literature has been defined variously to reflect what literature does in society as well as its contextual functions, and the genres of literature as opposed to other forms of writing. Arguing from the first approach to literature, literature has been described to have two antipodal functions. In one vein, literature is viewed as a medium through which hierarchical structures of society are communicated and learned, and in another, a medium through which societal ideologies are challenged and subverted. Culler (2007), like many others, contends this description and posits that, "unless the functioning of literature is described in rather vacuous

terms, it is not likely to have a single function that all literary works perform" (p. 229). Again, the so-called "functions" of literature (constituting a nation, and contesting ideologies) can be performed by nonliterary discourses.

The second approach to literature tries to describe literature by identifying some distinctive characteristics of the literary genre. Definitions from this viewpoint often include discussion of important characteristics of literary works, such as their fictionality, their non-instrumental use of language, their high degree of organization that extends to levels and to linguistic features usually regarded as transparent, and intertextuality. But again, such characteristics of literature are not distinctive enough because they are likely to be identified in nonliterary works. Culler (2007), arguing in support of this notion, notes that literariness is not confined to literature as it can be studied in historical narratives, philosophical texts, and rhetorical and diverse cultural practices. Essentially, literature may be the name of a variable cultural function rather than a class identified by distinctive properties of language.

Bennett and Royle (2004) note that literature imitates and represents the realities of the world. This implies that literature evolves out of a people's individual and communal experiences. They note, however, that while some literary criticisms (e.g. structuralism) argue that literature is separate from the world, poststructuralist approaches to literary criticism (likewise historicism, feminism) assert that literature is actually in the world. Thus, the feminist approach to literary criticism holds that the events in a literary text are a representation of the actual happenings of the world. Since literary writers are part of the world, they rest on the happenings of their environment for their literary compositions. Therefore, although literature may be tagged fictional, it hides behind fiction to tell something about reality.

Society's conception of sex and gender are among the recurring subject matter in literary works which feminist critics often uncover and criticize. Feminists always emphasize a staunch difference between the concepts of sex and gender. The categories, sex and gender are far more complicated than a mere alignment of male-female with masculinity and femininity. Newman (2002:353) defines sex as "the biological status of a person either male or female based on anatomical characteristics". This suggests a purely biological concept of sex, which is determined by anatomical facets like genitalia, chromosomal, and hormonal variations.

The genitals distinguish two primary sexes: females, who possess a vagina, and males, who have a penis. However, there are people who by virtue of genitals are neither identified as males or females, namely the intersex, who have both female and male genitals. Typically, people with XX chromosomes are females and people with XY chromosomes are males to the exclusion of intersex persons who may have various chromosomal abnormalities or other inherent sexual developmental variations. Biologists also typically equate estrogen primarily to females and testosterone predominance with males. It is, however, important to note that both hormones are present in both sexes.

The conceptualization of gender, in general, revolves around a nature-nurture binary. Biological determinists argue that gender awareness is created during prenatal brain development in response to hormonal exposure (Newman, 2002), which mostly determines gender role development. Another understanding of gender, which feminists mostly subscribe to, is that gender identity is a complex internalization of cultural systems of meaning and is subject to variation across cultures and historical periods (E.g. Butler, 1990; Mead, 1949). This implies that it will be analytically invalid to absolutely equate sex to gender because there exist instances where a transgendered man (although has a vagina) will still identify as a man due to hormonal changes. The fact that you are born a female does not automatically make you a woman, as Cooper (1993:10) notes: “Woman is created by social conditioning” (cited in Newman, 2002). However, for many cultures, sex is seen as a determinant of gender, an idea that radical feminists dispute. To the radical feminist, assigning gender to individuals based on their sexes restricts the individual in diverse ways. Firstly, it leaves most people in a dilemma as to either “changing their gender identity to fit their bodies, or using sex modifying procedures to align the body with the sense of subjective gender” (Newman, 2002:353).

Gender roles, just as gender itself is socially constructed and culture-specific. Humans are born male or female, but society decides who is a man and who becomes a woman. In the same vein, the genders are only socialized to take up certain roles over others. Gender roles may include socially ascribed expectations like attitudes, behaviour, values, and beliefs which are attributed to individuals. In this paper, we argue that Akan male writers mostly transfer Akan’s idea of gender roles to their literary works and so their characters are often cisgendered.

1.1 Research Objectives

This paper seeks to criticize gender roles as observed in the following contexts:

1. Marriage
2. The job market (career roles)
3. The extended family

In each context, the roles of women are juxtaposed with that of men to see if the two genders are given equal roles in society.

1.2 Synopsis of *Mbofra Mfa Adwene*

Mbofra Mfa Adwene is one of D. E. K. Krampah’s novels. It was published by the Bureau of Ghana languages in 1970. The novel is set in Duase, in the post-colonial patriarchal society. Male characters of this novel outnumber the female characters, while not forgetting also that the role of the main character is predominantly played by males. Some of these male main characters are Kweku Yaakwa and Kwesi Taaber whom the plot of the story revolves around. Yaakwa, the head of the Aboradze clan of Duase, out of selfishness, devises dubious means to claim sole ownership of the clan’s inheritance. The males among the young ones of the family rebel against Yaakwa over this. Yaakwa, rethinks his position and later gives in; Taaber takes over as the head of the clan, and thus, supervises the clan’s properties as well as the affairs of the members.

The author traces the genealogy of the Aboradze clan to four females, Amba Baa, EsiKwansewa, Efuwa Bagyina, and AbenaaDɔfo. The first chapter of the novel asserts that the fruits of these four wombs make up the Aboradze clan. However, the only thing we hear about them is their names and ‘the kind of children’ they bore; giving prominence to those who bore more male children. The main theme of the novel is the greed of adults including leaders of the family, which the events of the novel caution the younger generation of the clan about.

1.3 Background of the Author

Daniel Edmund Kobina Krampah is among the prolific Akan writers of the twenty-first century. He was born in 1935, and hails from Edwumako }kyeso.

Krampah writes in multiple languages, and his works range from literary works to Akan language textbooks. He is well known for 13 works in 28 publications, which are written in six languages (such as Mfantse, Asante Twi, Akuapem, and English). Among his most rated books are *Life in Ghana* (1974), *ƷbrawƷtɔbobɔ* (1977), *Helping with literature* (1979), *Asante kasasuumfɷtiaseenwoma*, *Akuapemkasasua: mƷfɷtiaseenwoma*, *MƷfantseKodzisem ho adzesua* (1997), and *Mbofra Mfa Adwene* (1970).

II. RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical framework

This paper adopts the Radical feminist approach to literary criticism. In view of this, this section provides prefatory information about feminism in general. Much attention is however given to radical feminist ideologies and how they apply to literary criticism.

Suaidi (2016:86) posits that feminism is “a collection of movements and ideologies that share a common goal to

define, establish, and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal, and social rights for women". While this definition appears to be one-sided, it can be credited for labelling feminism as a collection of movements rather than a single movement. Feminism essentially operates under three main theoretical groundings (Hannam, 2007). The first is the fight for a reversal of power imbalances in the sexes, which put women in a subordinate position to men. Second, is the belief that women's condition (as subordinates) is socially constructed, and can therefore be changed. The final approach emphasizes female autonomy. Not all feminists subscribe to all three theories simultaneously. As a result of this lack of unison in theory, or better, different theoretical inclination, feminism is much more plural than a single unified movement. Although Feminism fights for a good course, it is considered by many (especially anti-feminists) as a very critical and controversial social theory. Such people argue that kowtowing to feminist advocacies will break the fabrics of society and leave society in a chaotic state.

Since its emergence, feminism has passed through three main phases, best known as the waves of feminism. These are alternatively referred to in the literature as first, second and third waves of feminism, each of which is marked by a distinct revolutionary movement. Presently, feminism is also categorized into African feminism and western feminism. African feminists fight for different rights than Western feminists. While Western feminists only look to achieving sexual freedom, African feminists seem to still have a lot of issues to kick against. They have patriarchy to kick against, racism to battle, as well as customs and traditions to change. Western feminism has always been tagged as radical feminism while African feminism is considered a dormant type of feminism. It is worth noting, however, that there are subscribers of radical feminism who are not Westerners just as African feminist ideologies are not practised by only Africans.

Radical feminism, which emerged in the 1960s, is theoretically based on deconstructing the patriarchal system with the political inclination of eliminating it. Radical feminists from Africa for instance, pay attention to the ways in which patriarchy (that is, the psychological and political system that values men than women) hides behind customs, laws, traditions, force, language, etc. to keep women governed by men. Feminists argue that the oppression of women is a direct implication of patriarchy. On the fundamental ideology of radical feminists, Vukoicic (2013) writes:

The unique position of radical feminism is formed of the idea that, in order to end the oppression of women, the patriarchate has to be abolished, which potentially includes:

- i. Incitement and rejection of traditional gender roles and the ways in which women are presented/constructed in the language, the media, as well as in their personal lives;

- ii. Anti-patriarchal constructions of female sexuality by banning pornography and rejection of traditional models of relations between the sexes;
- iii. Achieving the reproductive freedom. (p. 36)

Based on this inclination, analysts who subscribe to the feminist approach to literary criticism often drive their analysis of literary texts to these three theoretical groundings. They will always elicit these elements from literary texts and criticize them.

The gender role differences society establishes between women and men, according to radical feminists, often breed discrimination which apparently triggers oppression. Adichie (2016), for instance, has argued that the idea behind gender roles is untenable, and she, therefore, proffers that both females and males are trained to take up equal roles in society. For instance, house chores like cooking and sweeping should not be thought of as feminine roles because they are not biologically inclined: cooking and sweeping are learned. For her, males should be socialized to do everything that biology allows, which to her, is "everything apart from breastfeeding" (p. 26). Moreso, some radical feminists have argued that even childbirth and breastfeeding should not be reserved for women, although their biological makeup prone them to these roles. Their basis for such argument is that it is this 'special' childbearing role that makes women susceptible to men's oppression and restricts their fight for equality. Such roles serve as a police force that enforces patriarchy. Thus, when analyzing a text from this framework, attention should be paid to the role of women in marriages to ascertain society's expectation of married women.

Radical feminists also disregard the idea of conditional female equality—what others prefer to call womanism. Championed by Simone De Beauvoir, radical feminists advance that women should not be regarded as the "Other", that is, the Object whose Subject is the man. Given the rule that Objects are selected by their Subjects, radical feminists will not accept an ideology like "he is the head and I(the female) am the neck". Such an idea suggests subordination: "I am only when the man is not available". While woman is argues that men are naturally superior to women but are required to treat women well, radical feminists reject this and emphasize that there are no two ways about feminism.

Finally, the idea of liberation of humanity cannot be ruled out of radical feminist ideologies. The call for the abolishment of patriarchy, according to radical feminists, will not benefit only women, it is akin significant to men because the implication of patriarchy makes men suffer due to limitations. For instance, in some cultures, men are trained to be less expressive about their emotions. As a result, in some cases, they are overburdened with negative emotions like sadness which is assumed to be one cause of high mortality rate among married men. Due to this ideology, a radical feminist approach to literary criticism will often require an analysis of both male and female characters.

Empirical Literature

Literature is one instrument that women devise to profess their feminist ideologies as well as criticize social structures. Such act was very prominent in the nineteenth century with writers like Jane Austen, who with novels like *Pride and prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (1818) tried to criticize the place of women in the regency period. Thus, some critics assert that men and women write differently; therefore, the representation of women in a male-authored text will always depart from how women are represented in female-authored texts. Generally, the Feminist approach to literary criticism involves the application of feminist ideologies to literary analysis. Feminist critics examine and explain the roots of women's subjugation and men's authority in literary texts. There are various ways to do a (radical) feminist analysis of a text. Some critics may look at the use of language and how it subordinates women. Others may focus on characterization by exploring the roles given to women in literary works.

Feminist literary theory has been used by many scholars as a framework for analysing the portrayal of female characters in many African novels. For instance, Hassan (2016) analysed the role of women in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. It was argued in this paper that the author (Achebe) views women as slaves and that treating them cruelly is just a natural phenomenon. Also, he argues that women were treated like animals as in the excerpt: "Everyone carrying a towering load of five or six pots held together with a net of ropes on a long basket, and seen in a half-light like a spirit in a fantastic head" (Achebe.2008: 19). Also, Asare-Kumi (2010) analysed how women are portrayed in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Changes*, and Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and *Not Without Flowers*. It was argued in this paper that the issue of female subjugation, fears and societal struggles are mostly subliminal in most literary works. This, according to the author, were identified by analysing the characters involved, the situations, the themes, and the conflict of the novels. This particular study further argues that the issue of female oppression in Ghanaian novels is somewhat sexual, political, professional and social in nature. Moreover, it was revealed that women in Ghanaian literature are often associated with the issue of social vices, poverty and health issues.

In relation to Akan novels, there seems to be limited analysis in such respect. Therefore, this current paper tries to unfold certain gender-related issue embedded in the chosen novel.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The paper adopts a qualitative approach to research, specifically, library research. This approach is appropriate because of the source of data (that is, a novel) for the analysis. The technique used in analyzing the data is content analysis. After carefully reading the novel, we sorted instances of gender role specification in marriage, followed by those exhibited in job places and finally, instances of gender roles in the extended family system. After sorting, we categorized the identified instances according to the aforementioned themes.

We adopted the content analysis research tool because it allows for flexibility in the analysis since texts can be grouped into themes or categories or as to authorship, authenticity, or meaning based on the content analysis coding system. Finally, content analysis is a technique used to make replicable and valid inferences and generalizations about identified patterns by systemically evaluating texts of various formats like oral communications, video, and graphics (including literary texts).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

This section analyses the novel *Mboframfaadwen* by identifying some gender-specific roles of the characters in the novel. These gender roles are analyzed under three main themes: gender roles in marriage; the job market; and the extended family. However, the analysis begins with some prefatory information about the generally expected behaviours of male and female characters in the novel, using the Akan socio-cultural system as a benchmark (since the novel is set in an Akan community).

Gender-specific behaviours in the novel

Hard work as a human quality is presented in two distinct forms in the novel. In the first place, since the female characters in the novel played no active role in career jobs, their hard work is measured by their ability to manage the house and help their husbands in their jobs. Men, however, are credited for their diligence and hard work in their jobs, the family and society. The narrator's description of Nyenkopa, Taaber's step mother's hardworking quality in this excerpt is evident to this distinction: "Onyim adze yemapa..." (she is very good at doing house chores) (p.13). From the foregoing, it could be argued that men are expected to be more hardworking than women and that men's handwork is valued than that of women.

Again, men are expected to be protesters, while women must always accept situations no matter how foul it is. The idea of women's subservience is subtly expressed in the roles of the female characters of the novel. When Yaakwa arrogated the properties of the Aboradze clan, it was the young men of the family who rebelled against him. They expressively showed their dissatisfaction with Yaakwa's act, and in the long run, they summoned him before the chief of Duaseto call him to order. Even before the rebel and the summon, the female members of the Aboradze family had accepted their ordeal by remaining in the family house and allowing themselves to be controlled by Yaakwa, whereas the men rejected any form of control by moving out of the family residence. This incident presents women as so many things that are contrary to the idea of positivity that a man would naturally exude.

Furthermore, unlike men, women are supposed to be dependent. The construction of women in the novel presents them as intelligently dependent, and impediments, particularly as financial liabilities to men. This expectation of women as presented in the novel is reflective of the Akan perception of

the woman. To the Akan, the man is more developed psychologically than the woman. A belief evident by the fact that women are not allowed to play an active role in decision making. In most Akan marriages, women are supposed to rest on their husbands for decisions about the family and even the affairs of the woman. Again, it is inappropriate in Akan communities for a man to be financially dependent on a woman—rather, a man must work and take care of the female members of the family.

Also, the narrator, in chapter eleven, advances that women who are retortive and disobedient do not make for good wives. Should a woman depict such quality in her marital home, the punishment she gets is to lose her husband's support or her marriage. This is evident by a conversation between Afariwa, Taaber's second wife's mother and her daughter, Amba Ata who had visited her the first time after she had left for Taaber, her husband's house.

Ata: Yewɔhɔahomka mu. ɔnoaraɔnnye me dzaɔmmfatabiarantsimo so medze no ayedemonuapanyin. (We are doing very well. He treats me so well so I have made him my elder brother).

Afariwa: ...Wo kun no hwe no yie. ɔnoaranaobedzidziamawo bi adzi...ma ɔnyew'egyanawonuabanyin...ɔkyeredɛonnyidɛnye(basi a) nyiyiano, ɔwɔdɛɔyɛahobreadzɛama no kun so eenya no tsirmunaɔdzɛahwe no yie.(p. 49)(Take very good care of your husband. You depend on him for survival...treat him as though he were your father or your brother...this means she does not have to be retortive. She has to be humble so that her husband will take good care of her)

This excerpt suggests that women's dependence on men prone them to be obedient and submit to men's oppression. As the narrator opines in previous conversations: "ɔbaadzekwaseakɔawarnaɔdzenyansa aba fie"(A woman acts stupid in her marital home in order to gain resources for her family) (p.39). This means that to have a successful marriage as a woman, you must always pay heed to your husband's orders. A

wife has to work the marriage out to make it successful just because she depends on her husband for survival and the ticket to this is maintaining her marital relation with the husband.

Gender Roles in Marriage

Marriage is a very celebrated institution in the Akan culture, and given the setting of the novel, it comes with little surprise that marriage recurs as a theme in the novel. The narrator presents marriage as though it were an achievement for the female characters only. The future of the female characters is only secured through marriage. In the novel, women are mostly mentioned in relation to marriage. For example, the first time we hear of characters like Kwamba and Amba Ata (Taaber's first and second wife respectively), Nyenkopa

(Onnyibi's wife) and MaameDɔnkɔ (Yaakwa's wife), they were being addressed as wives. Male characters are however mostly mentioned outside marriage.

Again, most Akan communities believe that for one to be a 'proper woman', she should have child-bearing capabilities. Thus, childbearing is the only role that tears men and women apart, and that the most basic but no less important role of a woman in marriage is to bear children "for her husband". This responsibility of the woman also informs why some women suffer demeaning treatment in marriages. This expectation of women is not absent in the novel. The narrator categorically states that the relevance of marriage is childbirth: "Awar ne fewaranyeawo" (the worth of marriage is child-bearing) (p. 15). All the marriages mentioned in the novel are those which were blessed with children. The narrator, prior to YaaKwamba's marriage to Taaber described her as a hardworking woman because she could do all the house chores. More praise was given when YaaKwambawas reported to have made her husband proud by giving him twins as their first born. Other marriages like that of Onnyibiand EsiNyenkopa; Yaakwa and his two wives, etc. were all reported to have been blessed with children.

In furtherance, household chores were reserved solely for women. House chores ranging from cleaning and cooking to fetching of water, etc. are supposed to be done single-handedly by women and girls. The excerpts below are evidence of this claim:

1. "Yebaenagyamabaa no hwehweɛbiribikakra ma medzekaam'anoyi..." (The women got me some food to eat when I arrived) (p. 9)
2. Ber a fidua no nyinaadzidziwiei a nkatasia no rokɔnsu no" (When everyone had finished eating and the girls had gone to fetch water) (p. 29)
3. Habanmudwumana fie adzeye so obiarannto no wɔ mu. (She has no competitors regarding farming and house chores) (p.33)
4. Hwe, ndɛɔsoɛranapa a nnaɔnye ne nakanomanomrokoapra ho.(She now struggles with her little mothers to be given the opportunity to sweep) (p.33)

In all four excerpts, no man is mentioned in relation to house chores. Excerpt (3) presents an unequal sharing of roles. While men work on the farm or their job places and come home to relax, women perform doubly roles. Women work on the farms with the men and when they come home, there is no relaxation for them because they have to do all the house chores.

Moreover, a married woman is supposed to be dependent, like an underage child or a slave, and can neither solely own property nor control her own earnings, except under very specific circumstances. When their husbands die, they still have no freedom to make decisions on whom to remarry because it is customary that the successor of their late husbands marry them as part of the properties the successor is

inheriting. However, if the successor is not interested in marrying the wife/wives of his predecessor (like the case of Taaber, Yaakwa's successor), the woman reserves the right to marry another man upon the successor's consent. When Yaakwa died, Taaber was to marry Yaakwa's two wives, so that they can receive the price of depending on him for survival. However, Taaber had two wives already so he rejected this offer, a move which benefited the last wife of Yaakwa to remarry another man.

In all, women and men have roles to play in order to make their marriage successful. However, there is a disproportionate division of responsibilities among men and women. While husbands are in charge of only providing for the family, wives take care of all other aspects including helping the husband to provide for the family.

Gender roles in the job market

The novel presents male characters as though they were the only qualified personnel for the corporate world. The little details of men in their job places are given just to present them as hardworkers. The job of women on the other hand are just mentioned with little or no details. For example, the narrator took readers to Taaber's farm on several occasions (e.g. chapter 7; 17), mentioning throughout, the bountiful farm produce he has been able to cultivate. The praise for Taaber's farm is solely possessed by him; meanwhile, he tilled the farm with his first wife, YaaKwamba. The narrator recounts:

YaabetsenaaTaaber ne fie nawɔdzepɛkornansikorsuooekwadwuma nomu.(pg. 21) (*When Yaa moved to Taaber's house, the two worked effortlessly in the farm business*).

Again, men are trained for income-generating jobs such as farming (E.g. Onnyibi, Taaber), and hunting (e.g. Onnyibi's father, who the novel reports were a chief hunter in his village). In chapter one, Taaber seeks his father's assistance in helping him choose a career. Upon deliberations, he settles for farming because as he claims, farming can sustain him even when he is caught up by age. Although there were other females of Taaber's age in the family (e.g. Famamonko, Taaber's cousin), the narrator never mentions them in relation to any income giving job. The only time women are mentioned in relation to a job is when Yaakwa tells Onnyibi, Taaber's father, that he has been receiving his regards from some women traders. This is evident in Yaakwa's speech:

"...mbaa a wɔbahɔbedzigua no san ba fie a wɔdzewonkyiabre me" (*The female traders extend your regards to me*) (p. 9).

Trading is however a shared job between the male and female characters of the novel. Male characters like Onnyibi (who traded in "nsɔwnansɔsɔw", chp 3); Papa Kyimfo(who traded in imported items) were traders. Men are given the privilege to engage in income-earning jobs because per their gender, they are supposed to work in order to cater for their wives and children and even unmarried female siblings. If women are privileged to find themselves in the job market, it would either

be to assist their husbands or fathers (especially on their farms). In other instances, women are given menial jobs in order to prepare them for single lives. This is implied in YaaKamba's conversation with Taaber about her plea for her husband to give some portion of his farmland to his nieces: *"...ɔwɔdɛɛyɛamadaakye bi woennyakunnom a wotumhwɛhɔn a wɔanntseetsee"*. (p.29). Kwamba's fear was not about her sister in-laws' inability to get themselves suitors but for the ability of these suitors to provide for all their needs.

Regarding career selection, fathers are responsible for ensuring that their wards learn a job. However, in situations where the child has no father, the responsibility falls on the uncle. This is why Taaber visits Onnyibi, his father for his assistance in the acquisition of farmland. Since Onnyibi didn't have the resources for that, he directed the obligation to Yaakwa, Taaber's uncle, who also rejects this responsibility reason being that he is not the father of Taaber. Women are thus free of the stress in helping build a future for their children.

Gender roles in the extended family system

The Akan extended family is made up of several nuclear families of one descent. Since the Akan practice a matrilineal inheritance system, one will always be identified as a member of their mother's extended family. By extension, the nuclear family can be appropriated to the clan system of the Akan. In *Mbofra Mfa Adwene*, the extended family takes the form of the Akan extended family system. The members of the Aboradze clan are actually descents of four mothers. By membership, the offsprings of these four females comprise the Aboradze clan. Each member of the clan has a role to play in the family.

The role of women in the extended family

The relevance of the woman's childbearing role does not only remain in the confines of her matrimonial home. She is obliged to reproduce to help build a considerable population for the family — her way of contributing her quota to the development of the family. Simply, women are responsible for creating the extended family. Just before the events of the story unfolds, the narrator draws attention to the woman as a species who must reproduce — the one whom the family relies on for population. The narrator has said that the Aboradze clan is but for the reproductive ability of four females:

"Abaatanbaanannawɔkyekyereyɛɛ Kwame Anntofibobow no...Amba Baa, EsiKwansewa, EfuwaBagyina...AbenaaDɔfo"(p. 5). (Kwame Annto's family traces its descent to four mothers: *Amba Baa, EsiKwansewa, EfuwaBagyina...AbenaaDɔfo*)

Irrespective of the woman's role as 'the creator of the family, the family does not bear the name of the woman, it is the men who take this glory—they are named after the family which the woman creates. This is why the narrator says: *"Kwame*

Anntofibobow...” which translates literally as (*Kwame Annto’s family*).

Another relevance of women in the extended family is for them to provide health care for the entire populace of the family. This role is true of the Akan’s health system, which has women (especially the older ones) as one of the health management personnel. In Akan communities, diseases that are not severe are managed by the immediate family members of the sick person. In most cases, it is the mother, the grandmother or the wife who see to the management of a sick person in the family. These people are considered to have enough experience in diseases management. This is what MaameSika who was nursing Yaakwa at a traditional care provider implies in this statement: “*meenyaayarfo ho ntsenae, naiyidze...*” (*I have nursed several sick persons but this is extraordinary...*) (p. 108).

Yaakwa’s treatment begun at home under the management of his first wife, MaameDɔnkɔ because Akan believe that through the experiences of older women, they are able to prescribe medication to cure diseases like stomach upset, malaria, headache, fever etc. at home without necessarily taking the sick to a herbalist or priest or soothsayer. And this was what MaameDɔnkɔ did, she prescribed some herbs and tree barks for managing Yaakwa’s sickness. As evident in chapter 20 of the novel, women also act as nurses in disease management process. Even if the sick is sent to a herbalist or priest for treatment, the wife, mother or grandmother remain the nurse. When Yaakwa’s wife’s medication proved ineffective and he was sent to a professional (a herbalist) the wife still played the nursing role.

The man in the extended family

While women are expected to bear children to ‘stock’ the family (whose members will work and accrue properties for the family), it is the man who heads the family and in essence, controls the accrued properties of the family. This practice is in unison with the Akan inheritance system where the family head (*abusuapanin*) is almost always a man. It is institutionalized in the Akan inheritance system for the family’s property to descend only to a male heir. This is because the Akan believe that women are incapable of managing the affairs of men. In cases where there is no direct male heir, the inheritance can be sold out temporary to another family with male descents until the nuclear family who is supposed to provide a male successor is able to produce one. This inheritance role bestowed on men affirms the fact that patriarchy as well as its promulgation from one generation to another is deliberately carried out. It is a means of assuring continuity of the patriarchic order by way of maintaining the existing hierarchical forms. Thus, a conscious effort society devises to ensure that women never come closer to the apex of the hierarchical system, where men reside. This is what Landstedt, Asplund, and Gadin (2009:963) capture in the following words; “structural patterns in gender relations and positions construct a dynamic, yet consistent, hierarchical

structure in which men and boys collectively possess higher status, resources, and power than women and girls”.

Also, if there is any family debt or any monetary contributions, the responsibility falls on the male members of the family to provide. During the reunion meeting between Yaakwa and his subjects, he proposed that every man pays a sum of two cedis as family dues. Women were not made to pay this money; this is reasonable because, in the first place, women in the family have no salary or income-generating jobs, they all depend on their fathers or husbands for survival. However, in extreme cases, women are included in monetary contributions. This often occurs when perhaps the money is beyond the reach of the men. For example, after Yaakwa’s funeral (in chapter 22), all the family members were made to make contributions to support the payment of the debt the family incurred during the funeral. The payment terms were as follows:

“*Wɔtsewsidieduonuanankawmaeabusua no no mu mbaadewɔnkyentua, nambanyin no so faasidieduananesia*” (p. 122). (*They shared 24 cedis of the debt among the women and the men also paid the remaining 46 cedis*)

The debt was not shared equally, the men paid about two times what the women paid, showing their position as financially sound than women.

Men are also given roles like settling family disputes. This role is reflected in the various family gatherings which were always organized by the male members of the family. During such meetings, women were not seen playing an active role. It does not even appear that they are called to such meetings because the narrator never mentions women as invitees of any of such meetings. The only time the narrator mentions a woman as a participant at a judicature was when Yaakwa’s nephews summoned him before the chief of Duase. Even this, the woman (who was Yaakwa’s wife) was not aware of her relevance at the gathering. It was until Yaakwa has mentioned her as his witness that the chief ordered that she be called from home to join the gathering. Nonetheless, men play very significant roles in settling cases: they play the role of judges, prosecutors, and consultants. In a typical Akan judiciary system, the role of the consultant is reserved for an unseen woman, referred to as “*aberewa*”. It is quite surprising that in *Mboframfaadwen* the writer takes this role from “*aberewa*” and gives it to a male “*EgyaEgyin*” (chp. 15). In any case, these roles assigned to men depict that they allegedly have higher levels of knowledge than their women counterparts. This is true, given that in Akan contexts, it is the “wise” who settles disputes. Thus, relegating women from such roles is an indication of their allegedly poor psychological development.

Apart from their role as case settlers, men are also the members of the family who take decisions on the family’s behalf. This role still attests to women’s intelligence dependency and psychological underdevelopment. The Aboradze clan in the novel held about four decision making meetings. In each of them, the host of the meeting (which was

mostly Yaakwa, the family head) never invited women to the meeting. He will always invite his distant nephews to the meeting to the exclusion of the many female members of the family with whom he shared the same habitat with. In cases where the attendants of the meeting are not many to his satisfaction, he will rather invite his male friends (who are non-members of the family) rather than risk calling the female members of the family. In larger meetings, women will be invited but they uttered no word at the meeting. The men deliberate on all the issues at the meeting and reach a consensus on the final decision.

V. CONCLUSION

There seems to be no logical and biological linkage between gender and roles. The justifications behind the gender-role assignment, especially in the Akan context, appears to lack a firm and logical framework. What about females makes them cleaners of the home and what is it about males that makes them providers of money? Perhaps in the past, it made sense for women to clean the homes, because again, society thought women were not 'fit' to take up career jobs; therefore, they had to take care of the home while their male counterparts went out to work in order to provide for the family. However, these days, with the help of feminist revolutions, both men and women are allowed to work.

The assigned roles to women in *Mbofra Mfa Adwen* establish the basis of gender stereotyping and construction. It also bears true evidence to the defined place and role of women within the Akan context, and Ghana as a whole. It is evident from the analysis of the novel that women are misjudged, mistreated, and discriminated by men, or better, society. The roles of women in the novel imply that imperfection and inferiority are synonymous with women. It is therefore, not surprising that some female characters like Amba Ata; Yaa Kwamba (as wives and mothers) and Famamonko and Taaber's nieces (as sisters) led submissive lives and had to accept their fathers,

brothers, uncles and husbands as authorities. The self-sacrifices of motherhood and the arduous responsibility for domestic work, and housekeeping were also embraced gracefully by the female characters. As such it could be argued that women, as well as men, abided by their gender given roles with or without little objection because these roles appear to them as both prehistoric and predestined and so rebelling against them, would profit nothing.

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