UNSEATING BROKEN STORIES:
A DECOLONIZING CASE STUDY OF WARRIOR QUEENMOTHER,
NANA YAA ASANTEWAA

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ABSTRACT

Western scholarship and media continue to reproduce problematic, inaccurate representations of Africa. African women have borne the brunt of these misrepresentations, and despite all evidence to the contrary, have too often been presented as weak, submissive, voiceless, and dominated by African and other men. Pluralizing stories of African women’s agency, past and present, deserves more focused critical scholarly attention. This thesis aims to challenge stereotypical stories of African women’s defenselessness by modeling one approach to unseating such broken stories through a critical analysis of representations of the historical figure of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, an Asante warrior and one in a long line of anti-imperialist African women leaders seeking justice for their communities and nations. People who tell undermining stories about defenseless African women often do so from within the power systems they wish to uphold, or in which they are caught. Biases and stereotypes that benefit these systems inform circulating ideologies with a vested interest in producing and reproducing reductive stories about African women. The approach here is to start from strengths-based stories in a critical effort to model the construction of more complete stories about African women. Nana Yaa Asantewaa has left a profound legacy that still informs representations and understandings of contemporary Ghanaian women as critical subjects with agency. Her role in the war against the British from 1900-1901, and the ways that her story has been taken up since, illuminate the complex range of forces shaping Ghanaian histories, and framing local, regional, national, and transnational challenges perpetuated by, but also mounted against, hegemonic patriarchal power structures. This research examines the representations and vested interests of diversely positioned academic and non-academic storytellers in discussions surrounding Nana Yaa Asantewaa through narrative, discourse, and visual analyses, employing a critical decolonial theoretical lens that centers the perspectives, achievements, and promise of African women.
DEDICATION

To my mother, Mama Francie,
For setting your dreams aside, so all your children could pursue theirs, you are our most beloved and benevolent matriarch

To my dad, Dr. T.K, my personal inspiration and role model, who has supported me, with prayer, pride, and positivity

To African storytellers, may you drum on stories to full completions, with hope, with passion, with relentlessness fortitude and courage, held on by joy, with love from the lands below and the skies above

To all my family, may all of our dreams rise in triumph.
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*Ayeyi, ne aseda kese nka Nyame.* Let praise and immense gratitude reach God, for the grace that has covered me throughout this journey. You deserve the glory for you made a way for me.

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GLOSSARY

**Accra:** The capital city of the West African country of Ghana

**Adae:** A ceremony to appease departed ancestral gods

**Adinkra symbols:** Symbols, objects, abstract designs, and shapes from the Akan culture that have cultural significance. They are considered representations of proverbs and concepts to convey messages

**Akan:** Multi-ethnic group made up primarily of Asantes and Fantes. Akan also refers to the languages spoken by Asantes

**Afua:** Name given to a female born on a Friday by the Asantes

**Afua Kobi:** The name of An Asantehemaa

**Akofena:** An adinkra symbol that translates to “sword of war,” meaning valour

**Ama:** Name given to a female born on a Saturday by the Asantes

**Anglo-Ashanti Wars:** Wars between the British and the Asantes

**Apentemma:** A type of Ghanaian drum

**Asante:** Are an ethnic group who live within the Ashanti region in Ghana and are currently ruled by Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, who has been ruling since 1999 as the 16th Asante King

**Asante-British war of 1900-1901:** Also known as the Asante War of Resistance, The War of the Golden Stool or the Yaa Asantewaa War

**Asantehene:** Paramount King/Chief of the Asantes

**Asantehemaa:** The Queen Mother of the Asantes. The current Asantehemaa is Nana Konadu Yiadom III, the elder sister of the Asantehene, chosen at age 83 in line with Asante traditions of choosing the oldest suitable female candidate

**Asanteman:** Asante nation, empire, or kingdom

**Asantewaa:** A female who belongs to Asanteman

**Ashanti:** Refers to a region in Ghana, and is sometimes used in reference to the Asante people who live in the region

**Ashanti region:** One of the regions in Ghana
Atumpan: A type of Ghanaian drum

Broken stories: Stories that are deeply problematic, misappropriated, distorted and incomplete

Cedis: Currency of Ghana

Destoolment: Removing a chief from power

Djembe: A type of Ghanaian drum

Dondo: A type of Ghanaian drum

Ejisu: (also colonially spelt as Edweso) A small city in the Ashanti region and birthplace of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, where she was also their Queen mother

Ejisuhene/Edwesohene: Chief/king of Ejisu/Edweso

Ejisuhemaa/Edwesohemaa: Queen mother of Ejisu/Edweso

Elmina: A town in the central region of Ghana, known for trading during the slavery period

Ensoolment: Appointing a chief to power

Fante: An Akan group located primarily in the Central region of Ghana

Fontomfom: A type of Ghanaian drum

Gye Nyame: An Adinkra symbol from the Akan people which means Except God, nothing more supreme than God

Juaben: A town in the Ashanti region of Ghana

Kofi: Name given to a male born on a Friday by the Asantes

Kumasi: The capital city of the Ashanti region in Ghana, also colonially spelt as Kumase

Mampong: A town in the Ashanti region of Ghana

Mamponghene: Chief/king of Mampong

Manhyia Palace: A palace located in Kumasi and the home of the Asantehene

Matriarchy: A social system where women govern their communities; used by Asantes to indicate that queen mothers have designated power to lead and govern their communities

Matrilineal: A system when lineage is traced through the female line
Mpredwan: Name of money used in the 1900s in Ghana

Nana: A title often used before a king/queen’s name as a sign of respect in the Asante Culture

Nana Yaa Asantewaa: Also refers to Yaa Asantewaa, a queen mother of Ejisu

Nana Ama Afranewaa: The name of a queen mother of Ofinso

Nana Ama Sewaa: The name of a queen mother of Juaben

The Gold Coast: The former name of Ghana, because of its rich gold resources

The Golden stool: Also known as Sika Dwa Kofi: this is the sacred stool which is believed to hold the soul and spirit of the Asantes and without it, the Asantes believe they will cease to exist

Offinso: A municipal district in the Ashanti region of Ghana

Offinsohene: Chief/king of Offinso

Offinsohemaa: Queen mother of Offinso

Ohemaa: Refers to a queen

Ohene: Refers to a king/chief

Okyeame: Chief linguist who is the spokesperson of a chief/king. A person cannot speak directly to the chief/king and must speak through the Okyeame

Okomfo: Refers to a traditional priest feared and respected in the Asanteman, who communicates between the spiritual realm, ancestors, gods, and the living

Okomfo Anoyke: The traditional priest associated with the origins of the Golden Stool

Omanhene: A king of a region

Sika: Money

Sunsum: Soul of a person/thing

Twi: A predominant Akan language spoken by Asantes

Yaa: Name given to a female born on a Thursday by the Asantes
CHAPTER 1

Ah ye case (in the beginning) Introduction: Contextualizing Yaa Asantewaa

1.1 Context of Study

A few years ago, I was invited to brunch at a restaurant in Canada. I was one of only two people of colour in the midst of a group of white women seated at our table. There was the usual polite chatter about the weather and the recommendations of what was tasty on the menu, until I was asked to tell everyone about my home country of Ghana. When I said that given such a broad topic, I wouldn’t know where to begin, I was encouraged to start with the struggles of Ghanaian women. In transnational conferences, too, I have heard African men in positions of power make claims about the limited agency and efficacy of African women. Even among my graduate peers, I must continually challenge such deeply problematic narratives. Being called upon so often to tell stories about African women emphasizing their suffering is troubling. Such coercive requests invite my complicity with false and reductive accounts that overlook the strengths, contributions, and resiliencies of African women. Of course, I must refuse to tell unethical stories that shore up the self-satisfied privilege of those who make such requests at the expense of meaningful solidarities with African women building better futures for their communities and countries than transnational imperialisms, past and present, could imagine for the African continent. Clearly, a critically informed Afrocentric approach is called for, one that holds all stories about African women to rigorous account for their precise motivations, demanding refusals of hegemonic distortions.

For many years “exotic, uncivilized, starving, savages” have been characteristic elements of the prevailing stereotypes circulating for western consumption about people living on the continent of Africa. Imperialists have “routinely appropriated, misrepresented, and distorted” (Waziyatawin, 2012 p. 268) the voices of colonized peoples. These same stereotypes have been used by the west to consume African peoples and places, first through slavery and colonization and, more recently, through the neoliberal globalization of capital. Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2018) contends that:

…stereotypes in the West about Black Africa are anything but benign. Racism, the idea of the black race as inferior to the white race, and even the construction of race itself as a
biological and social reality, was of course used by Western Europeans to justify slavery and later to justify colonialism. And these dangerous stereotypes found their way into popular imagination and literature (Adichie, 2008, p.43-44).

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1993), another Nigerian author, argues that such racisms were laced with gender biases, as well, noting how “with the arrival of the colonizers to Africa, traditional political structures were either completely abandoned or distorted to sweep away any previous female participation, replacing them with completely male structures and positions” (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993, p.108-109). Colonialist structures “hardened attitudes of male superiority and female exclusion and enforced ideologies of patriarchy which existed in African societies anyway” (p.109). Further, for more than a century, National Geographic magazine disseminated stereotypes about Africa all over the world, under the guise of education. It was only recently that its editor in chief acknowledged that “for decades, our coverage was racist” (Goldberg, 2018). For years, very little was done by National Geographic “to push readers beyond stereotypes ingrained in white American culture” (Goldberg, 2018). When it came to the depiction of the African continent, almost no voice was accorded to Africans. Instead “the only thing black people were seen to be doing, was exotic dancing, as though the editors, writers and photographers had to consciously not see” (Goldberg, 2018) what else Africans embody or are capable of. Indeed, such distorted representations suggest a deep failure of integrity and accountabilities in the west, with systemic demands for reification of prevailing norms upholding egos that constantly need to be assuaged by repeated opportunities to feel righteous, better than, or to justify structural racist tendencies toward those who are not white.

The late Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina (2005)’s essay, provides an iconic and ironic example of representations of Africans and African women in the west:

The starving African wanders the refugee camp nearly naked and waits for the benevolence of the West. Her children have flies on their eyelids and pot bellies, and her breasts are flat and empty. She must look utterly helpless. She can have no past, no history; such diversions ruin the dramatic moment. She must never say anything about herself in the dialogue except to speak of her (unspeakable) suffering. Her children are all delinquent. These characters should buzz around your main [white] hero, making him look good. Your hero can teach them, bathe them, feed them; he carries lots of babies…It
is okay to mention that Africa has been severely depopulated by AIDS and War (Wainaina, 2005).

Eve Tuck (2009) suggests that these types of stories “reinforce a one-dimensional notion of people as depleted, ruined and hopeless” (Tuck, 2009, p.409). Colonialist perspectives and positionalities love a good damage story for its ability to bolster hegemonic power structures. Such deeply problematic narratives about Africa and African women emphasize their struggles, suffering, limited agency, and constrained efficacies. Misrepresentations that depict African women as submissive, disempowered, weak-minded, and primitive have mislocated them in subservient positions as compared to African men or white women, who are presented as more progressive. Furthermore, such problematic representations and misguided approaches must be constantly checked and called out for what they are: oppressor’s tools that have not only failed to give African women the respect they deserve, but also interfered with understanding the realities and dimensions of their agency. Colonialist misrepresentations have failed to recognize African women for all they are and do, including contributing to the defense of their ancestral lands.

Post-colonial African scholars have continued to push for Afrocentric approaches, challenging this discursive reproduction of subalternity (Spivak 1988), or suppressed public voice, but there is still much work to do. To borrow the words of Adichie, I too, feel the need to challenge the “dangerous and single story” (Adichie, 2009) of African women that circulates in prevailing global discourses. In step with Adichie, I would argue, “not that some catastrophic stories about Africa are untrue” (Adichie, 2009), but rather, that there are other stories of resilience, accomplishments, and hope that need to be told, to promote more accurate accountabilities. I think of the many family stories, close and distant, I heard growing up, that exude resilience and inspiration.

I think, for example, of the extraordinary story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, a warrior queen who fought for the Asante people in Ghana against British colonialism, but also of ordinary Ghanaian women whose stories of courage and fortitude are not necessarily recorded for posterity. Africa has had many female warriors like Nana Yaa Asantewaa, The Dahomey Amazons of Benin, Queen Amina of Nigeria, Nzinga Mbande for example, and African women more broadly, display daily courage as they navigate the power structures around them. Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s importance in Ghana, in Africa, and the world can be seen in the ways her memory has been nationally institutionalized and internationally supported, through the establishment in 1960 of the
Yaa Asantewaa Girls’ senior high school in Tanoso, located in Kumasi, as well as the Yaa Asantewaa festival and Museum, established in 2000. Although it was destroyed by a fire in 2004 (McCaskie, 2007, p.170), discussions are underway that would allow for the museum to be rebuilt and restored for educational and tourism purposes. Mensah (2010) suggests that “many uninformed writers see Indigenous African women as docile bodies with little or no agency and resistance power” (Mensah, 2010, p. ii). She adds that Yaa Asantewaa’s story shows “clearly that African women are not docile subjects waiting to be saved by the West; rather, they have collective agency and the power to challenge patriarchal practices in Africa” (Mensah, 2010, p.84).

Stories that affirm African women’s agency and resistance have been misplaced and under-reported, in part, due to the cataclysmic effects of western imperialisms and their institutional biases, another set of submerged stories that are too often missing from prevailing knowledge production schemes. Tendencies to leave out the stories of imperialist brutalities and of the courage of minoritized peoples must be challenged. This may involve a deeper analysis of the genres of storytelling, as well. As Gingell and Roy (2012) point out, textual engagements with oral cultures often lift a story “out of the discursive environment where it lived, thus decontextualizing or decentering it, and reifying it when it is then carried across into a new medium and discursive environment, thus also recontextualizing or recentering it” (Gingell & Roy, 2012, p. 14). Attending to the power dynamics involved in such shifts of presentation and context is vital, particularly when stories are forged at the intersections of competing meaning and power systems.

In good conscience, then, I cannot be silent about the immense and significant contributions of African women, both ancestral and living who embody so much more than the stereotypes I hear, read, and continue to encounter in my personal and professional experiences. These problematic representations are troubling, especially because access to verifiable and accurate information is available. Tracing the trajectories of the stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s, influence and contributions offers a case study about how to challenge problematic stories about African women and to marshal more critical and empowering narratives to inform discussions of Ghanaian women’s agency.

I am using the concept of the “broken story” as a way to demonstrate that such reductive representations do not belong to the colonized, but to the colonizing. For me, broken stories are best explained in relation to the Ghanaian cultural tradition of storytelling through drumming. Drums in Ghana and other African countries are powerful tools of communication, an integral part
of telling stories, whether played with a wooden stick or by hand. There are even drums known as talking drums that imitate the human voice and speak to people. Drums are deployed on many occasions from festivals to funerals, to pay homage to ancestors and to salute and celebrate life, resilience, leadership, and culture. Drums, whether played softly or loudly, denote strength, embolden people, help with healing, serve as a catalyst in dancing, and resonate in situations where words need not be uttered. According to Willie Anku (2009), “to understand the structural concept of the African drum ensemble, it is important to grasp its socio-cultural background, the performance contexts in which it operates, as well as instrumentation and playing techniques, and how these are manifest in various ethnic practices and approaches” (Anku, 2009, p.38). He adds that:

Akan drum ensembles usually consist of a selection of bells, rattles and stick-clappers (idiophones), and a combination of drums (membranophones). The idiophones are usually confined to playing prescribed, non-variable rhythms. Membranophones range from small makeshift drums to large and heavy log drums of varying levels of pitch, timbre and intensity. Usually the largest (and thus lowest) drums assume the principal role of master or lead-drum. There is a general notion that the larger the drum, the lower its pitch, and that the ensembles are arranged in a hierarchical order of pitches from high to low. While this is generally true, a few exceptions may be noted. In the Akan adowa ensemble, the donno drums are sometimes pitched relatively lower than the principal drum - the atumpan. Similarly, the fontomfrom bell - adawura - sounds distinctly lower than the expected pitch of other Akan bells (p.40).

From fontomfrom to apentemma to atumpan to djembe to donno, from open to closed, from huge to small, from drums that hang from the shoulders or are carried under the armpit, to drums placed on the ground, Ghanaian drums are designed to tell individual and collective stories with precise affective resonances. Most drums are made out of wood and some are carved and have Adinkra symbols invoking Gye Nyame (the supremacy of God), Akofena (valour), or Sankofa (learning from the past). The drumhead is usually made out of an animal skin, most often a goat. In addition to communal responsibilities to the land, African drums transmit embodied messages about strength, power, bravery, they also send warning messages during battle, indicate reverence for royalty, acknowledge leadership, communicate healing, and more. Below are a few illustrations of
Ghanaian drums, the first from the late Ghanaian music theorist, Willie Anku (2009), and the second from the Ghana Tourism Authority.

Figure 1.1

![Diagram of Ghanaian drums](Image Credit: Willie Anku (2009))

Figure 1.1.1.

![Image of Ghanaian drums](Photo Credit: Ghana Tourism Authority (2020))

A drum that cannot serve its purpose, often when there is a tear in it, is considered broken. A proper drum storyteller would immediately recognize the limitations of a broken drum, the flawed communication that would result if it were played, and so, would set it aside until it is
repaired. Broken stories, in this analogy, emerge as distorted, often untrue, or deficient narratives, communicated by people who neither understand the stakes of the story, nor value the ethical meaning of a more “complete story” (Adichie, 2009) – because the drum in context and at play is not whole, yet they provide their imperfect accounts anyway. Broken stories also arise from misappropriations and imposed or imagined fragilities, repeatedly reinforcing the notion of a ‘ruined and drained’ African continent. There are no strengths in broken stories, just struggles. Therefore, broken stories can be manipulative, ill informed, unaware, lacking in depth of historical accuracy or in meaningful engagement with traditional knowledges, and, ultimately, incomplete.

Famed Nigerian author Chinua Achebe is often associated with an African proverb, which states that, “until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” Achebe’s statement urges Africans to tell our own stories, unseating the broken stories told by colonizers, who have presented themselves as “superior saviours” rescuing “inferior savages.” Colonialist damage stories have perpetuated racism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, environmental destruction, and problematic stereotypes, all mechanisms of oppression. Imperialist iterations of academic production erect barriers, preventing African historians from telling African histories through colonialist displacements that have also resulted in dismissed and diminished appreciation of the humanity of Black lives among white audience members. In order for Africans to take ownership of our stories, Africans must speak for ourselves with our own voices instead of having Europeans and colonialist systems dictate and control our narratives, from boardrooms to bandshells. Critically engaged storytelling refuses to suppress uncomfortable truths and affirms the African-centered approaches that were interrupted by imperialist interventions.

As a Pan-African and a Ghanaian, I feel called to make room for more accurate, hopeful, and pluralistic stories that facilitate representational integrity by examining and presenting the stories of African women leaders, like Nana Yaa Asantewaa. Their legacies exceed colonialist accounts and their stories have shaped my own cultural milieu and understandings of African women’s agency. By locating myself and my connections to the research, and by holding myself accountable to the needs of Ghanaian, and African women above all else, I claim and share my allegiances freely, and thereby, declare the audiences to whom I feel most responsible. Stories of many inspirational African women persist and must be retold in service of a deliberate agenda that recognizes their significant contributions, their strengths over struggles, until more constructive and accountable representations are recognized and normalized.
1.2 Objectives and Significance of Study

This thesis explores a range of representations of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, that have the potential to challenge prevailing gender frameworks in contemporary patriarchal and postcolonial institutions in Ghana and beyond. Nana Yaa Asantewaa is famous for her courage and wisdom. However, there are differing views of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s precise role or roles in the eponymous war from 1900-1901 in the Asante Kingdom in Ghana. Using a critical, Afro-centric decolonizing lens, I examine selected iterations of her story as a matriarchal leader who contributed to the Asante people’s quest for independence from British colonialism. I look at interpreters of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s colonial experiences, as well as their situated attachments to stories about her, in light of her historical significance as an African woman defending her homeland in the face of imperialist oppression. I also consider the general tone and tenor of these selected accounts and whether they vary depending on the gender, racialized identity, and social location of the authors. My goal is to show what may be missing or otherwise require ethical intervention in ensuring that the available materials more accurately reflect the rich histories and potentials of African women.

This research provides an intervention into the broken stories that target African women and challenges westernized and patriarchal African notions of submissive and struggling African women. My hope is that my work can help model both how to deconstruct prevailing misrepresentations and how to catalogue the range of possible stories and futures that Nana Yaa Asantewaa has inspired. Yet hers is one case study among many possible explorations of the stories of African women working on decolonial projects, from the first invasions by colonizers until now.

1.3 Original Contributions

I will be tracing the influence of a matrilineal line of descent and practices of decolonial agency from the core story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa into the present moment. My critical intervention exposes the politics shaping stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa, in order to re-emphasize the culturally contextualized impulses informing her decisive and strategic actions to protect her people and prepare for the future. By tracing the ongoing ripple effects of her choices into different spaces amongst the Asante peoples in Ghana, and their implications beyond Ghana’s borders to Pan-Africanism and the diaspora, I wish to emphasize, the ongoing force of her decolonizing message. By tracing the exemplary stories of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s agency through the matrilineal structures supporting Ghanaian and African women, more broadly, I wish to
emphasize how anti-imperialist Ghanaian women have retained cultural power and offer acute critical perspectives that can stand the test of time.

In addition, as a storyteller, I introduce an example of decolonial storytelling, based on a model I refer to as an African-Women-With-Agency or AWWA, type of storytelling. This approach to writing and storytelling is inspired by Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo, who recognizes the strength of African women and gives her female characters the audacity to make bold choices for themselves. Following Dakota historian Waziyatawin’s example, I “engage narratives that allow me to assume another responsibility of the storyteller: to re-imagine, re-create and re-articulate the essence of the original stories and thus effectively maximize their impact on the intended audience” (Waziyatawin, 2012 p. 265) by centering the perspectives of those to whom the stories are sacred.

1.4 Research Questions

The following questions guide this research:

- How have stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa been framed and reframed for presentation to different audiences and to what ends?
- What are the investments of differently positioned storytellers in telling and retelling stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s roles and influence within and beyond Ghana?
- What is the significance of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s representation as a “warrior” queen as presented and delineated by Asante oral traditionalists and scholars from diverse contexts?
- What is the significance of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s age, motherhood, matrilineal and matriarchal culture in challenging patriarchal thinking about Asante gender roles?

1.5 Summary of Chapters

The thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the context, objectives, and significance of the study, as well as the research questions guiding this work. Chapter 2 provides a detailed literature review of the history of the Asante nation, including the Asante matriarchal and matrilineal traditions, the origins of the Golden Stool, the sacred artifact which was successfully defended by Nana Yaa Asantewaa through the war that bears her name and in the outcomes of that war. I also discuss historic and contemporary representations of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, the centenary celebrations of her achievements, the role of stories about her circulating
in tourism and other contexts within and beyond Ghana. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the chosen theoretical frameworks: narrative structural theory (with my own extension of this theory), postcolonial feminist and critical decolonial theories, and how each advances and frames the thesis focus. Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology adopted, connections to selected theoretical frameworks and the ways theory and method work together to generate answers to my research questions. This chapter also includes a description of data selection criteria, a summary of the data collected for my research archive, my use of NVivo software, and other approaches I have relied upon in my data analysis. Chapter 5 provides an assessment of the interests of the diversely situated and positioned storytellers examined, addressing omissions from their interpretations, as well as their situated accountabilities, the operations of differential power discourses, and the importance of using an Afro-centric approach in critical scholarship about Africa. Finally, Chapter 6 provides a summary of the findings of the research, delineates the strengths of the current contributions, outlines the limitations of the study, and makes recommendations for future research directions to extend the work commenced here.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review: All because of the Sika Dwa Kofi

2.1 Introduction

In the long line of African women leaders, Asante foremother Nana Yaa Asantewaa is often invoked in Ghanaian culture as a queen mother, advisor, warrior, and a model for understanding the qualities and successes of such leaders. This literature review offers an overview of the Asante nation, the Asante matrilineal system, and the significance of defending the Golden Stool in the Ghanaian narrative of colonization and Asante resistance. My goal is to provide a chronological outline of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s activities, varied representations of her role during the war that bears her name, her legacy as intertwined with national and international politics, and the use of related histories in Ghanaian tourism and national celebrations, all of which help to inform the themes under discussion in this thesis. Because the available literature on Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s history and legacy is scant, I have drawn upon the work of African, European, North American, and some Indigenous scholars, to provide an overview of events and some of the persistent tensions that shape her legacies.

2.2 A Brief History of Asante Nation and Ghana

It is important to contextualize the challenge to British imperialism undertaken by Nana Yaa Asantewaa in relation to other imperialist projects in Africa. “The first Europeans to arrive in the Gold Coast (former name of Ghana) coast were the Portuguese, in 1471. In 1482, the Portuguese built the Castle of Elmina, the first European settlement on the Gold Coast. From here they traded slaves, gold, knives, beads, mirrors, rum and guns. News spread quickly, and eventually, English, Danish and Dutch traders arrived as well” (Miller, Vandome & McBrewster, 2009, p.1). Not long after, the British subsumed “the remaining interests of the other European countries, … took over the Danish Gold Coast in 1850 and the Dutch Gold Coast including Fort Elmina in 1871. Britain steadily expanded the colony through the invasion of local kingdoms as well, particularly the Ashanti Confederacy and Fante Confederacy. The main British problem was the Ashanti people who controlled much of Ghana before the Europeans arrived and are still today the biggest community in Ghana” (Miller, Vandome & McBrewster, 2009, p.1). Before the imperialist invasion by the British, the Asante kingdom, especially between “1680 and 1750”
(Webster & Boahen, 1967, p.116), under the reigns of “Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware” (p.116), was recognized for its “military strength, which was unparalleled in its ability to defeat neighbouring states to become one of the most powerful empires in West Africa” (Hale, 2013, p.14). Asante military prowess and state leadership continued to be respected by surrounding groups after contact and colonization, as well. The Asantehene (paramount King) Kwaku Dua I, had maintained “a wealthy and powerful Asante state in a climate of peace and was adept at maintaining state power. However, the Asante state and society began to unravel with the death of Kwaku Dua I” (Boahen, 2003, p.10). Asantehene “Kofi Karikari (1867-1874) and Mensa Bonsu (1874-1883)” (p.10), who were the successors of Kwaku Dua I, could not quite maintain power against the British military in the third Anglo-Ashanti war from 1873-1874. There were five Anglo-Ashanti wars, from 1823 to 1831; from 1863 and 1864; from 1873 to 1874; from 1895 to 1896, with the fifth and final war, also known as the War of the Golden Stool or the Yaa Asantewaa War, which lasted from 1900-1901. These wars took place in response to the British colonialist agenda based on the Asante determination to resist.

Ivor Wilks (2000) reports that by “the end of 1895 Asante remained an independent kingdom. It was ruled by a king, Agyeman Prempeh I, whose powers were checked if not quite balanced by two councils: The Assembly of the Asante Nation and the Council of Kumasi” (Wilks, 2000, p.14). In Downfall of Prempeh: A Diary of Life with the Native Levy in Ashantti 1895-96, Major-General Robert S.S. Baden-Powell outlines reasons for the British Expedition, led by Sir Francis Scott, as provided by the Secretary of State Mr. Chamberlain for the Colonies:

The expedition was undertaken solely in the interests of the Gold Coast Colony, and at the request, often repeated, of the inhabitants of that colony. Both they and the Government considered that steps must be taken to suppress what was neither more nor less than an intolerable and injurious nuisance. The government of the Kingdom of Ashanti had, ever since 1874, stood in the way of civilisation, of trade, and of the interests of the people themselves, and should, on these general grounds alone, be put a stop to…. (cheers)…. [as is] the duty of this country in regard to all these savage countries over which we are called upon to exercise some sort of dominion (Baden-Powell, 1900, pp.8-9).

In step with this racist rationale, “the British had called upon Prempeh I, to accept the 'just demands' of Her Majesty's Government. One demand had been that Prempeh should meet the cost of the expedition” (Tordoff, 1960, p 33), which Prempeh I, refused. However, by 1896, “British
troops invaded Kumasi and Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I, was captured and exiled, to The Seychelles” (Hale, 2013, p.15). Agyeman Prempeh I’s exile was a result of the Asantehene refusing to accept a treaty proposed by the British to “have a commissioner stationed in Kumasi who will be advising the Asantehene on matters to do with facilitating the penetration of Asante by the British” (Wilks, 2000, p.17). The Asantehene, along with other leaders in the Asante empire, could not accept a proposal intimating that “they will be relinquishing Asante sovereignty” (p.17) to the British. The British later sent an ultimatum to the Asantehene “to the effect that Kumase must become a protectorate of the Gold Coast Colony as the British Government” (p.20) wanted to control the Asante kingdom.

At a meeting on 17 January 1896, between the Asantes and the British, the British Governor, William Edward Maxwell, demanded from them “the whole balance of war indemnities incurred since 1874” (p.43). Maxwell then “ordered the arrest of the Asantehene, Asantehemaa, Mamponghene, and many of the leading Kumase councillors and two of its sub-chiefs, Edwesohene and Offinsohene” (p.43). The Edwesohene was Kofi Tene, the grandson of Nana Yaa Asantewaa. The Asantehene, prisoners, and others the British “had forcibly abducted, were escorted from Kumase on 22 January 1896, and taken to Elmina on the Gold Coast (and subsequently, of course, to Sierra Leone and the Seychelles)” (p.45). When Maxwell was sent on leave, Governor Frederick Hodgson replaced him as Governor of the Gold Coast. In 1900-1901, the Asantes and the British again went to war. This war will be further discussed in Section 2.5. After the war of 1900-1901, the British remained in Kumasi, exploiting the Asantes under a colonialist system, purportedly helping them to “progress” along a map of imperialist design.

With the emergence of the First World War from 1914-1918, the Asantes were conscripted to “actively support and participate in the War on Britain’s behalf. This, in combination with the total consensus among paramount chiefs calling for the return of Agyeman Prempeh I, eventually pushed the British to order for Prempeh’s return” (Hale, 2013, p. 16) to Kumasi in 1924. After the Second World War ended in 1945, “the Commission of Enquiry was established to look into rioting that had occurred in the Gold Coast. A recommendation was made to end indirect rule. Local leaders present suggested organizing local government structures based on the British forms” (p.17). On 6th March 1957, Ghana emerged as the first sub-Saharan African country to gain Independence from the British colonizers. Newly independent, Ghana was led by Kwame Nkrumah and his colleagues of the Convention Peoples’ Party (CPP), Mr. Obetsebi-Lamptey, Mr.
Ako Adjei, Mr. Edward Akufo Addo, Dr. J. B. Danquah and Mr. William Ofori Atta, also known as the Big Six.

Kwame Nkrumah viewed Ghana’s sovereignty as “meaningless unless it was linked with the total liberation of the African continent” (Okoampa-Ahoofe, 2006, p.6). Following Ghana’s lead, thirty other African countries declared their own independence within the next decade (Poe, 2003). While the history of Ghana is often centered on the Big Six, the forefathers who fought for Ghana’s independence, Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s demands for independence are threaded through their own demands and contributions and those before and since, in fighting against British imperialism. Therefore, I would argue that Nana Yaa Asantewaa ought to be at the forefront of Ghanaian decolonizing histories, too.

2.3 Matrilineal Traditions of Asante Nation

The name of the Asantes, “can be contextualised to mean the people, their territory, and their language. Other orthographical constructs of Asante are Asuantsi, Asiante, Ashanti and Ashantee” (Botchway & Agyemang, 2017, p.2). The term Asante “evolved from the agglutination of the Akan Twi language radixes Asa or Esa (war) and Nti (reason or because), which suggests that vassal states became integrated because of a war to liberate themselves. The victorious confederacy assimilated other communities, grew in size to become Asanteman, and flouted the conventional understanding that alliances collapse when their common enemy is overpowered. The Asante realm used diplomacy, intimidation, coercion, and straightforward conquest to dominate its neighbours during the first century of the Union” (p. 3). This history is important because as an ascendant, territory-expanding force themselves, the Asantes would have a strong sense of the stakes in their resistance to the British.

The Asantes practice a matrilineal system of social organization, where children inherit position and status according to familial descent through maternal generations. Akwabi-Ameyaw (1982) adds that “the Ashanti people believe that it is only through females that the blood is passed on from one generation to another in the lineage” (Akwabi-Ameyaw, 1982, p.329). Farrar (1997) states the practice of “maintaining separate, parallel political hierarchies for the female and male sections of the population is a fundamental and presumably ancient feature of Akan political organization” (Farrar, 1997, p.582). In addition,
in the day-to-day affairs of government in precolonial Akan society, women did not normally come under the authority of men. All issues pertaining primarily or exclusively to women (and there were many – political, economic, and cultural) and all conflicts between women were addressed within the context of this female political hierarchy (Farrar, 1997, p.582).

Rattray (1923), a historian still frequently cited on the Ashanti matrilineal system, discusses how among the “Ashanti descent is traced through the female and only a woman can transmit blood to descendants as male or female” (Rattray, 1923, p.77). Rattray (1923) lists the following elements of matrilineal practices in the Ashante nation:

(i) The status of women is raised because *oba na owo obarima* (a woman is the one who gives birth to a man);

(ii) No woman stands alone in the Ashanti culture, for behind the woman stands a united family, bound by blood which has power;

(iii) A woman’s children belong to her and her clan, not to that of her husband;

(iv) A woman’s individually acquired and inherited property is hers and her clan’s and her husband cannot touch it. Not only is this so, but when she dies, no male even of her own clan may be her heir until all her female blood (clan) relations are extinct;

(v) If the last surviving person in a woman’s clan dies, then the clan becomes extinct even if there are one thousand (1000) male members left;

(vi) Only a woman can transmit blood to a King (pp78-79).

Further, queen mothers who are considered “senior females in the clan, play a role in local government and in the selection and enstoolment of a chief. Without the queen mother, a new chief will not exist” (p.81). McGee (2015) states that queen mothers “have political, economic, and social status among the Akan people in Ghana. The Akan Queenmother, *ohemmaa*, held bonafide political power and, at some point in history, had even become the king or *omanhene*. She was chosen by her male and female senior lineage mates. One of her responsibilities was to nominate the *Asantehene*” (McGee, 2015, p.5). Farrar (1997) adds that one “example of a queen mother becoming a king was the reign of the Juaben *ohemmaa*, Nana Ama Sewaa. Nana Ama Sewaa occupied the Juaben Royal Stool in the mid-nineteenth century in the absence of suitable male heirs and she was, in turn, succeeded by her daughter” (p.582).
Another example was when Nana Ama Afranewaa also acted as both “king and queen” (Boahen, 2003, p.147) in her case, of Offinso. She was committed to “joining hands and fighting” (p.147) with Nana Yaa Asantewaa. Boahen (2003) discusses how Nana Ama Afranewaa is believed to have “fired a gun when the British came by in search of the Golden Stool” (p.147) and that “she was arrested along with Nana Yaa Asantewaa, but was eventually freed and not exiled” (p.147). Nana Ama Afranewaa was also committed to the war because, as a mother, her son, “Apea Sea” (McCaskie, 2007, p.154), being exiled by the British greatly upset her and she wanted him back; she was willing to do everything for his return, in addition to protecting the Golden Stool, as a sacred cultural artifact, as well. This shows the key leadership role of queen mothers, making and sometimes becoming kings. Further, queen mothers have risen to the occasion in defense of their people, even with males present at meetings. The Asantehemaa Afua Kobi, is known to have had occasion to protect her people when threatened by a British Governor. Nana Yaa Asantewaa is also known to have encouraged the Asante nation to go to war when she felt a British Governor had disrespected the Asante monarchy.

As Rattray (1923) points out, queen mothers play powerful roles in the making of a king. Some include leading any discussion on the selection of a nominee and having the ultimate power to make the final decision. The queen mother gives advice to the appointed chief and sits to his left during assemblies of chiefs. The queen mother “alone has the privilege of rebuking the chief, the chief’s spokesman or the chief’s councillors in open court” (p.82). She may listen to “petitions and can grant pardon or mitigate a sentence” (p.82). She has her “own court and decides cases with the full powers of the chief on female matters and also has jurisdiction in certain cases where males are litigants” (p.83). As well, the queen mother’s role involves “performing rites during ceremonies for departed queen mothers” (p.83). She may keep a chief waiting after an Adae, since “the chief cannot return to his room after a ceremony unless the queen mother salutes him” (p.84). The queen mother also attends ceremonies “connected with birth and puberty and is personally concerned with” (p.84) ensuring that the moral standards in the community are followed and enforced accordingly.

Rattray (1923) notes that despite the recognition given to female bloodlines, menstruation is still seen as “a natural inferiority of women from a physical standpoint” (p.81), which can be read as a feminized damage story (Tuck, 2009). Traditional beliefs hold that during her period, “a woman suffers from a disability and cannot go to war. A woman was considered unclean and had
to be avoided” (Rattray, 1923, p.81). This view did not apply to queen mothers, however. Certain queen mothers (including Nana Yaa Asantewaa) “accompanyed an army to war because they were old and had passed menopause” (p.81). Thus, older women were seen as clean, able, and could be in close contact with men, leading, guiding, and consulting with them over war strategies. Rattray (1923) also notes that in investigating these vested powers of queen mothers, he was told by both Asante men and women that “the white man only recognized Asante men. The European considered women of no account” (p.84). Nonetheless, the reign and influence of queen mothers in the Asante kingdom, remains. The matrilineal system of the Asantes is revered and continues to birth lineages of queens and kings.

2.4 The Significance of the Golden Stool, Sika Dwa Kofi

The origin of the Sika Dwa Kofi (Golden Stool born on a Friday), according to folklore, stems from a 1701 meeting of chiefs from various Asante states who wanted to be united under one main leader. It was decided that the stool of the chosen chief would be greater than any other and all would swear an oath of allegiance to the chosen Chief. Okomfo Anokye, a traditional priest at the meeting stated that, in order to select this chief, he would pray to the ancestors and gods to send a stool from the skies and the chief on whose lap the stool landed, would be the chosen Chief of the Asantes. All the chiefs present at the meeting agreed to this (Kyeretwie & Poku, 2020). Okomfo Anokye, on a Friday, gathered all of the chiefs again and began to jump and dance to heavy drumming, with lightning striking several times from dark clouds. He conjured the Golden Stool from the sky, which landed on the lap of Nana Osei Tutu. This meant that the ancestors and gods had chosen him to be the Chief of Chiefs, the unquestionable King of Kings, the Asantehene. Okomfo Anokye informed the chiefs, after they drank a concoction he offered, that by drinking the potion, they had sworn their commitment to the gods and ancestors and must always protect the Golden Stool and stay united for the Asante nation (Kyeretwie & Poku, 2020). The Golden Stool “has a curved seat, 46 cm high with a platform 61 cm wide and 30 cm deep. Its entire surface is laid with gold and hung with bells to warn the king of impending danger” (Kyeretwie & Poku, 2020). The location of the Golden Stool is not public knowledge, but it is believed to be in the Ashanti region of Ghana.

Botchway & Agyemang (2017) explain that “legend has it that Sikadwa Kofi, the Golden Stool that the Asante hold in the highest regard as a national spiritual and political treasure,
was generated by spiritual ancestors of Asante, and magically conjured from the sky by Okomfo Anokye, the first Okomfopanyin (High-priest) of Asante, to be the symbolic soul of Asante, emblem of political authority, and evidence of the unique and sacred ordination of the Asantehene” (Botchway & Agyemang, 2017, p.4). Okomfo Anokye was also known as “Kwame Agyei Frempon, and had different appellations such as Kotobre, Obiri Komfo, and Osiahene.” (Botchway & Agyemang, 2017, p. 2). They add:

…the Asante confederacy started under two leaders, who were also personal friends – Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye. These almost apotheosised men used pragmatic politics, diplomacy, and magico-religious means to engineer an Asante history, culture, and national image. However, it was the awe-inspiring Okomfo Anokye, who, purported to have used his magical powers to help Osei Tutu and the Asante confederacy to defeat the Denkyera, was responsible for binding the foundational states of the union with a mystical oath, and laying the foundation of the Asante constitution which made Osei Tutu the Asantehene, and his clan, the Oyoko, the sole providers of future Asantehene (Botchway & Agyemang, 2017, pp.4-5).

British researcher on Asante history, Tom C. McCaskie (2000) offers a different account of the origins of the Golden Stool that he heard from one “Reverend N. V. Asare, a prolific writer in Akan traditional history” (McCaskie, 2000, p. 62), who had interviewed elders present when the Golden Stool was created. McCaskie (2000) alleges that according to Asare, Okomfo Anokye created the Golden Stool, to unite the Asantes as a great nation, and that it did not descend from the sky. McCaskie reports:

The Golden Stool (see Figure 2.4.3 and Figure 2.4.3.1) was first carved of wood, and later, skilled goldsmiths covered it over with pure heavy gold. Big gold nuggets were hung from it and the space inside the stool was filled with precious beads. Suspended from the stool were seven pretty large bells, five made of gold and two made of silver (pp. 62-63).

As an African-born reverend trained through the Swiss Basel mission, Asare may have had his own reasons for challenging the notion that the Golden Stool descended from the skies. It may be possible that Okomfo Anokye went home to create this Golden Stool after his initial meeting with all the chiefs of the Asante states. What is more significant is that, as a traditional priest, Okomfo Anokye was known by the Asantes to exercise supernatural powers in his dealings with the
spiritual realm of ancestors and gods, who may have guided and empowered him to hold the ceremony in which the Golden Stool emerged from the skies. The folk story, of the stool descending from the skies has been told in Ghana from generation to generation to demonstrate the connection between the ancestors, gods, and the decision of the Asantes to follow the direction and instructions of Okomfo Anokye, in uniting under one Asante leader. In this model of leadership, the Asantes have maintained their commitment to be led by one Asantehene, which has made the Asante nation intrinsically stronger since that fateful Friday, many centuries ago. This model of leadership requires the Asantes to stand behind the Golden Stool and defend it, which was precisely what Nana Yaa Asantewaa did.

The Asante nation prides itself on its strength and preparedness for conflict, through the popular Asante motto, “wo kum apem a, apem beba,” which translates: if you kill a thousand of them, a thousand more will still emerge. The Asantes owe this preparatory mentality to the unifying agenda led by Okomfo Anokye, whose efforts to support alignment among the chiefs would prove necessary to resisting the encroaching imperialists. Today, a statue of Akomfo Anokye, located in Kumasi (as seen in Figure 2.4.1), shows the priest summoning the Golden stool from the skies, with one foot raised and one hand in the air. Okomfo Anokye is also known to have planted an immovable sword (as seen in Figure 2.4.2) in Kumasi in 1695. It is believed to have mystical powers that keep it firmly stuck in the ground, symbolizing the unity of the Asante nation.

Figure 2.4.1: A Statue of Okomfo Anokye (Kumasi) Photo credit: Ghana Travel Tourist Guide, 2017
Figure 2.4.2: The Immovable Sword (Photo credit: The African Dispatch, 2012)

The Immovable sword was planted by Okomfo Anokye in 1695 (in Kumasi) with a declaration that no one would be able to remove it. The bottles of Schnapps are drinks given to ancestors to communicate with and thank them for their protection.

Figure 2.4.2.1: Replica of the immovable sword, Photo Credit: The African Dispatch, 2012
There is no question among the Asante that Okomfo Anoye had powers that summoned the Golden Stool into being. McCaskie (1986) himself admits, “this man had remarkable powers. It is said that his powers were a gift from the gods, because when he was only a child, he could disappear and reappear at will” (McCaskie, 1986, p.326). The folkloric tale of the Golden Stool emerging from the skies holds more weight and power for the Asante people than any other version because that tale aligns the Asante’s oath of unity with the sacred, infinite time and space of all possibilities.

McCaskie (2000) agrees that The Golden Stool “holds together the Asanteman (Asante nation) and serves as a powerful symbol of the head and strength of the nation” (p.63). What is key here is the undeniable significance of the Golden Stool, in both the account McCaskie (2000) provides and the one known in oral traditions. It is believed that “if the Golden Stool is taken from the Asantes, just like a body bereft of its soul, it will become a corpse” (p. 63). In addition, if the Golden Stool were to “leave the Asante nation, it would be better for all Asante people to shoot themselves and to leave this earth behind” (p. 63). Today the Golden Stool is being protected by “some honest and reliable royal servants. These servants have practiced complete self-denial and have sworn to devote their entire lives to the service of the Sika Dwa” (p. 64). Day or night, rain or shine, storm or harvest, they guard the Golden Stool from danger.

The Golden Stool is extremely sacred to the Asantes as it contains the spirit of the Asante peoples. It is their symbol of national unity; the Asante nation will cease to exist if the Golden Stool is taken away from them (Kyeretwie & Poku, 2020). It is the sunsum (spirit) of the Asanteman and gives the people their life and existence, anchoring the continuity of their history, beliefs, and future. Thus, the Golden Stool must be protected at all costs, from both internal and external forces. Therefore, without doubt, Asante nationalism is invested in the Golden Stool.

Below, I provide several images of the Golden Stool. In the first and second images, the Golden Stool is shown, resting on a chair, not touching the ground. The Golden Stool is laying on its side in these images, because it cannot be sat upon. Not even the Asantehene is allowed to sit on it. In the final two images, the Golden Stool is presented beside the 15th and 16th Asantehene, respectively.
Figure 2.4.3 An image of The Golden Stool (Photo credit: Philip Ewusi, 2018)

![Image of The Golden Stool](image1.jpg)

Figure 2.4.3.1 An image of The Golden Stool

![Image of The Golden Stool](image2.jpg)

Photo: Marc Deville/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images, 1995
Figure 2.4.4 The Golden Stool seated on a chair next to the former 15th Asantehene. Side view. (Photo credit: Frank Fournier, 1995)

Figure 2.4.4.1 The Golden Stool seated on a chair next to the current 16th Asantehene. Side view. (Photo credit: Kyeretwie & Poku, 2020)
2.5 The Yaa Asantewaa War and Outcomes

Nana Yaa Asantewaa (Figure 2.5), believed to have been born in 1840 and who died in 1921, was the queen mother of Ejisu, in the Ashanti region of Ghana. She was born to “Kwabena Ampoma and Madam Atta Poh and, by matrilineal inheritance, she was a member of the royal household of the Edweso State” (Asirifi-Danquah, 2006, p.31). As a farmer, she grew “plantains, cocoyams, groundnuts and onions to sustain her family” (Laing, 2006, p.53). Nana Yaa Asantewaa married “Nana Owusu Kwabena, a grandson of the Golden Stool” (Boahen, 2000, p.112). They had only one daughter, Ama Serwah Brakatu, who gave them eleven grandchildren, comprised of eight sons and three daughters (p.113). Nana Yaa Asantewaa encouraged her husband to “marry more wives so they could have more plantations. Moreover, she helped raise all the other children of their home” (Asirifi-Danquah, 2006, p.34) as her own.

She was also seen as “a mother of thousands of children as she considered every child in society as her own, providing for them whenever it became necessary to do so” (p.36). Her generosity and “benevolence earned her appellations such as ‘the mighty tree with big branches laden with fruits and from which children find satisfaction for their hunger’ and ‘the grandmother whose cooking pot entertained strangers’” (p.36). At the “age of 37, Nana Yaa Asantewaa was unanimously elected and enstooled as a queen mother into the Asona royal clan of Edweso state, about 18 kilometres from Kumasi” (p.34), the capital of the Asante nation. “She believed in moral excellence and possessed a distinct, enviable character, because she did not consider herself inferior to anyone. She believed that no one was superior to the other, thus her extraordinary courage and bravery to confront the British” (p.34) was founded on these values. Nana Yaa Asantewaa had privilege due to being born into a royal family and, therefore, had access to many spaces and meetings non-royal women could not even have been invited to. She used this privilege to influence decision making concerning her people.

Nana Yaa Asantewaa was “the first female to combine the dual roles of queen and king of the Ejisu state in its history and thus, by acclamation, was enstooled as King in place of her grandson, who was arbitrarily deported by the British” (p.34) for his refusal to relinquish Asante sovereignty. By ruling as both king and queen “with distinction, she won the unflinching support of her subjects and became the formidable monarch with men, women, old and young, bowing to her commands” (p.34). Known as a fierce hero, she played a role in the war against the British to protect the Asante Empire and the Golden Stool, a symbol of Asante sovereignty. For Mensah
(2010) the story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa “reveals complex and nuanced gender relations among Indigenous African society: on one hand, Yaa Asantewaa was a wife and on the other hand, she was a powerful queen mother who stood against British aggressions against the Ashantis” (Mensah, 2010 p.2). This dual representation of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, and an understanding important in appreciating the dynamic roles of many African women is obscured “in the West, given the way in which Western education has (mis)constructed and reconstructed gender relations in Africa” (Mensah, 2010, p.2). Because western models of gender are not ubiquitous, African women have managed to play different roles in private and public arenas with demonstrated agency in both.

According to Asirifi-Danquah (2006), Nana Yaa Asantewaa, was “the first African Female General who led an army to fight the British for encroaching on the rights of the people of Asante” (Asirifi-Danquah, 2006, p.27). Further, Nana Yaa Asantewaa is believed to have come from ancestors who “were acclaimed as famous warriors for the victories they won in all the wars they either waged or took part” in (p.48). Her “role in the Asante War of 1900 was sequential to the tradition set by her ancestors and [she] had no [sic] option but to fight in defence of the Golden Stool” (p.31). Boahen (2003) asserts that the “causes of the Asante War of 1900-1901 were firstly, the refusal of the Asantes to accept or reconcile themselves to the arrest and deportation of the Asantehene, Agyeman Prempeh I, and his family and chiefs;” secondly, “the imposition of direct British colonial rule on the Asantes between 1896 and 1900” (Boahen, 2003, pp.28-29) and thirdly, the “immediate cause that precipitated the War, was the highly provocative and arrogant speech delivered to the Asante chiefs on 28 March 1900 by Sir Frederick Hodgson” (p.29), when he demanded to sit on the sacred Golden Stool:

Why am I not sitting on the Golden Stool at this moment? I am the representative of the paramount power. Why have you relegated me to this ordinary chair? Why did you not take the opportunity of my coming to Kumasi to bring the Golden Stool for me to sit upon? (Wilks, 2000, p.54).

Hodgson recognized the significance of the Golden Stool, admitting in 1901 that “he knew that the whole history of Ashanti was attached to the Golden Stool and only the possessor of it was acknowledged as the Head or Master of the Ashantis” (Boahen, 2003, p.41). Hodgson said it “was only the seizure of the Golden Stool that would have the Ashantis acknowledge the British as their
head or master” (p.42), an acknowledgment they were unwilling to make. Yet the implications of making such a demand, to sit upon the Golden Stool escaped him. This is because, as a British official, he was certain that the British Empire was destined to control much of the world. Hodgson was not circumspect, nor did he grasp the limitations of his own view, having been accustomed to an Empire that stole and demanded to be masters in all of the places they invaded.

The impudence demonstrated by Hodgson and the exile of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s grandson, whom she wanted back, may have cut deep for the queen mother of Ejisu, who was present at the meeting and responded to Hodgson’s disrespectful request, as part of her leadership role. Johanna Bond (2005) maintains that the British “underestimated women’s importance in Ghana. Thinking they had gotten rid of all possible threats and rebellion by deporting the Asantehene, Agyeman Prempeh I, with many male royals, the British forces were shocked to discover Nana Yaa Asantewaa, a 60-year-old woman, wanting to declare war on the British” (Bond, 2005 p. 351). Indeed, Nana Yaa Asantewaa is believed to have made a speech at the meeting, asking the Asantes to stand up and fight against the British.

To the British, although they knew something of the symbolic power of the Golden Stool, it was still just another trophy to claim, a souvenir to take away from Ghana to add to their pilfered colonialist collections when they returned to England. To the Asantes, the Golden Stool was their pride, the embodiment of their unity. Hence, it was no surprise that Nana Yaa Asantewaa was livid that British foreigners wanted to sit upon and remove it. Owing to her fierce refusal to tolerate this disrespect, there is “no female name known in the history of African actions and responses to European colonialism between 1880 and 1901 better than Nana Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana” (Boahen, 2003, p.17). Even though she was ultimately exiled by the British, ending the war, Nana Yaa Asantewaa emerges as a hero for the Asante empire, revealing a challenging and important pathway to independence for the Asante people and for the Gold Coast from colonial rule. Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s actions extended hope for Africa’s determination to achieve independence, providing a strong voice for liberation from colonial rule, comparable to the important contributions of other Africans. At the same time her actions were a powerful symbol of the strength of African women. Like other traditional accounts of resistance and sovereignty, stories of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s actions and courage have the same power to restore “our humanity… [and] solidify our identity with every word” (Waziyatawin, 2012, p. 267) as Waziyatawin’s Kunsi Elsie’s stories had for Dakota people (p.267). Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s stories are a part of a long
history of presence and survival that secures the identities of formerly and currently colonized peoples, whose pasts and potentials have always been larger than the projections of imperialists.

**Figure 2.5**

A widely known black and white photo of Nana Yaa Asantewaa from the wartime period (Asirifi-Danquah, 2006, p.28)

### 2.6 Historic and Contemporary Representations of Nana Yaa Asantewaa

The British saw the war against the Asantes as “an interesting little campaign waged against a brave and numerous British enemy” (Myatt, 1966, p.7). They called it “the Asante Rebellion or the Asante Campaign of 1900, while the Asantes called the war, the Yaa Asantewaa War or the Asantewaa War of Independence” (Boahen, 2003, p.27). According to Boahen (2000), Nana Yaa Asantewaa was named as a key figure who “instigated and precipitated the war of 1900 by being fiery, provocative and making gender-charged speeches that shamed Asante men into action, calling them cowards for not wanting to fight” (Boahen, 2000, pp. 113-114). Further, to “dramatize her determination to go to war, Yaa Asantewaa made chiefs take an oath to fight to rid the Asante of British rule” (p. 114). As oral sources, cultural speakers indicate that “Yaa Asantewaa was the inspirer and instigator of the uprising” (p.115). Boahen (2003) claims that “the Asante War of 1900-1901 was the only war in which the leader and commander-in-chief of the Asante army was a woman” (Boahen, 2003, p.28). According to Boahen (2003), Nana Yaa
Asantewaa is believed to be the military leader who turned her village, Ejisu, into the headquarters of the War, during which all chiefs in the Asante kingdom supported her (pp.117-119). Nana Yaa Asantewaa “sent orders through her field commanders, worked out strategies to use stockades as shields” (pp.119-121), all in order to foster the ouster of the British.

As an older woman, believed to be age 60 at the time of the war, Nana Yaa Asantewaa was able to consult with traditional leaders in the community, practice certain rituals and present herself as “an elderly royal versed in the art of war” (p.10). Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s age was important in her wisdom and in managing the war, but so was her challenge to Asante gender roles in choosing war as a strategy, and her ability to mobilize forces to fight against British colonialism for Asante liberation.

That said, Thomas J. Lewin (1974), a British historian who conducted interviews with surviving Asante people in Ejisu in 1970 who were present during the 1900-1901 War, reports on several witnesses of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s role, which reinforce prevailing Asante gender norms. Amakoo, who was about 90 years of age at the time of the interview, and 20 years at the time of the War, “maintained that Yaa Asantewaa never shot a gun or even fought in the War” (Lewin, 1974, p.205). Amakoo added that “women’s role was to pray to God that the men would win, but women did not actually go and fight” (p.204). An old man called Kofi Afrane, who was 80 years at the time of the interview, added that “the women including Yaa Asantewaa sang songs of encouragement, and Yaa Asantewaa stayed in Edweso, the whole of the war” (p.226). Another old woman, Mamunatu, who was about 90 years at the time of the interview and about 19 years during the War, stated that “Asante women gathered in the streets as early as 3:00 a.m. singing songs of praise of their men, rubbed themselves with white clay as a sign that the Asante men will be victorious, ate around 2:00 pm and then went back to sing some more” (p.94). According to them, although Nana Yaa Asantewaa was present during the meeting with Governor Hodgson and wanted the Asantes to go to war against the British, she served more as an instigator of armed opposition to British rule to keep the spirits of the Asante male forces soaring, to keep fighting, rather than actually fighting herself. The implications of these stories suggest that women like Amatoo and Mamunatu perhaps wanted to present Nana Yaa Asantewaa as more like themselves, women performing vital, but supportive cultural roles. Afrane’s version similarly presents women, including Nana Yaa Asantewaa, in a role that primarily supported the war efforts of men.
Lynda R. Day (2000) states that two different stories emerge of Nana Yaa Asantewaa during the War. One says she rode a horse near the British fort with her face “smeared with blood and clay, carrying a rifle and a knife, insulting British soldiers to come out and fight” (Day, 2000, p.154), while the other suggests that Nana Yaa Asantewaa never went close to the British fort, but commanded from afar. Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s role at the end of the War has equally different and contradictory versions. Some say that she was betrayed by a young Asante man who was promised a gift by the British governors while others believe her only daughter had been captured by the British and she had no choice but to surrender, given her maternal commitment to her family. These different accounts reveal how narratives based on oral traditions and rumours serve different interests and have significant implications for the ways her gender roles are interpreted in different contexts.

These contradictory accounts reflect how people choose to remember Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s strategic leadership, her familial obligations, and the performative value of her traditionally painted face in expectations about gender roles in war. Some people who belong to the Asante Royal family, including that of Ejisu, may have been loyal to Nana Yaa Asantewaa as their queen while those who blame Nana Yaa Asantewaa for the Asante defeat in the war, along with its related casualties, may tell stories based on their own motives. The Asantes, who practice a matrilineal system, benefit from telling a story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in which her daughter, a person who would inherit her role, is allegedly captured so that Nana Yaa Asantewaa has no choice but to surrender. The British, by contrast, may benefit from telling the story of an Asante man who gave his people up for a gift, to demonstrate the lack of loyalty and divisions amongst the Asantes, as an indication that not every Asante person was in support of Nana Yaa Asantewaa going to war. Boahen (2000) emphasizes, however, that it is inarguable that in all oral or written accounts, Nana Yaa Asantewaa is credited with a significant leadership role in the war, doing all she could for the protection of Asante’s monarchy and sovereignty.

2.7 Centenary Celebrations, Tourism, and Their Uses of Stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa

Tom C. McCaskie (2007) discusses the Yaa Asantewaa’s centenary celebrations of the 1900-1901 war in Kumasi, Ghana, and the politics surrounding them. These celebrations, held in the first week of August 2000, were planned by two Ghanaian organizations, the “Yaa Asantewaa Centenary Celebrations Planning Committee (YACCPC), led by the National Democratic
Congress (NDC) and the Asante Council (AC)” (pp.161-162). The YACCPC and the AC ran parallel programs from “2nd to 6th August 2000” (p.167). Their shared goal was to celebrate the heroism of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, as a person who changed the trajectory of history for Ghanaian women and the Asante people, and to develop tourism within the Ashanti region of Ghana.

However, “intermixed with these celebrations was a deep concern with electoral politics because of the upcoming scheduled elections” (p.163), later in December 2000. The two major political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), a social democratic party, and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), a liberal conservative party, have dominated Ghanaian politics since Ghana’s democratic elections in 1992; the contested rivalry between the two parties remains. In 2000, the NDC (who were in power) and the NPP were battling for victory, and both, wanted to be at the forefront of the celebrations in Kumasi, in order to gain Asante votes. The NPP opposition at the time wanted to “galvanize support for their presidential candidate, an Asante and their Asante-dominated party especially as the NDC was in disarray over the succession to the President who was disbarred from standing again by the constitution” (p.163), as he had already been elected for two 4-year terms as president. The Ashanti region is a key stakeholder in politics and elections as their chieftaincy system influences how the majority of Asante people choose to vote during an election; hence, these two political parties wanted to impress upon the region their respect for Nana Yaa Asantewaa and, by extension, the Asante nation’s contributions to Ghana’s independence.

McCaskie (2007) states that the leaders of both political parties had personal agendas, which shaped their hopes to gain political capital. However, despite their political warfare, both the NDC and NPP ensured cooperation to avoid any public confrontations. This is because their motivations for participation in the centenary celebrations were the same. They wanted to align their campaigns to recognize and honour Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s contribution to Ghana’s independence, and for Ghana to be seen, locally and globally, as a country with great leadership, then and now.

McCaskie (2007) further notes how, by virtue of her leadership in the war against the British, Nana Yaa Asantewaa “escaped the confines of her historical origin to become an internationally known figure” (p.171) as “Yaa Asantewaa was the single most famous Asante historical figure on the world wide web” (p.172). McCaskie (2007) also makes clear that representations of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in public and artistic forums such as musical theatre, documentaries, monuments, and statues, place her “at the heart of the 1900-1901 war” (p.172).
These representations make her a “cultural artifact, reconfigured to meet the needs of different contexts” (p.173), and an inspirational figure in Ghana and beyond. In sum, the centenary celebrations highlighted the historic, cultural, economic, and political importance of Nana Yaa Asantewaa to many Ghanaians, Africans, and members of the African diaspora. She has become an iconic figure.

Lynda R. Day (2000) also discusses historical memory in the context of the centenary celebrations of Nana Yaa Asantewaa. Day (2000) identifies Nana Yaa Asantewaa as a national symbol of bravery and pride, who played a critical role in preserving Asante sovereignty (Day, 2000, pp.153-154), a key defining note in her current legacy in Asante history. The centenary celebrations provided an opportunity for Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s “public persona to be recognized, examined, and placed in the context of the history of Ghana as a whole” (p.153), although the colonial narrative of Nana Yaa Asantewaa has varied, lending itself to a proliferation of representations. Some have defined her as a “dangerous subversive who had lost the war and run away to hide” (p.153) while others have seen her as a warrior and “anti-colonial resister” (p.153). Day (2000) states that while “many of the events which made Yaa Asantewaa famous are disputed or shrouded in myth” (p.153), she has come to be known as “an anti-colonial guerrilla fighter, a role model for Black women everywhere, a conservative royalist, an African feminist, a Ghanaian heroine, an Asante nationalist par excellence” (p.163). Day (2000), an African American, saw Nana Yaa Asantewaa as “her own cultural foremother who had to receive her due recognition for her sacrifice” (p.155) for the Asante monarchy. Members of the African diaspora may think of Nana Yaa Asantewaa as someone who defended the Asante homeland and gave her people hope to continue living on their lands for generations. She may also serve as a role model in negotiating and sustaining resistance in their own respective contexts.

Day (2000) points out that although Nana Yaa Asantewaa was primarily an Asante figure, by recognizing her as a Pan-Africanist, the centenary celebrations promoted her story of bravery and sacrifice as an inspiration to many outside Ghana. The centenary celebrations made two claims. First, they defined Nana Yaa Asantewaa as a genuine heroine whose story was being mobilized to boost interest in tourism in the Ashanti region of Ghana, which is where Nana Yaa Asantewaa hailed from. Second, these events helped to promote wider political consciousness of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s resistance movement, honouring her immense contributions, and legacy to Ghana,
while affirming the important role of women in Asante culture, and by extension, in all the matrilineal cultures of Africa.

Day’s second article on the topic explores “some of the challenges of linking the Yaa Asantewaa legacy to the promotion of tourism and development” (Day, 2004, p.100), and the ways the centenary celebrations were used as a tool to connect Ghana with the African diaspora, especially those interested in returning to the homelands of their ancestors. The centenary celebrations were designed to focus on the life and legacy of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, with an income generating agenda at the forefront, since tourism is the “third-largest foreign exchange earner” (p.100) in Ghana. It also brought about a debate on the “benefits and the negative consequences of global tourism” (p.100), including whether the centenary celebrations would, in the long term, advance local development in the Ashanti region. Day (2004) records a resistant belief that “tourism in developing countries amounts to another type of colonization, as people from the developed world travel to poorer regions to enjoy the remnants of indigenous cultures” (p.100). During these “public representations, history is subject to the political needs of the moment as historical accuracy is typically sacrificed in the interest of promoting tourism” (p.103). For example, in recreated scenes from the war of 1900-1901, instead of Nana Yaa Asantewaa being played by an elderly woman, a teenage girl was chosen to play the part. Perhaps this was done to empower young Ghanaian girls inspired by Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s leadership to revitalize her story for new generations, or perhaps it was designed to sell the strength of Nana Yaa Asantewaa through a younger body, implying the resilience of Ghanaian women, both old and young. Either way, the story was presented in ways that suited the organizers.

Day’s (2004) article examines the appropriation of Nana Yaa Asantewaa as an inspirational figure who has been turned into a symbol for economic and marketing purposes. The article unpacks the politics behind honouring Nana Yaa Asantewaa during the 2000 centenary celebrations, and the ways she is being internationalized with mixed motives and results as a Ghanaian icon. A key aspect of both of Day’s articles, is showing the contradictions in the stories, arising from the ways different people choose to present Nana Yaa Asantewaa. One of the questions that remains is: whose versions of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story are most invested in her Asante and African heritage?
CHAPTER 3
Theoretical Framework: Using a Decolonizing Lens

3.1 Introduction

I mobilize critical decolonial feminist theory, narrative structure theory, and postcolonial feminisms as primary theoretical perspectives. These frameworks permit me to explore the plethora of stories (broken, celebratory, or otherwise) centred on Nana Yaa Asantewaa, challenging the misinformed assumptions about African women conveyed in hegemonic discourses that have too long held them in the background. I began these explorations in order to bring African women’s agency to the foreground, despite what is said of them in both pre-and post-imperialist accounts. As part of my efforts to lay out this theoretical framework, I cite the progressive actions of historical and contemporary Ghanaian and other African women. Their lived investments in future generations are themselves a form of abiding incarnation that frames Afro-centric approaches to women’s rights. The politics of representation inform on multiple scales the heart of this thesis, in witnessing, in writing, and in interpreting African women’s political and practical achievements. Therefore, through an in-depth analysis of selected academic literature and archival materials, I utilize their lived practical aspirations and accomplishments, to explore examples of the kinds of representations of Nana Yaa Asantewaa that are available, the purposes of these stories, the people telling them, their audiences, and who benefits from their circulaton.

3.2 Narrative Structure Theory

According to Tzvetan Todorov (1960), “there are five stages to a story” (Adepati, p. 441), in particular, those presented in textual or literary form. The first stage is *Equilibrium*, when the character is leading a life centered around stable daily activities, as defined by the author. The second stage is *Disruption*, which occurs when the character’s daily activities are disturbed by an event or events. The third stage is *Recognition*, which occurs when the character has realized the cause of this disturbance. The fourth stage is *Repair the Damage*, which is a stage where the character tries to fix the problem that is happening in the story. *Equilibrium Again* is the fifth stage, which arises when the character tries to manage the problems that happen in the story and whereby they adjust to the new situation in which they find themselves (Adepati, 2018 pp. 441-442). Analyzing the multi-faceted stories of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in terms of Todorov’s theory, what
stands out for me are the disruptions to her way of life owing to the British invasion, whether as a mother, grandmother, farmer, or queen mother, the exile of her grandson, her participation and leadership in the 1900-1901 war, and her ultimate exile by the British to the Seychelles Island.

However, because of her leadership role, Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story stretches beyond Todorov’s five stages of protagonist evolution and invokes two additional stages, wherein she stands up for her people and does everything necessary to challenge invading forces, defend her nation, and ensure that others would rise to the occasion too, to support her mission. I am calling this stage Radical Leadership. Radical leadership here involves the powerful invocation of the collective identity, history, present, and future of an entire people, so that both individual choices and the collective actions of many can engage with the sacred field of all possibilities in order to chart a course, not only for a single person, but for the entire group. Often, mature women, who have learned to cultivate the survival of children and communities, have spent their lives cultivating the wisdom and vision to act effectively, as individuals and in concert with others when radical leadership is called for.

Waziyatawin (2012) argues that “when we imagine warriors in the liberation struggle, we typically do not envision elderly Indigenous women” (Waziyatawin, 2012, p.266). This ageist and sexist failure of recognition persists, even though brave grandmothers have often led efforts to maintain cultural continuities. Such ancestral precursors must be retrieved and revered because “the stories of the ancestors form the basis of knowledge regarding all that has been lost and thus also form the basis of our vision for reclamation. For the sake of our own liberation, we too must work to become master storytellers” (ibid. p.266), and recognize ancestral commitments to wider communities, beyond individuated transformations. In step with these dimensions of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s complex history and lasting contributions, I would add a final stage I am calling Surrender or Acceptance, in which she weighed the options of her situation, choosing carefully to fulfill her mandate as Queen mother to save lives and choose peace over problems, shifting her individual story to secure the best outcome for her people. When Nana Yaa Asantewaa stands down on behalf of her people, she saves many lives, having secured the survival of their spirit well into the future. Thus, she chooses to accept the imposed imperialist repercussions for her actions because the goal of protecting the soul of the Asantes was met through the strength of their resistance. Whatever happened next in her individual story, she knew Asante resistance could rise, as it has always done before, again and again.
3.3 Postcolonial Feminist Theory

Postcolonial feminisms challenge the “representations of women and cultures in binary terms and attributions of Western notions of enlightenment, rationalism, and individualism applied to all peoples and cultures” (Kim, 2007, p.114). Postcolonial feminists also challenge the “falsely universalized Western/feminist frames of reference about world cultures and women of colour” (p.113). In refusing a narrowing racialization of theories about how power works among those misinformed via their conditioning by hegemonic meta-narratives, postcolonial feminisms push to allow a much wider array of discussions, more accurately gaging the impact of variously positioned representations of women’s realities. There is a constant need to challenge “discourses that produce a reductive and homogenous notion of third world women and deny their agency” (Kim, 2007, p.113). Thus, postcolonial feminist theory is invested in challenging problematic stories that have constructed a destructive, deficit-based representation of racialized women, dependent on white feminist or colonialist saviors. Of course, adults who have demonstrated that they know what they want to do with their lives and have the power to sort out how to do so, do not need saving. Postcolonial feminisms recover and tell the stories of women like Nana Yaa Asantewaa, a grandmother with a voice, who challenges the colonialist imaginings of the helpless, unenlightened African woman victim. Victim stories in discourses of difference and representation are themselves a form of victimization and must be interrogated and challenged.

3.4 Critical Decolonial and Decolonial Feminist Theories

There are some undeniable similarities between postcolonialism and decoloniality; both are key “developments within the broader politics of knowledge production and both emerge out of political developments contesting the colonial world order established by European empires, albeit in relation to different time periods and different geographical orientations” (Bhambra, 2014, p.119). Postcolonialism “emerged as a consequence of the work of diasporic scholars from the Middle East and South Asia, mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Bhambra, 2014, p.115) while decoloniality “emerged from the work of diasporic scholars from South America from the fifteenth century onwards” (Bhambra, 2014, p.115). Ultimately, “postcolonialism and decoloniality are a necessary consequence of the depredations of colonialism, an intellectual resistance to associated forms of epistemological dominance [that] offer more than simple opposition” (Bhambra, 2014, p. 120). While academic parlance has moved from post-colonial to
Decolonial frames more recently, decolonization has existed since Indigenous peoples have stood up to reject the invasion of colonizers, and admonished “the insularity of traditions emanating from Europe” (Bhambra, 2014, p.115), including imposed ideologies about best ways forward in personal and public life.

Decolonial theorists like Aníbal Quijano (2007) argue that “the structure of power was and even continues to be organized on and around the colonial axis. Consequently, from the point of view of dominant groups, the construction of the nation, and above all the central state, has been conceptualized and deployed against blacks, mestizos, and Indigenous peoples” (Quijano, 2007, p.568). Furthermore, colonization has “imposed the ideology of ‘racial democracy,’ causing cultural genocides that mask the true discrimination against and colonial domination of blacks, Indigenous peoples, and Latin Americans” (p. 568). Since “the classification of people is realized in all spheres of power” (p. 574), Europeans have used categorizations and classifications to exploit and harm Indigenous peoples in many places. “Domination is the requisite for exploitation, and race is the most effective instrument for domination that, associated with exploitation, serves as the universal classifier in the current global model of power” (p. 574). Eurocentrism is foundational to this classifying framework.

Another decolonial theorist, Walter Mignolo (2007), argues for “working toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ” (Mignolo, 2007, p.459). Bhambra (2014), in referencing Mignolo, adds that there is a need for “the histories and thoughts of other places to be understood as prior to European incursions and to be used as the basis of developing connected histories of encounters through those incursions” (Bhambra, 2014, p. 119). Decolonial feminist theorist María Lugones (2010) affirms that “the decolonial feminist's task begins by seeing the colonial difference, emphatically resisting the epistemological habit of being erased” (Lugones, 2010, p.753). African academic writers like Oyèrónké Oyewùmí (1997) have argued against the “academic practice of relying on disciplinary theories and conceptual debates originating in and dominated by the West” (Oyewùmí1997, p. ix), demanding more room for ideas and concepts originating from Africa. This approach allows for more empowered and empowering African stories to be told, whether by theorists, scholars, or storytellers. Decoloniality offers “the possibility of a new geopolitics of knowledge” (Bhambra, 2014, p.120) and releases the power of older knowledges that were buried and
dismissed by the “abyssal thinking” (de Sousa Santos 2007) of European colonizers, in their
tendency to deny the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing.

Decolonial feminism “extends the arguments of both Quijano and Mignolo to demonstrate
how coloniality not only divides the world according to a particular racialized set of logics, but
also “creates specific understandings of gender that enable the disappearance of the colonial/raced
woman from theoretical and political consideration” (Bhambra, 2014, p.119). Lugones (2010)
“makes explicit the issue of listening and learning from others in any development, away from
current dominant structures of knowledge production” (Bhambra, 2014, p.119). She also points
out that “a hierarchal, dichotomous distinction between human and non-human was imposed on
the colonized in the service of Western men” (Lugones, 2010, p.743). This distinction highlights
both ”abyssal thinking” (de Sousa Santos 2007) and the “hierarchies of oppression” (Bhambra,
2014, p.119) to which it gives rise. Thus, decolonial theory rejects Eurocentric assumptions of the
so-called supremacy of colonizers who are exploiters within a self-aggrandizing mission to
promote their own ideologies and impose a fictional inferiority on the colonized. Decolonial theory
recognizes that colonization has been, from the outset, ferocious and fallacious, as perpetrated
through religious assimilation, colonial education, land theft, capitalist expansion, and the
depredation of colonized and formerly colonized people and places. Decolonial theory calls for
revolutionary resistance, deconstructing claims to Euro-colonial/white superiority and any related
framework that raises itself upon false assumptions “about two-thirds world women and peoples”
(Mohanty, 2003, p.506) through imperialist approaches to discourses and scholarship. The
simultaneous goal is to advance acceptance of Indigenous knowledges that have existed since long
before colonization.

I am indebted to Indigenous decolonial storyteller Waziyatawin (2012) for articulating a
foundational principle in my thesis:

When we listen to the stories of our ancestors, we develop intimacy with those ancestors
as if they were physically and tangibly part of our everyday lives and as if they were the
ones who helped lovingly to raise us. We, therefore, also share the same pain they suffered.
This is one of the performed implications of growing up with the stories from the oral
tradition. We feel indignant at the wrongs our ancestors suffered, and when we equate all
humanity with theirs, we recognize that none of us deserves to be the victims of crimes we
have suffered under colonial invasion and rule (Waziyatawin, 2012, p.267).
In essence, then, decolonization represents unapologetic disobedience to defiance of, and resistance to imperialist epistemologies, relentlessly resisting, and asking: what else might come next? Decolonial theorists offer non-stop, thunderous drumming with a simple message, which as a spoken word artist I am paraphrasing here,

We like our way. You do not have our permission to introduce your ideas and then make them dominant. You do not have permission to dissect our cultures and call it research, when it is our entire existence and life. Any action by you that preys on us, on others, and plays God, will be rejected as dangerous, and hence avoided and diminished, in perpetuity, in our collective responses.

This summary, in my own voice, affirms that African-Women-With-agency (AWWA) have provided us with living stories and histories as a pathway, both to establish postcolonial aspirations and practices and to re-imagine our futures based on decolonization in action.

**Stories about African Women with Agency (AWWA)**

One example of an AWWA style of storytelling can be seen in famed Ghanaian author Ama Ata Aidoo’s 1991 novel *Changes: A Love Story*. In this novel, set in Accra, the capital of Ghana in the late 20th century, the protagonist, Esi, is an educated and independent woman who works at the Department of Urban Statistics. She is married to a traditional man, Oko, and they have a daughter named Ogyaanowa. Esi’s story centers on her mission to seek a divorce from her husband after suffering marital rape. Esi did not want another child, but Oko forced himself on her anyway to enforce his will and show his power because he says his friends were laughing at his inability to have more children. Esi, decides she did not deserve to be treated that way and that divorce is the only option. However, Esi’s mother and grandmother are disappointed that she would choose that pathway, especially since Esi decides to become lover to a man called Ali, who is already married, ultimately becoming his second wife. Ali has multiple marital affairs and, despite his compensatory gifts, Esi feels lonely with him too. Esi, however, decides to do whatever pleases her, despite any projected outcome. In so doing, she defines and redefines the expectations of an African wife who does not stay in a marriage simply because of coercive obligations to her offspring or family members. As such, her story, according to Ginette Curry (2011), shows that there is an ongoing need to “challenge society in general to reconstruct a wider society that more fully explores African women’s lives and experiences within it” (Curry, 2011, p.196). Esi’s agency
significantly challenges the representation of African women as people who cannot defy patriarchal structures.

Another Ghanaian writer, Yaa Gyasi, in her historical novel *Homegoing* (set in the 18th century Gold Coast – now called Ghana), creates a protagonist named Akua, whose mother is accidentally drowned by missionaries in their attempt to baptize her in a nearby river. After her mother’s death, Akua cannot hide her disdain for their intrusive and dangerous proselytizing during subsequent encounters with them. At one point, a defensive missionary tells her “You are a sinner and a heathen. Be thankful that the British are here to show you how to live a good and normal life” (Gyasi, 2016, pp.183-184). Akua dismisses this insulting message with visible contempt (Gyasi, 2016, pp.183-184) and, as a result of this exchange, is whipped, then told to leave, in the context is a form of “Christianity” with vested interests it will pursue violently, despite in its claims to benevolence. From that day forward, each morning Akua vows she will “wake her daughters and lead them in a song asking God to defeat the British troops” (p.184). By singing the song below, Akua demonstrates her own resistance to the British presence, in her home city in the Ashanti region of Ghana, a resistance with which all Asante women and men will be familiar.

**Original in Twi**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twi</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Awurade Nyame kum dom</em></td>
<td>God, defeat the troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Oboo adee Nyame kum dom</em></td>
<td>Creator God, defeat the troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Enne yerekokum dom afa adee</em></td>
<td>Today we are going to defeat troops and take booty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Oboo adee Nyame kum dom</em></td>
<td>Creator God, defeat the troops and take booty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Soso be hunu megyede be hunu.</em></td>
<td>The long hoe will experience it and unripe fruits of the palm tree will also experience it (p.184).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This war song calls upon the Creator God, Nyame, to defeat anyone who wagers war against the Asantes or pushes them into war. The song also makes reference to using the hoe to bring down unripe palm fruits during the fight. The palm tree, which can live for 100 years, is perhaps a reference to the extended cosmology of the Asante people. The palm serves to demonstrate a strong belief in their strength, the longevity of their spirit, the intergenerational horizon of accountabilities for their actions, all spanning the many centuries of their existence in the universe, more than the British imperialists ever grasped. It could also signal recognition that war casualties are like fruits that are never permitted to ripen, and that the curse of bringing such destruction to the region belongs to the British. Thus, the prayer is also a call for justice. The importance of these sung prayers to the plot of this story indicates that the roles of the women who sang in resistance to
colonialism and in support of their warriors in battle were seen to be spiritually powerful in their own right.

Akua observes that “she had been told stories of men being too timid, disagreeing about what to say to the British. It was Yaa Asantewaa, Edweso’s own queen mother, who stood up and demanded that they fight, saying that if the men would not do it, the women would” (p.182). Akua’s mother-in-law, an old woman who saw that some men had chosen not to go to war, pulls out a machete and raises it near them, such that the men “took one look at the old woman holding the large weapon and left. And so began the war” (p.183). Gyasi’s characterization of Akua, her daughters, Akua’s mother-in-law, and this version of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story, shows the historical dynamism and agency of Ghanaian women during the 18th century, where Gyasi’s story is set, as the product of a long history of proud Asante leadership by and with women.

An AWWA perspective on storytelling represents an essential departure from broken colonialist stories about weak African women, by affirming their agency. There are many contemporary and astute African storytellers like Ama Ata Aidoo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who have given their female characters the power to make their own choices, to use their powerful voices, and to take pathways that may not be widely approved, but chart a vital course for themselves and others. The pathways forward carved in Africa belong to Africans. Three more contemporary examples of AWWA approaches to storytelling are addressed below. The stories are by Ama Ata Aidoo, who “has distinguished herself as a writer and as a consultant on education and gender issues.... [as] the Executive Director of Mbaasem, a foundation to support African women writers and their work” (Aidoo, 2000) and by Peace Adzo Medie, who is a “senior lecturer in gender and international politics at the University of Bristol, as well as a research fellow at the University of Ghana” (Medie, 2020).

In her novel entitled His only wife (Medie 2020), Medie tells the story of “Afi Tekple, a young seamstress in Ghana, who agrees to an arranged marriage to a wealthy businessman for her family’s financial security” (Medie, 2020). Afi does everything she is expected to do as a wife for her husband, yet he still cheats on her. Afi’s mother immediately asks what Afi must have done to precipitate this behavior by her husband. Afi responds, “I did everything you told me to do. Everything that you and aunty told me to do. I cooked and cleaned and smiled but he still left me for another woman!” (Medie, 2020, p.161). Afi is advised by her mother that since her husband still loves her, she should simply stay in the marriage. She is reminded that there are several women who end up being sister wives in
traditional polygamous marriages. Her mother admonishes her: “Afi, he’s a good man. Apart from this thing, (the cheating) he’s a good man. You have to remember that. I know women who are co-wives, it’s manageable” (p. 268). She is thus encouraged to be accepting of the situation as leaving the marriage will bring shame, disgrace, and embarrassment to her family. However, Afi is strong willed and decides to divorce her husband.

Afi argues that “marriage shouldn’t be a never-ending competition where you spend your life fighting to be seen and chosen” (p. 274). When she asks for the divorce, her husband tells her to “stop being unreasonable” (p. 266). So, she asks him “how would you feel if I cheated on you? If I told you I wanted to be with another man while married to you?” (p. 267). Her husband responds, “that’s different, Afi. You know it’s not the same thing” (Ibid). Afi responds with “It’s the same thing, but you would never agree to it, so why should I agree to this, to you being with her?” (p. 267). While polygamous marriages are legal in Ghana and accepted by some women, Afi, wants a monogamous marriage. So, when she finds herself with a husband who does not plan on leaving his other woman, divorce becomes her way out.

Afi decides to become an entrepreneur, selling clothes to make enough money to move into a home of her own, with her son, away from the failed marriage. Afi’s is a resounding story of refusal, no longer excusing the behaviours of men by staying in marriages to please patriarchal families at the expense of the wife. She uses her agency to choose what is best for her and her son because she knows that there is more to life than enduring a failed marriage. Afi’s story challenges traditional gender roles and expectations of women, just as Nana Yaa Asantewaa did before Afi, defining her own path for herself and subsequent generations.


Man: so, what did you say you will be when you grow up?
Girl: the president.
Man: the what?
Girl: the president.
Man: the president?
Girl: yes.
Man: of what?
Girl: this country.
Man: WHAT?!!
Girl: why not?
Man: you are mad.
Girl: no.
Man: well, you can’t be.
Girl: yes I can.
Man: you are mad.
Girl: I am not.
Man: anyway, you can never be the President of this country.
Girl: why not?
Man: listen, I don’t think the men of this country will ever let a woman be their President.

We find out later, in the future year 2026, (p.56) that the girl does not become a president, but her granddaughter, at age 36, becomes the “first President of the newly formed Confederation of African States” (p.59). The grandmother lives to the age of 86, to see her granddaughter fulfill her dream. At the end of the story the question being discussed by two men is not whether a woman could be president, but whether “she King” (Aidoo, 2002, p.62) would be an appropriate way to address her.

To date, there have been five female presidents and five acting/interim female presidents of countries in the African continent (Watkins, 2021). These female presidents have left an exemplary legacy and in chronological order, they are as follows the first being Liberia’s democratically elected former president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was president from 2006-2018; Joyce Banda the “president of Malawi from April 2012 to May 2014” (Watkins, 2021); Ameenah Gurib-Fakim “president of Mauritius from June 2015 – March 2018” (Watkins, 2021); the current Ethiopian president, Sahle-Work Zewde, who has been president since 2018; and Tanzania’s president, Samia Suluhu Hassan, was sworn in from vice-president to president and has been in power since March 2021. The five acting or interim female presidents in Africa have been the following:

- Slyvie Kiningi, Acting President of Burundi (February – October 1993)
- Ivy Matsepe-Cassaburi, Acting President of South Africa (September 2005)
- Rose Francine Rogombe, Interim President of Gabon (June 2009 – October 2009)
- Agnes Monique Ohsan Bellepeau, Acting President of Mauritius (March – July 2012 and May – June 2015)
While a woman president seemed to be but a dream for many years, Sirleaf and her successors have shown that the dream can be realized, with resolve. Therefore, young girls not only have the right to dream and aspire to be presidents; they have ample evidence that their goals are achievable. Even if it doesn’t happen for them, those dreams can inspire their granddaughters to the highest leadership positions in their country; to be president, and not just a president’s wife.

In the book “The Girl who Can and Other Stories” (Aidoo, 2002, p.27), Aidoo also tells the story of a 7-year-old girl called Adjoa, through conversations with her mother and grandmother, about her legs, which are apparently “too thin and too long for a woman” (p.29). Her grandmother says “if any woman decides to come into this world with all of her two legs, then she should select legs that have meat on them: with good calves. Because you are sure such legs could support solid hips. And a woman must have solid hips to be able to have children” (p.25). Adjoa is confused as to why there is so much focus on her legs and it is not until she becomes the champion as a “best all-round junior athlete” (p.32) that her grandmother “cries softly and says thin legs can also be useful, that even though some legs, don't have much meat on them, to carry hips…they can run. Thin legs can run…then who knows?” (pp.32-33). The grandmother’s corrective comment suggests that there is so much more to a young girl’s potential than their suitability to motherhood. Later, Adjoa says to herself, “surely one should be able to do other things with legs” (p.33), and the realization confirms for her, from a very young age, that she could do several things with those long thin legs including becoming a champion racer.

These two stories by Aidoo (2000) are examples of her approach to storytelling which often involves three generations of women as they have conversations around gender, the roles of women, and their power to challenge societal and familial expectations of girls and women. This intergenerational storytelling approach deploys the passage of time to begin undoing the knots of colonialist patriarchies. It uplifts the accomplishments of phenomenal leaders like Nana Yaa Asantewaa, to serve as an inspiration for modern day Ghanaian and African women. It invites them to be bold and not limited by society’s expectations of them, and to ignore assumptions and projections from the west about how African women can be understood. In the end, storytelling that reinforces AWWA is an indication that African women ultimately determine their own pathways toward empowered agency.
3.5 Ghanaian Female Agency in the Contemporary Context

In looking at the narrow ways the African continent is sometimes presented by the west “there is the tendency to assume that women are meant to be seen, but not heard, disregarding their historical role in national development” (Munemo, 2017, p.47). Despite the existence of historical women like Nana Yaa Asantewaa, who were both seen and heard, and contributed to national liberation efforts, old attitudes die hard. Afisi (2010) argues that “women have played leadership roles in the development of various African societies from pre-colonial days till now. Even though the patriarchal systems in Africa cannot be denied, “the African woman possesses the power that binds the society together” (Afisi, 2010, p.229). Furthermore, “in contemporary Africa, the traditional care-giving, home-making and nurturing roles of women, which formed the basis of their identity as wives and mothers are gradually being abandoned, as they have become increasingly involved in new roles and relations outside the home” (p.229). This argument is certainly true of Ghana and Ghanaian women. This is because

. . . in Ghana, although women’s roles and participation in economic activity have been defined and shaped along biological and cultural lines, women have actually made significant strides in all aspects of the Ghanaian economy, especially in the agricultural and service sectors. Presently, more Ghanaian women are now getting out of their home jobs into paid jobs outside the home (Amu, 2005, p.2).

This testimony shows that Ghanaian women are not limited to being good wives and mothers, as Ghanaian traditional norms have promoted, even as their capacities as carers are revered.

Odame (2010) asserts that, in choosing their own pathways to agency and empowerment, “Ghanaian women have made many efforts, including organizing themselves into groups for the purposes of solidarity. Women’s Organizations, such as the Federation of International Women Lawyers, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and the 31st of December Women’s Movement (31st DWM),1 have been able to advocate for social change, advancing public recognition of the inherent human rights of women and girls. These three organizations have focused on such efforts as “educational reforms to promote girl-child education and educational

1 31st December Women’s Movement is a women’s movement in Ghana founded by former first lady of Ghana Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings on 31st December in 1982.
campaigns that educate women on their roles in the democratic dispensation” (Odame, 2020, p.2). Madsen (2019) states that “the 31st DWM has a focus on socio-economic activities for women – often in the form of income-generating activities – but also worked more strategically to reform family laws. In addition, 31st DWM has influenced women’s political participation in different ways” (Madsen, 2019, p 75). Amoah-Boampong (2018) adds that “Ghanaian women recognizing their power within, acted together with other women to increase their solidarity and ability to contest and change power structures through The Women’s Manifesto for Ghana” (Amoah-Boampong, 2018, p.7). The Women’s Manifesto is a “non-partisan, political document from women who cut across political, regional, educational and ethnic boundaries in Ghana that explicitly outlines the common demands of Ghanaian women as a prerequisite for ameliorating the power disequilibrium and achieving gender equality and equity and sustainable national development” (p.7). The Manifesto exists as a political tool to push for women’s rights, ensuring that the work of women will come to the forefront in politics, governance, institutional reform, and many other important branches of leadership in Ghana.

Writers such as Sossou (2011) are of the opinion that “since the attainment of independence in Ghana [in 1957], women have increasingly moved into the paid labor force; however, women still lag behind men in all sectors” (Sossou, 2011, p.2). While this argument is not false, it is not the full and complete picture, either, as it does not leave room to recognize the contributions of Ghanaian women on multiple material and social levels, as outlined in this chapter.

Some of the highest positions in Ghanaian leadership in recent years have been held by Ghanaian women, from the current Chairperson of the Electoral Commission, Jean Adukwei Mensa, to the former Chief Justices of Ghana, Sophia Akuffo and Georgina Theodora Wood. As well, two former Attorneys General of Ghana and Minister for Justice were women, including Gloria Akuffo and Marietta Brew Appiah-Oppong, respectively. Betty Mould-Iddrisu who was the first woman to be Attorney General and Minister for Justice in 2009 was also Ghana’s minister for Education. In addition, three women have run as presidential candidates for their political parties, although none of them has won an election, yet. They are “Akua Donkor of the Ghana Freedom Party (GFP), Brigitte Dzogbenuku of the Progressive People’s Party (PPP) and Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings of The National Democratic Party (NDP)” (Hudson, 2020). Professor Naana Opoku-Agyemang was also the 2020 Vice Presidential candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) party.
Leadership roles in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, which was formerly known as the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs, have been taken up exclusively by women since it was created in 2001, despite the name change. There are also currently five women out of sixteen, with the rest being men, who serve as Supreme Court Justices in Ghana. They are Her ladyship Justice Agnes M. A. Dordzie, Her ladyship Justice Mariama Owusu, Her ladyship Justice Avril Lovelace-Johnson, Her ladyship Justice Gertrude Torkornoo, and Her ladyship Justice Professor Henrietta Joy Mensa-Bonsu (Judicial Services of Ghana, 2021). In addition, a former Ghanaian Supreme Court Judge, Her Ladyship Sophia Adinyira, served as a judge on the United Nations Appeals Tribunal from July 2009 to June 2016 (United Nations, 2021). Another prominent Ghanaian judge, Justice Ruth Annie Jiagge, was “the first Ghanaian woman to qualify as a lawyer and the first female president of the Ghanaian Court of Appeal. A tireless advocate for the rights of women, she was the principal architect of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the co-founder of Women’s World Banking” (McErlean, 2020). Justice Ruth Annie Jiagge “was selected in 1962 to serve on the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. She was elected Rapporteur of the Commission in 1966 and was its President in 1968, when the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was celebrated and the Declaration's impact reviewed” (Boutros-Ghali, 1996). Ghanaian women are achieving recognition and key public and governmental leadership roles at home and in the international arena.

Ghanaian women have led in multiple fields of action. Theodosia Okoh designed Ghana’s national flag in 1957, with the colours red (for blood lost by ancestors), gold (for Ghana’s gold resources), green (for Ghana’s vegetation), and a black star to represent independence. Children’s rights advocate and playwright Efua Sutherland, has a children’s park named after her in the capital of Ghana, Accra. We have also seen the introduction of the PepperDem Ministries (PDM) a feminist movement that took Ghana’s social media by storm in 2017, with its mission to rewrite gender narratives in Ghana. It started when “several Ghanaian women used the hashtag #MenAreTheirOwnEnemies to expose the misogyny pervading media coverage of an alleged affair by a famous Ghanaian actress, whose husband accused her of cheating on him. These women asked how the public would react if a man had been caught cheating by his wife, rather than the other way around” (Danso & Miller, 2019). Aware that in Ghana, when some men cheat, it is seen as a “part of marriage,” these women ask why it is that if a woman did the same, she would then
be seen as having committed an unpardonable error? Clearly, different standards have been established for women than men. Girls must always do the right thing, not make mistakes, be respectful and obedient, focus on building and managing the home, but ‘boys will be boys.’ These women wanted to change this type of thinking.

PepperDem Ministries (PDM) was created “as a call to duty to advocate for the unlearning of toxic narratives that promote gender inequity” (Danso & Miller, 2019), literally and figuratively to spray pepper into the faces of agents of patriarchy and patriarchal structures. Pepper spray has long been used as a tool to protect women in sexual assaults, sexual harassment, kidnapping, and all forms of violence men perpetrate against women. PDM became associated with a controversial post in 2018, which was interpreted by some Ghanaians to mean, “cooking by women was synonymous with slavery,” which the group denied and instead pointed out that their post said “If you want to praise your slaving or hardworking or loving wife, whatever adjective you find suitable, pls [sic] go ahead without suggesting that she defines what womanhood totally entails” (Citi 97.3 FM, 2018). As with the stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa, the PDM message was recrafted toward motivations far from the organization’s actual intent.

In response to this idea that PDM refutes a narrow definition of what women can be, SugarDem GH (GH here stands for Ghana) (SDGH) emerged in 2018. SDGH was founded by Afia Pokua, a popular Ghanaian television host and presenter. She encouraged women to cater to their husbands and be sweet darlings to them, especially through cooking for them. Afia Pokua argues that “SDGH believes in the advancement of women just like PDM” (GhanaWeb TV, 2018). However, while she says PDM is a fantastic group, she doesn’t think boxing (fighting) men is the way, “but rather, sugar them small” (GhanaWeb TV, 2018). So, SDGH asked for its members to “sugar, pamper, massage the men to make them happy in order to help women in the house” (GhanaWeb, 2018). SDGH organized a cooking event on Valentine’s Day 2018 to cater to men and believes that when women take care of them, men will learn to take care of women too.

According to its Facebook page, SugarDem GH is “a gender advocacy group that believes in equity as the foundation of women’s empowerment” (SugarDem GH, 2021). Afia Pokua says, “achieving and advancing women’s empowerment is through dialogue with men” (GhanaWeb TV, 2018). She believes that “when women are empowered, they can do anything. We have been fighting with men for equality but that hasn’t reached far. We have made progress, but not as far as we want to go” (ibid). So, the whole concept (of SDGH) is to dialogue with men, as fighting
with them has not solved the problem. “And the only way to talk to men is to persuade them, like marketing for foodstuffs, lure them, have them buy into your beliefs and then they will join you and support you. Ours is not to fight with anybody, because when men are happy, they help women and they are amazing. Men want respect and so women must speak to them that way and not antagonize them” (GhanaWeb TV, 2018). While the pathways advocated by PDM and SDGH are different, albeit mutually constituting, both believe in the empowerment of Ghanaian women and have women leaders.

Ghana in recent times has been ranked highest globally as the country producing the most female entrepreneurs, with an estimation of about 46.4% according to the Mastercard Index of Women’s Entrepreneurship (MIWE). The rising figures of female entrepreneurs are propelling business innovation in emerging markets. This shows that the entrepreneurial activities of women are the anchors of economic growth and development in the country. Despite the existence of challenges, women in Ghana are overcoming hindrances and thriving in their various ventures. (Badu, 2019).

There are so many examples of Ghanaian women building their own platforms, inspiring the next generation to make decisions for themselves, using their own voices and choosing paths that not only benefit them, but their communities, that it is clear they have a role to play in building and rebuilding the country.

Agency is defined by Donald, Koolwal, Annan, Falb, and Goldstein, M. (2017) as “the ability to define goals and act on them, which is crucial for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women” (Donald et al, 2017). With this in mind, Ghanaian female agency can be defined in accordance with the multifaceted ways in which Ghanaian girls and women embark on achieving goals to empower themselves, inspire their communities, build capacity, and provide solutions, despite systematic barriers and struggles set in place by profound and persistent patriarchal structures, constraining their inward-dwelling urgencies to excel. From the farmer and warrior that Nana Yaa Asantewaa was, to ministers in parliament, to market women organizing with each other in Ghana, to more recent controversial activist groups, all can lay claim to Ghanaian female agency, with a wider range of possibilities than has been imagined for or received through existing political and social structures.
3.6 Afro-feminist Interventions in Prevailing Stories

Oyěwùmí (1997) states that “the imposition of the European state system, where politics was largely a man’s job with its bureaucratic machinery, is the most enduring legacy of European colonial rule in Africa. One tradition that was exported to Africa during this period was the exclusion of women from the newly created colonial public sphere” (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p.123). Further, rudimentary and erroneous ideas about “biology made women ineligible for leadership roles. The imposition of a patriarchal colonial state was defined by the anatomy and subordination of women to men in all situations. And so, colonization was a twofold process of racial interiorization and gender subordination” (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p.124), reducing women to their colonially racialized bodies and gender roles. Because colonization “was a male institution in all its aspects, its masculine ideology, its military organization and processes, its rituals of power, it would have been unthinkable in the belief system of the time even to consider the part women might play. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was unthinkable for the colonial government to recognize female leaders” (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p.124), so they consistently dismissed women, encouraging African males to see themselves as above their female counterparts, whether or not that was consistent with past practice.

When it comes to making interventions in support of African women’s agency and leadership, African scholars like Oloka-Onyango & Tamale (1995) argue for western feminisms to be checked. For Oloka-Onyango & Tamale (1995), “Western feminism, which emerged dominant on the international stage is a result of both colonial domination and neocolonial exploitation” (Oloka-Onyango & Tamale, 1995, p.693), has too many hegemonic influences. They argue, “universal feminism is a fiction based on essentialist notions, detached from the ongoing experiences of women who have been colonized” (pp. 697-698). Confronting this dominance, bursting the bubble of any “romanticized sisterhood of feminism” (p.698), permits African women to create frameworks that offer a stage for meeting their own needs in ways that require the voices of African women to take center stage.

Aidoo (1990) asks that recognition be given to African women who have been challenging systems of oppression, long before such efforts were defined or associated with feminisms. Aidoo (1990) argues that the voices of African women should not be silenced or asked to speak gently in the presence of white feminists. Afro-feminists such as Chimamanda Ngozi-Adichie and Ama Ata Aidoo, whether in speaking engagements or in their writings, have made it clear that African women are among the most powerful activists for sovereign African futures. The complex stories of African women need to be explored with respect, unseating the damaging legacies of
colonialisms that would frame their experiences to serve western audiences and development agendas, and related missionary savior complexes. By drawing upon post- and de-colonial theories, while emphasizing the public dimensions of strategic choices made in lived experiences and creative narrative accounts about African-Women-With-Agency, my goal in this chapter has been to frame my case study of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s leadership. I wish to show that listening deeply to African women’s stories means accounting for the ways they challenge prevailing structures with great precision, using ancestral ties to their own histories, which have always exceeded the narrow motives of those who make the mistake of conflating power with aggression.
CHAPTER 4

Methodology and Method: Case Study of Circulating Stories

4.1 Introduction

As others have argued before me, and indeed, as my efforts to piece together a timeline of her activities in my second chapter demonstrate, there are different ways that the narrative of Nana Yaa Asantewaa can be told. Examining the telling, framing, and reframing of several narratives about Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s choices with an emphasis on the ramifications of her actions and contributions, then and now, enables respectful engagements with a queen’s decisiveness and a grandmother’s sacrifices, as interpreted by and for a wide range of nationalist, colonialist, post-colonial, and diasporic audiences.

Storytelling as a practice is at the forefront of this thesis and the texts, videos, and images to be analyzed. Narrative, visual, and critical discourse analyses are constituent elements of my methodology. Through critical post-colonial and decolonial feminist lenses, I examine writings, images, and videos representing a range of perspectives, unpacking how they relate to Asante matriarchal traditions and stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa. This enables me to engage the selected oral, visual, material, and written materials in order to illuminate the motivations shaping those diverse representations of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, and what they might reveal about contemporary power structures and decolonizing efforts to dismantle them.

4.2 Narrative Analysis

Herman, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Richardson, and Warhol (2017) state that a narrative is “somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion and for some purposes, that something happened to someone or something” (Herman et al., 2017, p. 3). In more detailed terms, “narrative is often treated as a representation of a linked sequence of events, a multidimensional purposive communication from a teller to an audience, where (character, setting, plot structure) are shaped in the service of larger ends” (Herman et al., p. 3). Kent Puckett (2016) adds that narrative theory “considers both the what and the how (and sometimes the who and the where) of the stories we tell” (Puckett, 2016, p.2) and “focuses, in other words, on the necessary relation between two aspects of narrative: (1) the events, the actions, the agents, and the objects that make up the stuff of a given narrative and (2) the shape that those events, actions, agents, and objects take when they
are selected, arranged, and represented in one or another medium” (p.2). That is, narrative theory engages how storied events are understood and interpreted by others. This is certainly part of my task in this thesis, to merge critical discourse and narrative analyses, to engage the multiple moving parts of power structures shaping the versions of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story in circulation for diverse audiences.

According to De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2015), narrative analysis is “designed to take up the challenge of interpreting and understanding layers of meaning in language and the connections among them. It is a form of interpreting a conversation or story in which attention is paid to the embedded meanings and evaluations of the speaker and their context” (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2015, p.25). Narrative analysis looks at “both the meaning of narrative and also the empirical study of different types of alignment between story and event” (Herman et al. p.145). It therefore involves finding, expanding upon, and interrogating received messages in language, in words, in books, including speeches, lyrics of music, and images, connecting them to their historic antecedents and contemporary impacts.

4.3 Critical Visual Analysis

Visual analysis helps viewers to understand, scrutinize, and interrogate the meanings generated by various, simple or complex images, videos, sculptures, banknotes, wax figures, and monuments that are part of the visual archive to which this thesis responds. According to Schroeder (2006), critical visual analysis

“affords new perspective for investigating specific cultural and historical references in contemporary images” (p.319). It requires looking at a range of variables. For images, it includes the description of key constitutive elements, “such as composition, colour, tone and contrast” (p. 305). It also involves “form, which is the way the subject matter is presented” (p. 308), and the way it is positioned for viewing consumption. For this thesis, visual analysis will
also consider the geo-spatial location and the purposes that inform the placement strategies of the image or object, as presented by the designer/sculptor, the organization or individual who may have commissioned it; the year/time the image was created; the medium or materials used in its creation; its historical and contemporary connections; and its maintenance, whether by private or public entities. Further, according to Schroeder, (2003), visual inquiry requires “an analysis of both internal and external narratives and three sets of questions” (Schroeder, 2003, p. 82), as follows:

1. What is the image of, that is, what is there in the image?
2. Who produced the image, when and why?
3. Circulation of images: how do people use the image? What function does it serve?

(Schroeder, 2003, p. 82)

However, there are additional questions to be asked that pertain to the images and objects selected for analysis in this study, such as (i) what is the significance in economic, spiritual, political terms of what is contained in the image or object; (ii) what are the ways the images and objects are seen by locals, leaders, tourists, and diasporic viewers; (iii) how long have those images and objects been in circulation; and (iv) how are monuments maintained to serve the purposes of their production?

Visual analysis also provides a “detailed and explicit method for analyzing the meanings depicted in images … [in terms of] their social context and the values made salient in the representation, like posture and gesture, size, and lighting” (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, p.3), whether present or absent. It offers “a descriptive framework, in bringing out hidden meanings, symbolic and eye-catching attributes, the background in the frame, any texts and the composition of the images that are up for study” (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 150-155), along with the economic, political, social, or spiritual significance attributed to the piece, based on reception.

For example, one might ask: does a monument that is seen as an everyday element of a community have the same effect on locals, as it will on visitors from a different region or from outside the country, especially the diaspora? Will locals in the community pause to give homage to a sculptural structure in a round-about, or will that site appeal more to the temporary or passing gaze of a tourist? An image or visual object can be consumed in three different ways – as an appetizer (when people take notice of an image, glance at it, and carry on), a main course (when
people stop by, absorb the object and explore its constituent parts), and a dessert (when people take only the preferred parts of what they encounter), perhaps to promote it to audiences who have yet to hear of it.

When it comes to other visual media such as videos, visual analysis, “enhances the richness of data by discovering additional layers of meaning, adding validity and depth, and creating knowledge” (Glaw, Inder, Kable & Hazelton, 2017, p. 1). Analyzing films and videos means “establishing what the film or video is really about, that is the content, and making sure to give due attention to issues regarding the sociopolitics of the subject” (Iedema, 2001, p. 186). This includes whether the video is in colour, inked, or black and white, whether there is a narrator, their tone, and who is doing the narrating, the length, the sound and lighting effects, and what is said or left unsaid.

Video analysis should “enable us to see the bare bones of the video, its nuts and bolts, enabling an engagement in a systematic and informed way” (p.187). Video analysis can often be “concerned with the choices made in relation to the sociocultural fields which they decide to hone in on” (p.188). Such analysis could include the type of music used, such as how drumming is tied to Indigenous cultures. Visual analysis asks that we look for “the artistic or logical nature” (p.187) of what is presented in the videos. It helps the researcher to consider whether the video “compresses time and space” (p.187), to contain only what the videographer, editor and/or narrator deems necessary, or to encompass a broader understanding of the subject or theme presented.

Iedema (2001) concludes her discussion by proposing “six levels of analysis” (p.188) when it comes to videos, to “bring together analytical categories often used in film theory, which are frame, shot, scene, sequence, generic stage and work as a whole” (p.188). First, the frame is a “salient still of a shot” (p. 189), which is chosen as the cover image (almost like a small poster), that is seen when the video is advertised or draws the viewer in. The second is the shot, “the movement of the camera” (p. 189), including “panning and zooming” (p. 189), which involves the width and breadth of the frame; and whether there are extra effects to transfer from one scene to another smoothly, or in a fast-paced manner. The third aspect deals with the many scenes that appear in the frame. Sequence considers when “the camera moves with specific characters or subtopics across time-spaces” (p.189) to make sure the story being told can be followed in each chapter where a character’s story is presented. The staging aspect looks at the “beginning, middle and end” (p. 189) of the narrative, the three temporal stages in telling any story. The final layer of
analysis engages the “work as a whole” (p.189), with a view to “classifying the video as a particular genre: fictional, factual, social-cultural, economic, symbolic” (p.189). I also pay attention to the historic, the Afro-centric, or whatever the most applicable theme that fits or is emergent in the analysis. Selecting images, objects or videos for visual analysis creates the opportunity for serious in-depth review of underlying and obvious messages, and what is missing or left out.

4.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) can engage visual, material, oral, or textual discourses and is focused on:

… systematically exploring the often-opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events, and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power (Fairclough, 1995, p. 132).

In terms of oral and print or digital textual discourse analysis, Terry Locke (2004) notes that CDA is “concerned with language and with the way in which patterns of meaning are socially constructed” (Locke, 2004, p.9). Similar to Locke, Griffin (2007) suggests that “analysis of language in use has two aspects: the first relates to the language itself that is used, and the second to the process of using language, for example, the amount of verbal space a speaker occupies, or the pauses or inflections they utilize” (Griffin, 2007, p. 9). Language is a critical part of CDA, which explores the essence of its use, including strategic word choice for inference of different meanings, for example.

CDA is also “about how and to what purpose language use is invested through the deployment of specific textual features (lexical, grammatical, semantic), in order to facilitate understanding of its effects” (p.9). Fairclough (1995) introduces a three-dimensional framework, under CDA, which are “analysis of text, analysis of processes of text production, consumption, and distribution, and sociocultural analysis of the discursive event (be it an interview, a paper, or a conversation for example) as a whole” (Fairclough, 1995, p.23). According to Fairclough (1995), this means that the texts under analysis can be visual, or include photographs, videos, oral speeches (including their syntax, genre, rhetoric, tone, repetitions, etc.), and written texts like print materials and web pages. Examining speeches by Asante queen mothers, for example, with an emphasis on
Nana Yaa Asantewaa, allows me to put her language under a microscope, to delve into the underlying meanings and effects circulating in the period of her speechmaking; but also, the effects it could have in a contemporary context if asserted by a contemporary queen mother, or under new conditions.

The addition of videos also gives the opportunity to look at the content itself, including the title, as well as “context of culture, context of situation, purpose/function such as (whether it is informing, investigating, describing, arguing for a position) the degree of formality of the diction-(figurative, plain or colloquial); aural elements such as voiceover, sound effects, as well as the structure like the initial focus, the general topic, the length and revisiting the initial topic again” (Locke, 2004, pp. 21-23). With the images, there is also the opportunity to look “at aspects of the design, such as patterns, thematic organization and cohesion” (p.23) of all the images/objects under analysis, any inscriptions or stories surrounding the images/objects, oral or written text, and whether a particular part of the image/object remains the main focus throughout its analysis.

Processing information using CDA involves looking at the type of audience who consumes the cultural item, the marketing goals, and different waves of interpreting them. In addition, the social, cultural, historical, and political conditions of the content and context have to be considered. To understand more fully, the discourse analyst must consider geographical implications of the image or object, the historical time frame in which the image or object was created, and whether there were political tensions, a prevailing agenda or challenging climate at the time of its production that may have influenced the image’s creation are all germane.

As part of my application of CDA, I will be employing the decolonial research methods of “reframing and storytelling” in my analysis, as outlined by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori scholar from New Zealand. Reframing, according to Smith (2012), is “about continuing resistance to the way Western feminists have attempted to categorize the positions in which Indigenous women should be located and how patriarchy is discussed without addressing imperialism and racism” (Smith, 2012, p.155). Storytelling works as a research tool, providing the oppressed with a stage upon which to challenge their oppressors. It has the capacity to enable decolonization in both academe and the media, two arenas that for far too long have offered so-called historical accounts that are really “damaging stories” (Tuck, 2009), which prolong the existence of the explicit aesthetics of Black suffering and white saviors.
These methods arise from and inform my Afro-centered, post- and decolonial framework. It is important to note that one can make a partial case for understanding the Asante people as Indigenous because of their relationships to the land. However, the Asante people are unlike Indigenous people in North America, New Zealand, or Australia, because, as much as the British colonialists invaded Ghana, caused chaos, and stole artifacts, eventually, they left. In other countries where Indigenous people live, they arrived and moved in, and settled, becoming the majority. The Asantes have contributed to postcolonial nation building. A decolonizing thread unites the interests of theorists from all of these histories to challenge deficit-based representations arising from westernized constructions of the “Other.” Reframing and decolonizing feminist methods allow stories about formerly and currently colonized peoples to be told in ways that do not rely on a single, dominant view. Further, this approach allows for a plethora of stories and knowledges to be explored, expanded upon, and reframed in ways that bring dignity to aspirations for sovereignty, as opposed to the rigid, voiceless portrayals of African women characteristic of Eurocentric imperialisms.

4.5 The Importance of Taking an Afrocentric Approach

According to Mazama (2001), the “European cultural ethos has held Africans to footnote status in the white man’s book, relegated black people to the periphery to become spectators of a show that defines Africans by European terms, experiences, decadence and madness” (Mazama, 2001, pp. 387-388). In this Eurocentric frame, Black people are expected to simply accept that reductive approach as sane. Oyebade (1990) adds that,

in the history of intellectual thought, the Eurocentric paradigm has often assumed a hegemonic universal character, and European culture has placed itself at the center of the social structure, becoming the reference point, or the yardstick, by which every other culture is defined. For instance, the Western definition of civilization has become the standard of what constitutes a civilization. The Eurocentric worldview has become so dominant in the contemporary world that it has overshadowed other worldviews (Oyebade, 1990, p.234).

In this worldview, Africans have been marginalized, stigmatized, like a painting with black markers on a black canvas – apparently offering nothing. An Afrocentric approach opposes this
reductive approach, allowing for Africans to be seen as humans with active voices. An Afrocentric approach, therefore, involves “a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective and worldview of the African person in every situation. An Afrocentric approach sees Africans as integral subjects rather than the victims” (Asante, 1991, p.171). An Afrocentric approach can also be defined as “Africa asserting itself intellectually and psychologically, breaking the bonds of Western domination” (Mazama, 2001, p. 388), by refuting manipulative colonialist stories that project themselves as a site of supremacy.

An Afrocentric approach “rests on the assertion of the primacy of the African experience for African people and views the European voice as just one among many and not necessarily the wisest one” (p.388), nor the one that has to be respected or consulted with. An Afrocentric perspective seeks to challenge any purported “Eurocentric monopoly on scholarship and thus assert a valid worldview through which Africa can be studied objectively” (Oyebade, 1990, p.234). Afrocentricity requires Africa to be included at the table when worldviews are being discussed. It also demands that an African perspective be situated at the forefront of any discussions surrounding Africa. Afrocentricity should be the foundational, immediate, and essential choice in the study of African civilizations, and the most valid pathway for presenting African consciousness and conceptualization by writers and scholars emerging from within the African continent, but also beyond it, including for the diaspora when they choose to reflect on the ways their own relationships with Africa have been conditioned by world events.

Afrocentricity “expresses the need to change hegemonic cultural aggression through research and writing from the African perspective. But it aims beyond this. Apart from asserting a valid perspective from which Africa will be objectively studied and not in an imperialistic or exploitative way” (Oyebade, 1990, p. 237), an Afrocentric approach offers the food for thought, for the soul, the main course and not just dessert. An Afrocentric approach wants African thought to seen in published writings, not as an afterthought, but as a key part of the first thought. An Afrocentric approach may have Pan-African tendencies, but is transparent enough to affirm the existence of varied experiences while moving African worldviews from the margins to the center of global discussions, in reciprocal equitable relations. An Afrocentric approach recognizes the contributions of its matrilineal cultures, including the Asante queen mothers who played such a vital part in leadership, governance, and in efforts to secure Asante’s independence. Asante women are not and never were simply victims paralyzed by patriarchy.
4.6 Data Selection

Given the historical legacy of the Asante kingdom and its matrilineal society, along with the popularity of and complexity surrounding Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story, an array of data is available. However, for the purpose of this research, I have carefully curated a representative archive (including key speeches, an image on a widely circulating form of currency, objects, a song, and passages from well-known historians of Asante history) to help answer the research questions posed. In order to engage the range of contemporary storytelling surrounding Nana Yaa Asantewaa, there are 7 shorter academic pieces, including a book chapter, 5 speeches, 4 photographs, 2 videos and a song.

The archive draws primarily from Ghanaian writers and storytellers, given the birthplace of the main figure under analysis, as well as scholars from contemporary academic contexts in the U.K. (a seat of colonialist empire) and the U.S. (home of a critical mass of Ghanaian-descended members of the African diaspora). These materials provide variety, depth, and a relevant range of geographical contexts, where different authors and artists are engaging different audiences. The criteria for selected data involved mainly the following:

i) well-known authors of Asante history as defined by how often they were cited or appeared in materials in discussions surrounding Asante history;  
ii) books/chapters/articles that mention Nana Yaa Asantewaa in the title or feature Nana Yaa Asantewaa and the Yaa Asantewaa War as central to the document’s discussion;  
iii) discussions about Akan women as well as discussions of powerful Asante women or Asante queen mothers who are celebrated for their leadership in articles that have more than a paragraph dedicated to them;  
iv) the most well-known spirited speeches attributed to Nana Yaa Asantewaa in response to the protection of the Golden Stool; and one by an Asantehemaa Afua Kobi to a British Governor threatening to fight him to protect her people;  
v) a popular historical song dedicated to Nana Yaa Asantewaa, still sung in contemporary Ghana;  
vi) visual cultural materials including a commemorative bank note, monuments, and selected videos focused on the public memory of Nana Yaa Asantewaa.

Below is a summary of the data sources.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality of author</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Racialized Identity</th>
<th>Type of materials</th>
<th>Language of material</th>
<th>Time/Time frame of publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ghanaian</td>
<td>Male and Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Articles, speeches, song</td>
<td>Akan and English</td>
<td>1977-2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Male and Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Article and video</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>2016-2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-British</td>
<td>Male and Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Article and video</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1990-2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Art objects</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Currency</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-European</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I chose to look at the selected materials together because of their similarities and differences as relevant to my discussion of varied uses of the narratives of Nana Yaa Asantewaa. For example, while the two videos selected are both about Nana Yaa Asantewaa as a warrior queen, engaging the Asante matriarchal tradition as a critical term, one is narrated while the other tells the story through drumming and subtitles. I chose to review the pieces selected by format – videos, speeches, images, and texts by geographical proximity (which were created within or outside of Ghana), and all visual cultural materials from Ghana in terms of proximity to the Ashanti region. Key critical terms such as matriarchal culture leadership models; oral, visual, and textual culture were considered thoroughly, with conscious attention paid to the positionality of different representational histories and practices. All selected materials are germane to my research questions and engage the power of matrilineal and matriarchal societies in relation to the phenomenon of a local warrior queen mother’s influence, shaping regional, national, and global investments (historical, colonial, decolonial, academic/non-academic, political, cultural, economic, etc.) in particular futures, via textual materials, videos, images, and monuments.
CHAPTER 5

Analysis: Exploring the Themes and Interests of Situated Storytellers

5.1 Summary of the Steps for Analysis

For my analysis, I examined the selected materials to discover the themes and interests that emerge, what is emphasized, and what is excluded, to help answer the research questions. Due to the different types of materials selected for analysis, I used NVivo software, a qualitative data analysis tool capable of storing text, image, video, and sound. NVivo has several functions including coding, querying, clustering by similarities, coding comparison, hierarchal charts, crosstabs to explore intersections of data attributes and nodes that are coded to make sense of data stored in adjacent spreadsheets.

The first thing I did was categorize the materials into five distinct format classifications: articles, speeches, videos, song, and images (photographs) and entered the data into the NVivo software. Then for each classification, I ran a word frequency query and looked for words and phrases that appeared most frequently, as seen in Table 5.1, using a minimum appearance of fifteen times as threshold, in order to explore the significance of repeated word usage. I did not limit the maximum number of times a word or phrase was used in order to see the most frequent emphases in a text or document.

It is clear from this analysis that Asante matriarchal culture and its matrilineal traditions feature prominently across all of the materials examined, when all terms related to women (or female) and Asante experience are combined, respectively. This is significant. Matriarchal cultures and matrilineal traditions have persisted in Africa, despite having been subjected to the aggressions of patriarchal, imperialist, and capitalist disparities. Matrilineal traditions, then, are a significant resource in the African context, and inform contemporary African feminisms. The importance of matrilineal traditions is also evident in the ways that the story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa has persisted and been reinvented and reproduced in multiple contexts, at home and abroad.
Another option in NVivo software is the “query wizard.” This enables looking for particular terms, relevant to the research questions, which can save time and help identify key phrases, quickly. When a notable frequent use of words, as well as patterns of expression emerged in texts, videos, or images, I was able to recognize those prevailing attributes and create different codes called “nodes,” which allowed for similarities in words, images, ideas, and themes to fall into related categories. For example, words such as “brave,” “courageous,” and “fearless” were coded together, as were words such as “lead,” “leader,” and “leadership.” I also was able to create cluster items by coding emerging ideas and themes from the data, as seen in Figure 5.1.2. Another helpful tool in NVivo was having the option to run a query on multiple items at the same time, rather than using only the individualized option. Nodes, which were automatically colour-coded, were easy to trace during the analysis process.

Creating infographics to illustrate the information gathered through NVivo is also a helpful feature. As indicated above, matriarchy and matrilineal traditions emerge as a salient theme, and in the graphic provided below, one can see how various themes are interwoven and stack upon one another in such a multi-faceted analysis.
Figure 5.1.2

EMERGING IDEAS & THEMES

MATRILINEAL TRADITIONS & MATRIARCHAL CULTURE

LEADERSHIP

NEGOTIATIONS & STRATEGIES

MENOPAUSE & MENSTRUATION

EXILE

COURAGE

ASANTE NATIONALISM

PATTERNS OF PATRIARCHY

DEFINITION OF VICTORY & DEFEAT

MEMORY & LEGACY
In order to develop a concrete direction for the analysis, over a period of weeks, I reviewed materials every day to see whether new constellations of ideas emerged, which elements were outliers, what might intersect, and so on. The following questions dictated the path the analysis took.

i. What are the most prominent emergent themes?
ii. What phrases stand out as exceptionally relevant?
iii. Are there popular words that may be used less than 15 times but strike a critical chord?
iv. What words in the Twi language can be coded using the English language?
v. What is the significance of using Twi language to convey a message?
vi. Who were the audiences in mind for the selected material(s)? What might happen for the target audience(s) in mixing in the Twi language without translating?
vii. What emotions if any are invoked/represented in the material?
viii. How are gendered undertones revealed in the materials, and which feminized roles such as wife, female, mother, woman etc. are emphasized?
ix. What co-locations emerge in the coded materials?
x. How is the story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa framed in texts, images and videos?
xi. What do the authors/artists choose to include and exclude in their materials?

Again, as several weeks were spent with the analysis, I ran through each of the selected materials at least thrice. First, I looked for what immediately stood out; second, I considered what was missing in the first round; third involved running several different queries to highlight themes and ideas relevant to the research questions. There are several findings that NVivo software helped to highlight for analysis. For any phrases or word usage patterns that stood out, I coded each, whatever the frequency, to explore the relationship between its use and the structurally layered interests of the storyteller, in relation to their social location. The more I analyzed, the more was revealed, including the perceived tone that informed the texts, images, and videos, and the positionalities of the different storytellers, including whether or not their racialization, lineage, gender, or country of publication played any role in the language patterns; structures of the material, or any other correlations germane to the research questions at stake.
It also became obvious that while a gender-based analysis was at the forefront of my emphasis, there were more male than female storytellers, all reflecting on the legacies of a prominent historical female icon. I was also aware that because there were more Black than white storytellers in my archive, using NVivo allowed for a focus on more Black storytellers than might have been the case if I had analyzed outside the software, or taken a less Afrocentric approach. I had to ensure constantly that while certain phrases were presented in the Twi language, I could translate them and code them in relation to similar and particular English phrases. This is one of the limitations of NVivo, which is itself a Eurocentric, and even Anglo-American-centric, digital tool.

Another key development was looking at the images from several different perspectives, considering what particular angles of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s face might represent – for example, if she were depicted face forward with head and shoulders, in profile, full body, standing on a platform, sitting down, or just as a face. I had to compare whether the images and videos provided specific symbolic or contextualizing elements, any new interpretations shared, or whether the format or perspective changed the frame of the storytelling. I had to look at whether or not sound effects such as drumming in videos, created meaningful content for discussion. I considered several ways that the results of data could be interpreted, for example showing how Nana Yaa Asantewaa called Asante men brave and cowards in the same speech, and the effect of the juxtaposition in such messaging. While the word “cowards” may stand out as a challenge to men and a kick at patriarchy, the use of “bravery” in a proximal breath could be seen as a tool or strategy adopted by Nana Yaa Asantewaa to demonstrate a choice. She encourages them to fight, by starting with praise first, before poking them with some tough words indicating reputational consequences if they did not follow her lead.

I created Table 5.1.2 to illustrate some of the ways queen mothers are represented in the materials examined. This analysis highlights the fact that Asante matriarchal culture stretches from one queen mother to the next, passing on their heroic traditions as a beacon of heart and courage for their people, regions, and country. In addition, I was also able to make several modifications, consider several frames of analysis, organize, and re-organize, structure and better restructure codes better with NVivo software, until I seemed to have exhausted all query options.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Queen mother</th>
<th>Region in charge of</th>
<th>Key Responsibility</th>
<th>Known Female Collaboration</th>
<th>Famously represented as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Nana Yaa Asantewaa   | Ejisu               | Defend the Golden Stool | With Nana Ama Afranewaa | • *Abrewa*-old woman  
• Participated in the war against the British  
• Challenged a British governor  
• Exile by the British |
| Nana Ama Afranewaa   | Ofinso              | Defend the Golden Stool | With Nana Yaa Asantewaa | • Fired a shot to protect the Golden Stool |
| Afua Kobi            | Ashanti Empire      | Affairs within the Ashanti Empire including nomination to the Golden Stool | Not in available data for analysis | • Diplomacy  
• Used her left hand to fight a governor |
| Yaa Akyaa            | Ashanti Empire      | Affairs within the Ashanti Empire including nomination to the Golden Stool | Not in available data for analysis | • Diplomacy  
• Negotiation  
• Ruthless  
• *Obaa barima* (be-woman)  
• Exiled by the British |

However, after working through what NVivo had to offer, I realized that while helpful, digital analysis was not adequate to some of my deeper lines of inquiry. NVivo could only do so much for me; to delve further I had to go back to my themes and consider differential power discourses, relying on my own analysis, beyond what the software could do. To illustrate, I explore the themes of imperialist alibis and whiteness as a symbolic assemblage in a short BBC video about Nana Yaa Asantewaa, below.

5.2 Differential Power Discourses in Conflicting uses of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s Story

i) Imperialist Alibis

The 11 July 2018 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News Africa video, *Yaa Asantewaa: Ghana’s Warrior Queen*, is only 2 minutes and 11 seconds long; however, it is the first YouTube (owned by Google) citation that pops up, and has the most views of any internet video reference associated with Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s name. This video is part of a series called
African Women Who Changed the World. It holds so much evidence of the dangers of misappropriated stories, that it had to be unpacked, frame by frame. As I undertook this work, the key discursive theme that emerged from both visual and textual analysis involves the perpetuation of an imperialist alibi. This occurs when a former imperial power puts on a show of support for those who have suffered under its violent colonialist actions, while beneath that performance of recently revised attitudes, lurks a persistent reinforcement of its ongoing aggression toward that region and its peoples, and a concomitant refusal to acknowledge how it continues to benefit from past injustices.

This video targets a western audience, providing a quick summary of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s role in the war against the British, along with a decidedly British take on what she and they did. The video attempts to perform “inclusion,” but falls short. No credits at the end emphasize Ghanaian voices. The producer and editor of the video is a white British woman, while the illustrator is a Black woman who has lived in Nigeria, Ghana, the United States, and the United Kingdom. While it is certainly important that Black and other racialized artists are hired to work in media industries in the imperialist west, it is also important to challenge a continued practice of tokenizing voices, particularly when their contributions are not contextualized by accounts of their lineage connections to the story (however interrupted by violent displacements), in the African way (Seegers, 2007).

This subtitled video includes up-tempo drumming in the background, a feature which could be interpreted differently by different audiences. This approach of not having anyone speak, but offering the story in English subtitles, reinforces the British interpretation of events. Perhaps even more telling is the compression of this critical Ghanaian story into a two-minute post-script to Imperialist histories. Acknowledging Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s leadership does not address what is missing. There is no apology, no engagement with the perspectives of the Asantes, and no attempt to present the conflicts or tensions surrounding Britain’s role in the war. As is common with western news media, a person from the group to be represented is selected to provide the abbreviated story, but not a fulsome perspective. The perspective of a Black person who has lived in Ghana may not be sufficient to capture the power of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story in Ghana and Africa. History is so often written by those who declare themselves victors.

Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story as presented in this video, is really about Britain as a colonialist power. The British flag is displayed, not once but twice, once from afar and once very
close up, so it is hard to ignore. The British flag is also strategically placed over Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s head to indicate colonialist power over the Asantes. It is not an accident that the British flag is featured in this video, to show the domination and survival of the British, and to claim ownership of countries they invaded. The Asantes are depicted in battle as not wearing shoes and are bare chested – which intimates poverty rather than environmental integration – an intentional contrast to the industrialized uniforms and footwear of the British, who can then subtly claim to be more advanced, with the Asante soldiers seemingly no match for them. No question of ethics is ever raised. Instead, this video offers a performative approach, or virtue signaling without substance. It acknowledges Nana Yaa Asantewaa as a brave queen mother and one of the African women who changed the world, but at the core, the video reflects a British nationalistic and commonwealth approach. Since the Golden Stool, which means so much to the Asantes but not to the British, does not translate easily for the intended audience with the same level of symbolism as the British flag, this vital cultural symbol of resilience and ongoing power is suppressed, reproducing the very misunderstanding that precipitated the war in the first place. Once again, the imperialists rest on their laurels.

As is to be expected in such an abbreviated animation, there is not much depth to this video, and too many details are left out. For example, the video mentions that Nana Yaa Asantewaa was exiled and spent 20 years on the Seychelles Island. The use of the word, “spending” seems to suggest that Nana Yaa Asantewaa took the time to be in exile as if she had accepted a tourist visa of some sort. While the exile of Nana Yaa Asantewaa is mentioned, its strategic value in terms of ending overt aggressions by the British against the Asantes is not addressed at all. Nana Yaa Asantewaa started the war to ensure that her people had a basis for claims to sovereignty. Once again, the issue of the abusive violence of colonialism is neatly skirted. The reason that the Ghanaian flag is nowhere present in the video might be declared a matter of historical accuracy because Ghana did not gain its independence until 1957. However, if Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story were positioned as foundational to the emergence of the Ghanaian state, which all Ghanaians recognize, the video could have ended on the Ghanaian flag as an update, also in the name of historical accuracy. Because the Golden Stool informs Ghanaian nationalism, an animated transition from the image of the stool to the flag might have been effective. Ghana was the continental leader in establishing the initial post-colonial nation state in Africa and has
demonstrated a long-standing vested interest in Pan-Africanism. The absence of this key point, central to any authoritative Asante account of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s narrative, is glaring.

By obscuring Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s vested interest in expelling invaders and inspiring growing nationalisms as grounded in ethnic groups, this short video finesses imperialist control of the narrative, using privileged access to global economic opportunities founded on colonialisms, such that that story of “winning” overrides a critical engagement with the unjust practices of economic dominance that persist. One example of this is the way the illustrator is both hired as part of a purportedly inclusive practice, and functions as an alibi. The BBC chooses to use its own colonially and racially conditioned target home audience as an excuse for practicing exceptionalism toward the Ghanaian version of the story, justifying lack of accountability to its cultural origins, by conforming to its own norms.

Ugandan transnational scholar, Catherine Odora Hoppers (2002), in her book Indigenous Knowledge and the Integration of Knowledge Systems: Towards a Philosophy of Articulation, has been researching imperialist and resilient localized knowledge politics, modeling conditions whereby all knowledges are welcome at the tables of learning and diplomacy, without coercion. Such an approach requires humility and a recognition that more rigorous knowledge construction is achieved when accountable and inclusive perspectives are welcome to revise existing approaches. The ego-driven imperialist model of “allyship” reeks in this video. A long overdue acknowledgement on the part of the British in a half-baked pathway of self-redemption, remains more celebratory than humbling, and does little to interrupt the master narrative; assigning defeat to the Asantes. This incomplete narrative, which the British have spread through history books and imperialist propaganda, persists – owing to the ways riches stolen from around the world have enabled the BBC’s global media presence, and despite the ways that Ghana and other nations have prospered in the years since the British were expelled.

ii) Whiteness as a Symbolic Assemblage

As suggested in my discussion above, whiteness as the product of an assemblage of power systems, pervades the presentation of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story in the BBC video. Beyond mere pigmentation, whiteness appears in the form of the British flag and the soldiers’ uniforms. The colour white in the union jack itself represents a story of colonialism, blending the flags of Scotland, Ireland, and England. The United Kingdom continues to navigate complexities as efforts
to preserve Welsh and Irish culture and language are themselves foundational to the colonial story of British imperialism, taking over adjacent lands. The red and white cross at the center of the British flag was carried into crusades, while British uniforms were adapted across the geoclimactic conditions of the colonies to ensure the visibility and integration of their presence on imperialist missions. Throughout the entire video, the faces of the British, Nana Yaa Asantewaa, and some of the Asante soldiers are visible, but everyone else, especially most of the women, have no faces. There is a black and white group photo of King Prempeh I, and an entourage which includes two women, but it is difficult to discern which one is Nana Yaa Asantewaa, because the photo is so grainy and there is no accompanying identification. In the two hand-drawn group pictures that illustrate the presence of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, where she is easily identified, she appears first as elderly and then as progressively aging. As indicated above, Nana Yaa Asantewaa is the only woman with a face.

One can make the argument that perhaps the BBC wanted to center the story and Ghanaian contributions solely on Nana Yaa Asantewaa, as a matriarch leading the fight towards Asante independence. Another reading might be that the faceless people are those whose stories “cannot” be recovered, thereby emphasizing Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s face more than the others. However, a much stronger argument suggests that imperialist history is masculinist and therefore, Nana Yaa Asantewaa is an anomaly to the British. The video states that “it was unheard of at that time for a woman to lead in this way.” However, in Ghana, Nana Yaa Asantewaa is not an anomaly. She was fulfilling her role as a leader. Emphasizing masculinity is a paternalistic way to dismiss the relevance of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s intervention, which was powerful. This patriarchal dismissal is also invested in a characteristic approach to whiteness, especially male whiteness which obscures the perspectives of those it chooses to other in order to shore itself up.

Whiteness is also evident in the British habit of taking over and displacing languages, as illustrated even in its own flag, the Union Jack. Despite other progressive efforts by the BBC to decolonize its own portrayals, by subtitling this story without Asante voices being translated, this video aligns with British efforts to impose their language all over the world. Many ethnic communities in Africa permitted English to remain the national language after colonization, to avoid giving primacy to just one ethnic group, preventing future disputes and (perhaps) so that translation processes would be less onerous. Nevertheless, such practical diplomacy has left a colonialist mark on the consciousness of the nations who adopted this approach. Obviously, the
audience is British, but this is a less than subtle way to exclude Ghanaian perspectives. The immense intergenerational and cultural power that Nana Yaa Asantewaa brought to the arena of war as a woman warrior is never adequately acknowledged, even with the last statement on the screen: “her legacy lives on.”

iii) Centering Ghanaian, African Descendants and Diasporic Perspectives

In contrast to the BBC video, discussed at some length above, I have selected several resources that build toward an Africanist view, challenging colonialist histories, and celebrating Nana Yaa Asantewaa, through education targeted primarily at diasporic and tourist audiences. Ghanaian-Belgian Vanessa Ewuradwoa Kyeiwa Danso. The 8-minute-35-second video (2016); African American Harcourt Fuller’s article, which features 4 images of Nana Yaa Asantewaa (2014); African American D.L. Chandler’s article examining one of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s famous speeches (2014); and Cameron Duodu’s article reflecting the perspectives of a Ghanaian living in England (2001), provide more fulsome and critical materials for analysis.

Danso’s illustrated video, *The Legendary Nana Yaa Asantewaa and the War of the Golden Stool* (March 25, 2016) comes up fourth in a Youtube search of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s name (with about two-thirds the number of views as the BBC video). It repeats some of the BBC video tropes in its prominent feature of the British flag, versus the Asante or Ghanaian flags (even if their appearance would be an anachronism). Although Danso (2016) draws the British flag in reference to the 1895 request by Paramount Chief Prempeh I for a Treaty of Friendship with the British, she accounts for their nationalism, only in reference to the Golden Stool, which requires contextualization for western audiences. Danso (2016) also uses an anachronistic Eurocentric image of a crown to designate Nana Yaa Asantewaa as a queen, certainly not a Ghanaian cultural reference.

Danso (2016) takes her time with the colourful British uniform she illustrates for Sir Francis Scott, and the unique attire for Governor Sir William Maxwell and Sir Frederick Hodgson. In illustrating the minimal gear of the Asante soldiers, however, her virtual stylus moves very swiftly across the screen to denote a necklace, a spear and shield, a small head covering, and loin cloths on the lower bodies of four identical warriors. Danso also draws a British postal stamp with the queen in profile, and uses traditional British red, white, and blue bunting, to suggest that Nana Yaa Asantewaa deserves a medal, when claiming her victory for Asantes. While this
conflation of British with Asante symbolics may or may not be intentional on Danso’s (2016) part, it suggests how a diasporic artist and audience may be influenced by imperialist narratives, whether intentionally or not, even when affirming Afrocentric representation.

On a more positive note, Danso (2016), mixes English with the Akan language of Twi to depict the role of the imperialists more accurately than the BBC video. She uses Ghanaian slang *Ewurade asem ben nie?* which translates to “Oh Lord, what at all is going on?” to interrogate Sir Frederick Hodgson’s vile effort to claim the Golden Stool. In context, the question translates to: “What on earth is this man doing?” She also says *enye ne fault, (not his fault) but*, to allude sarcastically to the evidence that the “gentleman” appears to have lost his mind, not having realized the magnitude of making a request to sit upon the symbolic stool, or the inter-generational consequences of his demands to take the Golden Stool. Since Hodgson wanted to appropriate the Asante’s sacred stories, the BBC video discussed above aids and abets his aims. Danso (2016), by using a Ghanaian language, resists.

However, the drumming in Danso (2016)’s video, associated with the Asantes, is very intense and impacts her own speaking presence. A British bugle call in the video would play very differently for British and Ghanaian audiences. While Danso (2016) use of the Akan language is an improvement in cultural emphasis over the BBC video, some of her colloquial expressions in English and in Twi, such as “highly allergic to nonsense” a prolonged “anyways,” and “she was quite pissed off,” or “eish wa ka asem o,” and “chale” in Twi, sound like casual slang, as though she might be talking to a friend who speaks both English and Twi. This performance of intercultural familiarity stretches credibility, given the diasporic audience she seeks to educate. Because the Akan language of Twi is arguably the most widely used Ghanaian language and is frequently spoken and understood by many Ghanaians at home and in diaspora, its use in this video may serve to renew interest in cultural heritage, even though some of the British-centered imagery undermines the film’s Afrocentric focus. That said, using the Akan language emphasizes Ghanaian sovereignty, with direct links to Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s battle for the soul of the Asante people, and the future Ghana and of Africa. Danso (2016)’s video is an effort to connect children and families in the diaspora with their roots, so she speaks with her own voice to tell Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story. However, the results are mixed, in terms of accountabilities to the deeper stories and legacies of the Asantes, and of Ghanaians and Africans.
For example, Danso (2016) does not feature other images of African women, apart from Nana Yaa Asantewaa. In group images, Danso (2016) does not show any faces of people either. Though she takes her time to draw this image of the group meeting where Nana Yaa Asantewaa asks the Asante men to fight, she does not show faces in the end, and the drawing almost looks like a modern take on a gathering of people wearing hats with some passing for small children (who have not been recorded in many places as even present for such an important meeting of adults). Further, the images of Nana Yaa Asantewaa that Danso (2016) features show her holding a stick, unlike the gun and knife which she is famous for wielding. In terms of the gendered composition of the Asante army, Danso (2016) mentions only that women were present at the Kumasi Fort but were later sent home. Since one of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s famous speeches speaks about how women will die fighting for their people, it is not known whether any of the women picked up weapons to fight for the Asantes. Still, an opportunity to take seriously the efforts of Asante women other than Nana Yaa Asantewaa, is missed.

Fuller’s (2014) article works to promote tourism in Ghana, emphasizing the potential for educating tourists about Yaa Asantewaa’s legacy, by building the image of her as a heroine for all Ghanaians, at home and abroad, and creating historical and cultural connections through the developmental strategy of boosting tourism. Fuller (2014) conveys a message that people beyond the Ghanaian home nation need to learn more about Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story, and to visit the historic sites which feature her statue, monuments, and wax figure, whenever they visit Ghana. While critical of reductionist approaches to tourism, Day (2016) notes that “some observers assert that a tourist presence reinforces and focuses local identities and strengthens local traditions” (p.101). Celebrations of local cultures and job opportunities are created for people at tourist destinations, who can sell souvenirs and engage with visitors.

Not everyone agrees, however. Having cultural displays and re-enactments of the Yaa Asantewaa war, through a mock battle for example, could be seen as historical trauma and a trigger for descendants of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, all for revenue that may not even come directly to them. A museum “projected to be the cornerstone of a tourist village” (Day, 2016, p.105) was created to “establish, enhance and preserve the heroic image of Yaa Asantewaa,” (p.107), but burned to the ground in 2004, and plans for replacement have yet to be realized.

In keeping with the goal of educating a wider public about Asante and African history, Duodu (2001), whose niece is Danso (2016), wants to see a specific Nana Yaa Asantewaa theatre
production continuously performed in Britain, to keep her story alive as an intervention in colonialisms, there. Duodu (2001) creates an image of an African diasporic connection and the ‘fusion of talents’ in the Nana Yaa Asantewaa play, by emphasizing that it includes a Nigerian, a Ghanaian, and a Caribbean national as cast members, while the script is by a Ghanaian-Caribbean writer, its choreography by a Ghanaian, music composed under the direction of a Ghanaian, while the entire play is directed by a Trinbagonian. Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story becomes, in this production, what it always was – a Pan-African claim of sovereignty for the many cultures represented, from multiple African-descended communities developing into a wider array of diasporic audiences.

A video with subtitles that makes no use of the Ghanaian language is much different from one which uses a Ghanaian language with aplomb, a play that embodies Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story in Britain from an Africanist perspective, or a deeply discursive analysis of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s rhetorical speeches. Decolonizing approaches to Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story must necessarily center Ghanaian and African perspectives, as those most affected. When the imperialist story appropriates Ghanaian history to shore itself up, the injustice perpetuates itself. However, versions that center Ghanaian language, characters, and speeches, decenter the imperialist narrative, and open the horizons of possibilities that Nana Yaa Asantewaa fought to activate.

**iv) Multiple Motivations for Appropriating or Sharing Stories**

As illustrated above, diversely positioned and situated storytellers have different motives in trying to recover (or not) the many aspects of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s life from the available materials and sources. What stood out in my larger analysis was the lack of depth provided in grasping the unique roles other key people like the queen mother Nana Ama Afranewaa played, beyond merely ‘consulting’ with Nana Yaa Asantewaa and other queen mothers when developing resistant strategies under colonialist conditions. By not giving faces to the other people in its short video, especially the women around Nana Yaa Asantewaa the short BBC video focuses solely on the contributions of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, as a matriarch among the Asantes. Whether intentional or not, this approach obscures the widespread relational networks upholding her role that would be evident to Ghanaians and other Africans.

In contrast, Duodu (2001) presents Nana Yaa Asantewaa almost immediately as one of the greatest women in history, one of a kind. Clearly, diasporic/Ghanaian historians demonstrate their
alignments with and allyship to Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s vision in ways that escape the purveyors of the BBC video.

A similar motivation can be seen in the thoughtful use of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s powerful and famous speeches, framing the arc of possibilities and investments in decolonization that come out of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story in the context of the ultimate defeat of the colonial empires operating in Africa. The four speeches made by Nana Yaa Asantewaa are considered by three authors: Albert Adu-Boahen (2003) Asirifi-Danquah (2007) and D.L. Chandler (2014). They show that she did not mince words in addressing the British Governor Frederick Hodgson or the Asante men, both of whom needed to take a critical look at their own responses. Nana Yaa Asantewaa, in asking rhetorical questions, does not need any answers from white or Asante men, as she is making the point that the white man had no business demanding the Golden Stool, and the Asante men had no business allowing him to disrespect and embarrass them. The authors who reproduce and analyze her speeches recognize them as a testament to her vision of the role of Asante matrilineal traditions and female power in preserving the living spirit of the Asantes, as discussed further, below.

v) Interpreting Exile: A key factor in competing histories

The topic of exile is discussed twice in the BBC short video, and in Danso’s (2016) video, as well as in many of the data sources under discussion. Strategic use of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s exile story is another key example of how the BBC overdetermines its account of a British “victory.” Exile in this instance, from the imperialist perspective, enables the forced dislocation of a person from their home as punishment through a demotion from leadership, to facilitate taking over the person’s or a people’s land, resources, and nation. Both Nana Yaa Asantewaa and Asantehene Prempeh I, were punished by being banished from their homeland, taken into involuntary exile because they refused to relinquish sovereignty over their lands. Exiling them was the British way of seeking to demonstrate who had the power to make decisions that affected a person’s life, their leadership role, and the fate of their people.

In the Danso (2016) video, the British are more accurately presented. Not only is Nana Yaa Asantewaa exiled, but she was “stripped almost naked of her clothes and also her personal stool that was her symbol of authority as queen” (Danso, 2016). Having learned from Hodgson the value of the Golden Stool, they wanted to strip the Asantes’ warrior queen of hers. Akyeampong (2000)
also addresses the British use of exile to humiliate when he argues that Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s stool and the Golden Stool were precisely the items that the British troops wanted, the Golden Stool more so, as a way to demoralize the Asantes. Since they could not find the actual Golden Stool, the British deemed the second-best theft would be Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s stool, which, like its owner, was exiled (in this case for five decades) until it was returned, just so the British could claim victory for themselves, both in the taking and the return. However, for the Asantes, although significant, Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s stool was not the equivalent of the Golden Stool, and since it was eventually returned and not held indefinitely in a British museum, that temporary theft cannot be categorized as victorious for the imperial forces. The moral victory belongs, and has always belonged, to the Asantes.

Further, while the British held onto the idea that exile was synonymous with defeat, Duodu (2001) makes the argument that they cannot claim defeat if the Asantes under Asantehene Prempeh I, chose not to fight. In essence, Duodu (2001) suggests that victory claimed for a war not fought, by way of using exile as punishment, is no achievement at all. This is a key point. Duodu (2001) adds in reference to the 1900-1901 war, that because the British did not get their hands on the Golden Stool, they failed in their goal, securing moral victory for the Asantes, in keeping what was rightfully theirs.

Ghanaian author Pashington Obeng (2000) states that the Asantes, although they resisted as fearlessly as they could, simply did not have the advanced weaponry the British had and, as such, were subjected to the cruelty of exile for further punishment and abuse. However, Nana Yaa Asantewaa, by choosing to surrender when her only daughter was believed to be captured, provided liberation for her people, bringing the war to an end, and saving many lives that may have otherwise become casualties. Some may argue that there had to be some freedom for Nana Yaa Asantewaa in stepping back from fighting, with no burden to be the protector on a battlefield and to settle into a quiet life away from the daily risks of war. On the other hand, the burden of being away from home and separated from most of her people and their way of life, was great. Nana Yaa Asantewaa died in exile and her body was returned home for burial twenty years later. That her story is commemorated in centenary celebrations and other ways, suggests that her exile did not defeat her investment in the Asante spirit, nor the Asante people’s investment in hers.
vi) Building Sovereignty

While the aspiration for national sovereignty can certainly be linked to Michel Foucault’s analysis of biopower (1977) which focuses on the “disciplinary power of a state to control its population and determine life” (Chibber, 2018), it is also important to define the notion of sovereignty for the Asante nation. It is well known that Asante nationalism is strongly associated with the Golden Stool, with its spiritual connections and protections. There are both spoken (bold declarations to defend the Asante nation by its people) and unspoken allegiances to the Golden Stool (a default understanding of loyalty associated with Asante identity), which persist to the present day. Thus, when given the choice to give up the Golden Stool or have their King Prempeh I, deported to Seychelles, for example, the Asante made their choices, and the Golden Stool was hidden from the British, despite several attempts to locate it. Defense of the Golden Stool remains a continued, ethical, and sovereign expectation in the Asante nation, through a long-sacred relationship between Asantes, the universe, and the ancestors.

Preserving and protecting the Golden Stool represents an uncompromising decision, reaching back and forward in building Asante sovereignty, which has become foundational for Ghanaian pride and Pan-African allegiance to pre-colonial cultural values. In essence, sovereignty has to do with sustaining ancestral lines that go back through time, harboring relational values from the past in present times and places, cultivating values, resiliencies, and futures inherent in the affiliated relationships among peoples and places that they represent, since the dawn of human perceptions of time. Invasive and divisive colonialists have much to learn about the primordial spiritual connections that ground Asante and other Indigenous investments in the substantive sustainability of commitments to mutual flourishing.

The introduction of Christianity to Africa has often been associated with the following assertion, variably attributed to the late Kenyan anti-colonial activist Jomo Kenyatta, and the late anti-apartheid advocate and South African leader, Desmond Tutu. “When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible, and we had the land. They said, ‘Let us pray.’ We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land” (Gish, 2004, p. 101). Gish states that Desmond Tutu clarifies that this joke was not made by him. For many traditionalists, the Christian mission in Africa was about theft, a misappropriation of spirituality in order to gain valuable resources, including land. This has deep implications for contemporary development schemes. The illusions of superiority that Christianity carried with it and promoted in Africa,
created a site of struggle for Indigenous Africans. Christianity, as a tool of colonialism, preached a message that dismissed the traditional values and spirituality of the Asante nation, and refused to give it due recognition.

Danso (2016), in her video, discusses how a replica of the Golden Stool was created for the British to convince them that they had the real one so they would stop searching for it. Because the Golden Stool is sacred to the Asantes, it holds deep spiritual values. Danso’s (2016) inclusion of this story emphasizes the lengths to which the Asantes went never to let the Golden Stool out of the Asante kingdom. It also reveals how smart the Asantes were in their efforts to trick the British, so that they would abandon their quest for the Golden Stool. An image of the replica Golden Stool shows that the original’s value was one way to measure what was at stake between the British and the Asantes. The British took the replica to England, thinking they finally had it, only to realize later that theirs was not the actual Asante Golden Stool. Because the Asantes were adamant, committed by blood and bone to the Golden Stool, it could never leave Asante lands for Buckingham Palace.

Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s impassioned leadership carried the spirit of the Ashanti people into and out of her eponymous war, ensuring the continued sovereignty of the Asante nation, and that the power of homeland, life, and the opportunity to flourish and prosper would remain, long after her exiled and mortal departure from the Asante kingdom. This model of sovereignty shows an underlying need to empower the Asantes to tell their own stories about the Golden Stool; their Queen Mother, Nana Yaa Asantewaa; and their continued resilience. The defense of the Golden Stool demonstrates that Asante sovereignty is founded on different values and symbolics than those of the British imperialists.

For the British, getting their hands on the Golden Stool was about two things. First, it was an attempt to try and demoralize the spirit of a nation, based on how the Asantes had emphasized that the Golden Stool literally represented their life as a people. Second, appropriating the Golden Stool would have been another souvenir of colonial theft, another item to add to an already massive accumulation of stolen objects, one might say debt to colonized nations. That accumulation is consistent with British imperialist goals. Unlike the British, the Asantes had no interest in taking anything from the British; they only wanted to protect and defend what was their own. The Asantes were living in a completely different universe of meaning, which can be traced through their
continued emphasis on the unifying symbol of the Golden Stool, with Asante nations ready to rise to any occasion to defend it in their various deployments of the image of Nana Yaa Asantewaa.

The Asante versions of this story are about carrying values proven in the past into a present that emphasizes their situated mutual flourishing with one another and their environment. Asante sovereignty is still alive and well in the hearts and minds of Ghanaians today and the efforts of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in fighting to save the Golden Stool from British appropriation are no small part of that and cannot be diminished by false and reductive narratives originating from elsewhere.

vii) Agency, Memory, Valour, and Legacy: Representations of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in Contemporary and Historical Material Media

Currency:

The appearance in 1986 of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s face on a 20-cedis Ghanaian banknote (Figure 5.1.3) is one of the very few times in Ghana’s history that a woman’s visage has graced a banknote and was named on the currency as well.

![Figure 5.1.3](Image Credit: Harcourt Fuller, 2014)

Being put on a banknote by any government is a form of praise, respect, and honour that cannot be afforded to just anyone. This deployment of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s image shows great national
respect for her contributions to Ghana as a whole. It also re-invokes that spirit of sovereignty and Asante and Ghanaian agency into the most recent model of western imperialism, the globalization of capital. On the banknote, Nana Yaa Asantewaa is seen with warrior gear on her head and the words “freedom or death” written above her fist with the words Gye Nyame (an Adinkra symbol which means “except God,” and emphasizing divine intervention) below that. “Freedom or death” was an attitude spearheaded by Nana Yaa Asantewaa and the “clenched fist, is the universal salute and symbol of defiance, resistance and strength” (Fuller, 2014, p.68). One of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s famous speeches includes the following declaration and appeal, “I shall call upon my fellow women. We will fight! We will fight till the last of us falls in the battlefields” Chandler (2014). This is not a small point in a matrilineal culture. Chandler (2014) raises the prospect of women as the backbone of both cultural and economic survival circuits in a globalizing economy (Sassen, 2002, p. 255).

According to Aryeetey, Fosu and Bawumia (2002), after Ghana’s independence from the British on 6 March 1957,

Ghana experienced reasonably high growth soon thereafter, but by 1965 per capita growth was already negative, and when the coup d'état overthrew the Nkrumah regime in February 1966, per capita income was below its value at the time of independence. Conditions appeared to improve significantly during the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the mid-1970s saw the beginning of significant deterioration, so that, by the early 1980s, per capita GDP had reached its nadir in the history of Ghana’s post-independence. While economic conditions have improved markedly since then, the growth rate has failed to accelerate significantly, and per capita income has yet to reach its level in 1957 (Aryeetey, Fosu & Bawumia, 2002).

Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s presence on the banknote in 1986 was seen as a “propaganda tool to present a narrative to a mass audience about the then president’s militancy, to express his political philosophy and path to power” (Fuller, 2014, p.68) by association with Nana Yaa Asantewaa as leader of an army. However, there is more to be explored here. An argument can be made that a reason Nana Yaa Asantewaa appears on the currency is that the government of Ghana understood intuitively that though the British had left, the economic systems they had created through imperial systems survived, especially in the 1980s when the “world economy was falling apart” (Green,
Her image on a banknote served as a reminder that, in the same way the Asantes had overcome the British attempt to steal the Golden Stool, Ghana would survive the trials of the global economy as an independent nation.

In many ways, Nana Yaa Asantewaa held the sacred spirit of the Asantes against the coercive values of the British. Putting her image on a well-circulated form of currency was an attempt to invoke the same spirit of protection, albeit temporarily, in the 1980s economic onslaught in the global south. Nana Yaa Asantewaa went into battle on the currency. This is because currency exchanges are weapons: money is a tool that controls economies and, therefore, Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s presence on the banknote presented her as a benevolent leader, going into battle for Ghanaian values in order to hold space in a violent global economy. Further as a figure on the national currency, Nana Yaa Asantewaa connects implicitly with the diaspora, her story summoning tourism as a resource in the globalizing economy.

Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s presence on Ghanaian currency demonstrates that retaining land sovereignty extends to the power of a country to choose its own pathways. Like Mohanty (2003) argues, “our minds must be as ready to move as capital is, to trace its paths and to imagine alternative destinations” for our aspirations. Nana Yaa Asantewaa used her power to imagine a different destination for herself and for her people than imagined by the British, even as a forced exile to the Seychelles Island. Her efforts to save her people and to allow for those that were taken away, left, or were driven into the diaspora, ensured that one day, they would have a homeland to return to, should they choose to do so. Therefore, because Ghana’s national currency was undergoing globalization at the time, Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s image serves as protection and also calls the diaspora home. Although the banknote did not endure, other monumental images do, showing continued investment in the story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa.
Statuary:

The statue (Figure 5.2.1), wax figure (Figure 5.2.2) and monument (Figure 5.2.3) of Nana Yaa Asantewaa that I have chosen to consider here, are contemporary ways local, regional, and national governments in Ghana are ensuring Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s story informs the tourism industry, as well as serving educational and history-making purposes.

Figure 5.2.1

Image Credit: Yaa Asantewaa Statue in Ejisu, erected in 2009 by the Canadian non-profit organization Yensomu Youth and Community Development and The African-Canadian Community. Photo: Action 4 Reel Filmworks/MACPRI via Harcourt Fuller, 2014
Figure 5.2.2

Image Credit: Chester Higgins Jr. for Manhyia Palace Museum via Harcourt Fuller, 2014
Figure 5.2.3

Image Credit: Harcourt Fuller, 2014
Having Nana Yaa Asantewaa framed as a lasting figure (Figure 5.2.2) allows for continued honour for her embodied role in ensuring that the Golden Stool remained with the Asante Kingdom for many generations. In Figure 5.2.1 we see the bronze statue of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, erected to stand in the middle of a roundabout in her hometown of Ejisu. In this monument, Nana Yaa Asantewaa has her mouth closed and is holding a rifle, but carries additional weapons, including knives at her waist (Fuller, 2014), indicating a willingness to die in hand-to-hand combat. In this monument, she is wearing a dress that was believed to have spiritual and protective powers. She stands, legs akimbo, ready for war. What is striking about this statue is the chosen Adinkra symbol present on the stand – *akofena*, which means “sword of war,” indicating great courage and heroism on behalf of the Asante nation. The bronze statue also enables this representation of Nana Yaa Asantewaa to withstand adversities of weather and war since her story survives attacks by the British, the exile of her grandson, the imperialist threat to the Golden Stool, and the war she both launched and brought to an end. The statue’s erection by an Afro-Caribbean Canadian group also suggests that the legacy of Nana Yaa Asantewaa is etched in the memory of people both within and outside Ghana. It is telling that Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s attire is reproduced in both the statue and monument (Figures 5.2.1 and 5.2.3), suggesting that her image survives with some consistently in living memory.

In Figure 5.2.2, we see the wax reproduction of an elder Nana Yaa Asantewaa at the Manhyia Palace Museum, seated, with her mouth closed. It shows a side profile of her looking ahead, with her hands on a rifle. She is dressed like Asante queen mothers often dress at funerals: a black cloth covers the top part of her body and a different coloured and patterned cloth, usually red, covers the lower body. This suggests that Nana Yaa Asantewaa is in attendance at her own funeral, that by choosing exile and returning from it in state, she has achieved the opportunity to finally be at peace. She is not pointing the gun at anyone but remains ready to fire, returning from the ancestral world, as her image on Ghanaian currency in the 1980s suggests, to fight any form of colonialism, should there be a need for it. Being seated on a stool reinforces her due recognition as a Queen Mother, restored to her now despite the British having taken her stool to humiliate her. That strategy did not stand the test of time. Nana Yaa Asantewaa is still lauded in Ghana, today.

Figure 5.2.3 shows what appears to be a stone monument of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, housed at the national museum in Accra. The monument presents her standing on a block, with her mouth wide open, pointing forward, to show her in full command, with her head protected, equipped with
what may be a weapon, including a rifle, perhaps to show she is still ready to lead any war for Asante peoples and, by extension, Ghanaians. She is dressed in attire that was seen as having spiritual power, according to Obeng (2000), a form of dress that rivals the uniforms of the British soldiers with its own symbolisms of protective values. Obeng (2000) argues that Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s “battle dress, studded with amulets and talismans, had mystical powers that lent invincibility to the one who wore it” (Obeng, 2000, p.148). While it does not appear as if the monument is currently maintained, it was built to last and its ability to remain standing, years on, emphasizes commitment to the durational persistence and enduring legacy of Nana Yaa Asantewaa.

**Lauded in Song**

The undisputed notion of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s role as a warrior is also preserved in the song that describes her standing before a cannon in defiance, as she remains both an historical and contemporary force shaping the story of the Asante people and of Ghana. The popular Nana Yaa Asantewaa war song (cited below on page 88) is still sung today in Ghana, memorized by children and adults, men, and women alike. It recognizes Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s bravery during the war named after her, showing the spiritual depth of her contributions, as well as her valour and legacies as a Queen Mother (further discussion below).

**viii) Interpretive Negotiations and Strategies**

Different strategies were adopted by the Asantes and Nana Yaa Asantewaa during the 1900-1901 war, including consulting oracles, honouring oaths, challenging and shaming men, building weaponry and blockades, providing food, mobilizing forces, and fighting as well as negotiating. Traditional practices of the Asantes, such as oath-swearing, and consulting oracles can be seen as a sovereign way of surviving the British imposition of their colonialist cultural worldviews. These practices meant swearing to the spirits of ancestors, pledging allegiance to commit to fighting, and giving permission to the ancestors to strike those who made pledges should they not honour their oaths. Some Asantes continue to practice traditions such as pouring libations (alcohol) to the ground, to reverence the gods, who drink first before humans, especially on important occasions when the community gathers.
It can be argued that Nana Yaa Asantewaa understood the Asante system and used it strategically in every act from shaming the reluctant men into battle, to consulting oracles to ensure the sovereign agency of the Asante nation, to standing against the colonialism of the British imperialists and protecting the Golden Stool. All of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s strategies, “enhanced her status as an elderly royal versed in the art of war” (Akyeampong. 2000, p.10). She had multiple ways beyond using material weapons to go about fighting the British. In honouring oaths, Nana Yaa Asantewaa demonstrated two things. First, that any commitments to the defense of the Golden Stool would be honoured under her leadership, and second, to show gratitude to the ancestors before her, seeking their blessings to continue to do what she could to defend the Golden Stool.

In provisioning her troops, Queen Mother, Nana Yaa Asantewaa, “supplied gunpowder to the field commanders and their troops. Nana Yaa Asantewaa further provided food and drinks to the warriors” (Obeng, 2000, p.146). By doing this, she showed that she was going to deploy all the necessary resources her warriors needed: gunpowder to destroy enemies and food to nourish them so they could keep fighting. Danso (2016) adds that Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s armies blocked all traffic going to the Kumasi fort, a center of the war, which also meant there were shortages in supply for the people involved in the siege. Today, Kumasi remains the capital city of the Ashanti region of Ghana and the home of Asante royalty. In the end, Nana Yaa Asantewaa let the “sick people and women go” (Danso 2016), so her energy could be focused on those who were strong and capable of fighting. This strategy allowed for a greater chance of success for the Asantes, instead of having everyone in the mix, diverting the energies of the soldiers from their critical tasks.

Another strategy was Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s use of extremely charged speeches, including the use of rhetorical questions, calling men cowards, challenging their masculinities, so they would stand up and face the British. Brempong (2000) notes that Nana Yaa Asantewaa asked, “How can Asante men sit there and listen to all the nonsense from the British Governor. She asked if the men had been turned into women or not” (Brempong, 2000, p.100). Her speeches were a way of gathering the male chiefs together, because they needed someone with courage to goad them and invoke bravery. Another courageous moment occurred when she sent a message to the Governor, “I have loaded my gun, and not for nothing” (Obeng, 2000, p.150). This message was a dare to the British to try her if they could.
All of these strategies and practices were an invocation of Asante culture. Despite the use of menstruation as an exceptionalist excuse for excluding women, gender binaries were not so rigid for the Asantes, owing to their matrilineal systems. In the Asante culture,

… after the Asante warriors vowed to fight, any man who showed cowardice in battle was executed; or, if the death penalty was commuted, the man paid a fine, was dressed in a woman’s waist beads (toma), his hair was dressed in a female fashion, his eyebrows were shaved, and if he were married, other men could seduce his wife, but he could not claim adultery fees or damages… to emasculate the offender (Obeng, 2000, p.145).

These actions were designed to teach other men who chose the path of cowardice about consequences. They also raise the question of how femininity was seen more broadly and how women could mobilize men to fight.

**Song: The Yaa Asantewaa War Song**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original in Twi</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Yaa Asantewaa</em></td>
<td>Yaa Asantewaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Obaabasia okro premo ano</em></td>
<td>A woman who fights before cannons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Waye be egyae</em></td>
<td>You have accomplished great things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Na wabo mmodene</em></td>
<td>You have done well</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Boahen, 2003, pp.62-63).

According to Obeng (2000) Asantes “believed in the efficacy of mystical forces, war medicine that could be tapped to wage war” (Obeng, 2000, p.147). It has been suggested that, for a time, Nana Yaa Asantewaa “was an invincible woman” (Ibid). The famous war songs sung of “*Yaa Asantewaa obaa basia a osa apremo ano*” (Ibid), invoke a woman who could stand, fearlessly, before cannons. Oral tradition “identifies a battle dress (*batakari*) worn by Nana Yaa Asantewaa during the 1900 war. The battle dress, studded with amulets and talismans, had mystical powers that lent invincibility to the one who wore it” (Obeng, 2000, p.147). She was a “provider of spiritual ammunition as well as conventional weaponry for her troops. She consulted the Asante war deities and organized women to perform war chants to aid the Asante warriors” (Obeng, 2000, p.147), by boosting their morale to fight.
Nana Yaa Asantewaa knew what to do, from provoking the British by calling them “foolish,” to giving up her freedom to stop the war, because she was responding out of the values and meaning systems of her own culture. Ghanaian writer, Agnes Akosua Aidoo (1977) insists that Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s “role in the 1900-1901 war illustrates the singular determination of the Asante queen mother to preserve the integrity of their kingdom. For her, there could be no compromise on the possession of the Golden Stool. She insisted that no price or sacrifice was too great to regain their usurped power and maintain their cultural identity embodied in the Golden Stool” (Aidoo, 1977, p.12). She did everything she knew how to protect it, including the use of culturally salient communications strategies that would mobilize the Asantes and their mutual ancestors.

ix) Patterns of Patriarchy

Despite the Asante nation being a persistent matriarchal culture with matrilineal traditions, patriarchal structures could still arise, especially when it came to women’s menstruation. Menstruation was seen as an abomination, contamination, and a disability. Ama Ata Aidoo (1990) argues that “in a society like the Akan, women were incredibly strong, yet when a woman had her period, her biology was used against her” (Aidoo, 1990, p.17). Menstruation was seen as a “significant ideological constraint. A ritual disqualification and the fear of menstrual contamination (rather than ‘assumed physical inferiority’) also prevented women from serving in Asante's armies” (Aidoo, 1977, p.4). This same blood that disgusted the Asante patriarchs had the ability to birth kings for the Asante nation. The only time a woman was seen as acceptable and could hold audience with men, could be listened to, was when she was post-menopausal.

Apart from menstruation, “there were certain cultural attitudes that restricted the modus operandi of women in public life. One such attitude was the universal abhorrence of aggressiveness in the public behaviour of women. The aggressive female was sharply rebuked as obaa-barima (a 'he-woman)” (Aidoo, 1977, p.4), or woman-man, in efforts to control the ways women appeared in public, subject to the quiet, gentle behaviour that Asante men consider acceptable among women. The queen mother Yaa Akyaa by contrast, was seen as merciless, and “earned her condemnation in Asante traditions as a ruthless obaa-barima” (p.10). However, because Yaa Akyaa was considered menopausal, she could engage with Asante men. Gender limitations were placed by Asante men on women for their own purposes.
It has to be emphasized that the British influenced these patriarchal patterns in Africa and elsewhere (Oyèwùmì, 1997, p.124). The British looked for practices that seemed familiar to them when they invaded African nations. They put African men in charge, had them invited to meetings and elevated their egos, even in matrilineal communities where women had highly responsible roles, making major decisions in leadership positions on par with men. Hence, the Asante culture contained elements that could be taken advantage of by the British, in ways that fostered complicity with colonialisms.

The structures of patriarchy work to hold women down and have created an unsteady balance against matriarchal elements, even though considerable generative power rests in matrilineal traditions. Because queen mothers like Nana Yaa Asantewaa recognized their inherent power, matrilineal cultures have continued to push against patriarchal complicities with British masculinities. Queen mothers like Nana Yaa Asantewaa have made contributions and sacrifices that ensure the survival of their cultural knowledges, which can bring necessary and creative solutions to seemingly insoluble problems. Nana Yaa Asantewaa showed a force beyond patriarchy and, together with other courageous resisters, turned the tide of history for Ghana and Africa.

x) Politics of language

The popular Yaa Asantewaa war song mentioned earlier has been shared by many writers, such as Boahen (2003); however, Brempong (2000) and Duodu (2001) each present a version that includes the phrase “mere woman” to describe Nana Yaa Asantewaa. Brempong (2000) and Duodu (2001) chose these versions in songs they both learnt as children, as part of a colonialist legacy. The British may have seen Nana Yaa Asantewaa as a “mere woman,” because “it was unheard of at the time for a woman to lead in this way” (BBC, 2018), yet Nana Yaa Asantewaa was still able to protect the Golden Stool for Asante sovereignty. The song is taught to young children to transmit her fearlessness and to let them know that women can also fight.

The Twi word *Obaabasia* which is translated by Brempong (2000) and Duodu (2001), as “mere woman,” is interesting as the literal translation means female/woman and adding “mere” was not needed for its English translation. Therefore, their interest in using “mere” might show her remarkable ability as a mortal woman to stand before cannons. Nana Yaa Asantewaa did something Asante men were not willing to do until she motivated them. She proved to the British
that Asante women were not meek and obedient; they were not the type to sit down and do nothing; they stood up and faced deadly cannons mirroring to the British their own barbarity.

Brempong (2000) mentions that Nana Yaa Asantewaa “lives in the memory and heart of the Asante people and she is immortalized in a song” (Brempong, 2000, p.110). However, he makes an interesting comparison to Joan of Arc. He says Nana Yaa Asantewaa, “was exiled, not burnt like Joan of Arc of French resistance to English overrule, and died in exile” (Brempong, 2000, p.110). Brempong (2000) may perhaps be arguing that Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s exile was the lesser of two evils, better than being burnt alive. Perhaps she should be grateful to have been exiled, rather than killed. Brempong (2000) argues that Nana Yaa Asantewaa could have kept fighting. She could have died on the battlefield, but as I have argued, being exiled made more space for her people. While Brempong (2000) may have been comparing Nana Yaa Asantewaa to Joan of Arc, as another world-famous female warrior and leader, the Asante’s cultural gift of affirming life also deserves recognition. Brempong (2000) seems to be writing for a diasporic audience and may have sought to draw the comparison for a more global perspective. However, is there a need to compare an African heroine to a famous European, in order to affirm her contributions? In the Asante meaning system, honour is given on its own without the need for additional comparisons, especially to a European heroine. Language has a way of influencing the direction of a message, and in this instance, Nana Yaa Asantewaa being referred to as “mere woman” seems condescending, and even a complementary comparison to Joan of Arc, undermines her sovereignty to stand in her own right and in her own cultural context.

xi) Recognizing Matrilineal Traditions as a Power Survival Circuit

The Golden Stool exists today in Ghana because of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s contributions; it is not in a European palace or museum somewhere to appease the British thirst for celebration of their conquests. Many trophies and properties were stolen by the British and made their way illegally from the shores of many countries on the African continent to famous and infamous British and other European museums. Some properties of African nations are still in British possession, with little or no attempt to return them. To keep a nation’s history suffocated in museums in Britain, is archival genocide yet the British parade on the global arena as if they are attempting to reduce disparities, forgetting their own roles in globalizing problems. Thus, retaining
the Golden Stool, to have stood against the Goliath of colonialism and protected their Golden Stool, led by a “mere” woman is a great achievement for Ghanaians.

Nana Yaa Asantewaa and, by extension, the matriarchal lineage from which she descended, did not seek recognition or permission from anyone to exercise leadership roles. She certainly did not seek permission from any man. She may have done what she felt was needed in the challenging conditions in which she found herself. She was committed to Asante sovereignty and by extension, to Ghana’s and ultimately Africa’s, independence from imperialisms. Matrilineal traditions saved the Asante nation at a critical historical juncture, through the person of Nana Yaa Asantewaa. The value of women grounds any notion of affluence and aspiration among the Asantes and is central to any discussion of stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa, a Queen Mother and matriarchal heroine. In essence, matrilineal traditions represent an alternative power system that is not about domination, but survival and care. That story is worth telling well.
CHAPTER 6

Awiee *(in the end)*: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Results

Throughout this thesis, I have analyzed the multiple motivations and vested interests operating in various versions and venues for telling diversely positioned stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa, in images, text, scholarship, journalism, digital media, and oral history, via cultural messages and songs. Nana Yaa Asantewaa is presented by diverse cultural agents and their agendas in different ways. Her multifaceted life story is framed by diverse actors – from Ghanaians, to the British, to people in the diaspora. This thesis has shown several ways in which stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa mobilize African women’s unbroken capacities to critique the appropriations and relational breakages that patriarchal and colonialist structures enact upon our lives and stories.

This thesis has worked to redirect the practices of targeting, blaming, and shaming back along those fractious breakages to where they belong, in processes of critical decolonization that show how shame and blame belong to the will to dominance. The influence and agency of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s choices reveal the powerful decolonizing spirit at her heart; her role as queen mother was poised within the kinship relations of her people in ways designed to rescue and secure the futures of their shared descendants. Because stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa persist, more than a century after her death, her leadership in the fight against the British, and because related nationalist and Pan-African stories persist, people at home and in the diaspora can be reminded of what the Asantes have always known: that courage is not isolated in one place, to one gender identity, or any single racialized group. Rather, like a drum, it reverberates through time and space, aligning intergenerational aspirations with undefeatable commitments to a form of justice that is bounded by the horizons of reciprocal human humility.

Throughout, I have defined and developed the term “broken stories” as a way to critique the ways that complete, and accurate stories do not always make their way to center stage, due to hegemonic power systems. Such power systems have been dead set on controlling the narratives of their challengers, fabricating, exaggerating, or suffocating the truth out of alternative stories in order to perpetuate an agenda of brokenness, damage, weakness, and subverted agency directing attention away from their own failings and toward those upon whom they have aggressed in greed.
and butchery. Too often, broken stories are framed through a single colonialist lens. Decolonizing lenses refuse such distracting representations and demand pluralistic and pluralizing approaches.

6.2 Unseating Broken Stories: Framing Accountabilities

In unseating broken stories, struggles need to be situated in the strengths they advance and enable. Unseating broken stories means unveiling the effects of Eurocentric teachings and their accountabilities for breakage and appropriation. Decolonization is about keeping people accountable in the stories they choose to tell, and questioning those who may feel the need to delegitimize, in this case, African stories. It is about interrogating the purpose of constructing African women as subordinated, in ways that shore up Northern models of philanthropy and development at the expense of those who bear the burdens of those monocultural efforts. It is about asking why colonialist imagery and narratives continue to animate stories of backwardness and darkness in relation to African women, cultures, communities, and histories. It is about “opening up spaces within academic environments and scholarly discourses in which orally centered or related ways of making and transmitting knowledge can be affirmed and validated in expanded ways so that the definition of what constitutes expert work can be enlarged” (Gingell & Roy, 2012, p.15). It is about refusing incomplete stories, even from those who claim to be experts. Where colonizers have labeled themselves as chief experts and aligned their systems with exclusions and exceptionalisms, there is a powerful need to reaffirm Afro-centric approaches that offer critical perspectives, demanding greater accountabilities to those most affected. Unseating broken stories cannot be about performing fictional allyship; rather it must constantly challenge those who intentionally or unintentionally frame Black women at the peripheries.

6.3 Summary of Study Contributions

This work shines a light on the multiple motivations always at play in colonialist appropriations; it seeks to undo the abuses of African stories that emerge as distortions enacted by capitalist imperialisms. It also illuminates how decolonial approaches are fundamental in telling stories about people whose stories have not been welcome in rooms where “experts” discuss their histories, or on public stages in imperialist contexts. As the false easy fixes of neoliberal disparities and market solutions have taken hold, global popular culture and international policy spaces have become too accepting of singular narratives of damage, based on exceptionalisms that resist plural
accountabilities. I have argued that imperialist stories survive on damage stories and harming the trajectories of counter stories. People who have been colonized must resist the appropriation and distorting of our stories and expose the damaging and broken stories that continue to circulate in what academic discourses ignore, leave out, or never cared for.

Secondly, this case study underscores a need to continue to recognize African women as powerful people whose complex stories deserve to be explored in the fullness of their situated meanings, rather than subordinated to the damaging legacies of imperialism. Westernized savior complexes are grounded in stories that must end, in order to make bigger spaces for the recognition of African and other women who have never stopped challenging systems of oppression. This research affirms the efforts of African women who refuse to be silenced or to speak gently in the face of patriarchal imperialisms. Stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa are not monolithic, nor are they exceptional. Many other Ghanaian and African women have shown bravery when faced with injustice. While, on their own, stories about Nana Yaa Asantewaa cannot represent an entire group, a thoughtful case study that interrogates the motivations framing variable versions, can inspire people to be critical about why there are so many conflicting accounts. My study shows one example of a specific, historically grounded, womanist story with material ripple effects that exceed the lifetime of its protagonist, and persistent powers to deconstruct misappropriations, when the living contexts of her choices remain central.

Therefore, this critical study has found reason to affirm and amplify the role of matrilineal culture in Ghana, in ways that confirm female agency at home and abroad, as central to any discussion about African women and what constitutes power. It also refuses the colonially convenient construction of damaged African women. Asante matriarchal culture and matrilineal traditions has always appreciated women as subjects of change, agents with voice, commanding, strategizing and, where needed, in co-leadership with men, or acting as both king and queen when called upon.

Thirdly, this study has introduced the concept of African-Women-With-Agency (AWWA), which includes a call for frequent re-awakenings of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s stories in materials for young children and adults in Ghana, in the rest of Africa, and in the diaspora. Discussions around the Big Six fighting for Ghana’s independence are true, but before them, there was the sixty-year-old warrior queen mother who paved the way for Ghana’s independence in 1957. The themes of integrity in cultural literacy and educational legacy are necessary correctives to broken stories.
To put it simply, AWWA undoes western victimologies. It shows female characters saving, liberating, leading, and challenging patriarchal structures, shaking structures of oppression, from within, from inside, outside, and elsewhere. AWWA storytelling takes a strong stand that values the greatness, potentials, and powers of African women demanding transnational collaborations that respect diverse, situated meaning systems and knowledges. Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s lived choices successfully survive the limitations of inaccurate interpretations, and misappropriations by colonizers, affirming the critical role of matriarchal cultures and matrilineal traditions that have never bowed down.

Paying homage to matrilineal traditions and sovereignty honours the intergenerational power and contributions of matriarchal cultures, pre- and post-colonialism, especially when it comes to courage, sacrifice, and finding a way forward, under difficult circumstances. It shows that African women’s courage is not new. It arises from a long history of matriarchal dignity and respect, which deserves to be highlighted in any discussion of women’s agency on the continent of Africa. It also gives due recognition to Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s role in establishing Asante sovereignty, in the defense and protection of the Asante homelands, which survive till date. African matrilineal cultures offer significant practices for reframing power as more collaborative and connective than destructive.

Many stories of exceptional bravery, sacrifice, and courage have been passed down through Asante culture and shared among Asante women. It is important that such stories not be decontextualized from the futures to which they remain committed. Nana Yaa Asantewaa responded to the challenging situations she found herself caught up in, in order to defend the flourishing futures of the Asante people. She was committed to Asante sovereignty and, by extension, to Ghana’s independence. Therefore, appropriations of her story for other ends are broken stories. Only by re-contextualizing the versions of her story circulating in the political periods and contexts in which they were produced, can the unbroken story be seen to emerge, as corrective.

Nana Yaa Asantewaa was not simply a martyr of matriarchy, sacrificed for the defense of the Golden Stool. As a woman of agency with great conviction and courage, once she had successfully made her point, she accepted exile to secure a future for her family and her people. Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s living story challenges colonial myths, because “her existence itself shows her as an active agent of decolonization” (Waziyatawin, 2012, p. 265). This research shows that
Nana Yaa Asantewaa was not alone in pushing a mandate that painted colonialism as a cowardly structure, compared to the power of matriarchal investments in the full flourishing of African cultures and their sacred trajectories. Other queen mothers, like Yaa Akyaa, Nana Afua Kobi, and Nana Ama Afranewaa, reveal the undisputed strength and leadership of Asante women.

Feminist discussions about women’s empowerment should not begin and end with emphasis only on the struggles or vulnerabilities of African women, as targeted by the egregious disparity politics of globalization. Against those odds, the contributions of African women stand out as vital interventions in the onslaught of necropolitical ethical failures which characterize the imperialist impulse. Appropriation as alibi needs to be called out for what it is, serving only the interests of people who benefit by diminishing the dignity and opportunities of people who deserve more, and better, from everyone. Appropriations and distortions belong to the spiritually impoverished, as illuminated by unbroken stories of courage, understood in context. AWWA storying is a call to celebrate the stories of the anti-imperialist defiance enacted by Nana Yaa Asantewaa, and the many African women who have stood and continue to stand against the tyrannies of colonialisms, including neoliberal austerity politics that impoverish the world. Sovereign stories demand accountability. AWWA stories insist on them.

Fourthly, in response to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s arguments about the “Dangers of a Single Story” (2009), my thesis has explored the motivations of authors and storytellers in repositioning a situated story in time and space; it has challenged unethical appropriations of that story for ends that distort the purposes for which it was lived. By exploring the details of the assemblages and audiences for whom a given version of a story is cast, examining an academic article line by line, or moving frame by frame through a video, underlying motivations and meanings can be revealed. Furthermore, not all stories are lived for individuated reasons. There is an intergenerational dimension to the stories of post-colonial and decolonizing Indigenous peoples that extend the pursuit of justice and peace beyond narrow and greedy imperialist impulses.

Discursive enquiry which centers the interests of those most affected, can engage the distorting frames that condition broken stories, when they are separated from their vital contexts. This project has explored the diverse motivations that shape storytelling about racialization and gender, through a case study that invites readers to develop critical sensitivities to such underlying influences. Recognizing Nana Yaa Asantewaa in a two-minute video is nothing like an apology or reparations for the damage inflicted on all futures by imperialist structures, nor a return of stolen
property or returning the myths of conquest to imperialists, as a cover for the shame of greed and oppression. Superficial tokenism, including the employment of diasporic Africans in colonial centers of representational production, cannot redress the violence of willful ignorance.

6.4 Limitations of the study, future research directions

There are limitations to a study like this. I recognize that in choosing to focus primarily on one woman, the stories of many other inspirational African women, while alluded to, may be seen to remain on the sidelines. Clearly, those stories must also be researched further, including in ways that value the oral histories that ground them. Secondly, I chose very distinct materials. An analysis of more recent materials by fellow Africans, including in digital formats, may inspire the work of younger storytellers. Thirdly, tourism and educational tourism involving Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s legacy remain to be explored in greater detail.

Future researchers can build upon the work of this thesis, by looking at other African heroines, beyond Ghana, and analyzing what has happened to their stories too. There are also bigger stories to engage in future research, in order to grow a collection of unbroken stories that continue to unseat the broken ones masquerading as tales of power, when they are simply tales of petty brutalities. I dream of an anthology of African women unseating broken imperialist stories, with AWWA types of storytelling that highlight the roles of matrilineal cultures and women’s contributions to challenging tyrannies, past, present, and future, as we have always done. A future direction for this research could involve a focus group or groups of women who belong to women’s movements, both of African and non-African descent, Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour (BIWOC), sharing not only an analysis of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s strategic leadership, in terms of her relentless commitment to her decolonizing mission, but stories from their own histories as well.

It must be said that in the year 2022, it has been 101 years since Nana Yaa Asantewaa died in exile for having challenged the British colonizers who wanted to steal the Golden Stool and keep The Gold Coast (Ghana) to themselves. Therefore, in any discussion of the struggles of African women, may Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s unbroken story be remembered, and the broken versions fall away, in celebration of how she embodied her decolonizing mission as a primary matriarchal principal. Ghanaian and African women have always had, and will always have, agency.
Finally, I end in a poem inspired by this research:

*Aseda ne Ahɔdɛn (Gratitude and Strength)*
To the heroic ancestors of courage, fire, virtue, who continue to save our futures
   Thank you for the arch and ark that is matriarchy,
   Thank you for queen mothers and for having our feet on the homeland
   We salute you with drumming, beats upon our hearts, and jumps to the skies.

To the unborn Nana Yaa Asantewaas, waiting to stand firm against oppressors
   May you fire up the ground and shake the meeting room tables
   To disrupt and unseat any and all broken stories about
   The African continent, when the tellers start with struggles and not strengths,
   When they include the tragedies but not the triumphs.

Shake them up with the truth and remind them that the African continent has overcome
   And is filled and fueled by roaring, relentless, resistant spirits.

Tell them we are following Chinua Achebe’s words.
   Tell them the lions and lionesses are telling the stories now.
   In human form, we are articulating our stories,
   Uninterrupted by noise
   Unmoved by masks
   Uninhibited by media.

   We are standing by bold, black stars
   In the journeys and stories that led to here.

To the siblings, relations, friends, and family members,
   By blood, sand, song, or water,
   May you always tell the true, complete, hopeful, and meaningful stories
   Of Mama the Motherland,
   Daily, till the end of time.
References


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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtcDrJHmQyc


Laing, G. F. (2006). Ghana: Yaa Asantewaa festival in August; From 1-6 August, the people of Asante in Ghana will be joined by the rest of the world at a festival in Kumasi to commemorate the heroic deeds of Yaa Asantewaa, the warrior queen who, in 1900, took on the might of the British Empire and nearly defeated it. George Ferguson Laing reports. (Arts & Culture). New African, (452), 52.


https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/


## Appendix

List of items selected for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Title and Year of Publication</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Racial Identity &amp; Gender of Author</th>
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<td>Asante at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (2000)</td>
<td>Emmanuel Akyeampong</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Asante Queen Mothers in Government and Politics in the Nineteenth Century (1977)</td>
<td>Agnes Akosua Aidoo</td>
<td>Black, Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>The role of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in the 1900 Asante War of Resistance (2000)</td>
<td>Arhin Brempong</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Yaa Asantewaa - warrior queen (2001)</td>
<td>Cameron Duodu</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>We were feminists in Africa first (1990)</td>
<td>Ama Ata Aidoo</td>
<td>Black Female</td>
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<td>Speech in an article</td>
<td>British rulers begin ‘golden stool’ war with Ashanti tribe on this day in 1900 (2014)</td>
<td>D.L. Chandler</td>
<td>Black, Male</td>
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<td>Black, Female</td>
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<td>Video</td>
<td>The Legendary Nana Yaa &amp; The War of the Golden Stool (2016)</td>
<td>Vanessa Ewuradwoa Kyeiwa Danso</td>
<td>Black, Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video</td>
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<td>Manuella Bonomi and Kat Hawkins</td>
<td>Black Female and White Female</td>
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