CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 General Introduction

> Nkanchina, Kpandai District, 4th October 2016. On this warm evening at sunset, most people in this small town have returned from their daily activities. At the entrance of the town stands a mango tree, according to community members, has been standing for years. Under the tree are 3 wooden benches arranged in a semi-circle. The benches have been arranged under the same mango tree where many years ago, girls from relatively smaller settlements gathered for the initiation rites of Female Genital Cutting (FGC). A middle-aged woman seated on one bench with a bowl of maize on her lap told me the day was the monthly meeting of women in the community and an NGO working on women's rights. A clan head, Hajia Kande, will chair today's meeting. For years, Hajia had gathered girls in the area and prepared them for FGC. The girls will stay with her for a couple of days until a circumciser arrived. Mrs Kande told me she inherited this role as head of her clan until a decade ago when the NGO visited the community and educated her on FGC. She remarked, "They made me aware that even though FGC is part of our culture, it violates women's rights and affects their reproductive health."[1] Hajia Kande now speaks against FGC and has encouraged fellow women who were in her position to stop. The meeting today will focus on the progress made in preventing FGC in the community.

This case from my field notes provides a quick glimpse into the main thesis of this research; women leaders and human security in Kpandai District. It follows my field observation in the area during data collection in 2016. Hajia Kande, as the leader of her clan, remains active in Nkanchina by engaging with the NGO in the fight against cultural practices like FGC that may infringe on basic rights. By doing so, she remains active in Nkanchina and provides services to her community that improve wellbeing. Her role as the leader is not only crucial in denouncing such harmful practices but also in improving her status in the community. For an adherent supporter turn advocate, the case mirrors the dynamism that characterises the activities of women leaders that will be central to the discussions throughout this dissertation.

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[1] Interview with Hajia Ramatu Kande on 4th October 2016 in Nkanchina near Kpandai.

In the conduct of this research, I realised the complexities in defining the institution of chieftaincy in Africa and the various terminologies that have been used in place of kin, clan and ethnic leaderships. For example, Arhin (1985) used the term 'traditional' in his book *Traditional Rule in Ghana; Past and Present* to mean the existence of the chieftaincy institution as a practice that has been long established. Kwarkye (2021: 101) further notes that scholars like Chinsinga (2006), Hahn (2012) and Parke (2003) have used different terminologies, including customary structures, local structures and inherited structures to refer to similar institutions. It is, therefore, important that I operationalise the term right at the beginning of this work. The chieftaincy institution in this research refers to a person or group of persons from a particular lineage, clan, ethnic or kin group who have been installed as a chief, queen mother, family head or priest/priestess based on customs, usages traditions and precedents (Arhin, 2006). Thus, when I use women leaders in this research, I am referring to the feminist aspect of chieftaincy to include women, who hail from the appropriate kin group(s) and have been duly installed as queen mothers, clan heads and priestesses based on customs, usages, traditions and precedents. It is important to note that in recent decades that the institution in Ghana has been characterised by a mixture of innovation (readjusting societies to the requirements of our time) and tradition (based on precedents passed on from generation to generation).

Chieftaincy makes up an enduring institution that exists in many parts of the country and embodies the way of life of many inhabitants (Odotei and Awedoba, 2006). The cultural attributes of the communities they represent partly shaped the ability of these leaders to perform their roles effectively. Among the Akan groups that live in southern Ghana, for instance, the existence of a matrilineal system means that enough emphasis is placed on the roles women play in the social and political structure (Odotei, 2006: 85). The hierarchical nature of women leaders in Akan polity, as argued by Stoeltje (2003: 4) distinguishes their social and political strata from other political organisations in the country by ensuring the direct linkage between members of the communities and the heads of these organisations. Today, many towns and villages possess parallel chieftaincy institutions, including chiefs and queen mothers holding traditional, customary and local government powers (see more discussions in Chapter 4).

Chieftaincy among females has been expanded even further to include traders in bigger and smaller markets in Ghana, known as market queens (*edwamuhemaa* or *magajias)* (see Clark, 1994; Schmitz, 2018). These market queens, as Clark (1994) posited, are significant actors in the day-to-day survival of their respective market trades. This research will, therefore, explore and contextualise the feminist aspect of chieftaincy in a relatively small district in the Northern region of Ghana known as Kpandai District (see Section 1.3.1 on the location of Kpandai District).

1.1.1 My Story

Among the many methods (see Section 1.3 on methodological reflections) I used for data collection in this research is autoethnography. To gain further understanding of the debates on women leaders in Ghana, and as a Ghanaian who grew up in a small town in central Ghana, I employed this technique to tell my experience of chieftaincy among women. In the section that follows, I use self-reflection to explore my personal experience and thoughts that connect to the wider meaning of this revered institution, its structures and interactions in Ghana. As argued by Adam et al. (2015: 22–23), autoethnography is "… a method of exploring, understanding, and writing from, through and with personal experience in relation to and in the context of the experiences of others." Agreeing with this definition, I have provided an insider's perspective on understanding cultural meanings, interpretations and experiences that undertone women leaders as I observed growing up in rural Ghana.

Autoethnography not only provides an approach to storytelling through my personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, identities, and self-reflection, but also describes cultural norms, values, and customs as they occur (Méndez, 2013). Thus, while reflecting on my interactions with my paternal grandmother, I have engaged in questions that have shaped women leaders through self-reflection and experience as a child and how these experiences first shaped my motivation for taking this research topic and second, on the current debates on the roles of chieftaincy in Ghana. I will do a further discussion on the merits and demerits of this method in Section 1.3.

My name is Thompson Gyedu Kwarkye, born in November 1990. In many Akan communities in Ghana, most children gain their first

given name from the day they are born. For instance, a male child (like myself) born on Sunday will automatically be called *Kwasi/Kwesi/ Akwasi* and a female child born on the same day will be called *Akosua/ Esi* (see Agyekum, 2006: 214). Most of my family members, therefore, know me as Akwasi (Gyedu). I grew up in a community approximately 50km north of Ghana's second city, Kumasi, called Wiamoase. The community is the largest in the Sekyere South District of Ghana, with a population of approximately 31,000 inhabitants (GSS, 2013). A considerable number of the inhabitants (mainly the youth) in recent years have migrated to urban areas for educational or employment purposes. My mother is from Adanwomase approximately 30km south of Wiamoase. However, because she married my father, she moved to Wiamoase and started a family. The socio-political organisation of the Akan is based on a matrilineal system. By matrilineal, Boaten (1992) explains it as a system based on kinship through the mother or female line. In this respect, and per Akan customs and traditions, Adanwomasi is my original hometown. However, I was born, bred and had my basic and junior high school education in Wiamoase. I have had much of my exposure to Akan culture, norms, values, and traditions while growing up in Wiamoase, only visiting Adanwomasi a few times. I, therefore, see myself as belonging to Wiamoase more than Adanwomase and thus, based this section on my experience growing up in Wiamoase.

Many households in Wiamoase and to an extension many Akan communities belong to one of the eight Akan clans known as *Abusua*[2] (*Ɛkoɔna, Bretuo, Asona, Oyokoɔ, Aduana, Agona, Asenie* and *Asakyire*) (see Owiredu, 1959: 161). It is common in Akan socio-political structure for members of one *abusua* to extend beyond a single household to two or more households or even communities. All social, cultural and political practices are connected to the notion of *Abusua* (Stoeltje, 1997: 53). Of much significance to the identity of every individual in Wiamoase and other Akan communities is the matrilineal system (Akyeampong and Obeng, 1995: 488; Stoeltje, 2003: 4). My father, for instance, belongs to the *Ɛkoɔna abusua* and until 1995, we lived in one of the *Ɛkoɔna* family

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[2]   *Abusua* is the Twi word for the extended family of Akan people that shares the same blood ancestry, usually from the mother's line. The genealogy of the *abusua* could be traced over several years of the different Akan Subgroups (Stoeltje, 1997). There are eight *abusua* and members may not marry from the same *abusua* (Owiredu, 1959).

houses next to the Wiamoase market. Mbiti (1970) rightly recognised that the family, clan and kin structures in Africa include a much wider circle of members as compared to those in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Indeed, membership to the *Ɛkoɔna abusua* extended beyond the nuclear family to include uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, children, parents, nephews, and nieces living in the same or sometimes several households.

The household(s) that makes up the *abusua* is headed by a male elder (*Abusuapanin/Abusuapanyin*) and a female elder (*Ɔbaapanin/Ɔbaapanyin*) (Akyeampong and Obeng, 1995: 488). As noted by Stoeltje, the *Abusuapanin* settles major disputes and represents the interest of the *abusua* (2003: 5). He performs religious and symbolic functions by pouring libations to the gods and ancestors, praying for good harvest, prosperity, unity in the *abusua,* and protection for all members (ibid). The male head and his council sit in state to receive mourners and visitors during funerals, weddings, naming ceremonies and other social engagements that relate to members of the *Abusua*. He also serves as the link between his *abusua*, other *abusua* and the chief of his community. Thus, the *Abusuapanin* usually acts as the representative of the family to the chief's council (ibid). This form of representation of the male family head is hierarchical that expands from the bottom of the hierarchy with the extended family head, village and town heads, divisional and paramount chiefs at the top of the hierarchy (see more in Stoeltje, 1997: 42).

At each level of the hierarchy are also women heads parallel to men. As mentioned earlier, the term *Ɔbaapanin* mainly refers to the woman leader of the *abusua* that corresponds to the *Abusuapanin* (Nukunya, 2003). The *Ɔbaapanin* is usually the mother (sometimes the sister) of the *Abusuapanin* (Sackey, 1989; Stoeltje, 1997: 43). Her responsibilities reflect her relationship with both her *abusua* and the *Abusuapanin*. She is viewed as a repository of wisdom and knowledge and provides counselling on complicated issues to the *Abusuapanin* (Boaten, 1992; Stoeltje, 2003: 4). Gibson (2010) referred to the *Ɔbaapanin* as the mother of the household where the wellbeing of women, children, and men in the *abusua* becomes her responsibility. Steegstra (2009) agreed by noting that the *Ɔbaapanin* is positioned as the caretaker of the entire family. She has a small court that settles minor civil cases and all cases on women, girls and the family lineage.

1.1.1.1 Awo

The *Ɔbaapanin* of the *Ɛkoɔna abusua* of my father to which I was exposed and who is also my paternal grandmother, is *Nana Adwoa Frema*. Members of the family, however, affectionately called her *Awo.* There were at least seven households that make up the *Ɛkoɔna abusua.* Awo alone had 17 children among who are a set of twins and of which my father is the seventh born. Awo was not only responsible for her children but also the children of her late younger sisters and children from all the other households. With a wider membership from several households, Awo's responsibility as *Ɔbaapanin* was enormous. Since her brother (and later her son) was the male head, Awo became their principal advisor on matters of grave family interest. Awo was knowledgeable about family virtues, values, justice, and temperance. In his role in settling disputes as the *Abusuapanin,* most of his decisions ended up with *'yɛnkɔ bisa abrewa'* literally translates 'let's ask the old lady', with Awo being the old lady in this case. Awo provided counsel in many family disputes in ways that amicably settled them. Aggrieved members of the family always came to terms with Awo's suggestions and her ability to resolve disputes between both family members and sometimes non-family members were extolled. On a small corridor, in front of her room, was a tiny open space she used as a court. People came to Awo with many disputes. The most common among them I could recall relates to witchcraft, marital problems, theft, and false accusations.

Awo was directly responsible for all matters relating to women and girls in the extended family. She had to oversee the activities of her daughters, daughters-in-law, nieces and nephews, in the upbringing of all her grandchildren, numbering over 40. She presided over an extended family, to the best of my knowledge, that was filled with children and babies. Daily domestic chores such as cooking, the upkeep of the family and the home were under her supervision. Our upbringing was crucial to her role as the head of the family. She instilled in us Akan values, including respect, discipline, and mannerism. I recall the time she rebuked me for greeting with the left hand.[3] She also taught many

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[3] In Ghana, the left hand is considered a 'dirty hand.' All social interactions are done with the right hand and the right hand only. If your right hand is occupied and you intend to use the left hand, you will have to apologise in advance for it. Children are raised not to use the left hand for anything. If they use the left hand, they are rebuked or severely punished (see more in Kita and Essegbey, 2001).

of these values through folklore and storytelling. On many evenings after the day's work, she will gather most of her grandchildren by a small open fireplace in the middle of the family house where she told stories about the devil, manners, animals, life, doing the right thing among others. I specifically remember the story of the dog and the sheep, which was told many times. The tale teaches one to be patient, perseverant and disciplined. Awo's storytelling was intriguing and, as a child, I always looked forward to listening to them. While the stories were told, we listened closely to Awo and engaged in asking questions such as: Why does cockerel crow very early in the mornings? Why does hair grow on our body even when we shave? Why do we have to clean our rooms every day? Where do rains come from? Where do dead people go? among several intriguing questions children my age will ask.

I must note that not all our evenings were filled with folktales about discipline and manners. Awo insisted many times that we were the future of Ghana and that we should embark on claiming for ourselves the identities that define us as Ghanaians. Even though Awo had no form of classroom education, she encouraged all her children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews to take that step. She understood education was the key to claiming the identities that defined us as Ghanaians. She never took it lightly if any of her grandchildren were recalcitrant or absented her or himself from school for a long time. On one warm Wednesday afternoon before going to the farm, Awo expressed rebuke and disapproval over Kwabena's (one of my many cousins) behaviour for absenting himself from school continuously for a couple of weeks. Her message, even though drastic, was simple: "if you don't go to school, you are not eating in this house." She supervised our early morning showers (including Kwabena), made sure we were prepared for school, sometimes discussed our day's work and the lessons we learned in school with her in the evenings. We usually had lunch after school and Awo made sure our meals were available as soon as we returned from school.

Awo is my first woman hero. She taught me most of the Akan values I know today. Her role as the female head of her extended family emphasised not only the contribution of women leaders in the upbringing of children but also as a pillar of support for everyone, either within or outside the family context. She understood children and their needs and worked accordingly. We were huge in numbers as a family, but she had time to make everyone feel at home. She gained the respect of

almost everyone in the family. At the entrance of what used to be a very popular hotel in Wiamoase owned by one of her sons was the portrait of Awo in her memory with the inscription *'Awo batan pa'* which translates, 'Awo the good mother.'

Figure 1.1: At the entrance of a once-popular hotel belonging to her son in Wiamoase was a portrait of Awo with the inscription that translates 'Awo the good mother.' Photographed by Kwame Tawiah Kwarkye in November 2018.

1.1.1.2 The Move to the Nuclear Family

On 23rd February 1995, exactly one year and a month after the birth of one of my younger brothers, we moved out of the family house to a three-room house built by my father. Our family was more nuclear, comprising both parents and three children. Even though we moved out of the family house, we were not exclusive with the extended family. Almost every weekend, we gathered at the family house to discuss family matters, listen to stories from Awo, help the household with chores or celebrate the birth of a newborn in the family. About a year after our move, we heard a knock on our door. It was a messenger sent by the *Abusuapanin*. Awo had been sick for a while and the messenger was there to inform us of her passing. It was a very sad day for everyone in the family. By 1996, I only had two brothers, so in our nuclear family, I shared my room with my senior brother (Kwadwo-born on Monday) and a little brother (who, also, was born on Sunday and is called Akwasi). Awo's death was very devastating to us, but as my father explained, she (Awo) had travelled to a faraway land where she was going to prepare a place for us. After her funeral a few months later, the role of *Ɔbaapanin* was taken over by her eldest daughter, who was my aunt. Since we had already moved out of the family house, and only visited occasionally, I experienced nothing out of the usual role my aunt played as the female family head.

The only female I knew when we moved out of our extended family house to our small nuclear family was my mother. Bringing up three boys (later five) was an enormous task. My mother never had a formal job and many people in my hometown have had the opinion that my mother never working perhaps had a significant role to play in how we turned out. Our upbringing was the sole responsibility of my mother. Household activities (cooking, washing, cleaning, feeding the chickens, fetching firewood and water) were divided by her between us.

Occasionally, we had one extended family member, or the other come to help with these chores. Awo was religious, but she never went to church regularly. However, I learned a lot of spiritual virtues from her. Church-going became apparent when we moved to the nuclear family. At least mother made sure of that. Every Sunday, we joined mother and walked nearly 3km to a small (at that time) Presbyterian Church at the main entrance of Wiamoase. My mother also made sure we played active roles in church activities, including Bible readings,

taking part in church quizzes and leading praises and worship. Staying with my mother made us learn moral values, which were an extra dimension to me.

My interest in the political, social, and cultural aspects of the inherited system grew exponentially when we attended funerals, weddings, naming ceremonies and other social engagements in the family house. My socialisation with the church and school under the supervision of my mother further enhanced my understanding of the Akan polity. As pointed out by Boaten (1992), the Akan political system, even though emphasises women, still subjects them only to nurturing and family roles. The subordination of women to nurturing, family and household roles could be explained as follows; the most significant distinction of the political structure of the Akan in the 1800s was the waging of war (Akyeampong and Obeng, 1995: 492). The activities of war that encompassed the Akan political structure were typically manly occupations (ibid). Women as providers of life through childbirth could not go to war but were asked to 'stay home and take care of the babies' as the men fought these wars.

Women staying at home were visible growing up in my hometown and this could also be exemplified in my self-reflection of both my extended and nuclear family. The analogy of the subordination of women to the home as caretakers could be much exemplified in my experience with Awo. In many instances, even though Awo was a treasury of knowledge and wisdom to her male counterpart, her advice to the *Abusuapanin* was not binding. Which meant the *Abusuapanin* could opt to take her advice or otherwise. Another example is that when we moved to the nuclear family, I experienced no severe form of punishment or negative reinforcement from my mother. All my destructive behaviours and truancies either at home, school or church were met with *'mɛka akyerɛ wo papa'* which translates to 'I will tell your father.' The analogy is that only fathers had the responsibility to punish children for their wrongdoings. Mothers were seen as warm and loving, while children usually develop a fear of fathers. The scenario emphasises the dominant roles of males as the sole punishers of children in the family in some parts of the country.

However, and as could be inferred from Hajia Kande's case at the beginning of the chapter, there has been a drastic change in the roles of women leaders and women in general in Ghana in recent decades. While women family heads, queen mothers, priestesses, and market

queens are still playing the nurturing, family and household roles, they have also become a strong pivot as cultural embodiments, social workers and advocates in the communities (Steegstra, 2009). Their daily activities are reflected in the improvement of gender equality, empowerment and human security. I will argue throughout this research that there is a fresh wind of change that has taken control over the significance and roles these women leaders play, primarily because of new trends of democratisation, globalisation and advancement in technology. This fresh wind supports women in the global context. I will, therefore, begin the next section of this chapter by positing that international norms and values have provided the avenue that favours family heads, queen mothers, etc. while furnishing them with the yardstick to become active agents representing their respective communities.

1.2 Locating the Study

Since the end of the Cold War, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has annually published a report aimed at advancing the wellbeing of humans. Rather than assuming economic growth as a major indicator of development, many of these reports have taken a wider human-centred approach to development. By focusing on the wellbeing of individuals, the UNDP aims at improving the standard of living by providing humans with more choices and opportunities. In 1994, for instance, the UNDP report showed that the concept of security has been narrowly defined to mean states protecting themselves from external aggression (UNDP, 1994: 22). The report introduced an alternative approach to security dubbed 'human security.' They defined human security as all those disruptions in the pattern of an individual's daily life including chronic threats such as hunger, diseases, repression, violent conflicts, drug trafficking, climate change, human rights abuse, unemployment among others (ibid: 22–24).

This new human-centred approach provides a holistic framework that recognises and understands cross-cutting threats on an array of scales that affect people in the global environment (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, 2007). Human Security focuses on individuals as against the state as the principal subject of reference, making its discourses anthropological. Thus, the dignity, security, and wellbeing of individuals are the goals of this new extended security approach (ibid). In agreeing with extending this human-centred approach, the Commission on

Human Security established by the United Nations in 2003 postulated in the first chapter of their report that Humans Security was

> "to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment ... protecting fundamental freedoms ... protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations" (Commission on Human Security, 2003: 4).

The central point of human security, explored in Chapters 2 and 4 of this research, highlights three broad components: freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from indigeneity (UNDP, 1994: 24). After the Cold War, new security questions arose and confronted both the state and individuals, which broadened and shaped the understanding of security. This post-Cold War security definition, as Rothschild (1995) termed it 'extended security,' was shaped by new threats that emerged during the war. Kaldor (2012) further postulates that globalisation, democratisation and improved technological innovations had increased wealth and introduced novel forms of insecurities. The UNDP report highlights that human interactions with the ecosystems were causing serious destructions, producing drought, flooding, devastating food shortages, poverty and hunger (1994: 24). Many countries in the developing world, especially in Sub Sahara Africa, are vulnerable and are bracing to the detrimental effects of these destructions (ibid).

The lives of women are especially bound to these vulnerabilities (Boserup et al., 2007; Chenoy, 2009a). Adepoju and Oppong (1994) contend that their responsibilities as caretakers of the home, food producers, food processors, and food distributors are deeply shaped by these threats to human security. The long-term negative impacts on human insecurity, as argued by Neumayer and Plümper (2007), usually intensify gender inequality, discrimination and gender imbalances, especially in the developing world. Any approach aimed at ensuring human security should, therefore, be geared towards full realisation and transition of first, the most vulnerable countries (developing countries) and second, the most vulnerable groups (women, girls, ethnic and religious minorities) in those countries (Chenoy, 2009a).

The effects of human security on gender are further highlighted by growing international debates and discourses. For example, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was perhaps the cornerstone of women's

rights and empowerment that placed women at the centre stage of the human security debate (Cook, 1994). In 1992, the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil further provided an opportunity for gender equality and women empowerment through community-based approaches to agriculture, land distribution, water resource, forest fire and land management (UN Women, 2014). Three years later, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasised the need for women's equality, women empowerment, respect for women's rights, women in power and the institutional advancement of women emphasising the gender and human security discourses (Bunch and Fried, 1996; Reichert, 1998).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the international community has not overlooked women's role in human security, empowerment, and equality. As noted by Chenoy (2009a), recent debates and resolutions in the UN, coupled with international norms and agreements, have reaffirmed the need to involve and empower women in the human security agenda. The UN Millennium Declaration in 2000, among others, resolved to promote gender equality and women's empowerment as an effective way to combat hunger, diseases, and poverty (see Assembly, 2000). Women's representation in law-making, for instance, was a key indicator of improved gender equality, as emphasised by the declaration (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme, 2011; Heyzer, 2005). The United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 68/139 and 68/227 on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas further embodied countries to mainstream and leverage gender considerations in the governance of natural resources management, provide support for women in smallholder farming and access to equal productive employment opportunities for all gender (UN Women, 2014).

The current pattern of sustainability is not in line with human security and gender equality, even with the global debates and discourses (ibid). Julia and White (2012) while agreeing with this assertion, note that there is a growing disparity in income while gender inequality, poverty, hunger diseases, drug trafficking and destruction of ecosystem services still prevail and are increasing in a high proportion. Even though there has been a significant improvement in the last decade, most developing countries are still lagging. The results are excessive migration, untimely deaths, unfavourable climatic conditions and health challenges that may spin out of control if unchecked (UNDP, 1994: 24). These risks affect all stakeholders and require a bottom-up

approach that involves effective mobilisation of all genders and other stakeholders at the local levels. As noted earlier, women often bear a high proportion of the cost of human insecurity and other related shockers and stressors. Privatisation and land grabbing are making indigenous people, women, children and people in rural areas as vulnerable as ever before, as most of their livelihoods depend on these ecosystem services (see Julia and White, 2012; Levien, 2012).

1.2.1 Fitting Women Leaders into the Discourse

Women in developing countries and women in leadership roles are key contributors to human security (see Charlton, 1984; Chenoy, 2009a). Indeed, when the UNDP postulated for a more human-centred approach to security, they admonished scholars, researchers and policy analysts to understand in part how indigenous institutions help solve human problems. The benefits of women's empowerment in many developing countries are clear. Traditionally, as pointed out by Hassan and Silong (2008), community and local affairs are dominated by men because of gender inequality and patriarchy across various communities and local councils. However, Skaine (2008) notes that times are changing. All around the Sub-Saharan region, there has been an increased mobilisation of women in leadership positions, which is yielding positive results (ibid). Africa has had a high proportion of women in leadership roles than ever before and this has become very intriguing for researchers and scholars alike.

In Ghana, for instance, the works of Gibson (2010), Mensah et al. (2014), Odotei (2006) and Owusu Mensah (2015) identified family heads, queen mothers and market queens as active agents in human security and improved service delivery. The relevance of women's leadership could further be explained through the understanding of historical perspectives. For instance, Arhin (1985: 2) and Odotei (2006) note that before the inception of colonial rule at the beginning of the 20th century, power was concentrated among single individuals or groups of individuals (usually males) in a highly centralised system of political organisation among the Akan in the South, The Gonja and the Mole-Dagbani groups in the North. These individual(s) oversaw all activities in their respective areas of jurisdiction by performing spiritual, diplomatic, executive, legislative, military and judicial functions (see Arhin, 1985; Busia, 1951; Odotei and Awedoba, 2006).

In the Akan political system dominated in the south of Ghana, American Anthropologist Beverly Stoeltje's work, *Asante queen mother: A study of Female Authority* revealed that queen mothers play complementary roles with their male counterparts. She further notes that parallel roles among a chief and a queen mother in Akan may not reflect equality or sameness (Stoeltje, 1997). Women leaders known as the *ɔhemaa* or *ɔbaapanin* (for lower-ranking officials) were usually the mother (sometimes the sister, aunt or cousin) of the male leader (*ɔhene* or *abusuapanin*). Her key responsibilities as discussed in my reflection growing up in rural Ghana included all domestic issues and issues relating to women and children while advising the male leader on all matters of grave significance to the respective community they represent. In several Akan communities, she also nominates a candidate to fill the position of a male leader (ibid: 54).

Their knowledge of social and political issues shaped the advisory role of these women leaders in the social, political and cultural system. Gyekye (1996: 119) exemplifies the role of Akan queen mothers in advising their male counterparts by using the Akan proverb *'It is when the chief has good councillors that his reign becomes peaceful.'* That is, the success of the reign of the male leader depends on the complementary role of her female counterpart in providing counsel. British Anthropologist R S Rattray's work titled *Ashanti Law and Constitution* agreed with this notion by identifying women leaders as what he referred to as "the whisper behind the stool" (1969: 88). It is also important to emphasise that among the Akan, the absence of the male leader requires the female leader to assume the position of the central authority to rule her people until a new leader is selected (Odotei, 2006). The definition of power and authority of queen mothers in Akan political structures is vested in stools (Stoeltje, 1997: 4, 2003: 51). Stools legitimise their powers just as thrones do for European monarchs (ibid). Historically, Ashanti queen mothers such as Akyaawa Yikwan and Yaa Asantewaa have exercised enormous powers and authority that placed them on the same pedestal as their male counterparts. For instance, Brydon (1996), observed that Akyaawa Yikwan was a major negotiator and arbitrator before the Ashanti war with the British in the 1820s. At the beginning of the 20th century, he further highlights that Yaa Asantewaa led the 'Yaa Asantewaa War' against the expansion of British rule (ibid). Even though she lost, she exemplifies how powerful queen mothers were before the onset of colonial rule.

In Northern Ghana, where greater social and political significance is attached to males because of the patrilinear[4] nature of family relations and inheritance, Odotei (2006: 83–89) postulates that women leaders remained active in the socio-political structure and organisation. She points out that the female heads of various lineages of the segmented Tallensi people, for instance, played roles that complemented the male family heads. The family is very important to the Tallensi and all social organisations are formed around it (see Gabrilopoulos et al., 2002). Women family heads, according to Odotei (2006), bore sole responsibility for maintaining and building the lineage. Other leaders, such as female priestesses among the Tallensi, performed magical powers that ensured abundant rains, good harvest and before every hunting season for good luck and better catch (Arhin, 1985: 11).

Among the Dagbon people, also in the north, Arhin (1985: 47) and Odotei (2006: 84) affirmed that there are categories of skins[5] that were occupied by the princesses of the *Na*[6]. The *Gundogu, Kpatuya,* and *Kugulogu* skins, for example, are all held by daughters of *Na* while the mother of the *Na* occupies the *Saselege* skin to wield remarkable authority in the Dagbon Kingdom (ibid). Odotei (2006: 84) further holds that among the Nanumba, performing religious and social functions are reserved for the *Kpandiglipona*. She further argues that there is an acute sense of social and spiritual responsibilities that are attached to the role of the *Kpandiglipona.* She adjudicates cases at her civil court, prepares food during festive celebrations and handles the last spiritual bath at the death of the overlord of Bimbilla (Odotei, 2006). It must be pointed out that the dynamics of women leaders may not be fully recognised, especially in northern Ghana. The patrilinear system means women's rights might be held by their husbands and by extension all males in

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[4] Patrilineal system is the inheritance or determining descent through the male line, usually through the father of a particular family. (See more in Goody and Goody, 1966).

[5] Whereas among the Akans stools provide the source of power and authority, in northern Ghana, this source of authority was derived from animal skins, usually cows. The skin legitimises the power and authority of the chiefs in the north (Arhin, 1985: 43).

[6] Dagbon is made up of three territorial divisions of Yendi, Toma, and Karaga, each of which has its chieftaincy, comprising male leaders called *Na* and a host of sub and divisional chiefs. The *Na* of Yendi, however, is the head of all the three *Na.* (For more information, see Arhin, 1985: 43).

the community (Arhin, 1985: 9). This, however, does not diminish their significant status in northern Ghana before colonial rule.

After 1900, the British colonial administration assumed the authority to oversee the activities of chiefs and queen mothers (Arhin, 1985: 89; Mamdani, 1996a) in the Gold Coast.[7] The assumption of powers by the British did not mean an end to 'traditional rule'. With the introduction of indirect rule,[8] they made provisions for the existing chiefs to exercise power over certain decisions (Arhin, 1985: 90) which led to the absorption of customary laws into the unified British common law system (Buur and Kyed, 2007; Crook, 2005; Lund, 2008). In the early 1900s, native authorities (that was how the chieftaincy institution was known at that time) had been established by the colonial government in the Crown Colony, Ashanti and Northern territories of Gold Coast and their powers to act were mainly derived from the colonial government (ibid: 92). At the various communities, these men and women heads continued to maintain their status as the primary agents of their respective communities, albeit being subjected to supervision by the British colonial administration (Arhin, 1985: 91; Asamoah, 2012). Indirect rule, therefore, became one of the earliest forms of local governance in the then Gold Coast, with chiefs and queen mothers as the key actors (Mamdani, 1996a).

Okupa (1999) and Stoeltje (2003: 1), however, assert that the role of the women leaders in the colonial era fell into disrepute and was given little attention by the colonial government. Introducing indirect rule did not cater to the roles of queen mothers, women family heads and priestesses. Manuh (1988), Odotei (2006) and Steegstra (2009), while in congruence with this assertion, further opined that colonial and missionary activities coupled with idealising women's responsibilities to domestic chores turn out to play a role in why they were ignored during the period in question. Women during this period were subjected to domestic chores, childbearing and household activities at home (see

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[7] Gold Coast was a British colony in West Africa made up of Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti and Northern protectorates, which gained independence in March 1957 and is now called Ghana.

[8] The system of colonial administration in which day-to-day government and administration of areas both small and large were left in the hands of 'traditional rulers', who gained prestige and the stability and protection afforded by the British government. (See more in Berry, 1992; Crook, 1986a; Mamdani, 1996a).

Steegstra, 2009) – an assertion I will later agree with while discussing the development of Nawuri women leaders in Chapter 3. Notwithstanding this, queen mothers, women family heads, priestesses and market queens maintained their significance by playing complementary roles to their male counterparts. They were, for instance, responsible for performing puberty, some marriage, and coronation rites while also serving as a link between the living and the dead (see Manuh, 1988; Odotei, 2006; Steegstra, 2009). They also presided over certain civil cases, represented the interest of all women in their respective communities and mobilised the people for communal labour (Okupa, 1999).

Post-colonial governments, according to Steegstra (2009), did little to support women leaders in the newly independent Ghana after March 1957. The formation of several associations by educated elites in the Gold Coast before independence rendered queen mothers, women family heads and priestesses as what Arhin (1985: 105) referred to as "considerably altered." Two ordinances in 1951 and 1954, for example, limited the powers base on chieftaincy in local governance and in 1958 chiefs and queen mothers lost their powers to establish their courts only settling disputes that relate to 'traditional rule' (ibid: 92). In the same year, however, The National and Regional Houses of Chiefs were established to oversee the activities of chieftaincy in the country (Odotei and Awedoba, 2006). Membership in these houses was male-dominated and lacked representation for women.

In the second, third and fourth Republics, government policies and programs have been geared toward organising the institution to suit Ghana's democratic dispensation and to fit the gender and human security debate (Ahwoi, 2000). Legal provisions and informal relationships have gradually streamlined the roles chieftaincy plays reflecting human security, equality, customs, traditions, and cultural practices (see Kwarkye, 2021). The current constitution of Ghana recognises chiefs, queen mothers, family heads, priests and priestesses, etc. and their roles in promoting human security at the local level (Thomi et al., 2000). Article 270 clause 1 of the 1992 Constitution states "The institution of chieftaincy, together with its traditional councils as established by customary laws and usage is hereby guaranteed" (Republic of Ghana, 1992: 150). At the local levels, and as shall be explored in the discussions in Chapters 4 and 5, chieftaincy continues to maintain its status as the main pivot to which local government is organised.

In the same constitution, Articles 240–255 establish local government institutions referred to as Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). The legal provisions task the MMDAs to provide basic services to improve the living conditions of the people at the local levels (Ahwoi, 2000). Ghana, therefore, provides a test example of a plural legal system where custom and tradition-based institutions exist side by side with state structures. The implication of this form of plural legal system is that the successes of community development, poverty reduction strategies, gender equality, and improved human security at the local levels, partly depends on the active involvement of both chieftaincy institution and state structures in mobilising the people, networks and hierarchies (Crook, 2005; Udensi et al., 2012).

As could be inferred from Hajia Kande's case at the beginning of the chapter, women leaders have made themselves visible and relevant in the day-to-day administration of their respective communities. The historical position of women leaders in Ghana, as argued by Mensah et al. (2014), makes them relevant agents in human security in their respective areas of jurisdiction. More so, the nurturing nature of women coupled with their unique leadership styles makes them key agents in HIV/AIDS eradication, the fight against poverty and hunger and the elimination of outmoded cultural practices (Maoz, 2009; Rey, 2015). Good leadership through women leaders (and their male counterparts, of course) are therefore relevant in providing successful developmental objectives, policy planning, effective policy implementation and coordination aimed at ensuring the human security of the people (Mensah et al., 2014).

1.2.2 Relevance of the Research

With the rise in recognition among international communities, researchers and policy analysts on women's political participation, it is only essential that new discourses in academia, research, and policy initiatives are geared toward looking at what women and women's leaders, in particular, bring on board the development agenda. The debate on women's empowerment and participation always hinges on intrinsic and instrumentalist (Bari, 2005). The former argues for equal participation of women as they make up half of the population of the world and for arguments of fairness, it is expedient that women are represented (ibid). Women are biologically, physically and socially dif-

ferent from men, according to the latter (ibid). Their unique leadership styles also mean they will bring new and special cares that focus on the political dynamics of human security, service delivery and welfare provisions.

Whether intrinsic or instrumentalist, it is vital to agree with the women in human security hypothesis, as discussed above, which holds that women leaders play vital roles in the development of many countries south of the Sahara. The case in Section 1, as noted earlier, represents the ever-changing roles of women's leaders because of elasticity, adaptability, and manoeuvrability taking place within the institution. There is, therefore, a likely positive outcome if they are integrated into local governance and development-oriented projects. Unfortunately, in many countries in Sub-Sahara Africa, historical analysis, research, policy and program initiatives on chieftaincy at the local levels are often criticised for their narrow concentration on males with little or no recognition of female leaders (CIKOD, 2014; Mensah et al., 2014; Owusu-Mensah, 2015; Tamale, 1997). For instance, in Ghana, as noted earlier, media reportage, scholarly articles and journals on chieftaincy reflect on the contributions of male leaders without the mention of the roles and contributions made by their respective female counterparts (see Mensah et al., 2014). Indeed, on the field, I observed many informants define chieftaincy as including only males. However, as we have discussed earlier, the institution encompasses what Knierzinger (2011a: 5) referred to as "neotraditional actors" including chiefs, queen mothers, family heads, stool fathers, priests and priestesses, landowners and in recent discourses heads of the various trading markets.

More specifically, researchers have given little attention to the historical role of the feminist aspect of chieftaincy in local governance (Stoeltje, 1997). Gyimah and Thompson (2008) agree with this assertion and further contend that more often research in most developing countries on the roles of these female leaders concentrates on issues such as sexuality and discrimination without mentioning the historical perspectives or their contributions to human security. British Anthropologist R S Rattray noted this limitation in his 1923 book *Ashanti*:

> "To-day, Queen Mothers are unrecognized by us [government and researchers] … In other words, the Ashanti have simply accepted the fact that our system seems to take no official cognizance as a power in the family in the state and therefore did not question our methods. Now I feel certain we have here a tremendous potential power for good in these old mothers of

Africa; … Surely if we that is the Government, do not in some small mea-
sure give the respect and honor that has always been the Queen Mothers'
right and the Queen Mother is to an Ashanti the personification of mother-
hood we cannot be surprised if her children follow our example." (Rattray,
1923: 84–85).

The nexus of Rattray's argument, as posited by Stoeltje (2003), is the
fact that researchers, governments and major stakeholders have for a
long time ignored queen mothers and other women leaders in their
works. The lack of interest among researchers accounts for the limited
literature in the field, as observed during my preliminary study on
the research topic. I, therefore, argue in this research that there is a
huge paucity of information that details and explores women leaders
in improving human security at the local levels, especially with his-
tory in the background. As the lack of engagement of women and more
specifically women leaders in community planning stifles the fight for
human security (see Bardhan and Klasen, 1999), it becomes vital to
explore how they could help in building effective programs and poli-
cies aimed at poverty reduction, improved service delivery and devel-
opment at large.

The lack of research that traces the historical perspective of queen
mothers, women family heads and priestesses before during and after
colonialism, many researchers have also argued, denies scholars a
holistic understanding and analysis of building a stronger and all-in-
clusive local government in plural legal systems (see, for example,
Mahama, 2009; Owusu-Mensah, 2015; Stoeltje, 1997). The chieftaincy
institution, as identified by Gomes (2006) is a major stakeholder in local
governance and development in many Anglo-Saxon countries. What
this means is that exploring and understanding women leader's roles
as smallholder farmers and household agents over a period could be
capitalised on by donor agencies, central and national governments,
civil society groups and NGOs in the fight for human security (Men-
sah et al., 2014; Owusu-Mensah, 2015). Furthermore, understanding
their community participation will help generate skills that are needed
to thrive economic growth, improve environmental conditions, food
security, access to income etc. Thus, any effort in achieving human
security in Ghana cannot ignore the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of
these women leaders.

More so, it is relevant to explore how queen mothers, women family
heads and priestesses have survived the tides of pre-colonial, colonial

and post-colonial governments (Mensah et al., 2014). This is necessary for understanding how the institution adapted and adjusted to change over time and how the survival mechanism(s) shapes their everyday decision-making.

1.2.3 Objectives of the Research

The world survey report on the role of women in development dubbed 'the Women UN' in 2014 argued that the moral and ethical implications for realising a secure world that is free from fear and wants are central to development (UN Women, 2014). Equality of all is what the world needs to fight the challenges that are brought by human insecurities. An 'all-hands-on-deck' approach is, therefore, a prerequisite if (we) want to achieve these freedoms. Involving all genders in the human security debate will lead to little shock and stressors for vulnerable groups in societies. The works of Bardhan and Klasen (1999), Charlton (1984), Nussbaum and Glover (1995) and Tinker and Bramsen (1976) among several feminist scholars, support the arguments in the report. They all agree that when women have greater voices and take part in public administration, public resources are more likely to be allocated positively towards investment in priorities that target human growth and development.

It is, therefore, of great significance that Anthropologists (like myself) and researchers alike focus on the gendered nature of human insecurity that creates and recreates the disparities in social and political settings. Gender and human security hypotheses assert that inequality in gender may have negative repercussions on economic growth and human development (see, for example, Agarwal, 2006; Buckingham-Hatfield, 2002; Dollar and Gatti, 1999; Johnsson-Latham, 2007). For instance, Dollar and Gatti (1999) concluded that societies that ignore half of their population (women) are likely to pay an enormous price for it in slowing economic growth and lower incomes. The Food and Agricultural Organisation in 2011 further pointed out that ensuring women's control over the asset in agriculture and farming is relevant to achieving food security. The FAO's argument is captured in the world survey report on the role of women in development, as follows:

> "Women's knowledge, agency, and collective action are central to finding, demonstrating and building more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable pathways to manage local landscapes; adapt to climate

change; produce and access food; and secure sustainable water, sanitation, and energy services. Increasing women's full participation is recognised as central to policymaking." (UN Women, 2014: 13).

Women leaders' role as smallholder farmers, custodians of culture, peacebuilders and active forces to be reckoned with in the household could be taken advantage of by several international, national and local actors in the fight for human security (UN Women, 2014). Their community participation will be helpful in generating skills that are needed to thrive on economic growth, improve environmental conditions, food security and reduce poverty. As noted earlier, any effort in achieving human security cannot ignore the contributions of these women leaders.

With the debates on women in human security hypothesis in the background, I set out the major thrust of this research to **explore and gain a detailed understanding of women leaders in human security in the Kpandai District in the north of Ghana.** In exploring this objective, my dissertation aims at filling the knowledge gap that exists in gender discourses, human security, historical studies and legal pluralism. The main framework for this research, thus, aims at understanding the dynamism that exists in the relationships between state structures and chieftaincy in the political arena of participation in a country that is considered a moderate democracy in Africa.[9]

In exploring this objective, I will be interested in looking at three broad questions grouped into primary and secondary objectives. Primary and secondary because I am with the conviction that the findings of the secondary objectives depend on the observations and findings of the primary objectives. Each of the three broad objectives includes several sub-questions that are treated in the respective chapters of the research.

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[9] Ghana has organised several competitive elections, with multi-party candidates contesting these elections. The country has undergone a peaceful transfer of power between the two main political parties and it is one of the stable democracies in a region characterised by electoral violence (see Boafo-Arthur, 2008). See https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/ for more information on Ghana's democracy performance in 2020. Accessed on 4th September 2021.

Regarding the primary objectives, this research seeks to answer two broader thematic research questions. Both primary objectives will be the focus of discussions in Chapters 3 and 4:

- **What historical perspective(s) undertones queen mothers, women family heads and priestesses among the Nawuri in Kpandai?** The aim is to access the historicity that exists among the Nawuri people of the Kpandai District (see Section 1.3 for details of the district). By accessing their origin and migration pattern, I will explore the creation of women leaders among the Nawuri and in answering questions such as what colonial and post-colonial policies favoured or disfavoured Nawuri queen mothers, women family heads and priestesses? and how are they adapting to the current trends in democracy?

- **What role(s) do these leaders play in human security at the local levels?** In answering the research question, I will give a profile of three Nawuri women leaders (two queen mothers and one head of the Okunle cult) at the local levels in Kpandai. I will also explore the core conceptual issues in women leaders and human security. The research questions of how significant are the roles of women leaders in human security and what challenges do women leaders face are discussed regarding the primary objectives of this research and will be vital in answering the major research question.

After exploring the primary objectives, the research will discuss in Chapter 5 the secondary objective. The main thrust of this objective depends on the findings and observations of the two primary objectives.

- **What interplay of collaborations, partnerships and networks of women leaders exists in the Kpandai District?** In this section, I will be interested in accessing the conceptual issues in chieftaincy's role in local governance in Ghana and the partnerships that are built. I will explore the legal framework existing at the national and sub-national levels in defining interactions, partnerships and relationships at the local levels while accessing networks among women leaders in their respective communities.

The objectives of the research are further illustrated in the diagram below:

Wider debates on gender and human security

Women leaders (queen mothers, family heads, priestesses)

HISTORY

1. Creation of women's leadership.
2. The cult made up of women.
3. Colonialism and customary women leadership.
4. Women leaders today.

ROLES

1. Profile of Nawuri women leaders.
2. Roles of Nawuri women leaders in human security.
3. Challenges and adaptation of women leaders to these roles.

NETWORKING

1. Power negotiations among stakeholders in rural Ghana.
2. Interactions, relationships and networking in Kpandai.
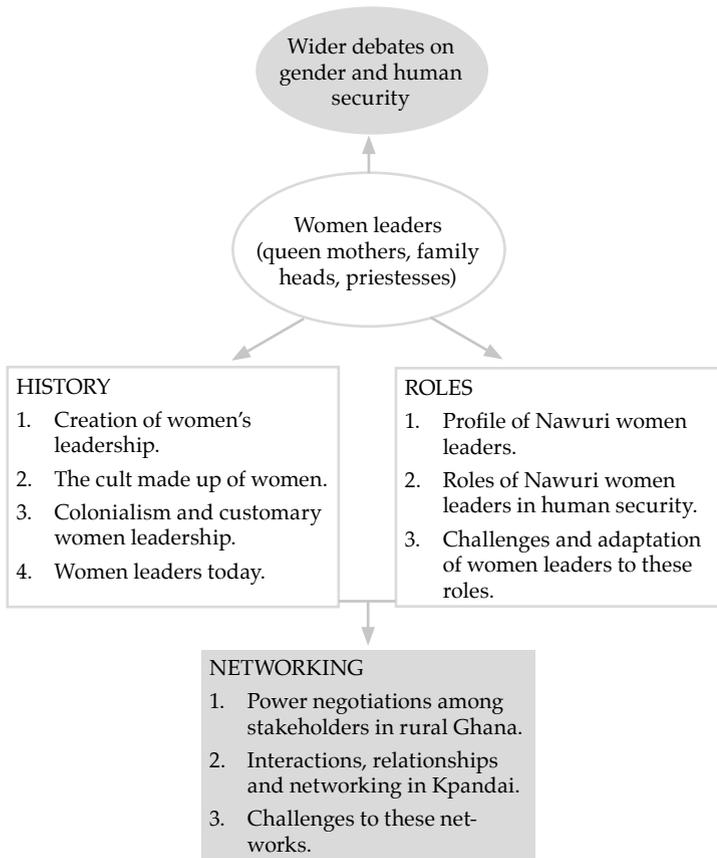3. Challenges to these networks.

Figure 1.2: A diagrammatic representation of the objectives of the research. The principal object of study is women leaders (queen mothers, family heads and priestesses). The white rectangles refer to the primary objective of the research. Understanding the primary objectives will lead to the secondary objective (black rectangle). The black circle on top refers to how the objectives of the research fit into the wider debate on gender and security discourses.