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Crossing Research Boundaries: 'Our Nankani Daughter' in Academia

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Abstract

Western education has the tendency of blurring specific or individual socio-cultural identities in the name of knowledge and civilization, creating in the process cross-cultural or multicultural identities. Although the extent of this impact is debatable, the art and craft of research, the hub of Western education, takes a toll on who we are, as non-Western scholars. Our identity, as beings of defined locations and creativity, is drawn into a sharp negotiation process. 'Crossing research boundaries' examines some of the problems of academic research and its impact on African researchers and their religio-cultural identities from a female perspective.

KEY WORDS: Identities, Boundaries, Culture, Nankani, Africa, Research

Introduction

'Words are spirits – use them with care' they said as we were guided through the formative years of our lives.[1] It is an undeniable fact that the life of the rural African child is lived in a community of peers, although constantly under the watchful eyes and attentive ears of its elderly community members. These peer groups, generally structured according to gender and age, form smaller social units for close bonding and cultural cohesion. This also makes it easy for supervision and instruction by the elders. Thus, growing up in a rural Nankani village, Naga, in the Upper East Region of Ghana, I was constantly cautioned on my use of words. The situation reached its climax when I became fond of the chorus of a particular dirge.

Returning from the boarding school for holidays, I joyfully joined in the performance of the final funeral rites of one of our grandmothers, Akalu. Actively participating in the role of the granddaughters, I sang and danced to my heart's desire. A chorus from one of the popular dirges soon became my favourite piece. Used for the final rites of older women, it had acquired a specific religio-cultural space and timeframe and could no

NOTE: The title of this article emerged after my PhD fieldwork in 2006 at the University of Edinburgh where it was used in a seminar presentation. The content of this paper is however significantly revised and updated.

[1] Rose Mary Amenga-Etego, *Mending the Broken Pieces: Indigenous Religion and Sustainable Rural Development in Northern Ghana*, (Trenton: African World Press, 2011), 130.

longer be trespassed, not even by those who see themselves as 'insiders'. Like other dirges, it was also confined to its allotted space of ritual enactment. Creating a boundary between that which may be differentiated as sacred (ritual) space and secular (social) space, my fondness and continuous use of the dirge outside the prescribed ritual environment became an area of concern even to my peer group. Thus it was soon brought to the attention of the elders. This ended with a serious 'educational' session by the then 'grandmother of the house'.[2] The talk was meant to help me learn and understand things from the broader perspective, a process that involves some form of personal reflection, a reflection that goes beyond the individual to the group and clan or community. From then onwards, the caution on the use of words expanded to include ritually inscribed songs, poetic language as well as other forms of ritual phrases and enactments.

According to these elders, some words possess spiritual properties and one's lack of knowledge or inability to use them appropriately is a potential danger to the self and/or others; hence, a source of concern. This is because of the fear that some form of misfortune could befall the individual and, perhaps, other members of the group, family or community. Although this can be understood within the popular phrase 'prevention is better than cure,' it is important to situate such a concern within the context of what it means to teach and/or learn (educate) among the Nankani. That is, it is now common knowledge that there is no such designation as a 'school' or 'classroom' in traditional African communities. In other words, apart from the multiple usage of ritual sites, like those used for puberty rites, no designated places are set apart with specific schedules and subjects for the youth or people to go and learn, and afterwards, return to their homes or community. Rather, Africa's classroom or school is part and parcel of the daily life.[3] Specific knowledge forms may however be given on a need-to-know basis, sometimes, within the confines of rituals. This includes both the experiential and the symbolic manner in which sacred knowledge is transferred or parted with.

A question then arises as to how a 'Nankani daughter' can effectively conduct a religio-cultural study like widowhood rites within her community, where she is fully aware of the religio-cultural conventions surrounding such knowledge systems. For example, my study on widowhood and widowhood rites in 2003 was hindered for a period until the performance of the final funeral rites of a clansman created the requisite opportunity and ritual space for the research to fully ensue.[4] The concerns of the widows were that 'we are invoking the spirits of our ancestors and the Supreme Being for you our daughters not to experience early widowhood or go through the widowhood rites yet you are here enquiring of it.'[5] To understand the hesitation of these widows is to return to the above phrase, 'words are spirits.' The belief is that an in-depth discussion on the subject matter of widowhood outside the ritual space with any of the clan daughters would be contradicting their prayers. Thus, to protect their daughters, they would rather stall the study.

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[2] This refers to the most senior woman of the household, often in the category of grandparents. This form of categorization does not necessarily relate to age, it may be a generational demarcation.

[3] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1990), 1.

[4] Widowhood and widowhood rites among the people of Naga in the Upper East Region. A paper presented to the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture, Trinity Theological Seminary at a workshop on: *Widowhood in a Multi-faith Context*, Legon, Ghana.

[5] Ayowine Awine, interview, Naga Chief House, 19th March 2003.

The above is quite significant to the transfer or acquisition of some aspects of indigenous knowledge forms as well as the subsequent usage. Yet, there is the awareness that contemporary research is engulfed in finding a balance between research objectivity and sensitivity. This awareness is nevertheless problematic. There are no clear guidelines as to how such a balance might be drawn. This is especially complicated for indigenous researchers who are not simply participant observers but are part and parcel of the research data they are dealing with and more so, if the data under discussion are confined to specific sacred (ritual) spaces and contexts. This undoubtedly becomes a problem for the researcher as he/she crosses the boundaries of object and subject, from the indigenous experiential knowledge demands to the Western academic sphere where research neutrality and objectivity– based on critical 'scientific' analysis of data is held to be the key principle of research– is required. Again, how can a religio-cultural insider negotiate the boundaries of the sacred and the secular in relation to the Western academic demands of empirical referencing? And finally, set within the African non-written (oral) data and subjective premises, in what way(s) and to what extent can these subjective data be made a substantive part of the indigenous researcher's material in the new world of Western academia?

Crossing Research Boundaries

The phrase 'Our Nankani Daughter in Academia' transforms and explains the symbolic representation of the former 'Crossing Research Boundaries'. By this, I am simply positing a case in which a 'daughter' from a rural African community, hitherto a 'non-literary' society, is crossing not just the sharp rural-urban divide of developing countries, but beyond this internal divide to an already established and institutionalized system of the academia where the rules and norms surrounding it are practically inconsistent with the society from which this daughter originates. This situation has serious geographical, religio-cultural, socio-economic as well as political implications. Even though the above factors are important, all of them cannot be dealt with in this discussion. Nonetheless, itemizing them helps to show that the discourse is beyond geographical and religio-cultural delineations or philosophies of teaching and learning. Thus, boundary crossing can be interpreted from diverse perspectives and this is often relative to the individual concerned. Even so, each interpretation will carry specific nuances relevant to the subject of study.

'Crossing research boundaries' involves physical and metaphysical boundaries. Yet, crossing these are essential for the researcher and her community, if the goal of having the daughter in the academia is to be realised. Even though this is not the focus of this study, there is a sense in which a discussion on some aspects of the researchers' crossing of physical geographical boundaries, and both the researcher and community's crossing of the metaphysical boundaries, are relevant contributions to this presentation. That the personal has become political in the academic quest for research objectivity can no longer be denied.[6] It is a fact that this researcher has traversed several geographical boundaries, in different capacities, in order to meet the varied needs of the extended African family system on one hand and to attain her desired formal (Western) education on the other. The latter is the basis for the current crossing into the world of the

[6] José Ignacio Cabezón and, Sheila Greeve Davaney. , "Introduction," in *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion*, eds. José Ignacio Cabezón and, Sheila Greeve Davaneyeds (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 4.

academia. In other words, crossing geographical boundaries is an integral part of acquiring Western education in many parts of rural Africa.

Thus a discussion on crossing boundaries from the geographical perspective is incomplete if its role in the researcher's educational endeavour is ignored. As in many parts of the world, all the stages of Western education cannot be acquired from a single rural community. The individual has to cross various communities, districts or perhaps regional boundaries for the desired education. So it is in this case. My educational journey from the rural area to the University of Edinburgh took me from the village to the regional capital of Bolgatanga, Jirapa in the Upper West Region and the national capital, Accra. Yet, each and all of these geographical locations, including the present one, Edinburgh, cannot simply be looked at in terms of geographical and academic boundary crossings. As shown above, the religious and socio-cultural challenges these have posed are immeasurable. Thus, the current stance of globalization, where the world is rhetorically declared a global village, yet, unlike my rural community in northern Ghana, crossing boundaries in this global village is fraught with difficulties. Not only is distance a problem, the various forms of technicalities and restrictions have set it apart from the village identified above.

On the other hand, boundary crossing among an exogamous patrilineal society such as the Nankani, and their neighbours, is neither new nor unique. With a maternal grandmother from Shia in the Tallensi-Nandam District, a mother from Balungu in the Bolgatanga District, a paternal grandmother from Kologo in the Kassena-Nankani South District and a marital community in Kandiga in the Kassena-Nankani East District, inter-community boundary crossing is an integral part of life, negotiated constantly to maintain filial bounds. This is especially common with women who are the main negotiators of these filial bounds through marriage. This system has helped to create avenues for easy understanding within the traditional system, for the maintenance and control of individuals, through such possessives phrases as 'our' as in 'Our Nankani daughter'. It is the daughters who, through marriage, establish the networks.

Sometimes, these boundary crossings are among neighbouring African countries and this may be part of the colonial heritage. In this case, the basis for an established network for boundary crossings may not be due to marriages but the partitioning of former indigenous communities among two or more nation states. For instance, there are family relations across the Ghana-Burkina Faso boundaries, enabling members from each neighbouring community to cross over to the other for filial reasons. This calls for a critical evaluation and understanding of community or ethnic boundary creation and demarcations in Africa and the dynamic roles of such boundaries in the people's lives. It is now clear that the arbitrary colonial boundary demarcations disrupted and affected the extended African family system as well as the traditional governance systems of indigenous communities. As Ann Bahr put it, these are "national boundaries that have little or no relationship to ethnic boundaries."[7] In other words, the concept of crossing boundaries presents different meanings to different people. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which one perspective does not obliterate the other but generates multiple identities, each enriching and enabling the other. Hence, one interpretation of the phrase 'our Nankani daughter in academia' is not limited to the physical aspect but to an understanding that transcends the entire Nankani conceptual frame of thought or

[7] Ann Marie B. Bahr *Religions of the World: Indigenous Religions*, Foreword by Martin E. Marty, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005), 56.

worldview. It is within this framework, the metaphysical, that the translation or interpretation of indigenous languages (oral text) into the Western academic system of written text with its subsequent demands for standardization becomes a problem for indigenous researchers.

Scholars in Africa have in diverse ways called for an examination of this situation of boundary crossing and its effects on Africa's psychological and intellectual framing. Indigenous African languages, with their symbolic forms of framing, are not just embodiments of culture and identity; they are an integral part of the people's "worldview or general philosophy of life."[8] In his work on *Globalization and the African Scholar*, Kwesi Yankah shows how, "our psychological attitudes to language make possible the immediate denunciation as unacademic any discourse not articulated in Euro-American languages. Translate the same discourse into an Euro-American language, and the cross-linguistic rendition almost magically propels it into the realm of academia.[9] The key issue emanating from the above quote does not only underscore the relationship between Africans and their religio-cultural and/or socio-political setting, but also illustrates the actual dynamics of boundary crossing in the academia. Yankah's portrayal of the African "psychological attitudes to language" and how such a make-up renders its linguistic framework 'unacademic' in 'the realm of academia' illustrates some of the concerns on the problems associated with the use of indigenous languages and frames of thought in academic research. The fact that the research area requires specific forms of representation or standardization in the English diction, one that does not fully take into consideration the contextual situation, is not an isolated problem of the Nankani, but one that "transcends the boundaries of rural, urban, non-literate and elite in many parts of Africa."[10] This is irrespective of whether or not these cross-cultural encounters are processes of enrichment and development.[11] In other words, Africans lose the richness and spirituality of their constructions to the benefit of the 'Other' through the academic standardization of language.

It is quite clear from this brief overview that the formative stages of this Nankani daughter is already immersed in a trail of boundary crossings. Yet, the fact that they play a crucial role makes them significant to this study. Thus, the geographical boundary crossings with their individual socio-cultural undertones are part and parcel of her journey into the academia. This notwithstanding, the process of acquiring formal education in the field of religious studies, from the Nankani perspective, especially, by a 'daughter', is a huge leap across the traditional worldview and the community's gender dynamics.[12]

Although at present the academia is a 'neutral ground', set in motion with rules for proper conduct and governance, it is still an area of great concern for some indigenous African researchers. For many Africans who have crossed these boundaries, this concept

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[8] Amenga-Etego, *Mending the Broken Pieces*, 69.

[9] Kwesi Yankah, "Globalization and the African Scholar," in *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives, edited by* Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho, Vol. I, (Accra-Ghana: Sub-Saharan Press, [2004], 2012), 53.

[10] Amenga-Etego, *Mending the Broken Pieces*, 235.

[11] Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural* Process*: The African Dimension* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1993), 96 and Ngûgî Wa Thiong'o, "African Languages and Global Culture in the Twenty-first Century," in *African Visions: Literary Images, Political Change, and Social Struggle in Contemporary Africa*, eds. Cheryl B. Mwaria, Silvia Federici, and Joseph McLaren, (Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2000), 155-161.

[12] Amenga-Etego, *Mending the Broken Pieces*, 255-256.

of 'ourness' is often lost as a result of crossing the boundaries into this new ground. It is within this general frame of understanding that this current study is being undertaken. The resultant concerns are twofold. What are some of the implications of boundary crossings and how would the theoretical and methodological demands of neutrality and detachment in the academia affect with the deep-seated community-based orientation and spirituality of the Nankani or African? That is to say, within the general frame of understanding 'Our Nankani Daughter in Academia', what would be lost and what would be gained? How would the current theoretical base of the academia deal with the involved narrative spirituality of the Nankani? Here, Yankah observes that:

> The denigration of Africa's academic discourse as unscholarly, rather descriptive, and insufficiently detached or superficial for academic purposes, appears to be a by-product of the Eurocentric perception that the 'primitive' African mind is generally incapable of abstract thinking and expression, and deals more with the concrete. This, by inference, extends to the realm of scholarly discourse, where Africans are said to indulge more in concrete descriptions than abstraction.[13]

This is rather unfortunate. As Yankah explains, this notion of the academia can be traced to Plato's *Republic*. Yankah traces Plato's epistemological viewpoint to his "the universe is no longer experienced with the senses, but is 'objectified'. Here the object separates himself from the environment in other to maintain control over it. According to this new epistemology, in order to be capable of critical thought, we must be independent from that which we wish to know-uninvolved, detached, remote."[14] How can or in what way can 'Our Nankani Daughter,' with the possessive 'Ourness,' represent as well as present the Nankani effectively in the academia?

Giving an Account of Oneself by Judith Butler provides the viewpoint of the academia from the Western perspective. The quote from Minama M. Adorna at the beginning of her first chapter on, 'An Account of oneself' depicts her desire to situate her work within the historical and theoretical context of Western academia. The quote: "'The value of thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar".[15] Positing such a statement in her first chapter from which she scholarly handles her augment on 'An Account of Oneself' presents significant insights on the one hand and raises critical questions on the other. With regards to this study, the statement raises more questions than it provides solutions. Whose 'value of thought' am I to consider? Is it the Nankani or the academia? In as much as the answer to this question is central to the measure of distance needed from the western academic perspective, it is also important in determining the extent of familiarity and/or the issue of discontinuity. Questions as to which is the familiar context, in relation to this study is vital? What do we mean by distance and what sort of distance is required in this context? On whose account is this distance to be measured and on what grounds would discontinuity be justified? All these questions are essential to our understanding of each situation.

In other words, to cross over from the traditional boundary to the academia requires one to distance, and if possible, disengage oneself from the familiar to engage, in this case the 'unfamiliar', in order that his/her "value of thought" can be measured for possible acceptance. It is worth noting though, that even though there has been, in

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[13] Yankah, "Globalization and the African Scholar," 54.
[14] Yankah, "Globalization and the African Scholar," 54.
[15] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 3.

recent times, a paradigm shift on this viewpoint in scholarship,[16] placing such a quote in a 2005 publication connotes the different categories of thought on the subject matter. That is to say, the notion of a paradigm shift from scientific neutrality to ethnographic reflexivity is, to some extent, a relative discourse; hence, relevant mainly to those concerned. It is with this considerable relativity that supposedly poses the problem for this paper. It is also precisely for this conflicting stands that the phrase 'crossing research boundaries' is an integral component in this study.

'Our Nankani Daughter in Academia'

A week after this title was published in the Religious Studies Seminar Programme bulletin; I was puzzled by the choice of words and title as a whole. I was also bewildered by the binary juxtapositions in which the title was framed. I was amazed as I mentally examined each of the words within a reasonable short pace of time. As I began to unravel the title, examining the words 'crossing', 'boundaries', 'Nankani', 'research', 'academia', 'our' and 'daughter', the questions 'who and where am I, the real me?' emerged. It was soon clear that even though the topic and intended content was clear at the time of its composition, I was no longer sure of it, especially, as I considered the subject of positioning. It was, and still is, obvious that the 'I' plays the role of the 'daughter'. The 'I' is responsible for the act of 'crossing', through the medium of 'research' but then, if the 'I' does gets into the 'academia', then the 'I' becomes 'Our'. The questions: 'who are these possessive group, are they the Nankani? How and why have they emerged to take possession of the 'I' became additional issues for consideration. It soon became apparent that this can be seen as a typical phenomenon in many African societies and, particularly, in relation to people or communities and the extended relationship they hold with their daughters, within the context of marriage?

Daughters, within the context of marriage, are not just a means by which inter-clan, intertribal or interethnic relationships are established and bridged; as Ifi Amadiume points out, they are an integral part of the redistribution of resources and wealth in traditional communities.[17] It suggests that a link between the Nankani and the academia is being drawn from the traditional socio-cultural perspective. This is not only in relation to the perceived possibility of wealth or financial gain, as with bride wealth; it hinges on the people's religio-cultural and socio-political lifestyles as well. This is because the daughter's identity as a Nankani will forever be an integral part of her being, irrespective of crossing the boundary into the academia. This identity tag also makes it possible for the use of the cumulative 'Our'. It is this presupposition, based on the identity tag, that posses a serious research problem for indigenous researchers, especially, in religio-cultural studies. How does one balance these religio-cultural conditionings with the academic grammatical convention and the principles of neutrality and objectivity?

According to some Nankani elders, the advent of formal education was the beginning of discontinuity for their children and their religio-cultural tradition. The new educational system did not only introduce a physical change of scenery, it drifted their children from the familiar to the unfamiliar frame of thought. This group of children are *sekul coma* (school children), a phrase used for the educated or those who have had some

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[16] Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[17] Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, (London: Zed Press, 1998).

considerable amount of Western education. The phrase *sekul coma* connotes a sense in which the community is aware that their children are learners (children) in their new environment. They were, and still are, quite aware that their children will have to continually strive to care for themselves, outside the traditional extended family support system. With the understanding that these children are alienated from the local community, a process in which a majority of them will no longer be familiar with their traditional norms, they took it as a duty to instil in these children a continuous sense belonging and responsibility. Thus creating an understanding of multiple belongings for their 'educated' children, the concept of 'ourness,' is a concept that expands the words 'home' and 'family' into community and its associated membership. In other words, 'home' and 'family' are not limited references to where the individual lives or nuclear family but to the place and among the families to which such an individual was born and raised. Such a reference may relate to an entire village or ethnic group. It is a reference of belongingness; hence, the use of the words 'home' and 'family' by migrants in the Western Diaspora might be a reference to their African roots.

It is in this regard that the issue of distancing oneself from the familiar poses problems for indigenous African researchers. At present, African researchers are not only crossing geographical and academic boundaries, they are doing so also in the religious sphere. Yet in all these areas, the indigenous background, to some extent, continuous to form an underlying current in frames of thoughts and actions. Ann Bahr has, for instance, argued that:

> The majority of converts to Christianity or Islam are not purist: They not only engage in indigenous practices occasionally but also continue to be informed daily by the worldview of African indigenous religion. The institutional and social structures of African indigenous religion have weakened in many parts of Africa, but indigenous religion remains the spiritual background of all Africans no matter where or whether they attend religious services. Simply by virtue of the fact that they are culturally and philosophically Africans, they continue to believe in at least certain elements of African indigenous religion.[18]

It is in this respect that rather than distancing oneself, indigenous African scholars researching their communities may choose to identify themselves. The post-modernist approach to research, despite the criticisms against it, is a welcome addition to research.

Another issue arising from this presentation is that of 'positioning'. The questions: Who am I? Where am I? Where do I belong? Are crucial. Even though these present different opportunities for analysis, the question remains as to how these different positions can be effectively negotiated within this subject of boundary crossing? The fact that all these questions are crucial in the processes of knowledge acquisition and transmission cannot be denied by indigenous African scholars, more so, female searchers. For instance, how is the question 'who am I?'- in the context of Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*, processed? In what way would the 'I' pose a problem in terms of research neutrality and objectivity and, therefore, affect "[t]he value of thought" presented. Thus, the intricate involvement of a researcher and the underlying implications of such an involvement on the question of research objectivity is a constant subject for critical review. For instance, even though John S. Mbiti tried to safeguard his work, and probably himself, from potential critics, by noting that "and in any case I am

[18] Bahr, *Religions of the World*, 57-58.

by birth an African,"[19] Okot p'Bitek argues that this is not enough because he forgot or neglected to say he was also a priest?[20] In other words, what is the required level of disclosure?

Although this possess' serious constrains on every researcher, it complicates the problems for indigenous African researchers, whose desire of crossing their traditional boundaries into the world of academia entails a great religio-cultural as well as socio-political leap. As Africans, with African research topics and subjects, they are placed within the 'insider' category of the "insider/outsider" debate.[21] James L. Cox sees this position as compromising the researcher's efforts on the subject of scientific neutrality and/or objectivity; hence, the need for an honest identity disclosure.[22] It is worth noting that even though the insider/outsider debate is not the focus of this study, hence, cannot be strongly engaged in this discussion, its role on the issue of positioning cannot be overlooked.

Positioned as insiders, indigenous researchers may possess some basic knowledge of their communities like language, political and geographical landscape, religio-cultural and other social traits. In this regard, the indigenous notion of belonging and communal solidarity may also provide a degree of security and mutual trust, between the researcher and respondents. This can be facilitated by reason that 'our daughter' or 'son' will do the 'right thing' and vice versa. Yet, it is this very point that presents serious challenges to the subject of research neutrality and objectivity; thus, the crux of presentation. Straddling two different, yet contesting, worlds of intellectual objectivity and filial solidarity, indigenous researchers find themselves in a threshold. It is for this reason that the question: 'should the quest to enter the Western oriented academia present such tough stands as 'crossing research boundaries'?' becomes relevant.

This notwithstanding, there are often some internal dynamics associated with indigenous knowledge acquisition and redistribution. As shown in the introduction, this may relate to ritual spaces and time, but they could also be tied to taboo and secrecy as well as the community's gender and age restrictions. As a daughter of the research community, I am predisposed and privileged to the above-mentioned insider's knowledge systems. This notwithstanding, my gender, femaleness, as in the phrase 'our daughter' presents a different dimension to the way and manner in which some of the insider information may be divulged, understood and analysed. This does not only present a different scenario, but also, a gendered perspective in information dissemination to and by indigenous researchers. Thus, a gendered perspective in this case may still question the undue generalization of the privilege positions of insiders. Hence, the female perspective in this study would not only provide a different viewpoint to the traditional male dominated studies in this area; but would also pay specific attention to some peculiar problems of female African researchers, especially, in patrilineal communities. It is important to note that although the concept of 'daughter' is a life-long title and it's not peculiar to patrilineal societies, it's inclusion in this title seeks to stress the community's insistence on its entitlement to whatever may be derived from this

[19] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2.

[20] Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in European Scholarship*, (New York, Chesapeake: ECA Associates, 1990).

[21] James L. Cox, "African Identity as the Projection of Western Alterity," in *Uniquely African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, eds. James L Cox and Gerrie ter Haar, (New Jersey and Eritrea: African World Press, 2003), 27.

[22] Cox, "African Identity as the Projection of Western Alterity," 34-36.

crossing of research boundaries. This is irrespective of the often-mention of menstruation as a religio-cultural limitation on female religiosity and leadership roles in Africa. It is also important to note that, traditionally, the Nankani have no general religio-cultural menstrual restriction on their female. Rather, the attainment of important family, clan or community religio-cultural knowledge rests on the status and role of the female within the exogamous marriage system.

As a married woman, I have crossed the first two hurdles of the required feminine gender roles of marriage and childbearing. Considered to be reasonably matured and responsible enough, I am now deemed to be capable of accessing some traditional knowledge, relevant to my new status in the community. These traditional categorisations provide additional spaces to access other relevant research data. Bette Ekeya's explanation on the changing roles and status of the African female is not only applicable, but significantly elaborates and underpins this gender dimension.[23]

On the other hand, there is a sense in which educated females have also acquired some form of masculinity in traditional society. Although the colonial educational heritage, left females in many parts of rural Ghana at a disadvantage, the gradual education of girls provided new avenues for knowledge acquisition and self-expression. In time, the educated female acquired a place and status in family, clan and community. Thus, western education generally provided African women some masculine status. This is particularly evident in patrilineal societies. At present, it offers them privilege access into some traditional institutions and knowledge systems that are denied to non-educated women. Some educated women have become unofficial council of elders in their families, clans and communities. I have argued on this in an earlier study that such privilege statuses should be placed within the context of the financial and material assistance this group of women give to their families and communities.

The above has also affected some traditional gender roles. The primary feminine role of marriage and childbearing, although still highly desired, regarded and encouraged, is quietly and slowly relegated to the background, because of the immediate financial and/or material gains. As a result, the initial attitude of viewing educated women as bad women is also giving way. Now some families say women are better providers and carers of their families than their male counterparts.

Conclusion

In an effort to engage the complexities inherent in the multi-layered notion of boundary crossings in this study (geographical, religious, academic and gender), I have chosen to discuss aspects Yankah's *Globalization and the African Scholar and* Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Although both are in the academia, one is situated in the US while the other in Ghana. Yet, both are addressing the pertinent research issues of universality verses particularity, from their respective scholarly backgrounds and contexts. *Giving an Account of Oneself* by Butler is been very significant as it epitomises the nature and demands of western scholarship. Normalised and universalised as the standard for academic research, Yankah's *Globalization and the African Scholar* questions this hegemonic stands in the academia. Arguing that in the "so-called global trends within the academy,

[23] Bette, Ekeya, "Woman, For How Long Not?" in *New eyes for reading: Biblical and theological reflections by women from third world*, edited by John S. Pobee and Bärbel von Wartenberg-Potter, (World Council of Churches: Geneva, 1986), 59-67.

we often forget that 'globalisation' is merely the promotion of another local culture and knowledge to the world stage. The question of whose local knowledge is centralised as the standard, and whose should be designated as peripheral borders on the politics of knowledge: who is in control."[24]

These different perspectives have an impact on my study among the Nankani. As a Nankani in the academia, both scholarly views are methodologically and theoretically important and problematic. That is, effectively crossing this research boundary, with both my gender-based experiential knowledge and research focus on African indigenous religions and cultures without loosing my communally binding pride of 'our Nankani daughter in the academia,' will continue to be a personal challenge, at least, for now. This is because even though Butler seems to have responded to this when she indicated that the concepts of universality are not necessarily problematic. She also noted that it may become so if a universal principle cannot easily lend itself, in a culturally responsive way, to a particular context. In other words, when this happens, "the universal precept itself becomes a site of contest, a theme and an object of democratic debate."[25] This is the bane of Yankah's argument with respect to the contextual realities of indigenous African researchers and their research concerns, hence, the many concerns raised in this article.

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[24] Yankah, "Globalization and the African Scholar," 52.
[25] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself, 4*.

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