Contemporary Ghanaian Perceptions of *A Doll’s House*

Anku, Solace Sefakor

Thesis submitted to the Centre for Ibsen Studies, Faculty of Humanities

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

[June 2012]
© Anku Solace Sefakor
2012
Contemporary Ghanaian Perceptions of A Doll's House
http://www.duo.uio.no/
Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo
Contemporary Ghanaian Perceptions of *A Doll’s House*
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgement .......................................................................................................................... 5

Dedication ......................................................................................................................................... 7

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 9

**Chapter 1- Introduction** ......................................................................................................................... 11

1.1 Ghana and *A Doll’s House* ........................................................................................................... 12

1.2 Significance of Study ..................................................................................................................... 15

1.3 Theories and Concepts .................................................................................................................. 15

**Chapter 2 – Caught in the Gender Web** ......................................................................................... 19

2.1 Issues of Gender Equality ............................................................................................................. 23

2.2 Years After the Slammed Door ................................................................................................... 28

**Chapter 3 – Teaching and Performing Ibsen in Ghana** ..................................................................... 31

3.1 Ghana’s Literary and Theatre History ........................................................................................... 33

3.2 Teaching Ibsen in Two Major Universities ................................................................................. 36

3.3 Performing *A Doll’s House* ......................................................................................................... 37

3.4 Cultural Effects on Interpretation ............................................................................................... 44

**Chapter 4- The Women’s Issue in Ghana and Interpreting Ibsen’s Symbols** ............................ 53

4.1 Fear Woman and Live Long ......................................................................................................... 55

4.2 Politics and Symbolism ............................................................................................................... 65

4.3 Ibsen’s Symbolic Contestation of Motherhood ......................................................................... 72

**Chapter 5 – Summary and Conclusion** .......................................................................................... 81

Summary .............................................................................................................................................. 81

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 82

**Bibliography** ..................................................................................................................................... 87

**Appendix** ......................................................................................................................................... 93
Table
Table I .................................................................................................................................................. 16

Figures/diagrams
Figure/Diagram I ............................................................................................................................... 17
Figures/Diagram II ............................................................................................................................. 66
Acknowledgement

I would like to first of all thank Astrid Sæther who as a supervisor guided me through every step of this study and also became an inspiration. She understood my state of emotions when I lost my sister and urged me on to finish this thesis. Esi Sutherland-Addy as a mentor has been of great help to me.

Also, I extend my appreciation to Dr Awo Asiedu of the School of Performing Arts, Univ. of Ghana and students interviewed. The same goes to Atta Xornam, research assistants and students of the Theatre Arts Dept. University of Cape Coast. I convey my appreciation to Janet Owusu who is brave enough to stage *A Doll’s House* and also give me access to her documents. She made a whole chapter of the study feasible. I am indebted to Afrakoma Boakye – Ansah for her help in translations from Akan to English and also my idea of employing cloth names to interpret issues of gender inequality.

Finally I sincerely thank my mother Veronica Dzakpasu and my brother Kwesi Anku. We went through a lot of pain during my sister’s passing but we all came out strong. They helped me stay focused and encouraged me throughout my nights of writing. I also thank Harry Katamani for accommodating my frustrations and always understanding me.
To the memory of my sister

Anku, Bubune
Of all Ibsen’s plays A Doll’s House is the most read in Ghana but rarely performed. This study looks at the only performance of A Doll’s House in Ghana with analysis of the director’s interpretation. It also traces the teaching of the play in two main universities of the arts in Ghana and further gathers the perception of readers of the text. Issues of gender and culture make the core of my analysis and also those gathered on the field. Particular attention is paid to motifs and symbolic representations of ideas by the playwright and how they are translated and used in a different cultural setting. Further, Nora’s symbolic slamming of the door is examined.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Being the first major study of Ibsen reception in Ghana, this thesis looks at the reception of *A Doll’s House* (1879) in my home country. It relies on perceptions drawn from correspondents who were interviewed. Students and lecturers from the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast were interviewed; also the director and cast of the only performance of the play in Ghana in 2006 were interviewed. In all this interviews Nora’s dramatic exit was reviewed and analyzed.

Analysis of the performance is based on a recorded version made available to me by the director. Documents on the performance were sourced from the director’s archive and the School of Performing Arts library. Searches were also made in the Efua T Sutherland archives (which houses documents of the Ghana National Theatre Movement) to trace the possible performance of *A Doll’s House* prior to the 2006 performance by the School of Performing Arts.

Further in this chapter, I examine the significance of this study to Ibsen studies within relevant concepts. I also establish Ghana’s historical and current relationship with Norway. Chapter two situates the text in the politics of gender from the perspectives of various African researchers. This is to help analyze the text with respect to the culture in which it is being read and also give a discourse of issues of gender and being woman in Africa. Various authors’ thoughts are sampled on Nora’s ‘liberating’ exit and its contribution to gender equality and women’s rights.

Chapter three looks at teaching and performing Ibsen in Ghana. The 2006 debut *A Doll’s House* is critically analyzed. My analysis is based on information gathered from the director, the lead actress (who played the role of Nora), the audio-visual recording and my memory of the rehearsals I participated in as a student at the School of Performing Arts. The revised ending of the play’s famous ‘slamming of the door’ by this director is critically analyzed. In
the fourth chapter, my focus is on student readers of *A Doll’s House* and their perception of the themes of the play. The women’s issue is discussed extensively. Also the play is set in the milieu of post colonial analysis and the search for one’s self as exhibited by Nora viewed symbolically. Ibsen’s portrayal of motherhood is discussed and its symbolic representation deduced from the text and analyzed. The fifth chapter sums up my observations and thoughts on the contemporary perceptions and analysis of Ibsen and especially *A Doll’s House* in Ghana. It then relates it to the significance it holds in Ibsen research and studies.

1.1 Ghana and *A Doll’s House*

Early Norwegian influences on the continent were felt through Danish presence along the coast of Guinea (the gulf of Guinea present day West Africa) in 1650. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (2007)\(^1\) refers to the Danish influence as Dano-Norwegian occupation of the coast of Guinea due to a heavy presence of Norwegians alongside the Danes. At this time, Norway was under the king of Denmark and a colony; Ibsen had not been born.

In 1850 Denmark sold all her assets in the Gold Coast to the British. The Gold Coast is established as a British colony in 1874. What remains of the Danish-Norwegian settlers presence in Ghana today according to Winsnes (2007:14), are few ruins of plantation buildings and also tamarind trees planted in avenues; also are the forts and castles sold to the British. Most prominent of the remains is the Christiansborg castle; the seat of the Ghanaian government and power presently.

Norway broke away from Denmark in 1814 and gained its independence 1905. Centuries on, Danish influence in Ghana is strong in forms of aid and bilateral corporations. Norwegians relations seem unnoticeable as compared to western countries’ influences. While Norwegian influence seems unnoticeable, Ibsen’s literary works found readership and academic influence. Ibsen’s texts promote Norwegian influence through culture and ideology. Various

---

\(^1\) Selena Axelrod Winsnes compiles, translates and edits the letters of Paul Erdmann Isert’s journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia 1788 in her book *Letters on West Africa and the slave trade*. Paul Isert working as a colonial officer under the Danish King and territory in the Gold Coast also led the Dano-Norwegian settlements of farmers and businessmen.
references from the School of Performing Arts and the Efua Sutherland archives reveal a possible debut of his works in the late 1960s. The University of Ghana, School of Performing Arts in the mid 1980s introduced two major Ibsen texts – *A Doll’s House* and *An Enemy of the People* – in the school’s curriculum. Later these texts and others such as *Peer Gynt* (1867) made way into the departments of English literature and Philosophy. Presently, Ibsen’s texts are being taught and studied in the major Ghanaian universities of the humanities.

*A Doll’s House* has a symbolic action that resonates across most cultures. The plot and subject has significant meaning in various contexts. Thus has generated debates from diverse institutions and people; from theatre professional to politicians through to the feminists. For the feminist and the women liberation movement, it is a long fight’s win over patriarchy. From politics of gender to the power politics of governance, this play stands for freedom and self awakening. Can Nora’s slamming of the door be wholly interpreted as liberating in the realm of female contestation of patriarchy? Symbolically, Nora gains her freedom out of the confines of her doll’s house. This interpretation is valid to some extent, further interpretations into a wider context raises various questions of how sustainable that is. Can Nora survive the larger world governed by highly patriarchal institutions?

Major works analyzing Nora’s phenomenal slamming of the door interpret it as liberating, and a revolt against patriarchy. Other schools of thought obviously against the feminist analysis of Nora’s action simply interpret as action of an irrational woman. One of the most recent Erika Fiischer-Lichte edited publications on Ibsen studies titled *The Global Ibsen-Performing Multiple Modernities* (2011) devoted a whole chapter on Nora, seemingly based on fascinations with Nora’s slamming of the door. So far, analysis on Nora’s decision and action has not totally exhausted the diverse reasons for her decision and also her survival in the wider world. I do wonder if, Nora’s action can be seen wholly as contestation to male power, rule and the construction of culture and norms, especially with respect to women? Kate Millet’s theorization on feminism in literature titled *Sexual Politics* (2000) which refers to Nora’s revolt failed to question the possible outcome of her action. She writes:

> In Aeschylus’ dramatization of myth one is permitted to see patriarchy confront matriarchy, confound it through the knowledge of paternity, and come off
triumphant. Until Nora slammed the door announcing the sexual revolution, this triumph went nearly uncontested (2000:115).

Gender as theme and subject dominant the trend in the reception, adaptation and interpretation of this play. It forms the identity and core of the play (a tag that Ibsen denies) throughout the years and in many cultures. Issues of gender equality vary from culture to culture, to be easily identified by audiences; it takes precise and coherent presentation of plot and/ or adaptation/interpretation. As the prominent theme and subject, it is my quest also, to assess if a group of audience will think otherwise and providing an alternative theme and interpretation.

Issues of gender and/ or women representation in Ghana have over the years been brought to the fore and debated. So far, there have been improvements as compared to other African nations and cultures; largely due to political stability and the high rate of education coupled with financial empowerment of Ghanaian women. Gwendolyn Mikell in the introduction to the book *African Feminism – The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1997) gives a clear picture of the gender concerns and reactions of the contemporary African woman. She states:

Contemporary African women sometimes think of themselves as walking a political/gender tightrope. On one hand, they are concerned about the sea of economic and political troubles facing their communities and their national ‘ships of state.’ On the other hand, they are grappling with how to affirm their own identities while transforming societal notions of gender and the familial roles (1997:1).²

Being female in Ghana is largely a socio-cultural construction as it is biological. Motherhood on the other hand gives the highest status in the African and the Ghanaian construction of the woman. Within contemporary Africa, Ibsen’s text if analyzed critically with detailed look at its symbolic representations of power relationships between men and women, role sharing, financial, and politics. Within the context of female sexualities, the play does not only tell its audience the similarities of the issues of women as whole but women with a common goal and struggle for independence from patriarchy.

---

² *African Feminism* edited by Mikell Gwendolyn looks at the politics of survival in Sub-Sahara Africa.
1.2 Significance of study

In this study, I look at general contemporary perceptions of a cross-section of Ghanaian readers. Issues of gender and Nora’s slamming of the door will be discussed and analyzed. Working reader of and within a post-colonial environment and sentiments, the text will be analyzed with respect to post colonial reading and analysis. Most importantly, I seek to find that ‘thing’ that makes this text travel far and near through centuries and cultures. Also, what makes readers especially woman identify with Nora? Is Nora’s slamming of the door liberating?

1.3 Theories and concepts

Colonization it is said to be a thing of the past in Africa as all countries on the continent are independent. Politics and economics of most states have been affected but the most visible effect is seen in literature and performance. In the former British colonies, Shakespeare had a long lasting effect that transformed the basis of literary culture and performance. The circulation of Shakespeare’s books within the educational and cultural spheres has been a powerful hegemonic force throughout the history of the British Empire (Mead&Campbell 1993, Gilbert & Tompkins 1996).

In post-colonial literature and performances, themes and sensitive subjects are shrouded or embedded in symbolic actions and/or bodies. Parallels are created within which gender and race become vehicles or media through which themes and subjects are modeled. A post-colonial writer’s representation of women with respect to issues of gender will to an extent strike a relationship and identity with feminist writing due to his/her creation of a female body. The representation of contestation of issues of control and the search for freedom are catalyst to this identity and relationship.

Major works of Ibsen before Norway gained autonomy cannot openly be declared as post-colonial writing. Mostly in terms of analysis and interpretation, these texts fall between the labels of satire and ideological works. Also the effects of the rule of Denmark are not similar
to that experienced in the Third World. Ibsen’s texts familiarity to post-colonial writing is his subject matter and symbolism.

*A Doll’s House* finds identity with subjects of oppression, restriction and vulnerability. These issues were/are very profound in the colonial and post-colonial era; these are very complex issues that the Third World reader easily identifies. Nora as a ‘body’ defines gender, institutions, culture and power politics. This body serves as a catalyst for the progression and realization of actions and themes of the author. Ibsen’s motive is channeled through Nora. Gilbert and Tompkins explain that:

Post colonial theatre finds in the body more than mere ‘actor functions’ or ‘actor vehicle’. The body’s ability to move, cover up, reveal itself, and even fracture on stage provides it with many possible sites for decolonization. In general, the post colonial body disrupts the constrained space and signification left to it by the colonizers and becomes a site for resistant inscription (1997:204).³

Below shows the various characteristics that defines a colonial/post colonial body and also that of Ibsen’s Nora. These characteristics over a period of time build resistance in these bodies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colonial/post-colonial body</th>
<th>Ibsen’s Nora</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oppressed</td>
<td>Oppressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable</td>
<td>Vulnerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted</td>
<td>Restricted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity crisis</td>
<td>Identity crisis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: analysing Nora with respect to a colonial/post colonial body’s experience

From the above table, Nora shares the same attributes of post colonial bodies or characters. The common denominator or factors that build these characteristics is the space these bodies habit. Both of their spaces are controlled. Ibsen specifically created a doll house; a

---
³ Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins’ book on post colonial drama looks issues of theory, practice and politics. They further explore the staging of post-colonialism and its intersection with performance theories. Their work looks at text and performances from the old British Empire and territories across the world with emphasis on the third world.
dependent entity so is a colonial state. In their controlled spaces, they were restricted, controlled and totally dependent on their colonizers. Helmer Torvald in the play symbolically represents a colonizer. Over a period of time, colonized bodies under these conditions gradually develop identity crises and with other factors build into a quest for resistance and freedom.

In terms of power politics, the play takes us through different kinds of power representations and how the vulnerable are used to fulfill this quest and sustainability of power levels. Nora takes the reader through:

Nora’s flexibility and fluidity as a character and an idea/symbol makes her universally accepted and interpreted. In various political spheres, Nora has become a symbol for rebellion, emancipation and courage.

In post colonial reading, Nora’s feminist impacts can easily be ignored. She is interpreted as a political ideology and a symbol of freedom; whereas in feminist interpretation and analysis, she is a symbol of identity and emancipation. West African literature and
dramatists interweave and analyze drama, fiction and other bodies of literature with a
exploration of broader contexts of culture, politics, economics and gender. In the next
chapter, I look at the text caught in the politics of gender within African gender expects
perspectives.
Chapter 2
Caught in the gender web

In this chapter I situate *A Doll’s House* within the concepts of gender inequality. Also, I shall look at how it has paved its way into different cultures and has addressed the same issue over a century and a half. Here, I trace issues of being female with particular emphasis on the nature-culture concepts. These thoughts I then weave around the author’s main concept of freedom.

Ibsen’s friend Georg Brandes in his book titled *Herik Ibsen, A Critical Study* (first published in 1899 and reprinted in 1964) set the tone for Ibsen’s self search for freedom and liberty. He also traced how this search cropped into his famous works. I took much interest in Brandes’ second impression of Ibsen’s works where the quest for freedom and liberty for Ibsen as a person and for his characters resonates soundly. Brandes asserts that to some degree, Ibsen’s search for freedom can be translated into a search for a breakthrough for his works and also the establishment of his name on the literary stage in Scandinavia (1964:43). Politically, Brandes states Ibsen frustration towards Norway’s attitude towards the Dano-German war that forced him into exile. Brandes writes:

In 1864, in spite of the promises given at great assemblies of students, and reiterated by the Scandinavian party in the press- pledges which Ibsen regarded as obligatory – Norway and Sweden declined to assist Denmark against Prussia and Austria. For all these reasons, his native country, which seemed to him the abode of pettiness, apathy and faintheartedness, became so hateful to him that he turned his back upon it (Brandes 1964:43).

Brandes, an authority on Ibsen writes from the perspective of a friend and an objective critic. His lamentation on Ibsen’s search for freedom and how this transcended into most of his prominent works gives a clue to the themes in *A Doll’s House*. This also explains in greater detail the sudden awakening and restlessness of the main character that has over the years been a symbol for liberation struggles, especially female revolution. Ibsen’s own struggle
for freedom went as far as him finding home in homelessness. Brandes describes this state below that:

Since 1864, he (Ibsen) has not had his feet under his own mahogany, nor slept in his own bed. He has never, in the stricter sense of the word, settled down; he has accustomed himself to feel at home in homelessness (Brandes 1964:43).

In view of this, one can justify Nora’s actions arousal of debate and critical analysis. From Ibsen accustoming to home in homelessness we can then say that Nora’s slamming of the door and walking into an unknown world is not as problematic to Ibsen as it is to a wide array of audience and researchers. To him (Ibsen), it is obvious that Nora can equally find a home in homelessness; where she can continue being a woman but not as a conservative one. His home in homelessness can be interpreted as liberty and a state of defining one’s self devoid of cultural and societal obligations.

In Brandes’ perception of the play, the women issue was not of importance. He was much intrigued by Ibsen portrayal of an individual’s search and attainment of freedom. Ibsen’s A Doll’s House is so full of symbolic representations that one cannot help with the magnitude of interpretations and also the high probability of contradicting ones thoughts and assumptions. Brandes makes this dilemma clear as he continues with his second impression on Ibsen and his works, he states of the:

…painfully intense impression produced by A Doll’s House, where we see a butterfly who, through three acts, is pricked with a needle, at last transfixed by it- if we think of all these things, we perceive that the fundamental mood, answering to the painter’s landscape background, is, in all the pathetic parts, an intense grimness. It may rise to terror, to tragedy, but it is not primarily due to the fact that the poet is a tragedian (1964:44).

I find Brandes’ critic of the play very interesting. The women issue did not show up in his impression about the play. His relation was largely in the perspective of freedom and liberty; of which he meticulously weaves with respect to Ibsen’s beliefs in morality and the human being. Also, I find it very objective and a not so polemic a treatment of the theme and subject matter discussed by the playwright. From his perspective a reader can forecast Nora’s survival based on Ibsen’s concept (as propounded by Brandes) of home in homelessness. Also a reader who seeks for this analogy can do so void from any gender
prejudice. Home as I have deduced from Ibsen’s perspective from Brandes’ impression is anywhere; where an individual can reconcile with him or herself. If that home is important to that individual then it must be the ultimate attainment. This then builds up a conflict of the individual against the society of which Ibsen is a perfect example.

In 1889 Gosse Edmund published his review on Ibsen’s works seven years after Brandes’ second impression in 1882. Gosse was writing around the time that *A Doll’s House* made its first debut in London and was greeted after the show with lots of controversy. The women issues got to its heights from its study build up from the play’s debuts in Scandinavia. Titling his review as *Ibsen’s social dramas* Gosse’s review states the central concept/subject of the play as:

…in *A Doll’s House* he (Ibsen) confronted his audience with a new conception. Woman was no longer to be the shadow following man, or if you will, a skin-leka attending man, but an independent entity, with purpose and moral functions of her own. Ibsen’s favorite theory of the domination of the individual had hitherto confined to one sex; here he carries it over to the other (Gosse 1889:113, emphasis mine).

Whereas Brandes did us a favour of taking us through the author’s stands on issues of politics, liberty/freedom and morality, the women’s movement and present modern researches have a polemical stands on Ibsen’s representation of the subject matter he had effortlessly presented to audience. I am a culprit too in this polemical reading and understanding of this text; which always defends his probable feminist agenda or inclination. Gosse (1889) opens up the platform for the women issue to be adequately debated. Gosse stands on featuring *A Doll’s House* under the title of social dramas is effortless as the writer in his notes reveal his intention of writing a drama which will highlight the ‘anomalous position of women in the prevailing male-dominated society’ (McFarlane 2008:viii).

The first staging of this text made a symbolic statement by hanging the painting of Madonna and child right above the piano.⁴ According to Holledge, most directors in cooperated this motif in the set of the play in the early years of staging. This borrowed motif moved from country to country in Scandinavia (Holledge 2011, 3 Nov. class lecture Photos of

---

⁴ This is taken from observations of Julie Holledge from her on-going research on Ibsen across cultures. This became evident as she collected pictures from archives on the early productions of A Doll’s House.
performance and set shown on slides). The painting gives us a clue as to the main thematic interpretations accorded the text in its early years and also today. It is likely that the hanging of the paint is the catalyst to the reception and anger at the play. This reaction can in my view, trigger the text’s adoption by the women’s movement as a revolt against patriarchy. The presence of the painting was a symbolic reinforcement of gender stereotyping of women, thus contradicting the theme of the play. The first director of the debut in Copenhagen clearly stated his position and definition to womanhood by that painting. Also with the cultural interpretation accorded to that painting in Europe audiences can also form a gendered interpretation of Nora’s actions. With a critical analysis, the reaction of the audience has a link to the deliberate or non-deliberate reinforcement of the ascribed role of womanhood. Nora’s rebellion is a sharp contrast to what the motif stands for. Holledge and Bollen (2011) writing on the cartographic revelations in the world of theatre performances are of the view that staged performances are related to the imaginative space of a script or story, its setting as indicated by the action of the performers actions and speech, and further signified on the stage through the design of set costumes, lighting and sound. These early directors signified the theme of the play through a non verbal symbol which was easily decoded by the audience.

Whereas the early production of the play played on the nurture and domestication theory of women, events in the production of A Doll’s House took a different turn in the twentieth century. The women’s issue became vocal and the pivot of Ibsen’s theme in the play. Nora’s rebellion is not suppressed by cultural artistic icons (such as the painting) but rather a fascination of most directors. Joan Templeton in an article which traces modern radical productions of the play noted that, updated productions did not emphasize Nora’s reactions to her children. She further stated that one director omitted them; another gave a brief glimpse of them while two other directors neither made much of them (Templeton 2005:190). The evidence of this total push of Nora’s children into the background or non-existence of Nora’s children is to an extent in support of Ibsen’s statement for a woman’s duty to herself and herself only. Ibsen presents an underestimated child’s claims on its mother and for believing that a woman will place duty to herself over her parental responsibilities. The painting of Madonna and child is iconic reminder and reconstruction of
Ibsen’s supposed deviation as observed above. In Templeton’s view, this deviation from the norm is precisely what makes *A Doll’s House* radical (Templeton 2005:190). She further explains that Nora is not everywoman, but, on the contrary a rare exception (Templeton 2005:190). This rare exception chose mobility and individuality to her ascribed roles. Her action calls for the neutrality of genders.

### 2.1 Issues of Gender Equality

Ibsen’s creation of a rare exception (as Templeton calls it) of a woman makes this character fluid and adaptable to centuries and concepts. Most often, this character gets caught within the concepts of gender in/equality, culture, nature/biology and the definition of individuality. As she (Nora), over the years travelled as an icon for gender equality advocacy throughout cultures, her identity is more pronounced within the concepts of gender equality. This section situates the text in renowned gender arguments. Ibsen writes of Nora who sacrifices for love. In sacrificing for love, she contested and moved steps out of the confined definitions of a woman. Nora forges her father’s signature for a loan to cure her husband of a chronic disease; threatened by blackmail she is confident of her husband protection and love, and a possible cover up for her crime. She realizes at the turn of events that love will not protect her neither can she protect herself. All she has is duty to herself thus to assume this duty and role she has to shed off her maternal and wifely responsibilities. Slamming the door to these responsibilities, she walks away.

Ibsen publicly denied writing for the course of women fighting for recognition and equality in society (see McFarlane 2008) so did Brandes avoid touching on the women’s issue in his critique. Unfortunately for Ibsen, the slamming of the door did not just resonate across the world, his character Nora becomes an icon of female power and liberation. Templeton’s description of Nora as rare is to the fact that she is bold enough to recognize the duty to herself and not to her husband and children. The resonance of the slammed reverberates through many cultures due to the universality of female subordination. Sherry Ortner gives a vivid exposition of female subordination; she writes:
The universality of female subordination, the fact that it exists within every type of social and economic arrangement and in societies of every degree of complexity, indicates to me that we are up against something very profound… (Ortner 1974:67)

It is amazing to note that female subordination cuts across every type of culture and society, therefore the fight for equality and liberation resonates and transcends through every culture. Hence the quick identification with Ibsen’s Nora and the symbol she has become. At the helm of female subordination is the construction of the nature-culture relationship that is translated into power relations and perception of one gender of the other. Ortner in her attempt to explain resorts to a construction of relationship based on biological determinism, she writes:

There is something genetically inherent in the male of the species, so the biological determinist would argue, that it makes them the naturally dominant sex; that ‘something’ is lacking in females, and as a result women are not naturally subordinate but in general quite satisfied with their position, since it affords them protection and an opportunity to maximize maternal pleasures, which to them are the most satisfying experiences of life (Ortner, 1974:71).

Throughout Ibsen’s later plays, he presents to us various women who are forced to make choices based on that ‘something’ that defines and orders their line of thought. Nora lived the life of a doll because she found protection and thought that is the order of life for a woman, Hedda (in *Hedda Gabler* 1890) marries a man she does not love because she is aging and thinks Tesman will give her the power and protection she needs while Mrs Alving (*Ghost* 1881) is given away in marriage. She gets trapped but has to resort to her duty as a wife and a loving mother; also Linde (in *A Doll’s House*) though independent as compared to Nora longs for protection and that ‘something’ draws her into the very world Nora finally decides to leave. Below are excerpts from the plays stating their resort to male protection and adherence to female ascribed roles:

Nora: [imperturbably] …I passed out of Daddy’s hands into yours. You arranged everything to your tastes, and I acquired the same tastes. Or I pretended to…I don’t really know…I think it was a bit of both, sometimes one thing and sometimes the other. When I look back, it seems to me I have been living here like a beggar, from hand to mouth. I lived by doing tricks for you, Torvald. But that is the way you wanted it. You and Daddy did me a great wrong. It’s your fault that I’ve never made anything of my life.

(*A Doll’s House* 2008:80)
Hedda: I’d really danced myself tired, my dear sir. I had had my day … [she gives a little shudder]. Oh, no… (*Hedda Gabler* 2008:203)

Hedda: Yes, so I did …and then when he came along and was so pathetically eager to be allowed to support me. … I don’t really see why I shouldn’t let him. (*Hedda Gabler* 2008:204)

Linde: [tidies the room a little and gets her hat and coat ready]. How things change! How things change! Somebody to work for …to live for. A home to bring happiness into… (*A Doll’s House* 2008:66)

From the above, we see that women feel a duty to men and a state of completeness of their being in the institution of marriage and nature. It is a constant pull towards the dominant other for existence. While many argue towards the nature-culture theory of women being closer to nature, socialization built on the institution of culture determines these tendencies. Socialization according to Lungiswa Memela, plays an important role in the society because it is a process of welcoming and incorporating new members into a particular society (*Memela* 2005:96). Socialization creates the various gender ascribed roles and perceptions which places women below men, and also reinforces their total dependence on them. These perceptions through culture are enshrined in laws, which further affirms patriarchy and the extent to which women are marginalized.

Sibongile Ndashe in her article on human rights, gender and culture found disturbing clauses in the customary law in South Africa; she found that the patriarchal system reserves a position of subservience and the subordination of women in which they are regarded as perpetual minors under the tutelage of their fathers, husbands or the head of the extended family (*Ndashe* 2005:40). Ndashe’s observation is no different from the deeply entrenched patriarchal cultures of sub-Saharan Africa. In Ghana women had to advocate for the passing of the intestate succession law which give rights to women to inherit some percentage of a deceased husband’s estate. Ortner further explains that, “Since it is always culture’s project to subsume and transcend nature, if women were considered part of nature, then culture would find it ‘natural’ to subordinate, not say oppress them.” Hegel (1991 as cited by Moi 2006:245) ranks men above women, he is of the view that men have a substantial life in state and learning, further he says, men have a way to self - sufficiently uniting with themselves. In *Elements of philosophy of rights*, Hegel (1991) sees titled roles within the
family unit –father, wife, mother, and daughter, son etc- as generic terms and as pure functional titles. Moi critically deduces from these two claims by Hegel and simply puts it that: men become citizens and participate in public life; women remain locked up inside the family unit (2006:245). It is true, then, that Hegel’s titled roles may be generic to men because women assume these titles and get consumed by them. They (women) remain under the tutelage of men from being daughters to wives. Ibsen plays before us a family like any other that vividly tells the nature-culture divide and categorization. He gave us expositions of Nora upbringing and husband’s control over her which gives us the sense that she has all her life been under the tutelage of her father and later her husband. This is a typical experience of women sub of the Sahara which to a greater extent explains the ease for an African woman for that matter a Ghanaian woman to identify with Nora. The recent move of the text from the North to the South of the North-South divide is due to similarity and also the search for a model for female liberation and empowerment in the South.

A critical analysis of socialization being the culprit of gendered role ascription shows that women are the agents of socialization. They impact cultural perceptions of both genders onto children. Ortner again explains that woman is the primary agents of a child’s early socialization; it is she who transforms the infant from mere organism into a cultured human, teaching it manners and the proper ways to become a full-fledged member of a culture (Ortner 1974:79-80). Memela paints an African picture of female–male socialization which supports Ortner’s assertion, she writes, “From an early age boys are taught not to cry. When a girl cries, we as mothers comfort her, but when a boy cries, he gets a lecture on how he is supposed to be strong, tough and that he must fight back”. Typically it is an adage in Ghana that men do not cry; this knowledge has been transferred throughout generations through symbols, proverbs and games of socialization. Also the highest form of female-male socialization is the institution of puberty rites and boys’ initiations rites across cultures in Africa. After the basic socialization of mothers, adolescent boys and girls are taken in a final reinforcement of the gender divide before adulthood.

The issues of gender ascriptions/identities has been debated for long and mostly concluded that we as humans are born gender neutral and that it is our socialization that brackets us into our various gendered labels and roles. Most critics of the ‘Ibsen women’ cannot believe
that Nora walked out on her children and Hedda tactfully rejects the baby growing in her. Biology is said to make women mothers but the individuality is always in a clash with our biological order to motherhood. Helmer sees the female biological order as the most sacred duty a woman has to perform.

Helmer: This is outrageous! You are betraying your most sacred duty.

Nora: And what do you consider to be my most sacred duty?

Helmer: Does it take me to tell you that? Isn’t it your duty to your husband and your children?

Nora leaves her duties as a mother to rediscover herself as she tells Helmer:

Nora: I have another duty equally sacred.

Helmer: you have not. What duty might that be?

Nora: my duty to myself. (A Doll’s House 2008:82)

In Templeton’s view, “Torvald’s plea is always that Nora considers her duties to her husband and children as though the three were a compound noun” (Templeton, 2001:143).

Ibsen’s creation of a woman who realizes and accords the duty to herself and finding her identity created the new woman. Kate Millet writing on sexual politics in literature gives a clear view of female representation in literary works as observed over centuries; to her Nora’s slammed door announces sexual revolt. She writes “In Aeschylus’ dramatization of the myth one is permitted to see patriarchy confront matriarchy, confound it through the knowledge of paternity, and come off triumphant. Until Nora slammed the door announcing the sexual revolution, this triumph went nearly uncontested. The concept of the new woman stemmed out of Nora’s revolt. Tsobouchi Shoyo describes people’s perception of the new woman as:

Some interpreted ‘new women’ to be women who will emerge naturally in the new age; others defined them as ideal women who must emerge at all cost from now; others thought them as unwomanly; another group considered them aggressive, revolutionary women who were born in reaction against centuries-old conventionalism; still others saw them as distasteful, uncontrollable, selfish women who were born of the restless, confused society in transition to the age. (as cited by Erika Fischer-Lichte, 2011:2)
Her (Nora) label as a new woman is from the sudden rebellion against patriarchy and her departure from her maternal duties. In finding and defining her duty to herself, she stripes off her social and biological role ascriptions and becomes mobile and not policed by culture and the ‘fathers’ (symbolic representation of patriarchy, no more under the tutelage of her father).

2.2 Years after the Slammed Door

The universality of this play does not come from its demand for truth in every human relation, but in its demand for equality in the relation between women and men (Templeton 2001:143). In Scandinavia the gap has been bridged between men and women. There are equal rights for both genders and women have a self identity. The West as a whole has embraced the sexual revolution in the 20th century and has defined a political culture that embraced total inclusion of genders. In this environment _A Doll’s House_ may to some extent have realized its thematic goal. Hence the new wave of it study and performance in the developing world which is now gearing up to reach the status of the West.

Issues of gender inequality in the developing world or the third world are complex. As much as they are deeply entrenched in the culture/biology theories so are they in the political sphere. Some amount of issues of female representation can be traced by the spillage of colonial administration in this region especially in Africa. Gwendolyn Mikell explains:

> Some of the need to deal with the twin gender-political crises in Africa has resulted from social-structural problems that arose from during the process of European colonization, as African political economies were tied to the west and African men were given increased recognition relative to women. The problems escalated after independence, particularly as shifts in the global economy during the 1970s sent shocks waves through African economies (Mikell, 1997:2)

The African woman sub of the Sahara is faced with as much cultural gender ascription as political and economic. Her revolt must be heard in three-folds. Therefore the women movement on the continent differs radically from that of the West. Mikell further gives an exposition of what the African woman has to contend with as she fights for gender equality and recognition.
Also, as the nature-culture theory wears off gradually in the West and women can control their fertility and child birth, in the Third World and Africa women still hold on to their biological roles of child bearing and nurturing. Due to this, Western feminist are troubled that African women are not entirely independent from the nature-culture ascriptions. Their main worry is that:

African women take their reproductive tasks seriously, celebrate their ability to give birth, and refuse to subordinate their biological roles to the other roles within society. The pro-natal aspect of African culture is reflected in the fact that in many parts of Africa women strive to bear and bring to maturity at least six children while being economically active (Mikell 1997:8).

In reaction to this perception held by western feminist, Signe Arnfred (2004:8) in her introduction to a collection of chapters on sexualities in Africa explains that, that definition of gender has been constructed under Western eyes. She states further, that Western ideas and definitions of the woman and gender have been the criteria for constructing key definitions and the assessment of gender, womanhood. The conceptualization of gender in Africa according to Kolawole (2004) is “male-biased and western oriented”. Therefore many gender researchers in Africa are of the view that, the African woman representation must be contextualized within an African setting and not in comparison to the west theoretical constructions.

Motherhood is pivotal to being a woman and also to the traditional state. Ife Amaduime and Oyeronke Oyewumi feminist African researchers see this institution as a source of power for women because they grow the state; it is the institution of wifehood that to them is subordinating. Oyewumi writes that: “motherhood is the preferred and cherished self-identity of many African women” (Oyewumi, 2000:1096). Motherhood is for over centuries tied to female identity, hence its impact in the understanding and performance of this play. The catalyst to Nora’s fame was her denunciation of her role as a mother and when she slammed the door, she shocked her audience. To slam a door is an everyday action, but her slamming of the door became symbolic due to the context and people affected by her action. Most women as wives are confined in a doll’s house which explains Oyewumi’s conceptualization as a subordinating institution; however, motherhood which is a cherished self-identity for African women and also women of the west some decades ago keeps them
(women) in this confinement. The German actress Hedwig Niemann-Raabe\textsuperscript{5} was part of a host of actresses who pushed for and informed Ibsen’s writing of an alternative ending of the play. Clearly, this demonstrates the role motherhood plays in the decisions of a women, hence the hindered mobility of women. Ibsen therefore takes the biological institution of motherhood to task and puts the individuals well being and sane decisions to themselves before being mothers. Today, his theme resonates as women largely in the West decide whether or not to become mothers. Motherhood to some degree is a choice in the West. The story is completely different in sub Saharan Africa where motherhood is not a choice but a status and identity one has to attain at a certain age and time. It is then obvious the importance of \textit{A Doll’s House} as an advocacy play for women rights to decision making and right to the economy in this region. This play is not just a symbol for female negotiation of power with patriarchy but a harsh reality to patriarchy. Before her exit, Nora changed her clothes. She shed of femininity into an undefined identity. She becomes gender neutral.

Nora’s defeat of patriarchy in \textit{A Doll House} is a ray of hope for female equality and power relations with men. However, her daring adventure into the world which she has little knowledge of is symbolic to a more female presence on the world stage – economics, formal employment, politics etc. Today, women can easily move in and out of their doll houses (homes), the walls have been completely broken down. They can make inputs in areas of economics, law, politics and science which to a greater extent affect culture. Hence, patriarchy today does not have full control over culture.

In this chapter I have looked at the various reasons why the text had a flirtation with the women’s movement and what is now feminism and gender equality advocacy. It is obvious that Ibsen played with the nature-culture theory with respect to motherhood being a major determinate of womanhood and being female. He also showed women as being under the tutelage of their ‘fathers’ while he did not hesitate to treat issues of child socialization. The next chapter transports the text to Ghana and looks at the themes under which it is taught and performed.

\textsuperscript{5} This alternate ending is the play is to accord respect to patriarchy and the concept of motherhood. It also shows the effect of culture on the perception of theme and motifs in the play. Ibsen touches on motherhood and as this ending portrays motherhood as a concept and an institution enshrine in culture and by biology colonizes women. More can be read on Neimann-Raabe on http://www.ibsen.net/index.gan?id=11111794
Chapter 3

Teaching and Performing Ibsen in Ghana

In Ghana as elsewhere in Africa theatre affirms identities, culture and also has a purpose. African theatre has a language which Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1938- ) a prolific writer and theater practitioner refers to as the ‘language of the people’ in his book *Decolonizing the mind - the politics of language in African literature* (first published in 1981). Defining theatre in Africa is complex; as every traditional event is dramatic enough to be called a performance. Performances in this context are spectacles which can be termed as theatre because it involves role playing and an audience. Theatre is a relationship between actors and audience; they both need each other to exist and to produce spectacles. The root of African theatre performances originates from the performances of festivals, puberty rites, and naming ceremonies just to mention a few. Colonial influences and evolution in performances over a period of time created a new form of theatre and performance on the continent.

Literary and performance scholars posit the advent of present day African theatre as a post colonial residue art form. Ngugi wa Thiong’o defines the new African theatre as an isolated event (2011:35-37). He compares it with pre-colonial African theatre that was communal. The communality of African theatre has an adverse effect on the staging and performance styles of directors and cast of plays of African origin. These effects are most felt in the performance of western plays. Mostly the space, mood and the motifs of the writer are affected. A thin line is drawn between adaptations and the originality of the text being performed.

The language of the text becomes a subject. Language here refers to what aids in the audience identification of the themes of the play. Therefore we can say that language in this context posits the communality, purposive or the political stances of the themes and the motifs of the playwright. A play that speaks for and to the people then becomes relevant.
Language in this context becomes a vehicle and a political identity for the writer and his target audience.

Most works of adaptations on the continent are based on the fact that they have features of the language that African literary works speak such as issues of gender, politics, and religion and so on. Further, this language when transposed onto other contextual settings will not lose potency of theme and subject, but, rather add value that could have been lost if performed in originality in its new context.

The literary field in Africa up until the late 1960s was male dominated. Men represented the stereotypical woman in their works. Hardly were the female writers respected for their candid representation of being woman in sub-Saharan Africa. Their works were hardly considered in researches neither were they reviewed. The absence of female recognition was felt most when major works on African literature such as Emmanuel Ngara’s *The Art and Ideology in the African Novel* (1985) did not mention the works of African female writers. This is enough evidence to prove male domination in African literary works some years ago.

Writing about and telling the female story greatly affected the female writers, so then, what will be seen of a male writer telling the female story? Even though I do not have much evidence when *A Doll’s House* made inroads into Africa, so much points to a very recent introduction. Ibsen’s representation of the woman from the male writer and politicians’ perspective is a painful truth. Ama Ata Aidoo (1942- ) a female Ghanaian writer reacts to the writing of her male counterparts, she clarifies the similarities of their experiences and the desire to write about things deemed appropriate for the African writer; she writes and chastises her male counterparts of the often bickering of old issues that to some extent are no longer of major importance: “Did we not all suffer the varied wickedness of colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism and global imperialists and fascism together?”(2011:514). While female writers choose subjects of social and cultural relevance, their male counterparts dwell on issues of politics and also an array of patriarchal display. African female writers write on social issues that benefit first and foremost women and society at large but when Ibsen chose to write for all humanity he chose a woman and made the world revolve around her.
Contextualizing Nora in Africa, we see not just a freedom fighter for women’s rights but a reflection of a marginalizing African culture, politics and institutions.

This chapter thus looks at the teaching and performance of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* in two major Ghanaian universities of the humanities and arts. It traces the possible advent of the study of Ibsen’s works and the context within which it is read and taught. I also look at the debut performance of *A Doll’s House* with a critical look at the altered famous slamming of the door ending.

### 3.1 Ghana’s literary and theatre history

Theatre in Ghana grew predominately out of varying influences from British literature and theatre traditions. The development of literary drama in most African countries during the colonial period enjoyed institutional support (Agovi 1983:3). Most of these performances were staged and performed by European literary clubs. Their audiences were well defined by membership and for members only. In the 1930s, dissemination of literary theatre in Ghana reached its peak as educated and elite natives (Ghanaians or Gold Coasters as referred to during the colonial period) formed literary clubs. One major reason for the increase in literary theatre clubs among elite Gold Coasters was due to perceptions of attaining affluence and a ‘high-life’ style close to that of the colonial officers and expatriates.

Literary theatre club formation and memberships became criteria for measuring status. From the native elites (the lawyer-merchant class), literary theatre moved down to the larger population of Gold Coasters. Majority of these performances as documented by Agovi (1989:22), do not bear any relevance to life of the natives, except evoke and reinforce loyalty to British rule and culture. A theatre critic in the Gold Coast Spectator of 1935 (as cited in Agovi, 1989), observed that the audience in this category were not well educated to understand the text performed; to them it was just an art form in vogue. The lawyer-

---

6 In this chapter I use the adjective Ghanaian and Gold Coasters interchangeably within contexts and periods before independence. Colonial Ghana was referred to as the Gold Coast. Her people then were called Gold Coasters.
merchant class is accredited apart from the British as the native promoters of literary theatre. They also developed a writing culture in the native owned newspapers.

In the midst of these developments, the Concert Party performance was born\(^7\). The concert party is a folk drama that draws on the American minstrel, Vaudeville, and the Slapstick. Concert party groups developed a comic gag with a fusion of dance and music. As their popularity grew in the 1920s they became travelling theatre groups performing through the country. They brought theatre performances to the ordinary people; who do not belong to the literary clubs and cannot understand or relate to the literary performances and texts. The concert party is a distinct performance genre associated with Ghanaian culture and performance studies.

Amidst the struggle for independence from British rule in 1955, there was also a growing enthusiasm of regaining African consciousness through culture and tradition. The National Theatre Movement was born with a major aim of promoting Ghanaian traditional performance and Ghanaian literary works. Kwame Nkrumah (the first black prime minister and later president of Ghana) was the main patron of this theatre movement. With his African consciousness ideologies he was in constant support of the performances of Ghanaian literary, musical and folk story production. Also, there were a lot of experiments with modern European dramas; the most frequently performed was the works of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and Eugene Ionesco (1909-1994). Maya Angelou recounts her days in Accra as a young writer and actor playing the character Mother Courage in Brecht’s famous play *Mother Courage and her Children* (1939) in her book *All God’s Children need traveling shoes* (1991)\(^8\). Brecht’s works took center stage in the teaching of modern theatre in both the department of English and theatre arts. This period in Ghanaian theatre was filled

---

\(^7\) The Concert Party is a performance genre associated with Ghana. It has a stock character of the joker popularly referred to as the ‘Bob’ in its initial stages of development. Today, the ‘Bob’ still is a stock character but not as vibrant as in the early stages. Also the concert party apart from providing its audience with themes drawn from their communities is serving as a great form of providing developmental education and information dissemination in Ghana.

\(^8\) In this book Maya Angelou chronicles her days in Ghana a years after independence. It dwells on her experiences in the University of Ghana and her relationship with Efua Sutherland.
with ideologies hence the selection of these literary works. Apart from Brecht and Ionesco, S. I Hsiung’s *Lady Precious Stream* was performed regularly.

The mid 1960s was not favourable to the movement; it was near disintegration due to the political instability of Nkrumah’s government and later his overthrow. Efua T. Sutherland (1924-1996) (a famous Ghana playwright and acclaimed modern African dramatist) and director of the group incorporated it into the Ghanaian university system. The Ghana Drama studio, the home of the National Theatre Movement has been relocated to the University of Ghana campus and has become a major performance space in the University of Ghana. Her pioneering work in Ghanaian theatre has impacts on both dramatists and the country’s theatre industry.

The National Theatre Movement is noted for the birth of Ghanaian literary theatre and performance. It gave birth to dramatists who experimented with Ghanaian folklore and it representation of the stage and also as a literary form. A host of Ghanaian playwrights and dramatists had their grooming with the National Theatre Movement. Distinguished playwrights and dramatists such as Martin Owusu and Aseidu Yerenkyi who later became professors in theatre studies. Most of Efua Sutherland’s experimental performances were with the National Theatre Movement; plays such as *The Marriage of Anansewa, Foriwa* (1967), *Odasani* (1961)-is an Akan adaptation of *Everyman, Edufa* (1973) and a host of others were written during the transformations stage of producing Africanized plays and performances. Out of all these experiments, *The Marriage of Anansewa* is noted for vividly transposing the Ghanaian folk story-telling genre onto the literary and performance stage which is referred to as “Anansegoro” (the Spider play).

By 1970s there were a number of commercial theatre groups running and a lot of concert party groups on tour. Hit by the economic recession of the 1970s most groups went bankrupt hence a steady decline in commercial performances. The 1979 political instabilities and the series of coup d’états saw a lot of curfew impositions in the early hours of the evenings and mornings; night life was non-existent and most commercial theatre groups collapsed.

---

9 *Lady Precious Stream* was originally published in June 1934 it is an old Chinese play adapted in English. It popularity in Ghana later has an effect on Sutherland’s *The Marriage of Anansewa* which exhibited some Chinese theatre characteristics.
Throughout the 1980s commercial theatre performance was to some extent non-existent. Only the secondary schools and the universities had some form of theatre. These were mostly student productions. Presently, ninety percent (90%) of commercial theatre or theatre performances in Ghana are on the university campuses. Majority of these are student research performances opened to the public. These performances have a thriving box office just as any other commercial theatre house.

3.2 Teaching Ibsen in two major Ghanaian Universities

Tracing the role and effect of teaching Ibsen has been a total shift from the concept of exploring earlier modern European playwrights. Earlier in this section, we observe that Brecht gained prominence due to his theatre and ideological stance on performance. On the contrary, Ibsen is being taught and read for his role in modern drama and his representation of social issues and stance on ideas. The works of Ibsen are taught and analyzed in the modern drama class for third year students. Awo Asiedu, professor in theatre studies and the instructor of the modern drama course in the School of Performing Arts is of the view that students forget about Ibsen as the father of modern drama as his themes and subject take precedence of his dramatic genre. Over the years of teaching Ibsen texts, Asiedu observes that his themes and subjects are of more interest than any other aspect of analyzing his text.

Out of the two main Ibsen text taught, Asiedu states that *A Doll’s House* is more appealing to students than *An Enemy of the People* (1882). Even thought issues of corruption are widespread in Ghana, students take likening to the issues in *A Doll’s House*. In view of these, this text is always read and analyzed by students in the modern drama class. On the other hand, Asiedu explains that, the growing popularity of the text is also due to its availability on the Ghanaian market and in bookshops. She recounted instances where students could not find *Hedda Gabler* (1890) and other texts in bookshops hence the constant repetition of *A Doll’s House*.

Throughout West Africa, this text is the most popular and widely read. So also is *An Enemy of the people* which on the contrary has enjoyed quite a number of performances than *A
Doll’s House in Ghana. Its recent performance was in 2007 by the School of Performing Arts’ directing student. The theme of corruption and issues of nepotism were of interest to him. Whereas the subject of corruption and nepotism is widely spread in the country, it is not as sensitive as those of gender and self identity in A Doll’s House.

The character and symbol Nora, incites a lot of debate. Mostly the debates divide the class into two; male students proving overly stubborn in favour of Helmer while female students empathize with Nora. The same can be said of the University of Cape Coast with the issues of availability and the text’s selection due to its theme and subject matter. On the other hand, this theatre arts department though younger explores Ibsen’s texts both in the study of modern drama and also in the text analysis and interpretation. It is in the analysis and the interpretation class that students explore the symbolism of the characters, the period and culture in which the plot is set. Also the modern drama class cannot ignore the social issues and symbolism of the text as it explores the ideologies of the playwright within the context of modernism in theater studies. Frequently discussed are issues of gender, marriage and religion. Below shows the context within which A Doll’s House is examined:

A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and the judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view. Discuss this with reference to A Doll’s House. (Ebo Mefful (research assistant) Dr. Ben- Abdullah (Lecturer), first semester 2010)\(^\text{10}\)

None of Ibsen’s texts has been performed in the University of Cape Coast. So far, there is no performance of the text but most directing students I spoke to are very interested on working on very acts as adaptations.

3.3 Performing A Doll’s House

Being in circulation as a text for decades, A Doll’s House had its debut performance in 2006 in Accra. It was staged as a master student directing research project. I observed a trend of

---

\(^{10}\) Originally from Ibsen comments and thought about women, this statement forms the basis for debate on this play. Found in his notes, this statement convinces researchers that Ibsen wrote for the cause of women. In the introduction to Henrik Ibsen: Four Major Plays James McFarlane elaborates and is convinced that Ibsen wrote for the cause women emancipation and gender equality.
abysmal interest in the staging and performance of the play which is over shadowed the vibrancy of its theme, style and language (language used here as an identifier not necessary diction) amongst students. It was clear that the text is not the favourite of the directing class. From my point of view, most student shy away from plays of sensitive subjects and themes.

In 2006 Jane Owusu, a master student of directing picked the text and identified relationships with issues of gender and female identity based on the trend of gender issues in Ghana. She met objections from her supervisor who thought the text was not suitable for the viewing public and also its style will not be of interest to her audience. She recounts the arguments that ensued between her and her supervisor, her supervisor in his numerous defense of his stance explains that the text is simply boring to the Ghanaian audience. Owusu thought otherwise.

**Picture 1:** A poster advertising the performance (Credit: Owusu Janet, production documents)
In her thesis on staging the play titled: *Challenges in Directing ‘A Doll’s House’* (2006); she takes her reader through the various staging processes and her interpretation of the play. Owusu stated clearly her choice of the play as a mission to put women first and to tell the women’s story through a great writer whose text has over the years stood for the cause of women. In her introduction she states:

> It is important that issues concerning women are harped upon, using the theatre as a medium. It has been proven over the years that women are marginalized in all spheres of life for example at the workplace, in the home, in the extended families, in relationships and other areas in developing countries. But the problems still persist unless something is done about this situation, the society at large will continue to suffer. Women need good information on all matters concerning their lives. Men are supposed to be the head of the family and women the neck. The head can only rest on a firm neck and also turn the head in whatever direction. But this is usually not the case in several instances. It is with this background that I believe women’s voices should be heard and a solution found to their concerns. A doll’s house appeals to me because it deals with helping the society overcome some challenges which cannot be wished away. It has a workable theme, structure, and a believable plot in simple language. (Owusu 2006:6)

Meeting Owusu was a moving experience; she never thought anyone would research her work some years later. When I walked into her office at the Ghana Broadcasting and Television Corporation, she was in awe and curious as to why I wanted to interview her about her performance. She says, ‘I love that play and I am still hoping to create a television drama out of it, we can do that together right?’ In Jane is a woman who has a cause to tell the story of women. She confessed that her supervisor’s protest against her choice of text was a contributing factor for her persistence; “I went to the Norwegian consulate for help; o yes I did” (when she noticed my raised eyebrows) says Owusu. When I left her office that afternoon, I realized I just spoke to a rebellious woman, who will not be defeated. She suspected that the major theme of the play may be the factor, not necessarily issues of style and language as explained by her supervisor.

With a production budget of 967 Ghana Cedis (3200 NOK) Owusu could have access to only 200 Ghana Cedis (800NOK) as research grant from the theatre arts department. She quickly wrote a letter to the Norwegian consulate and was given a grant of 640 Ghana Cedis (2000NOK). Set for work, Owusu selected her cast and crew. She faced two major problems namely performance stage and script. She could not find the text with the alternative ending
Ibsen wrote for his German debut. Unfortunately, Owusu’s search for a latest English translation of the text proved futile hence she could not explore the alternative ending of the play. She was of the view that a comparative look at that script may have informed her presentation of the play. The only available text in the library was an old version probably the early Oxford translation of the text. The copy she handed to me has no reference page.

Secondly, the main theatre on the university of Ghana campus, the Efua Sutherland Drama Studio was fully booked for performances throughout the semester. An alternative space has to be sought; she decided on the amphi-theatre. According to Owusu, an effective blocking (movement direction) of actors became an essential method of achieving a proscenium effect. Also, the set design translated her ideas and created a proscenium effect to make up for the inappropriateness of the stage. James Gibbs¹¹ based on his experiences of working on this am phi-theatre space explains the frustrations of putting up a play made for the proscenium stage; he writes that:

The open-air theatre has been constructed on the Grecian pattern but without a Greek awareness of the importance of sight-lines and acoustics: the ‘bowl’ is too flat, the position too exposed, the members of the audience often find themselves too far from the action to hear or feel involved. I came across some platforms rotting away in a corner of the campus – I think they had been discarded after serving their purpose at some official function or other- and these were moved to the orchestra of the theatre, where they formed a very adequate thrust stage. Seats were arranged close to the edges of the platforms and, as part of the ‘elizabethanization’, the actors were provided a ‘tiring’ house (Gibbs 2009:185).

¹¹ James Gibbs is an authority on Ghanaian theatre and performance studies. He lived most of his life in Ghana as a performer, professor and a critic of African performance. He lives in Ghana and has a library in his house the houses collections on Ghanaian and West African theatre and folk performance.
Picture 2: Aerial view of the University of Ghana amphitheatre

Credit: The University of Ghana

Picture 3: A close-up of the staging area

Credit: Anku Solace Sefakor, June 2011
With a living room set, the traditional background of the amphi-theatre does not fit the space that Ibsen describes. The set designer employed the use of a back-drop made of plywood to block the view of the castle-like backdrop of the theatre. Below is the set design used; the blue background shows the partitioning of the wall and the creation of a third wall effect in proscenium staging. The set shows a middle class living room; here the director tries to stick to Ibsen’s set description in the text.

**Picture 4**: floor plan of the set

Credit: Owusu Janet, 2006
Ibsen describes his set below:

A pleasant room, tastefully but not expensively furnished on the back wall, one door on the right leads to the entrance hall, a second door on the left leads to Helmer’s study. Between these two doors, a piano. In the middle of the left wall, a door; and downstage from it, a window… (Ibsen 2008:1)

With the help of the flat board partitioning the director achieves the most important set descriptions of Ibsen. Below Owusu explains her choice of maintaining Ibsen’s set in its original as much as possible.

It is important to note that the play takes place in one room. An upper class apartment tastefully furnished. The room represents Helmer’s concern for class status therefore the set tells of Helmer’s aspirations and quest for a social status. This is where they entertain guest and conduct their lives and also assume symbolic importance. In this set is a world of oppression, marriage as an institution and motherhood. This set creates the symbolic doll house and an icon for emancipation. Nora consistent occupation of this set shows some amount of control and also
imprisonment. She appears in a space she does not own (owusu 2006: 33, with excerpts from interviews)

![Picture 6: Nora playing the role of motherhood with assistance from Helen. In the background are Helmer and Dr. Rank. Her Owusu creates a home out of the doll house. There was laughter and joy. Here we see a point where most characters were in the same space. Credit: Owusu Janet, 2006]

3.3 Cultural Effects on Interpretation

Culture and tradition affect the outcome of interpretation of texts and performances. A play moved from one cultural setting to the other experiences changes in its interpretation. Motifs and symbols are altered to suit the contexts in which they are performed or read. Their
meanings are contested or misrepresented; for a theatre director to effectively transpose an original meaning into her context of presentation s/he must not lose meaning of the playwright’s motifs and symbols.

In this performance Nora’s final exit is re-constructed. The reverberating sound of a bang is not heard, however, Ibsen’s symbolic meaning is not lost. In her thesis, Owusu explains why she re-created Nora’s exit.

I could not find the authentic copy of the script Ibsen wrote for the German debut, I used the script which ends with Nora leaving. I had to respect the playwright’s view, but in line with my culture and philosophy as a director, I made Torvald inform the household of Nora’s departure. Ann Marie the nursemaid, Helen the maid, and son Ivar run after Nora; while the two other children remain seated to console their father. The lights went off (2006:20).

Having been married for over thirty years, Owusu’s views on Nora’s exit are conservative. She is not in support of Nora’s neglect of her children but admires her courage. In reaction she her re-constructed, Owusu explains that her adaptation places expectations in the audience of Nora’s return. In the minds of the audience is the foreboding of return embodied by the maids and Ivar’s pursuit of Nora. Also, she (Owusu) portrays the involvement of the external family in marital issues in Ghanaian culture; the actions of the two maids are representative of the external family. In this performance, we see Ibsen’s symbolism modified to accommodate culture’s reaction to views and representation of female and female rebellion.
**Picture 7:** Nora finds her voice and realizes her mistakes and the wasted years of servitude.

Credit: Owusu Janet, 2006

**Picture 8:** Helmer announces Nora’s departure to the household. The two maids run after her.

Credit: Owusu Janet, 2006
Moreover, Owusu acknowledges the influences of the Ghanaian institution of marriage on her reconstructed last scene. Marriage as an institution and tradition in Ghana is not about a couple living together and pledging their love. It is about families coming together and accepting each other. A woman marries into her husband’s family; she does not marry just her partner. When problems arise in marriages, help is sought from the extended family of the couple. Divorce in the Ghanaian context of marriage is very much prevented. Lauretta Ngcobo (2011:534) writing on African motherhood explains that marriage is a relationship between two groups and not just two people; sometime the death of a partner does not invalidate the marriage itself. Explaining the concept of divorce, Ngcobo writes that:

> The image of divorced women in our society and our literature is negative. Only a handful earns understanding of the community such as in cases where the woman has a clean reputation which contrasts sharply with her husband’s maltreatment of her. Only in a few case do women win the sympathy of the public. This is confirmed if they are seen to behave with dignity after the divorce (2011:534).

Does Nora really have a cause to leave? Defining Nora in the context of a sub-Saharan African woman’s role and identity in marriage will be difficult. They have so much in common; Nora’s experience is not different but race and cultural setting makes a difference. In response to this question, Owusu confirms that she sees Ibsen as writing for humanity and the cause for women. Personally, she disagrees that the play is a feminist work. Overall Owusu sets out to deduce working themes that will convey issues of women but most importantly a cause for both men and women to find an understanding with regards to issues of gender and human rights.

Recreating/adapting the final scene also shows the effect of society and the extended family on the individual. Its hold on the individual is seen in diverse ways as Owusu subtly but symbolically employed Helmer’s call for help from the maids. This action portrays the consistent involvement of the society and the extended family in the institution of Ghanaian marriage. She also demonstrated the age old communal nature of the African society and culture. An Akan proverb says:” a man must depend for his well-being on his fellow man” (this version of translation is taken from Kwame Gyekye’s African Cultural Values 2003: 35).
In this context, it is very easy for thoughts and symbols to overlap. Nora’s search for emancipation and awakening of critical consciousness can be suppressed by the same culture which is serving as a criteriomn n for analysis and interpretation. In this recreation we see a possible reinforcement of the societies’ hold on an individual and also a recapture of Nora back into the doll’s house. To a large extent, we see culture and society’s quest to tame women. Ibsen’s variables for freedom are not independent from tradition and culture. In Act Three we have an exposition on Ibsen’s thoughts on the issue of culture and tradition embedded in Nora’s description of her life as a routine. She says:

Nora: [imperturbably]. What I mean is: I passed out of Daddy’s hands into yours. You arranged everything to your tastes, and I acquired the same tastes. Or I pretended to . . . I don’t really know . . . I think it was a bit of both, sometimes one thing and sometimes the other. When I look back, it seems to me I have been living here like a beggar, from hand to mouth. I lived doing tricks for you, Torvald. But that’s the way you wanted it. You and Daddy did me a great wrong. It’s your fault that I’ve never made anything of my life. (Ibsen 2008:80)

Here Ibsen tells of patriarchy’s hold on women. The experiences of Nora are not different from what Ngcobo (2011:534) tells of the various transitional stages in an African girl’s life.

A little girl is born to fulfill this role. She is made aware of the destiny awaiting her development and prepared from the earliest age possible for the role of motherhood that she will play elsewhere, away from her family home. She is well loved but her rights within the family are limited compared to those of her brothers. She is aware that somehow she is on her way out . . . in short; from the earliest childhood she is an outsider who is being prepared for the central role that she has to play at her in-laws. Many young girls will be forgiven for their eager anticipation of their marriage and a place where they will finally belong. But as we shall soon see, disillusionment awaits them. This is double jeopardy, for they will never really belong anywhere.

Ngcobo did not create a doll’s house in her description of women in the institutions of the family and marriage; she takes us through a more expatiated exposition by Nora’s statement above. Nora’s position as a woman from her childhood and adulthood as a daughter and wife is made clear and as we follow through to Ngcobo’s discourse; we see Nora’s disillusionment and identity crisis. Clearly Nora tells of her feeling as being an object as she relates the transfer from her father’s hands into Helmer’s; her father groomed her into a woman fit for marriage, fit for being ruled by a man (contextually). Generally, every woman’s story is not different from that of Nora’s. The female gender has over the years
proven to be a unifier of both the developed and the developing world. Issues of women may not be the same across board but then, there is a factor and a quest to win over patriarchy.

We also see the effects of culture on the Nigerian adaptation of the play titled *Nneora: African Doll’s House* by Tracie Chimo Utoh-Ezeajugh. Her adaptations as faithful as it is to the original plot depicts issues of being a woman and the preference of male children. The forgery in the original is replaced with Osita’s demand for sexual favours from Nneora. Such forgery will not be a relevant cause enough for conflict. Forgery and corruption are common features in Nigerian society, to which audience in this context will find irrelevant and undeserving of such attention. Here, Nneora did not slam the door neither did she leave her children behind. She departs with her children. Awo Asiedu in an article on the virtues of womanhood with respect to this adaptation posits that:

The fact that we do not see Nneora leave slamming the door, suggests a ray of hope of reconciliation could be interpreted as the playwright’s desire to lessen the blow on male sensibilities. It may also be an indication that perhaps the fight for equal rights by African women is not as confrontational as their counterparts elsewhere (2011:10).

The reserved or the seemingly non existence of African feminist as posited by western feminist groups is due to the non-confrontational media through which African feminist or gender advocates address issues of women rights and gender equality. Every feminist has a final goal of creating an equal playing field for both women and men, whatever the approach may be. The result is most desired. Utoh-Ezeajugh’s adaptation is consciously rooted in Nigerian culture through which she redefines symbols, the setting and the themes. Issues of empowerment and identity were resolved. Culture determines the media and approached used in creating symbols and decoding those symbols. On one hand, Owusu and Utoh-Ezeajugh unconsciously reiterated the culture of female submission and the non-confrontational relationship between men and women. While on the other hand, they (Owusu and Utoh-Ezeajugh) channeled strength and a ray of hope through this media.

Nora’s tarantella tells of aspirations of freedom and rebirth. Whereas, there are Ghanaian dance forms which Owusu could have employed, her insistence on the Tarantella is due to the symbolism of freedom it represents. Owusu’s presentation of this scene does not
symbolize neither did it forebode events yet to happen. On the contrary, she explains in an interview and in her thesis that, the tarantella serves as a last dance and chance for Nora to be Helmer’s doll (Owusu 2006:35). From my observations, she treated the scene as any action within the progression of the plot; it failed to realize the playwright’s intentions. Also, Owusu omitted the ‘stockings scene’ of the second act. It is very obvious that as a director she does not associate symbolism to very iconic actions and gestures of the characters through which the playwright forebodes future actions and the turn of events. However, the omission is not detectable and neither did it have an effect on the realization of both the playwright and the director’s motives.

Analyzing my interviews and documents of the production I have come to believe that Owusu’s interpretation of the play failed to manifest in the performance. Below she furnishes us with her understanding of the play’s symbols:

Helmer has a very clear and narrow definition of a woman’s role. He believes that it is the sacred duty of a woman to be a mother and a good wife. Moreover, he tells Nora that women are responsible for the morality of their children. In a sense, he sees women as both childlike and helpless creatures responsible for the purity of the world through their influences. Nora as a symbol is called a number of names by Helmer throughout the play. These include ‘little songbird’, ‘squirrel’, ‘lark’, little feather head’, ‘little skylark’, ‘little person’ and ‘little woman’. Helmer is consistent about using the word ‘little’ before the names he calls her. These are usually followed by the possessive ‘my’, by this Helmer believes that his wife is more or less his property. Helmer’s chosen names for her reveal that he does not see her as his equal by any means. Nora at times, as if expected, behaves like a doll or pet for him. There is a feminine low image of Nora as against Helmer’s masculine bourgeois moral authority that has imprisoned her. It is not entirely clear that she can survive in the harsh social and economic climate outside the comfortable Helmer’s home, but it is clear that escape of the little woman is her final objective (Owusu, 2006:31-32 including excerpts from interviews).

Throughout Owusu’s performance is a conflict of interpretation with an attempt to implement the theory of realism. I am of the view that she did not achieve realism as she could not put the period of 1879 Norway made for a proscenium stage on an amphitheatre in 2006 Ghana. Therefore the outcome of this production questions the director’s thoughts on theory and its practicality under the circumstances of her production. It also throws light of issues of adaptation and to what degree can a text be performed in originality when transposed into a different environment. Further, one is left to wonder if the transposition
and recreation of just the symbols and major themes into another culture should most importantly be termed an adaptation.

In the next chapter, I look at the perception of a range of students about the text and the character Nora. I seek to look at the relevance of the text in present-day Ghanaian society. To achieve this, many topics are discussed ranging from social to politics.
Chapter 4

The Women’s Issue in Ghana and Interpreting Ibsen’s Symbols

Helmer: This is outrageous! You are betraying your most sacred duty.

Nora: And what do you consider my most sacred duty?

Helmer: Does it take me to tell you that? Isn’t it your duty to your husband and children? (Ibsen 1997:82)

Oh, mother, I heard good news today. My wife has given birth.

What did she get? A girl.

Welcome, source of water, she will give us water to drink.

Oh, mother. I heard good news today, my wife has given birth.

What did she get? A boy!

Oh, mighty man of valor, stay on if you have come (Mercy Oduoye, 1995:87).

Socialization plays a major role in gender role ascription. Culture enshrines basic socialization functions which are passed on over periods of time that spans over generations of a group of people. As elsewhere in Africa, Ghanaian traditions and cultural systems of socialization are orally transmitted and recorded. These oral forms of documentation are found in folklore; such as myths, proverbs and idioms. Presently, popular culture or urban culture has taken on the role of folklore in socialization. Modernity of African folklore is seen through popular culture/urban culture of music, fashion and oratory.

In Mercy Oduoye’s accounts (in the opening quotation of this chapter) of a mother’s reaction to her son’s good news of child birth, we are to understand the value placed on the male child and the warm reception of the new father. Out rightly, one observes the difference between a boy and a girl, thus, can forecast the socialization of these two. This
example is situated in Akan culture; as explained by Oduyoye, it categorizes a girl as the giver of water and a boy as a mighty man of valor (1995:87). Though within a matrilineal society, the Akan girl child’s first construction is into servitude. Ibsen describes this notion of servitude as duty; a duty that Helmer (for that matter men and society) thinks a woman should know and not be told. He even refers to it as a “sacred duty” (see Ibsen 1997:82-83).

Women make more than half of the population of Ghana and represent 52% of its labour force. Majority of them work in the agricultural sector of the economy and in private business enterprises. Mostly, these private business enterprises that women are engaged in are referred to as small businesses. Ghanaian women are very industrious and innovative. Takyiwa Manuh writing on the Ghanaian context of gender violence explains the status of the Ghanaian woman below:

Women also dominate the formal sector of the urban economy, forming about 60 percent of the labour force. Their presence is poorly felt in the informal sector of the economy where they are only 15 percent of all employees. In the police services for example, only 11 percent of employees are women, while in the public services, females constitute about one-third of all employees, with most of them employed as secretarial and support staff. A little over 6 out of every 10 men in Ghana (65%), but more than 4 out of every 10 women (43.5%), are literate. . . . in politics and decision making, the proportion of females in parliament has only shown marginal increase, from 9.5 percent in 2000, to 11 percent in 2008, although there have been increases in the numbers of woman standing as candidates for elections. These low percentages as well as debates in the national press about as women high office bearers demonstrates a deep unwillingness in the Ghanaian body politics to accord women their rightful place as decision makers and full citizens. The reasons for the low numbers of women in decision-making and public life are numerous, and include low educational achievements, discrimination on the basis of gender, traditional prejudices, and the absence of political will and commitment (Manuh 2009:47&48).

This chapter further accesses the perception of being woman in Ghana. It traces this through oral literary forms of socialization. This assessment shall aid in my discussion of how A Doll’s House is read, understood and analyzed. Developed in sections, this chapter further constructs the theme and characters within the context of symbolism.
4.1 Fear woman and live long

“Fear woman and live long”\footnote{This axiom is very popular in Ghana. It can be found in many of the dialects and has become an accepted axiom throughout the country. Sutherland-Addy’s translation is from Akan into English. With this translation she writes on the representation of Ghanaian women in popular culture in Sex and Gender in the Era of AIDS – Ghana at the turn of the millennium.} is a very common saying found throughout most of the ethnic groups in southern Ghana. Over time, it has crept into popular culture especially on the Highlife music scene. From the late 1970s to present, the concept of ‘fear woman and live long’ has been the theme and subject with which most Highlife musicians and Hiplife artists found most interesting and flexible to work on.\footnote{Highlife music is a music genre in Ghana which fuses traditional music with other western types of music. Here we can observe the influences of calypso, jazz and the blues on one track of music. Hiplife is a progression on the highlife genre which has a heavy influence of the Rap, Reggae and techno music genres.}

‘Fear woman and live long’ has a lasting impression and interpretation of womanhood. As the waves of gender equality advocacy goes on, it has to compete with this axiom circulating in popular music and music videos in Ghana. Esi Sutherland-Addy is of the view that as a maxim, it embodies an ideology in the pithy phrase which lends itself to a variety of interpretations (Sutherland-Addy 2006:255). At first glance of this maxim, it tells the reader how a woman is perceived and how men will relate to her. Ghanaian women being labeled as fearful can have relative interpretations. It can be good or bad; the bad supersedes in most interpretations. Ama Ata Aidoo explains in an essay that this maxim transports negative meaning of womanhood. She writes:

To some West African men, the way West African women struggle to be independent “is really quite bad”. They think that “these women are all over the place”. Wherever men meet, you can be sure to hear jokes and stories about women, all of which are supposed to show how “terrible” we are. One solid piece of “advice” any growing boy is likely to pick up along the coast of West Africa is: “Fear women” (2005:380).

The first fragment of this statement is often verbalized (as seen above in Aidoo’s statement) and also, as inscriptions on the body of commercial vehicles. As an ideology and part of speech in Ghanaian languages especially Akan it enriches, creates a shared understanding
and interpretation of meaning within an individual’s context. Also, Sutherland-Addy posits that, even though as a maxim and expression in language women and womanhood are being viewed in a misogynistic light (2006:256). This maxim exists with other forms of maxims in praise of women and womanhood most especially motherhood. The earth in most Ghanaian cultures is referred to as female and her attributes are duly celebrated through festivals and harvest seasons. ‘Fear woman. . . ’ seems to stem from issues of love relationships between men and women and the widely spread witchcraft accusations of women and girls. Below I quote the lyrics of a song that gives a wider understanding of the context in which this maxim which has grown to become an accepted description of Ghanaian woman over a period of time used. The songs are originally in Akan and translated by Esi Sutherland – Addy. In translation, Tumi Ebo Ansa’s song titled “Kente Dress”; has the refrain: “Fear woman and live long, indeed, Kwame Ata, fear woman and live long”. Ansa sings with a tone of warning to Kwame Ata to fear woman so that he can live a long life. Women will kill you, the song continues and warns. In other highlife songs translated by Sutherland-Addy we see these male musicians tell of various experiences with woman and the need for the male folks to be weary of them. In Brantie Amakye Dede’s song titled “Mma Pe Sokoo” (women love luxury) he generalizes the life of Ghanaian women as luxury loving and expensive to maintain. Below is a translation:

   Women love the luxurious life
   It is the luxurious life that women love
   The women of today, if you don’t have money they do not love you,
   Woman love luxurious life
   It is the luxurious life that women love.

In Nana Kwame Ampadu’s “Mmaa Dooso” he paints a picture of what a marriageable woman should be. He creates the character called Afrakoma.

   Afrakoma likes to roam too much
   She has no time to light up the hearth

14 Akan is a language of the Akan ethnic group of the Ashanti kingdom and it peripheries. It is now one of the most spoken languages in Ghana attributed to it being a major trade language.
Dog-woman
When I teach her
Anything, she cannot grasp it
She sits there stupidly
Sheep
Afrakoma…

As above, most of highlife songs with women as subject seek to pass moral judgment on women. They seek to create women to the taste of men. Ironically this field is dominated by men thus there is little retort from female singers on these issues. Most female musicians are found in gospel music. Hence this age old perpetuation of these misogynist interpretation of women. The danger of this perpetuation is that it has a wider audience and transcends the period in which it is made.

Ghanaian films as elsewhere such as Nigeria present young women as gold digging and cunning whereas the older one as witches and unbearable in-laws. Instances where plots tell of successful women, we are constantly reminded of her sexual exploits with the men in higher positions to get to her position or her relationship with political elites. Notwithstanding, there are very good films that tell of the many hard working and influential women too. Most often they are overshadowed by the well advertised ones that tell of cunning and adventurous women.

Ghanaian commercial entertainment industry was dominated by men in its early stages. Women scarcely mount the stage. Generally, there was a negative perception of female performers. These perceptions were somewhat pervasive through the industry and society as a whole. The female performer is seen as loose, and most often a woman without morals. John Collins writing on Concert Party traveling theatres deduced from interviews from that:

The low regard for women performers by the Ghanaian concert party and highlife band practitioners is manifested in their reluctance to allow women to join their groups; which is why up until the 1990s female parts and voices were practically always performed by men. The leader of the Jaguar Jokers confirmed that forty women had approached him for a job as actress-singer, but he had never hired any
because women members of the audience would be annoyed to see their husbands admire a real woman on stage (2007:47).

Traditional perceptions and definitions of female roles and identity are the main causes of women not performing on the stage. Within this perception is the concept menstruation rendering musical instruments impotent. There are claims of male musical performers who complained of their instruments being rendered impotent after being touched by menstruating women. Within some ethnic groups in Ghana, women do not play musical instruments. Musical instrument or instruments for performance are seen as sacred in most communities. They are integral parts of culture and traditions. Apart from taboos related to the biology of women, Collins explains further of the issues of modernization and women perception as stage performers. He writes that,

These traditional carry-overs that lowered the status of contemporary female popular artist were exacerbated by some aspects of the modernization/urbanization process. These include tensions within the extended and polygamous family, an increase in prostitution resulting from the high ration of urban male migrants, the formal education of woman and the introduction of new sexual norms. All these combined together to threaten traditional male authority – which explains why popular texts do always dwell on the subject of sexual tension, marriage treachery, ‘good-time’ girls, witchcraft accusations (Collins 2007:48).

The 1960s saw the gradual trickle of women onto the stage; first in the music industry and later on the theatre scene. This sudden burst was due to governmental intervention in the entertainment industry. Bands and theater groups opened up to women performers. Within the context of performance, these female actresses played stereotypical roles of wife, mother and a host of other female roles.

Today, women play versatile roles and even impersonate men whereas in the earlier performances male actors impersonated female characters. Ghanaian society’s perception of female performers still has an impact on how they are perceived, reviewed and their performance styles. With their present predominance on the stage, majority of their roles are still stereotypical female roles. Many have played very adventurous roles but the role of Nora is enormous. It took three nights of performance for the actress of Nora (in the Accra debut) to realize the impact the character had on her. “Every night was different and it
comes with different emotions too. Can I leave my children? For three nights I still have no answer to that question”.

Ruled by the thought system created by folklore, it is understandable why these perceptions have and are still in circulation for many generations. Tales create lasting images of women and the role of women while proverbs or maxims reinforce these images and thoughts through language and daily expressions. Being embedded in language their transmission runs wide and also, permeate other cultures.

Oduoye’s *Daughters of Anowa* (1995), looks at African women and patriarchy within Ghanaian culture within the context of Akan culture. She analyzes the effects folklore and language has on the perpetuation of thoughts and gendered role ascriptions. Here, she confirms the construction of women as ‘gold diggers’, she writes:

> Most damning to the image of women in Africa are the tales of relationships that portray them as demanding. Women are described as persons who stop at nothing to ensure that their husbands perform heroic deeds or even risk life and limb in order to retain their affections. … so it is that in folktales men often get wives by a display of wealth and, in marriage, women are labeled as gold-diggers who seek only material gain (1995:47).

Of tales, mostly those of southern Ghana are woven around a stock character, the spider, popularly known as Ananse. Referred to as Ananse stories in Akan; these stories seek to explain the myths of creation. Also, they are a media through which morality is preached and transferred. Told by the fireside on a moon-lit night; it is the favourite of children and to some extent adults too. Oduoye’s study points out that these tales shaped and continually are shaping social relationships even under modern political systems (1995:19). This continual shaping and influence is observed in African literary forms and popular culture; hence gendered social relationships and reinforced age old perceptions of what is masculinity and femininity. It also defines gender roles and age-defined roles.

Below is an Ananse story which paints most women as gold-diggers whilst explaining why babies cry.

---

Ananse, well-known for being poor, once exchanged his rags for the gorgeous cloth of his friend Kwa (Nothing), with whom he was going wife-hunting. As a result, every mother’s daughter, but one, agreed to marry Ananse, while they treated Kwa with contempt because of the rags on his back. Only one woman took pity on Kwa and gave him her daughter. All of Ananse’s new wives mocked Kwa’s bride.

On arriving back at the town of Ananse and Kwa, the girls discovered their mistake. Kwa and his wife, being generous, took them all in. Ananse grew jealous of Kwa and, with his usual meanness, managed to cause Kwa’s death. Then all the women made sure that all the children mourned him forever. This is why children always cry for nothing (Barker and Sinclair 1972:35-37, Oduyoye 1995: 47).

In tales where Ananse is married, we often see his wife as a dull, insignificant character that has no action in the plot; in most cases she does not speak at all and when she does she does not make any impact as she is depicted as stupid or a glutton. In instances where she makes an impact in the plot of the story, she is most often hardworking but cheated from her yields by her husband. These tales also construct women in most cases as obedient, motherly and hardworking.

On the other hand, maxims (idioms and proverbs) are regular parts of speech or expressions in everyday life. Proverbs reflect thoughts and philosophies of a group of people. They have a stronger effect of transmission because they are parts of language and speech thus their frequent use. As stated earlier in the instance of the maxim ‘Fear woman and live long’ the impact of gender classification through or in proverbs are enormous. For the sake of the objectives of this study, my focus is on those that answer the question of female representation and what is woman. However it does not change the fact that, there are many maxims in praise of women, but most often the other over shadows the latter.

Most at times, I am of the view that men as architects of culture created media in maxims to propagate their definition of femininity. Their placement and definition of woman to and within a standard lower to theirs is evident of their inability to understand the mysteries of the female body and mind. Below is a selection of Akan proverbs that seek to define the
woman and her roles. The proverbs stated below were collected into a book in 1879 by J.G. Christaller exactly around the time when Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* is published.

- Women love where wealth is.
- What you would not repeat in the streets, do not tell your wife in the bed chamber.
- The tortoise has no breast and yet feeds her young ones.
- When you catch the mother hen, the chicks become easy prey.
- Like hens, women wait for cocks to crow announcing the arrival of daylight.
- When a woman makes a giant drum, it is kept in a man’s room.
- Marry your daughter when you can, your son when you please.
- A stubborn wife does not care to be beaten.

As listed above, one observes a culture’s perception of women. These proverbs are hundreds of years old thus it relates age old perceptions of women. Their use today in speech tells of the consistency of these perceptions over a long period of time. It portrays women are lovers of wealth and luxury, disloyal and dishonest people. Also, the proverbs above tell of female dependency on males hence construct a submissive dependency. ‘When a woman makes a giant drum, it is kept in a man’s room’ we get the idea that the success of a woman is accorded to her husband or female success is owed to their male counterparts. This also buttresses the concept that women are under the tutelage of their fathers. The last of the list above prescribes physical abuse of women and gives a context in which a woman should and can be beaten.

There is to a large extent, a great achievement of gender equality in Scandinavia since the publication of Ibsen’s play. Much cannot be said about gender equality in Ghana as compared to that which has been achieved in Scandinavia. Ghanaian women had various media through which they reacted to proverbs or maxims that were demeaning to their image. In a culture which originally does not give women the privileges to self-expression; women found creative media through which they can negotiate their spaces and demands. Non–verbal and artistic forms of expression are generally common with women.

---

16 The selected proverbs were collected in Akan by J.G. Christaller in 1879 titled *Mmebusem*. Here I relied on Mercy Oduyoye’s English translations in her book *Daughters of Anowa* (1995).
One artistic media through which women relate their thoughts and create a philosophical expression is the naming of cloth. A popular fabric in Ghanaian fashion and traditional dressing; the wax prints is a symbol for Ghanaian woman. It serves as a media of self expression and tells a story. Cloth naming is solely a female prerogative. From accounts, no one seems to know exactly how the naming process started but it is suspected to start from business women who trade in cloth and/or by women who are the main users of these fabrics. The names given to most of these cloths reflect what women go through. Naming is base on the motif and patterns in the fabric and also the time and context in which it is released onto the market. Mostly in Akan but with similar translations and meaning in other languages, these names tell the mood/status of wearer or contextualize the event she wears the cloth to. Presently cloth names are not famous to the young public but in certain contexts today it is of importance.

Selectively worn to occasions, wax prints/cloths are media of self expression for women. A media and space not controlled by men. It offers them a source of freedom and a world in which they can exert their control and react to perceptions accorded them. Examples of cloths names such as:

- Ask before you marry (one has to investigate the family in which she is to marry from or from another perspective, a woman has all rights to choose who she decides to marry.)
- Handcuffs (from the explanations given, one deduces that this cloth embodies the ‘imprisoned’ or the policed nature of being female from the norms associated with living as a woman.)
- Pebbles in the house (pebbles can easily be thrown away if they is of no value to its owner or the compound in which they are found; so are women too. As objects, they can easily be discarded )
- A bunch of bananas (tells of women as very perishable commodities)
- A well (in the wake of all the relegation into the background of most societies, women are still seen as a source of life and the continuation of the human species.)
- There is no mediation for hatred (divorce is not common in traditional Ghanaian societies or cultures; most women stay in marriages at times with a strong desire to
leave. Here one can sense a sentiment of disgust toward the long family mediations of marital issues which should have ended up in divorce.

- One cannot pamper or seduce hatred (here the sentiment is similar to the above)
- I am not afraid of anything (a time to rebel)
- One can no more do good (we can deduce that the woman has had enough)

In these names are exhibitions of imprisonment and frailty. Female equation to a bunch of bananas shows how fragile and weak they felt. A woman who wears these cloths tells of her feelings. Further, we observe from the listed names the possible hatred women feel for being oppressed. ‘One cannot pamper or seduce hatred' tells us of Nora decision and throws light on Helmer’s failure to mediate with her neither could he seduce her into staying. Indeed, one cannot pamper or seduce hatred; enough is enough and neither can one do more good. Seen as feeble and uncourageous through these names we observe women sentiments of male thoughts about their courageousness.

Shifting from non-verbal artistic representation of the female reactions to patriarchal cultural representations we meet with female Ghanaian writers who tell of women from a new perspective. In Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Anowa* (1970) set along the coast of Ghana during the European invasion and slave trade, we encounter a rebellious girl (Anowa) who refused all men chosen by her parents to marry. She never conforms to being a woman; she makes her own decisions and chooses what to do and where to go. She elopes with a man. During the time in which this play is set Anowa’s actions were not in line with prescribed female behavior. From the accounts by the chorus in the play, it is evident that the community did not understand Anowa’s strange behavior. She was labeled strange, not woman and also, they suspected that she was under the influence of the spirits. Here also, we observe patriarchy’s construct of a woman having adverse effects of female behavioral classification which is out of the norm.

In her novel *Changes* (2004), Aidoo looks at women within marriage as an institution in relation to issues of modernism and economic independence of women. Her character also embarks on a search for freedom to express her feelings and to love a man on her own accord. Here Esi leaves her husband because he intrudes in her decision and her personal
Amma Darko (1956 - ) on the other hand looks at Ghanaian women in her novels as objects trapped in marriages and motherhood. She tells of issues of domestic violence and the dreaded fate of childless women. In her novel *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), we encounter Mara journeying through a loveless marriage and migration to Germany into a life of prostitution.

Ghanaian female writers have an onerous task of writing for women and telling the female story from a feminine point of view. It’s a daunting task in the wave of Ghana’s democratic success story and sense of gender equality as women rub shoulders with their male counterparts at work and in business. This picture which is projected drowns the reality of women in their homes and also the traces of old philosophical thoughts about women which are being propagated by popular culture. Somehow the works of gender advocates through campaigns and education of the rights of women is being threatened.

In my group discussion of the text with students, the majority of female students chastised Nora for leaving her children; ‘a woman does not leave her children’ they all confirmed. Clearly one observes from this statement that Ghanaian notions of being woman and wife have affected the analysis of issues of women. Motherhood to them is most important therefore Nora should have prioritized her children over herself. Recently, in a conversation with a Norwegian man on board a train; he was of the view the woman empowerment is affecting childcare and the core of the family. In Ghana, a male student was of the view that women should seek their happiness first before their families. He further explained that when a woman is happy and content, it reflects in her household. Based on his childhood experiences, he reveals his mother’s decision for a divorce from his abusive father. However, he stresses that based on a woman’s circumstances, it is best to seek the welfare of their children.

Consistently, women issues and the concept of the new women face conflicting interactions of culture. It creates a conflict of identities for the women too in which being that new women can be misinterpreted by women themselves and society too. Therefore Ibsen’s Nora has to slam the door over and over again after centuries. Hence the outburst and the prominence Nora has gained as a symbol for female emancipation.
4.3 Politics and symbolism

Over the years the theme and subject of gender equality has dominated the interpretation and analysis of this play. Occasionally there have been some politics read into her (Nora) symbolism but then again gender overrides this interpretation too. Issues of gender are highly political in terms of governmental gender mainstreaming policies in the areas of employment, economics and female participation in issues of governance. It is pardonable that issues of gender inequality are pervasive in the study of this text; the time the plot is set and also the playwright’s time of writing is catalyst to this interpretation. But the versatility of the character and subjects is of help to us to contextualize and transpose these subjects into different periods.

Other characters in the play have potentials of in depth analysis with regards to Nora’s attainment of a symbolic status. As the focus is always projected on Nora, the others drown in her fame. Here, I shall look at the web Ibsen creates in telling a political side of what Nora embodies. Inspiration for this section is drawn from one of my correspondents, who stated his dismay at the consistent feminist response to Nora as a symbol. A student of directing (Kelvin Hesse, interviewed on 16.07.2011), he is of the view the *A Doll’s House* has a political impact comparative to the feminist interpretation so far. He asked me to read Ibsen as I would read Wole Soyinka (1934- ) \(^{17}\). Literarily, isn’t Africa trapped in a doll’s house? How can a woman in our context search for her identity if a whole nation has not discovered their identity yet? I was provoked.

A critical look at Helmer Torvald within the context of African politics in general sat me on the edge. He embodies a century’s old political canvas of most countries on the continent. Nora on the other hand is a political victim just as Africa as a continent and its individual nations. Below are the interpretations of the character of Helmer Torvald:

\(^{17}\) Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian playwright, novelist and essayist; the first African to be awarded the Noble Prize. Soyinka wages a war with the pen on Africa politics and African leader. He is well noted for his days in prison, exile and the frequent marches against the Nigerian government.
Patriarchy which has been discussed extensively in earlier chapters has been accepted as a main political variable due to the flow of power relations, the family as a political unit and culture as the basis of the creation of role prescription and the distribution of status.

When asked their views about colonialism, Kelvin Hesse who provoked my thoughts and stance earlier is of the view that Nora experience under Torvald can be equated to most countries under colonial rule and those that have experience colonialism. “When Nkrumah gained independence for Ghana, what was his main agenda?” He asked and I replied, “Development and national identity.” Nora left in search for self development and identity the same as Kwame Nkrumah ideologies for an independent Ghana.\footnote{Kwame Nkrumah (1909-72) led Ghana to independence from British rule in 1957. As a prime minister, he later became the president of the republic of Ghana. A Pan-Africanist, he helped various Africa states in attaining independence.}

Fig:2  The various political institution that Helmer Torvald represents
Nora as a symbol in the context of colonialism represents a country under colonial rule. National and individual identity is very critical to people under colonial rule. Literary works from this region especially from sub-Saharan Africa during colonial and post colonial eras where director towards to realization of liberation and identity. The Negritude movement which later became a genre in African literature was projected towards an affirmation of African heritage. It is an ideological position on black culture, identity and liberation. This sentiment is seen also in Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall Apart* (1958). In this novel, Achebe (1930 - ) creates a well defined African community of order and communalism. From the negritude ideologist to prolific writers, the African identity and development is key to their writing.

In Soyinka’s *Lion and the Jewel* (1963) we encounter tradition and modernity in conflict. A beautiful maiden has to choose between an old chief and a young schoolteacher who admires western standards and seeks to emulate them. A satirical comedy, this play also takes us through the journey of the maiden’s search for identity. Read in political contexts, the maiden is a symbol of colonial states in identity clashes of modifying their cultures of adjusting and accepting a western culture. The maiden at the close of the play marries the old chief. She chose her culture and identity over what is new and a process of adaptation.

Nora’s slamming of the door in contexts like this can been interpreted as liberation for nations under colonialism and also, the journey of self discovery, the road to nationhood and self sufficiency. Torvald’s rule over Nora shows a relationship where only one party benefits. She builds a home for Torvald, makes him a father and gives him recognition and a role in his community. She has no freedom of her own, no source of income and no identity. Her prime identity has been the daughter, the wife and mother. Ibsen’s construction of a doll’s house explains to us her controlled lifestyle. Nora is because Torvald is; she exists in the light of her husband. In the play, I have observed that it is the males that play with the doll in the doll house not otherwise.

---

19 Negritude in most cases is seen as an ideology and not a literary form. Propounded or formed in Paris in the 1930s led by Senghor and Aimé Césaire.
A doll house is an object that is controlled. It is played with and can be reconstructed when required and equally discarded. Ghana has been a ‘property’ of the Danes and then handed over to the British. Norway once a Danish then Swedish territory has these sentiments of being a ‘property’, which can also be translated in relation to what Ghanaians have once encountered. Ibsen’s ideas in this play are satirical in reaction to Norway being a territory and also the Danish and Swedish occupations. Two of my correspondents who refused to put premium on the feminist analysis of the text believe that this play can be classified as post colonial. Feminist analysis translates Nora’s slamming of the door as liberating for women and womanhood. These correspondents translate that action as the independence of Ghana.

Kelvin Hesse analyzes Torvald further and says, “Can’t you see he is a man of words and not deeds? How different is he from these African leaders. What do they do? Formulate policies that do not materialize.” African leaders are not in office for the love of their people and country but for the fame and status that comes with that office. They do not adhere to the mandate of their populace. Torvald completely disappointed Nora when she needed him most. He once made all the promises of love to her but never kept any of them.

Further in our conversation, Hesse sighed when I asked if he thought Nora (here Nora is used interchangeably as an idea in politics and society) adjust to life out in the world. He was skeptical. Interpreting Nora as Ghana on the world’s political stage, we both concluded that Nora definitely has a long road. Peace and identity are in hand but her survival becomes very problematic to analyze.

Patriarchy and colonialism has a similar tactics of oppressing people they once had under their control. Years after the colonial empires disintegrated and patriarchy being contested, there are other forms of grasping people under control. Neocolonialism comes in the form of economic control by former empires on their independent colonies. This in an analytical context exposes and questions the extent to which an entity can be free or liberated. Also, can we then propose in Nora’s context (as in the popular feminist interpretation) that neopatriarchy will develop as patriarchy has been defeated? If we transpose the economic relationship of independent African states with the west then we can arrive at the possible existence of a new form of patriarchy/colonialism that is subtly felt. Just as African
countries are at a cross-road of how to define their freedom, Ibsen in his alternative ending to his German debut of the play creates a milieu in which he forecasts alternative dimensions of patriarchal hold on women. Here there is an exhibition of manipulation to get Nora trapped in her doll house all over again. She has the chance to taste freedom but at a cost. On the other hand even if she leaves she will feel so much guilt. Here, Ibsen creates a circle of women being colonized by marriage whereas in freedom, motherhood becomes another form of colonization. Nora is left in this ending at a cross-road that today we see manifest in women ability to negotiate for space, freedom and identity.

In politics and economics of developing countries women are given affirmative action quotas. These quotas are to aid women’s involved in politics and decision making offices. The policies of affirmative action are to create a level playing field for both men and woman, and people of all races in their access to work, healthcare etc.; presently affirmative action is widely known for the equal representation for women involvement in politics. Governments are given a percentage which women should fill in the politics most especially parliamentary elections. In education, Ghanaian universities lower the grade point for girls’ admissions into the sciences and mathematical fields of study. Their intension is to get more girls into fields dominated by men. What these quotas do is to reinforce notions of women not being capable of fitting into a male dominated field of study and work, hence a questioning of where a woman belongs and what she can really do.

While mainstream power politics has created a scenario of female empowerment, religion and the highly religious culture in Africa as in Ghana is consistently reinforcing gender role prescriptions. At a friend’s wedding in Ghana last year June, the preacher advised women to love and serve their husbands “don’t listen to those gender people, they are lying. How many of them are married?” he preached. Based on the assertion that Africans are incurably religious; “a woman is in religion as a client” (Oduyoye 1995:109). Religion in Africa is complex so for the sake of this study I will not try to indulge in its complexities. I am most concern about the advent of charismatic and the new African churches and their effect on an already polarized concept of being woman.
These churches preach female submission and are quick at labeling female intelligence and weirdness as witchcraft. Women being religion clients are seen to their consistent quest for miracles and healing. The search for a husband can also become a religious affair. Most self-styled preachers with mushroom churches dotted all over the country take advantage of women and most often abuse them. The general notion of women involvement in churches is to seek and find answers to their problems. A cycle is being created here in that as much as women have gained some amount of independence over a period of time due to education and advocacy for their rights and economic issues, another form of dangerous patriarchal control is growing based on the reflections these preachers gather from the Bible. The orthodox churches are not exempted for their hold on women either, but charismatic African churches are reconstructing the thoughts of the ‘new African woman’.

The new woman confronts patriarchy in a very tactful mode; in the text we observe two women whose actions are easily drowned by Nora’s but then, they are the actual catalyst to her actions. Mrs Linde and nursemaid Anne Marie are women through whom Ibsen gives a forecast of who and what the new woman should and would be. These two women bear the effects of women contesting issues of modernity and negotiating their way through the old norm and the new. While Mrs Linde finds balance, Anne Marie foregoes her duty to motherhood for a paid role of nurturing Nora and her children.

In finding balance between the old and the new, Mrs Linde who has seen the world and did commercial works feels the emptiness of childlessness and motherhood. She feels that need by taking up responsibility for Krogstad’s children and family as wife.

Mrs Linde: [tidies the room a little and gets her hat and coat ready]. How things change! How things change! Somebody to work for . . . to live for. A home to bring happiness into. . . (2008: 66)

Here Ibsen creates a woman who is longing to play the role of a mother and a wife but as the plot progresses we see another who is longing to leave behind those same roles. Ibsen advocating for liberation as a theme and a subject of the play subtly debates what a real new women should be. He knows that the freedom to discover one’s true identity is the key for the transition to a modern woman but then in Mrs Linde he creates a balanced equilibrium a
‘free woman’ conforming to a well negotiated duty to family and culture. In an earlier exposition Mrs Linde narrates her experience of facing the world as a woman:

Mrs Lindes: well, I had to fend for myself, opening a little shop, running a little school, anything I could turn my hands to. These last three years have been one long relentless drudge. But now it’s finished, Nora. . . . (2008: 11)

Through Mrs Linde Nora has an idea of what happens in the world outside her doll house. She may have taken a decision which looks unplanned and unattainable but a very critical analysis of the text shows that Nora has a fair idea of what the world has in stock for women.

According to the play, Mrs. Linde runs a little school and a little shop; all these give clues to Ibsen’s proposal of the commodification of female work and labour. The use of the adjective “little” creates in an audience’s mind the space of a home. Here Ibsen transposes the home sphere into economics and the space into a financial unit. We also meet Anne Marie the nursemaid who leaves behind family in search of paid work in a home. Apart from the commodification of female work and labour, Ibsen also creates a space in which his female characters move. Mobility as movement from one place to the other without restrictions was not common with women in the early centuries through to the period in which the plot is set. Throughout the world and in most cultures women are socialized to police their bodies and the spaces in which they find themselves. In Ibsen’s plot mobility was not out of reach of his women considering the period in which the play is set. Anne Marie embodies the new woman who works in the home sphere and is paid; also she migrates for economic reasons. He also touched on issues of single parenting and fostering as measures which can absorb women’s duty to humanity and give them opportunities to explore.

These characters are catalyst to Nora’s slamming of the door. Expositions of their lives gave Nora cues to finding her voice and a decision that has resonated for centuries since her debut. She did not make a hasty decision or acted childishly as most critics thought, she had enough reason and petty skills with which she can make a living. In the conversation between Nora and Anne Marie in Act Two, I have cause to believe that Nora knows that even in her absence her children can be nurtured partly by a single parent and through other means such as fostering and by a caregiver. With her own background of being raised by
Anne Marie it makes no difference whether a mother is present or not. Below, Nora questions Anne Marie about her decision of choosing work over her child and family.

Nora: yes, Anne Marie, from now on I can’t be with them often as I was before.
Nursemaid: Ah well, children get used to anything in time.
Nora: Do you think so? Do you think they would forget their mummy if she went away?
Nursemaid: Good gracious- for good?
Nora: Tell me, Anne Marie – I’ve often wondered – how on earth could you bear to hand your child over to strangers?
Nursemaid: Well, there was nothing else for it when I had to come and nurse my little Nora.
Nora: Yes but . . . how could you bring yourself to do it?
Nursemaid: When I had the chance of such a good place? When a poor girl’s been in trouble she must make the best of things . . . . (2008: 36)

Apart from the duty a woman owes to her society and family, she does also have a choice to determine what is good and beneficial to her as an individual and also to her family. Nora rebels because she has identified that society will fill the vacuum her departure will create. The duty of a woman and being woman can be redefined in which children will find a way to adapt in the absence of their mothers.

4.3 Ibsen’s Symbolic Contestation of Motherhood

Ibsen in most of his modern dramas focuses on issues of modernity but prominent in most of this works are the family as a biological and political nucleus. He further constitutes this nucleus in a community that is male-headed or patriarchal. Though women within these nuclei are the less prominent (as observed and discussed so far in this study), Ibsen created a world for them that yielded power. This power came with self-identity and achieved through that. Ibsen’s thoughts of women and in a patriarchal society are illustrated in his notes cited in the introduction of Oxford World Classics on Herik Ibsen (Four Major Plays 2008: viii):
A woman (says Ibsen) cannot be herself in contemporary society; it is an exclusively male society with the laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine from the male point of view.

Within this political nucleus—patriarchy—are the conflicts and observations of both genders’ response to the fast approaching modernism of life and living it.

Ibsen forecasts the effect of single male-headed households and its effects on their female children. It is not by chance that *A Doll’s House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890) caused a stir with the public and critics. The Oxford World Classics on Ibsen (2008: see back cover) says *A Doll’s House* provoked uproar when it had made its Scandinavian debut and *Hedda Gabler* is referred to as a private dilemma. In this section, I seek to interpret Ibsen’s views on motherhood through the symbolic representation of and omission some characters. These ideas are developed by comparing a host of his modern plays with emphasis on *A Doll’s House*

Ibsen’s most famous women - Nora and Hedda Gabler, though, seen on different levels and arguably stated not to be compared to each other, do have something in common. They both have firm roots from single—male headed households. This paper seeks to look at both Nora and Hedda Gabler as father’s daughters and not necessarily women as most critics would have. I feel that looking at both of these women from this perspective [not in defense of any of them] will give us an insight into who their fathers made them into and why though father’s daughters became threat to patriarchy. Also, both Hedda and Nora contested their biological duties of motherhood. Ibsen further draws parallels to the states of these female characters by creating other female characters through which we can observe the conflicts that these two are going through.

The consequences of modernity though subtly put forth by Ibsen, were rooted in the socialization of these daughters—Nora and Hedda. The sharp takeover of the upper class by the ordinary lower class and obvious bankruptcy creeping into well established families, were the devastating effects of modernity but according to Giddens’ (1990:7) reference to Marx, was the emergence of a more humane social system. The emergence of this ‘humane social system’ gave birth to a conscious observation of the gendered structures in the society and the famous women rights campaigns.
Nora was a doll under the tutelage of her father; even in her marriage her husband treats her as a doll and a person under the tutelage of another. Nora had I would say an overdose of patriarchy starting from her childhood, her society in which she was socialized and in her marriage. Nora never knew what being a neutral human being was like, it was only when circumstances pushed her to the wall that she realized the missing links in her socialization into a woman. Helmer later realizes as the crises builds up that Nora is really her father’s daughter. To me, this is his biggest flaw of judging Nora earlier as a naive woman. In his awakened moments he says:

Helmer: … should have realized something like this would happen. I should have seen it coming. All your father’s irresponsible ways are coming out in you. (2008:76)

Though Helmer’s stress is on Nora picking his father’s bad characters, I see this as a revelation of Nora bond with her father and the likelihood that she thinks like her father. Helmer is in awe that over eight years of marriage he turns a blind eye to the possibility of his wife’s flaws. One would argue with me that, Nora cannot possibly think like her father because there was a female character in their household when she was growing up. Anne Marie the nursemaid has nursed Nora from infancy; so we can assume that she took up the void of her mother’s absence. Anne Marie is a questionable character created by Ibsen. We know that she gave up her daughter in pursuit of her career as a nursemaid, so definitely she is biologically a mother but not a nurturing mother to adequately socialize a daughter into a woman.

Nora is a woman created by her father in an image her father thought was befitting for a woman. Her father obviously sees women as play things and so played with her daughter as a doll and instilled that imagine of a woman’s constant reliance on a man to have a full and meaningful life. Just as doll’s become active and useful only when played with; Nora’s meaning of life as a woman is to be cherished, and played with. Below she reflects on life with her father as she tells Helmer:

Nora: …..At home, Daddy used to tell me what he thought, then I thought the same. And if I thought differently, I kept quiet about it, because he wouldn’t have liked it. He used to call me his baby doll, and he played with me as I used to play with my dolls. Then I came to live in your house……. (2008: 80)

She explains further that:
Nora: what it means is: I passed out of daddy’s hands into yours. You arranged everything to your taste, and I acquired the same tastes…… (2008: 80)

It is evident then, that, though Anne Marie has been a female figure in Nora’s life she did not really have any effect on her socialization as a woman. Nora did not in any way acknowledge any effect or whatsoever her nurse might have on her. For her it was as she states above, a move from one male to the other. During that movement her ‘doll’ status is maintained and not contested, from childhood to the status of a wife she remains a ‘doll’. A doll created by men not women as her mother would have.

Hedda Gabler on the other hand moved from her father into a world in which her socialization was contested. Her life with the Tesmans was a constant struggle with her identity. The Tesmans were a force for Hedda to reckon with and Ibsen smartly creates and maintains this friction by Hedda holding onto her maiden name. He (Ibsen) refers to her as Hedda Gabler throughout the play. In a letter written to Moritz Prozor (Ibsen’s French translator) in 1890 (http://ibsen.net/index.gan?id=466&subid=0) Ibsen writes in defense of Hedda maintaining her maiden name, he writes: “in that way I wanted to indicate that as a personality she was more as her father’s daughter than her husband’s wife”. This statement gives us readers/audience cause to identify with Hedda’s actions. Hedda Gabler to me does not think woman, she thinks man.

Raised by a general of a father in a house full of power and valor, Hedda grew under the wings of her father. She learned to be a man not a woman. Unlike Nora she did not play with dolls and neither did her father play with her as a doll. She learned to shot and to wear black habit with feather in her hat. Miss Tesman in a conversation with Berte gives us an exposition on what Hedda’s life was with her father:

Miss Tesman: …General Gabler’s daughter. The way she was used to having things in the General’s time. Do you remember her riding along the road with her father? In that long black habit? And with a feather in her hat? (2008:168)

Ibsen did not give much detail on Hedda childhood but this brief exposition gives us a sum total of Hedda’s socialization by her father. Besides pistols, the only thing that arouses Hedda’s interest is Eilert Løvborg confirms Templeton (1997:218). Though Løvborg clearly arouses her interest as in terms of love and attraction, Hedda has a different concept when it
comes to love/amorous relationships. As a woman she views them as a man. She never thought about marriage until she realizes her time was running out. She sees marriage as a social obligation to which she has to adhere to. For Hedda, society did not control her body as a woman but she controlled her body as a man. In the end biology - her age and being female - made her succumb to the social obligation of marriage. She relates this in a conversation with Brack:

Hedda: I’d really danced myself tired, my dear sir. I had my day…[she gives a little shudder.] oh no …I’m not going to say that. Nor think it, either.

She continues further to give us insights into her stands on marriage.

Hedda: …and when he came along and was so pathetically eager to be allowed to support me….I don’t really see why I shouldn’t let him?

Brack: Well of course, if you put it like that….

Hedda: It was more than any of my other gallant friends were prepared to do, dear Mr. Brack.

Clearly from above, it is evident that Hedda sees marriage just as a support system. Love to her is “glutinous word” (Act II: 202).

Helmer: This is outrageous! You are betraying your most sacred duty.

Nora: And what do you considered to be my most sacred duty?

Helmer: Does it take me to tell you that? Isn’t it your duty to your husband and your children?

Nora left her duties as a mother to rediscover herself as she tells Helmer:

Nora: I have another duty equally sacred.

Helmer: you have not. What duty might that be?

Nora: my duty to myself.

From the above exchange between Nora and Helmer, we do not only see a conflict argument between husband and wife over definitions of duties but a conflict between the old and new order of gendered role definitions. This old order of Helmer enforces Hegel’s notion of women being locked up in the family unit. Hedda Gabler on the other hand, has clearly defined herself as an individual and the old order creeping into her life is what she contests.
Nora has every cause to remain with her children and not make her ‘self’ as a priority. Any woman in Nora shoes belonging to the thoughts of the old order would have chosen her children’s welfare over hers, so could Hedda’s pregnancy also determine her succumb to the old order.

Hedda Gabler needs no self search to discover ‘herself’ because she has been overly socialized as a man. She could not relate to her husband who brought up by two lovely aunts acts ‘woman’. Jörgen Tesman is seen in Act One all engrossed with his old knitted slipper his aunt had brought him. Also his research area gives us a clue to his ever closeness to the female gendered roles; Jörgen is an expert on female labour with concentration on Brabant home crafts. Hedda finds the Tesmans colony so different to her individuality and sees them as a threat. She becomes greatly frustrated when she discovers that Jörgen might not assumed the enviable position in academia and then to politics.

Patriarchy over the centuries becoming a culture and a political order in society needs an agent of reinforcement. So far women have been the agent of reinforcing patriarchy. Mothers being the core of the family unit as stated earlier are the basic socialization agents for children. They consciously or unconsciously transfer the gendered structures of the society as they socialize their children. The institution of motherhood I think is the greatest asset patriarchy has for its reinforcement of new members of the society. Nora and Hedda lacked a mother’s socialization and that is why they have a different perception of who they are and what the society expects of them. This explains why their very first debut received harsh criticisms and reviews. These two women broke the defined order of their gender roles and expectations. They became threats to the old order and were moving into the fast approaching lane of modernism that was sweeping throughout Europe. Hedda’s case attracted a lot of psychoanalysis and hence her classification as a defective woman.

Hedda commits suicide and Nora slams the door. These two actions as much as they have been interpreted as liberating, the actions that proceeded to these steps are the important issues to the ‘new woman’. The act of negotiation by women is then a subject to discuss. Without the power to negotiate women feel trapped within the spheres in which they find themselves. Though Krogstad has dropped his charges against Nora and Helmer pleads for a
second chance; Nora’s independence is at stake because there will certainly be a feeling of indebtedness towards both Krogstad and Helmer. On the other hand Hedda cannot stand selling her freedom to Brack in exchange for covering her links to the Løvborg murder. If these two have not negotiated their way out of these situations but succumbed then Ibsen would never have created these new women. Negotiating out of the old order of listening to and serving their husbands loyally gave way to the liberatory stands that these two women stand for today. It takes courage to negotiate.

I am of the view that the defect these two women shared was the courage they gathered to opposed the laid down orders of society. Their courage helps them turn their backs on the fundamentals of being woman and their responsibilities to their societies of nurturing offspring into the patriarchy order. Unlike Nora who moves from hysteria and the consideration of suicide to feminism, Hedda remains caught in the hysteria (Freud 1989:164). To survive this hysteria that Freud talks about one needs courage, Nora found hers and so did Hedda.

Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife (2001) is of the view that, unlike Greek tragedy where women disturb the norm but permit the norm to reassert itself to comment on and define their deaths, Hedda abandons the norm of dying neither a as wife nor mother but Hedda (2001:247). As compared to women being absorbed by the old norm, Nora and Hedda Gabler are different because they were raised by men and cannot identify with the norms of womanhood and motherhood. So we can also notice in Rebekka in Rosmersholm (Ibsen, 1886) who though grew partly under her mother’s care as a child later was raised by a man. Her understanding of being woman too is different from the norm.

Ibsen sees mothers as the perpetuators of the old. Motherhood and nurturing reinforces patriarchy in the terms of socialization of both sons and daughters especially daughters. His experiment with these two daughters socialized by fathers gave a milieu in which these women had the strength and courage to defend their individuality first before any other. As much as being a new woman or accepting the new norm – modernity- requires a paradigm shift so does the institution of the family especially motherhood changes its mode of socialization. Ibsen echoes this change through other female characters too in this two plays.
Nora and Hedda Gabler as much as they are female do not necessarily have to be what society wants them to be and to have the courage to contest the old order they have to go through a paradigm shift of how the transmission of the old has been structured. Ibsen was undeniably putting the institution of motherhood under the modernism microscope and tactfully tearing it apart.

Throughout this chapter I have constructed the text within issues of being woman in Ghana and further given a thorough analysis of the issues and symbolic representation of characters, subject matter and from motifs. At the long round, my thoughts show how applicable the text is in analyzing contemporary issues and how timeless it is a sit moves from culture to culture. Freedom is relative depending on an individual’s state of being and what it means to him or her. Can Nora exist and contest the wider notions of patriarchy in the world out of her doll’s house? In the next chapter I sum up my thoughts and findings in relation to Nora’s quest for freedom and her contestation of patriarchy.
Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusion

From the previous chapters, I have looked at various issues and contexts within which A Doll’s House is read, performed and perceived. With the context of perception the study looked further at how those perceptions are translated into performances. There are various instances when the text has been perceived differently other than the age old perception and interpretation it has been accorded over the years. In the first chapter, I introduced the reader to the objectives and the methodology employed to arrive at the context and the discussion of the text. It also looked at the concepts within which the study is situated with respect to the environment in which the text and research is being read/performed and conducted. With that in place, I proceeded to the second chapter that looked at putting the text within the context of gendered analysis. Here, I looked at the underlining gendered discourse put forth by Ibsen. To achieve a balance and also from my African culture, I chose literature that are not familiar in Ibsen studies to create the texts versatility and flexibility of the subjects and themes of the author. Also, the development of this chapter helps in my thought progression and gives a clear view hence forebodes the progression of my discourse.

In the third chapter, I focused on the teaching and performance of the play in Ghana. This focus is built around the two major art universities in Ghana namely the Universities of Ghana and the Cape Coast. Being the first major studies of Ibsen in Ghana, I made efforts to trace the introduction of the text in Ghana and the school curriculum; a time-line could not be established due to the unavailability of record in the schools and the poor culture of documentation. It also looked at the only performance of A Doll’s House in Ghana. Work on the performance brought other issues into discussion; issues of adaptation, culture and its influence on the interpretation and the method of staging of the text was discussed into detail. The fourth chapter which is a continuation of the third also looked at issues of gender equality in Ghana and the various media through which this issues and perceptions are projected and disseminated. With this in hand, the chapter continued to look at women’s reaction to these perceptions and also the similarity of Ibsen’s text to the culture of female
subordination in Ghana. Guided with these perceptions of being woman and living as a woman, I further looked into my correspondents’ interpretations the themes and the symbols of the play. Further I constructed Ibsen’s views on motherhood within the contest of the new woman and modernity.

Throughout this study, I have observed that readers of the text interpretations and analyses are based on their experiences and world views. Transposition of this play into other cultures gives a rich experience to Ibsen scholarship. It puts text into use and experiments which enhances and makes the text purposeful. Hesse’s rich analysis of the text is from his knowledge and interest in literature and performance. He desires to be a theatre director thus is vast array of knowledge of this repertoire. Whereas his course mates interviewed showed a much diverse analytical stance of the text he took me to an inspiring level of appreciating this play. There is more to discover in the use of Ibsen’s texts in Ghana. The challenge is for another researcher to look into the use of other Ibsen plays and their performance.

**Conclusion**

For a man to write for and about women centuries ago but still have precedence and control over these issues centuries on must be commended. The versatility of the text with its simple language makes it easily understandable. Working with very sensitive issues in a delicate period, I am of the view that Ibsen took to mind his audience and how fast his thoughts will reach the world beyond his reach. Written in Dano-Norwegian and a probable envisage of translation, Ibsen create a body of text that will not lose its symbolic meaning even while translated.

This play just as it transcended various forms of criticism; period of theatre history and time and also, in translation and adaptation has not lost the essences and meaning of its symbols. So far, culture and the context in which the play is performed seem to dictate the representation of these symbols. As observed in the third chapter on teaching and the performance of the play in Ghana, we notice a director’s efforts to give an original representation of the text on stage; she did not fail and neither did she succeed. Culture and
the environment affected her interpretation and representation of the text on stage. Whereas within the context of teaching the text in the modern drama class, Ibsen’s creation of the woman takes over the discussion and much of the theoretical teaching of modernism in the theatre is lost to the symbol of female rebellion. In the Nigerian adaptation referred to, the main subject and theme is not lost but some iconic catalyst that aided the progression of the action and solution were affected by culture and context of presentation and interpretation. Owusu maintain the forgery deed while Utoh-Ezeajugh in her adaptation did not find it necessary because she is writing from a country best known for corruption and forgery. Within this context Nora deed with Krogstad will not be seen as a grave deed to result in later events in the play.

Also, Owusu’s Nora did not slam the door neither was there a resonance. An Ibsen conservative may see this representation as not a representation of the text and a loss of the magnitude of theme and subject. As much as this director adhered to the iconic catalyst to the culmination of the action, her ending of the play was representative of the culture and what she thinks her audience will be comfortable with. In most of European performances, the sound of Nora’s slamming of the door still resonates. It is understandable because this is the culture in which the play is set. On the other hand, Ghanaiian culture determines the outcome of Nora’s actions whether an adaptation or in a director’s perception of originality.

Nora’s sudden move towards the regions of the third worlds is a manifestation that its themes and subjects are of importance to the audience in these regions. In these regions as in sub-Saharan Africa, A Doll’s House is not read or performed for art’s sake, it has a purpose and a contestation to very sensitive issues especially those of gender, human rights and politics. Even though the sense of rebellion is not exhibited by the ‘black Noras’ her simple action of walking out through the door with her back to the home that used to be a symbol of imprisonment is enough of a strong statement of courage and determination. A Doll’s House in sub-Saharan Africa is not only a fight for gender equality and respect for humanity; it is a campaign for female emancipation and contestation of age old cultural institutions and politics. Overall, the women’s issues is readily identified with before other interpretations are read into and accorded other symbolic and iconic representations of characters, subjects
and themes. It is fascinating to note that the women’s issue does not entirely over shadow other interpretation ignored for the sake of the play’s popularity with feminism.

Situated within the context of post-colonialism, this play sets a tone of political interpretation and national identity. It represents the untold symbolisms of Ghana’s fight for independence that earned her the title of the black star of black Africa; the first country below the Sahara to gain independence from western rule. Her action resonated throughout African and gave other countries the courage to fight for freedom and national identity. Nora’s rebellion and independence can be viewed in relation to most African independent states most especially Ghana.

Ibsen’s suspense of Nora’s departure and her possible survival in the larger world makes this play open ended and highly debatable. He creates in his audience uncertainties which also tell of the cost of freedom and emancipation. Freedom as the plays tells, does not come easily; it takes the brave to attain freedom and also freedom as expensive must be respected. In most African cultures as it is in Ghana, it is said that, a woman does not leave her children; Owusu’s Nora left her children. Within this context, this is the highest form of rebellion of a woman to her marriage and her duty to motherhood. This has a lasting impact to the resonance of a door slam. This interpretation and Ibsen’s iconic representation shows that to gain freedom and independence one has to seek self identity and individuality first. It can only be achieved alone.

The outburst of Ibsen’s literary works is predominating in the southern and eastern African countries where Norwegian diplomatic influences are most felt in sub-Saharan Africa. It predominance is due to the cultural collaborations and funding that is readily available to these region from the Norwegian government. In the west however, Ibsen is studied and performed without much assistance. Further, for majority of Ibsen literary works to be explored in this region, the texts must be made available. Through this A Doll’s House will not become synonymous to Ibsen as observed in Ghana.

As Henrik Ibsen and for that matter Nora has become a cultural symbol and icon for Norway, so is the growing debate of Nora’s contestation of patriarchy in the wider world out
of her doll’s house. From the growing changes of and dimensions of patriarchy it is clear that women cannot wholly contest this institution of culture but what is different now after Nora revolution is that women can at least express themselves and be heard. They have the freedom to be mobile and decide whether to be mothers or not. And in the context of political satire, western powers are still depending on their previous colonies and vice versa to create the system of neo-colonialism. The difference here is that, the relationship is clearly defined.

It is clear that women will prefer to have control over their identity, biology and institutions with uncertainties than to remain in a sacred duty of servitude in tranquility.
Bibliography

_A Doll's House_. By Henrik Ibsen. Perf. Janet Owusu. School of Performing Arts, Univ. of Ghana, Accra. 6-7-8 April 2006.


Kornu, Stanley. *reading and analyzing A Doll's House* Solace Sefakor Anku. 8 July 2011.


Owusu, Janet. *Interpreting/Directing A Doll's House in Ghana* Solace Sefakor Anku. 4-5 July 2011.


Appendix

Janet Owusu

Jane Owusu holds a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree from the University of Ghana. Currently, she is the head of programmes at Ghana Television network. She is in charge of public and current affairs, education, youth and gender.