

**Women Representation and Empowerment in Perpetua K.  
Nkamanyang Lola's *The Lock on my Lips* and Anne Tanyi Tang's  
*Ewa***

By

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**ABSTRACT**

The persistent marginalization and subjugation of women in contemporary Cameroonian society, particularly within social, economic, and political spheres, remain a significant concern reflected in literary productions. This study examines the representation and empowerment of women in *The Lock on My Lips* by Perpetua K. Nkamanyang Lola and *Ewa* by Anne Tanyi-Tang, with the aim of analyzing how female resistance against male dominance is dramatized. The objectives of the study are to investigate the forms of oppression experienced by women, examine the strategies of resistance and retaliation employed by female characters, and evaluate how empowerment is portrayed as a transformative tool. Anchored on Liberal Feminist Theory, the study adopts a qualitative research methodology, using textual analysis as its primary method. The instruments employed include close reading, note-taking, and thematic categorization of selected texts. Data are analyzed using thematic and content analyses to identify recurring patterns in gender representation and resistance. Findings reveal that women are portrayed within rigid societal stereotypes structured along social, economic, and political lines; however, the playwrights equally present education, economic independence, and self-assertion as mechanisms of empowerment and resistance. The study concludes that the plays challenge patriarchal structures and expose systemic inequalities. It therefore recommends increased advocacy for female education, economic inclusion, and policy reforms that promote gender equity in Cameroonian society.

**Keywords:** Women, Representation, Empowerment, Drama, Resistance

**1.0 Introduction**

The marginalization of women and their persistent struggle for survival within male-dominated or patriarchal societies can be traced back to the earliest periods of human history. Across centuries and for several

millennia, from ancient civilizations to the modern era, the contest for dominance and superiority between the two sexes has remained a recurring social reality. Feminist scholars describe patriarchy as a structured system of male dominance that consciously minimizes and subjugates women through ideological, cultural, social, and institutional mechanisms (Walby, 1990). This system reinforces gender inequality by privileging men in positions of authority while restricting women's access to power and resources. With the emergence of democratic principles and global human rights movements, women have increasingly sought to have their voices heard in the mainstream of cultural, economic, social, vocational, and political participation. Liberal feminist theorists argue that women's subordination is socially constructed and challenged through legal reforms, educational advancement, and equal opportunities (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Tong & Botts, 2018). Despite these efforts, the struggle for recognition and equality remains a permanent feature of global development. In contemporary postcolonial societies, feminine dislocation has become an important discourse, as women often occupy positions of relative inferiority when compared with the privileges and opportunities historically accorded to their male counterparts (Lerner, 1986). Although progress has been made, structural inequalities continue to shape women's lived experiences in social, economic, and political domains.

The belief that a woman's place is exclusively in the kitchen remains a widespread myth across many societies worldwide. A more damaging variant of this myth, particularly in certain African contexts, suggests that women's participation in public affairs leads to social disorder, as dramatized in Tang's *Ewa* and Lola's *The Lock on My Lips*. Contrary to these assumptions, African women have historically played crucial roles in the development and sustenance of their societies, both in traditional and contemporary periods. As mothers, they constitute the core of the family, which in turn forms the foundation of the nation. In terms of

economic contribution, women serve as primary producers and sustainers of their communities, especially in agricultural production and informal trade (Lerner, 1986; Walby, 1990).

Research conducted in connection with the Fourth United Nations World Food Day on October 16, 1984, revealed that African women contributed approximately two-thirds of the labor hours devoted to traditional agriculture and about three-fifths of the time spent on marketing activities (Food and Agriculture Organization, 1984). Despite these substantial contributions, African women have historically received limited recognition and often remain victims of various forms of oppression, including exploitation, discrimination, and systemic social prejudice. Even where women attain prestigious positions or significant autonomy, they frequently must struggle more intensely than their male counterparts to overcome structurally imposed inferior positions and achieve independence (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011; hooks, 2000).

We strongly believe that the major problem that could be addressed if African women are to be liberated from all forms of oppression lies in the realm of attitudes. These attitudes reflect both men's perceptions of women and women's self-perceptions. At the national level, for instance, societal attitudes toward women significantly influence how issues affecting them are treated in policy formulation and implementation. Theatre serves as a powerful instrument for influencing attitudes and promoting social change. As both a written and performed art form, drama presents situations more vividly and directly than prose fiction or poetry and, for the same reason, engages audiences with greater emotional sensitivity. This is the point made by Henrik Sjögren when he argues:

Drama is the most direct of all artistic forms. It confronts living beings with other living beings and in this immediate correspondence between its practitioners and its recipient's lies the

theatre's superiority over all other art forms" (Sjögren, 1986, p. 12). In Africa especially, drama occupies a very special place. Unlike the novel, which is largely regarded as a foreign literary genre introduced through colonial influence, drama has existed as an indigenous art form in Africa since time immemorial. A second significant feature of drama in the African context is that it is both seen and heard; therefore, literacy is not a prerequisite for its appreciation. This is particularly important because a large proportion of the African population historically has had limited access to formal education and literacy (1979, p.12)

The purpose of this study is to examine the representation and role of women in African drama. The role of women in African literature is an area increasingly attracting the attention of critics. Yet, very little research has been carried out on this subject within the field of drama. Critics who are interested in women's issues tend to overlook drama, while those who have produced extensive criticism on drama have not given adequate attention to women (Ngambika, 1986). *Studies of Women in African Literature* remains one of the most comprehensive works on the role of women in African literature; however, the contributors provide only limited recognition of women's representation in African drama (Davies & Graves, 1986).

In Lola's (2014) and Tang's (2000) texts, one notable feature that cuts across both is the victimization of women by their male counterparts, as evident in the relationships between Mrs. Ghamogha and her husband and between Ewa and her husband. In Lola's (2014), for instance, Ability masterminds the rape of Mrs. Ghamogha in order to silence her advocacy for women's rights. The community again strips her of her land title; however, due to her assiduity, she resists this act of dispossession. Likewise, in Tang's (2000), rape is used as a tool of victimization, as Ewa's husband, Ajoh, repeatedly assaults her. In this vein, this study seeks to examine how the playwrights dramatize male chauvinism while simultaneously advocating female resistance. Using feminist theory as its framework. Feminist theory is a body of social, political, and literary thought that examines how gender inequality is created, maintained, and

challenged in society. It seeks to understand the structures, beliefs, and practices that privilege men over women and to propose ways of achieving gender equity and social justice. At its core, feminist theory argues that women's oppression is not natural or biological but socially constructed and reinforced through institutions such as the family, religion, education, politics, and the economy. As Beauvoir (1949) famously stated in *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," (p. 281) emphasizing that gender roles are culturally produced rather than biologically fixed. Liberal feminism shall be used for the purpose of this study. The study is guided by two research questions: How is thematic construction employed to foreground women's victimization? How is female resistance dramatized in *The Lock on My Lips* and *Ewa*? The argument is therefore grounded in the hypothesis that both authors portray victimization through thematic development and resistance through women's empowerment.

## **2.0 The Representation of Women.**

Most African women have been politically, socially, and economically oppressed, discriminated against, and repressed for so long that they continue to encounter significant impediments as they attempt to ascend to positions beyond those traditionally "reserved" for or expected of them (African Development Forum, 2008). Efforts by women's rights advocates to challenge the status quo have frequently been met with resistance, not only from men but also from some women within these societies, who question their authority to confront established cultural norms (Simona, 2010). The persistent subordination of women has, in some instances, drawn comparisons with historical systems of domination, as the structural marginalization of women reflects entrenched power relations embedded within social, economic, and political institutions.

According to Oxaal & Baden (1997), empowerment can be understood in relation to power structures operating at institutional, household, and individual levels. They argue that power often manifests as “power over,” characterized by domination and subordination, but may also be redefined as “power to,” “power with,” and “power within,” which emphasize decision-making authority, collective organisation, and self-confidence, respectively.

In this regard, gender-biased practices against women may be viewed as manifestations of “power over,” whereby patriarchal systems sustain inequality through cultural and institutional mechanisms. This raises critical questions as to whether such practices represent merely the preservation of culture or constitute a modern form of structural domination.

In contemporary postcolonial African societies, women’s subordination is evident in socio-economic and political spheres, where limited access to decision-making spaces, resources, and institutional power continues to restrict their advancement. Oxaal & Baden (1997) further emphasize that empowerment is not simply about access to resources but about participation in decisions and processes that shape one’s life. Therefore, understanding the representation of women requires examining how socio-economic and political inequalities influence women’s educational advancement and overall participation in governance and development. The subsequent discussion critically analyses these dimensions of subordination and their implications for women’s empowerment in modern Africa.

### **2.1 Socio-Cultural Representations.**

Representations of women, in the context of this study, should be understood to mean socio-cultural perceptions of women in terms of access, participation, job stereotyping, and the struggle for emancipation. This struggle extends further into the economic and political spheres. In

Kibaaka, as well as in Ewa's society, women are considered weak, inferior, vulnerable, mentally unproductive, and subaltern. They are rendered voiceless and denied access to and participation in certain occupational positions. Their place is confined to the private sphere, notably the kitchen, where their primary roles are to marry, bear children, and take care of the family, as will be examined in the foregoing paragraphs. Such gendered perceptions reflect socially constructed roles that reinforce women's subordination and limit their access to resources and decision-making spaces (African Union Commission [AUC] & United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2008, p. iii). As noted in the glossary of key gender equality terms, gender roles are socially determined and often reinforce male power and the idea of women's inferiority, particularly in access to land, employment, and leadership (AUC & UNECA, 2008, p. iii), thereby sustaining structural inequalities within society.

In both Lola's (2014) and Tang's (2000) works, women's rights are constructed within cultural and traditional norms. These norms are based on social stereotypes attributed to women, not as individuals, but generalized to all women within society. Lola's (2014) is a feminist work in which the playwright advocates a serious transformation in the conception of what an African woman is. The perception the playwright seeks to reshape is undeniably influenced by entrenched patriarchal ideologies. This is reflected in Hon. S. Wirkitum's statement: "In other places women own land" (2014, p. 27). Land ownership by women is, in fact, the main cause of disagreement in the play. Mrs. Ghamogha, in defiance of Kibaaka traditions, purchases land and registers a land title in her name. To her, this is normal; African women have the right to own land, as in Western societies. Nevertheless, according to tradition, this act is considered an abomination because Ngwerong forbids women from owning land in Kibaaka.

Mrs. Ghamogha does not reject tradition entirely; rather, she seeks its re-adaptation to accommodate women's rights. When Silveria Nyuydze asks her, "...leader, do you like tradition?" her response is, "Yes, but we have to direct them at times" (2014, p. 111). She expresses a similar view when she asks her husband, custodian of tradition, "Can there be moderation in certain areas of tradition?" (2014, p. 66). This aligns with the playwright's assertion in the foreword that "Today, African feminism seeks to institute the rights of women without necessarily dismantling the cultural framework of which the woman is an important stakeholder" (2014, p. 8). Such a position resonates with contemporary understandings of empowerment, which emphasize transformation within existing institutional frameworks rather than mere symbolic inclusion (Norris, 2020, p. 2).

It is after her travels that Mrs. Ghamogha resolves to challenge entrenched perceptions about women. As Shey Ghamogha remarks, "It is the madness you contracted from the travels that misled you into thinking that you can create groups and own land in Kibaaka" (2014, p. 71). She has encountered alternative gender arrangements and seeks to introduce elements of women's freedom into her village: "The wind of liberation is racing from Weijing to Kibaaka" (2014, p. 112). Her ambition reflects a hybrid cultural vision, combining progressive aspects of Western gender perceptions with valuable elements of Kibaaka tradition. This reflects what Norris (2020) conceptualizes as cultural empowerment, which involves shifts in values and norms that endorse gender equality in both domestic and public spheres.

In Tang's (2000) work, discrimination against women is evident from birth. Granny recounts the story of a mother who gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl, and chose to keep the boy due to social preference. Ajoh's behavior further reinforces this preference; desiring a male child, he maltreats Ewa when she gives birth to a girl. Such practices mirror

persistent cultural attitudes documented globally, where socially conservative norms continue to privilege male authority in both public and private life (Norris, 2020, p. 8). Similarly, Kabeer (2005) defines empowerment as the process by which those denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such capacity, highlighting the link between agency, resources, and achievements (p. 14). In Tang's (2000), women's lack of educational access, "Even if you were a boy, I won't send you to secondary school" (2000, p. 19), illustrates how denial of resources constrains agency from childhood.

Furthermore, socio-cultural subjugation persists in the regulation of female sexuality. Many African societies equate womanhood with sexuality and treat female sexuality as male property. Such control reflects what Kabeer (2005) terms "power over," where dominant actors override women's agency through authority and coercion (p. 14). The marital abuse experienced by Ewa demonstrates how patriarchal norms justify violence under the guise of male entitlement.

In Lola's (2014), institutions such as Mwerong and the Council of Elders define and enforce these patriarchal norms. Mwerong, a male-only secret society, forbids women from owning land on the basis that land symbolizes lineage and heritage. As the supreme traditional authority, it excludes women from decision-making processes. This exclusion reflects what Norris (2020) describes as gaps in decision-making empowerment, where women remain underrepresented in institutions exercising political authority. The repeated metaphor of land symbolizes power, authority, and virility domains from which women are culturally excluded.

Despite legally purchasing the land, Mrs. Ghamogha is compelled by tradition to relinquish it to her husband. No woman belongs to Mwerong

or the Council of Elders; thus, decisions are consistently taken in favor of men. When Shey Ghamogha threatens to speak to her “as an institution,” he invokes the authority of Mwerong, reinforcing institutional patriarchy. Mrs. Ghamogha’s resistance, however, reflects transformative agency. Rather than demanding the abolition of Mwerong, she calls for moderating its laws. This reflects what Kabeer (2005) describes as transformative agency-action that challenges restrictive social structures rather than merely adapting to them.

When summoned before the Council of Elders, Mrs. Ghamogha openly challenges the traditional court, questioning whether a woman’s life is merely a stage for performing roles prescribed by “traditional tyrants.” For the first time in Kibaaka, a woman contests institutional authority. Recognizing the limitations of traditional institutions, she seeks legal redress through the formal court system, where “*The Lock on her lips*” is metaphorically removed. This shift from informal patriarchal institutions to formal legal structures reflects a movement toward policy empowerment, in which women use legal frameworks to claim rights (Norris, 2020).

In Tang’s (2000) work, although such institutions are not explicitly named, patriarchal structures operate implicitly. Nyango and her husband arrange Ewa’s marriage without her consent, demonstrating cultural norms that deny women agency. Ironically, the chief becomes an advocate for Ewa’s rights, suggesting the possibility of reform within traditional authority. Together, both plays dramatize the tension between cultural preservation and gender justice, revealing how empowerment emerges through resistance, negotiation, and institutional challenge.

## **2.2 Economic Representation of Women**

Economically, women have been oppressed, discriminated against, and repressed for so long that in many societies they continue to encounter significant impediments as they attempt to ascend to positions beyond

those traditionally reserved for or expected of them. Economic inequality remains deeply rooted in structural barriers that limit women's access to education, employment, property ownership, and financial resources. As Duflo (2011) argues, women's empowerment and economic development are closely interrelated; while economic growth can reduce gender inequality, persistent discrimination continues to hinder women's full participation in economic life. Despite global progress, women are still less likely to participate in the labor market, earn less than men for similar work, and face restrictions in property and inheritance rights.

Similarly, the OECD (2022) emphasizes that unequal power relations, discriminatory social norms, and systemic institutional barriers that restrict women's access to economic resources and opportunities sustain gender inequality. These structural constraints reinforce occupational segregation and confine women to low-paying or informal sectors of the economy. Consequently, even when economic development occurs, women may not benefit equally unless deliberate policy measures are implemented to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

Ownership in a patriarchal society is exclusively a man's right. The centrality of Lola's (2014), is ownership; Shey Ghamogha sums it all in these words:

Shey Ghamogha you are a kingmaker. You are a first class chief, a hero does not crash without relics of the crash, how can I remain the man when she is the owner? That land is my manhood. I am a title-holder of no mean standing. A hero leaves behind relics of the crash when he quits the scene. I am not the type of being that crashes without relics of the crash. I want to leave traces of my own journey before the curtains come down. If I lose the fight, I lose the land. Authority will abandon me. Once authority divorces me, any other thing follows... (p. 61)

He makes it clear that it is a man's right to own land and not a woman's right. Shufai Nsaw gives a reason women cannot own property when he

says: “*You have just told the elders that Shey Ghamogha paid a bride price on you, property does not own property*” (p.145). Thus, a woman is a man’s property, and just like a farm land wherein the owner harvests everything that grows therein, the man owns everything that the woman has.

This same narrative is echoed in Tang’s (2000). Ajoh states that: “listen to her stupid question, how much was my bride price? I thought that by marrying you, I will enrich myself, instead I have impoverished myself”. Just like Shey Ghamogha, Ajoh believes that Ewa is her property since he paid her bride price. As her property, she is supposed to earn him money. This explains why she constantly takes the little money Ewa makes from her puff puff and beans business until the capital is completely finished.

### **2.3 Political Representation of Women**

The participation of all citizens in the management of public affairs lies at the very heart of democracy. However, in most African countries, the political arena remains largely dominated by men and, in some contexts, functions as an exclusively male terrain. Despite international commitments to gender equality, women continue to face structural and institutional barriers to political leadership. As highlighted in IRI (2016), women remain underrepresented not only in legislative bodies but also in positions of political influence, particularly in decision-making roles.

Apart from a few rare exceptions, women are often discouraged from expressing their opinions in political gatherings, holding leadership positions, or participating in decision-making on important community issues. In many traditional settings, women are excluded from deliberations under the assumption that they are incapable of handling confidential or strategic matters. Such marginalization stems from persistent adherence to traditional practices and socio-cultural beliefs that restrict women’s involvement in public affairs. According to the

African Union (2008), culturally determined gender ideologies often reinforce male dominance and define political authority as a masculine domain, thereby limiting women's access to decision-making spaces.

The widespread belief in many African societies is that women's primary societal role is reproductive and domestic. Consequently, women continue to bear a disproportionate share of household and caregiving responsibilities, which restricts their availability and visibility in political life. Norris (2020) similarly observes that cultural empowerment remains uneven, as socially conservative attitudes continue to hinder women's effective participation in public decision-making processes. Political marginalization of women is often justified through patriarchal ideologies that portray women as the "weaker sex," incapable of rational decision-making or leadership. This ideological framing explains why men frequently occupy key leadership positions.

In Kibaaka, for example, leadership is concentrated in male hands: the traditional council is composed entirely of men, and women are relegated to the background. When Mrs. Ghamogha is summoned before the Council of Elders, she is judged according to laws established and interpreted by men-laws that inherently privilege male authority. Such institutional exclusion reflects what Norris (2020) describes as deficits in decision-making empowerment, where women remain underrepresented in bodies exercising governmental authority. The structural exclusion of women from institutions such as Mwerong and the Council of Elders mirrors broader continental patterns. The IRI (2016) report demonstrates that even where women gain legislative seats, they are often excluded from influential committees or leadership roles, thereby limiting substantive representation. Thus, political representation must be understood not merely in descriptive terms, the number of women

present, but also in substantive terms, their capacity to influence decisions and shape policies.

In Lola's (2014), the laws of Kibaaka favor men, as illustrated in the exchange between Mrs. Ghamogha and Shey Ghamogha (2014, p. 64). The dramatic representation underscores how institutionalized patriarchal norms systematically silence women's voices and restrict their participation in governance. This fictional portrayal reflects real-world structural inequalities identified in continental reports on women's political empowerment and representation.

**Shey Ghamogha:** Kibaaka has long been built. Live in what has been built before.

**Mrs Ghamogha:** Women want to live and not to endure.

**Shey Ghamogha:** Roles are assigned to women. Roles are not assumed by women.

**Mrs Ghamogha:** Father of my household. Look at my potential and not at my sex.

**Shey Ghamogha:** Woman. Human potentials can never go beyond those of the sex, to which he or she belongs. You heard me!

**Mrs Ghamogha:** Father of my...

**Shey Ghamogha:** (Cuts in). You are venturing into male dominions.

**Mrs Ghamogha:** We need change.

**Shey Ghamogha:** What do you want to change? Your natural sex, or your bare chin?

**Mrs Ghamogha:** Father of my household, when people feel hopeless and helpless, somebody has to do something...

**Shey Ghamogha:** (Cutting in). And that something implies becoming a man?

**Mrs Ghamogha:** Shey, everything favours the man.

**Shey Ghamogha:** Woman! I am a traditional priest and tradition-conscious.

In the excerpt above, all the laws and roles are created by men in their own favor and to the detriment of women, without taking into consideration women's feelings and freedom of choice. This situation reflects broader societal realities in which men occupying positions of authority make decisions that privilege male interests while neglecting the general good, particularly the rights and concerns of women. Such patterns align with findings in continental studies, which note that

institutional frameworks often reflect entrenched gender biases that limit women's influence in governance and public life (IRI, 2016).

Despite the inferior position historically occupied by women in various domains of African society, that is, politically, culturally, economically, and socially, Mrs. Ghamogha emerges as an activist fighting for women's rights and emancipation. She represents a modern African woman who has moved beyond dominant patriarchal structures that traditionally excluded women from the public sphere. Her association, MANJARA, functions as a symbolic weapon of liberation. In the traditional council court, Shufai Nsaw perceives her as a "patriarchal woman," implying that she challenges male authority. Mrs. Ghamogha therefore embodies feminist ideals of gender equality, equity, equal opportunities, and equal access for both men and women. This form of agency reflects what contemporary scholarship describes as women's political empowerment, the capacity to influence decision-making processes and reshape institutional norms (Norris, 2020).

Likewise, in Tang's (2000), the man is portrayed as the dominant political figure, evident from the king to other male-dominated leadership positions in the text. Political participation often demands financial capacity; thus, equitable participation of African women in political life requires economic independence. However, some men deliberately deny their wives the opportunity to engage in income-generating activities that could provide financial autonomy and enable political aspirations. Consequently, many women's incomes remain persistently low, undermining their ambition to participate in national political processes. As observed in broader gender studies, economic marginalization significantly reduces women's political representation and influence (African Union, 2008). Such exclusionary practices contribute to internalized limitations, in which women perceive themselves as

unqualified for political office even when they possess the same qualifications as their male counterparts.

Generally, an individual's economic and social status strongly influences political success. Limited financial resources, inadequate educational opportunities, and constrained social networks can hinder effective political participation. Therefore, the economic and social marginalization experienced by women is sufficient to exclude them from the political arena. In Tang's (2000), the protagonist is deprived of education and lacks economic empowerment both within her family and within her marriage. In contrast, Lola presents Mrs. Ghamogha as a woman whose educational attainment benefits other women and serves as a model to emulate. She encourages her daughter to study mathematics, a subject commonly perceived as male-oriented. Economically, she purchases land in her own name. Similarly, Ewa establishes her own business and restarts another after her husband bankrupts the first, striving for financial independence. Both characters resist a system that indirectly seeks to limit women's political participation by restricting their economic and educational advancement.

This is why the institution of gender-based anti-discriminatory legislation can be understood as a mechanism for defending and protecting women's political rights. Strengthening women's political rights enhances their access to political power, which, when attained, can serve as a pathway out of economic and social marginalization. As continental reports emphasize, sustainable gender equality requires structural reforms that integrate women fully into political decision-making processes (IRI, 2016; Norris, 2020).

After examining aspects of the socio-economic and political subordination of women in the 21st century, as represented in *Lola's (2014)* and Tang's (2000) work, we can therefore conclude that the inferiorization and domination of women resemble a new form of

structural subjugation. Despite the hard work displayed by many women, especially in rural areas, they continue to face discrimination and demoralizing treatment in various spheres of life. Such subordination fosters disillusionment, low self-esteem, and insecurity.

These inequalities have broader developmental consequences. The African Union (2008) notes that gender inequality limits women's participation in decision-making and access to resources, thereby hindering social, economic, and political development. Consequently, the continued marginalization of women undermines educational progress and impedes socio-economic transformation in Cameroonian society and Africa at large. There is therefore a need for sustained awareness and proactive measures to address and redress the persistent subordination of women.

### **3.0 Women's Empowerment**

The inferior status of women is deeply entrenched in history, culture, and tradition. The condition of women in contemporary society constitutes a major concern in feminist discourse. This study has demonstrated that women have been relegated to the background and are often perceived and treated as inferior, weak, and incapable. Consequently, many women live in societies where tradition does not fully respect their rights, particularly their right to education and to ownership of landed property. At the same time, they are subjected to inhumane cultural practices such as forced marriages and systematic exclusion from decision-making spaces.

Continental reports affirm that persistent gender inequalities are sustained by socio-cultural norms and discriminatory practices that restrict women's access to education, property, and political participation (African Union, 2008). Such structural limitations reinforce women's

marginalization and perpetuate unequal power relations within society. The main aim of this research, therefore, is to examine how women in the plays under study resist dominant male tendencies and challenge the socio-cultural structures that seek to confine them.

### **3.1 Female to Female Empowerment.**

Female empowerment refers to women's right to make and determine their own choices, as well as to their sense of self-worth. The right to have greater opportunities and access to available resources; the right to exercise control over their own lives both within and outside the home; and the ability to influence the direction of social change in order to create a more just social and economic order. The strength and nature of female empowerment vary across societies. According to Kabeer (2005), empowerment involves the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such capacity, particularly through access to resources, agency, and achievements. This conceptualization underscores the importance of autonomy and decision-making power in the struggle for gender equality.

Female empowerment, a key feature of African feminism, is portrayed in Lola's (2014) work through the female activist group, MANDJARA. This women's group aims to sensitize women on the need to fight for change within the Kibaaka community. Through the celebration of International Women's Day, under the theme "Elimination and Prevention of All Forms of Violence against Women and the Girl Child" (p. 109-110), women recognize the necessity of mobilization and conscientization as tools for claiming their rights. This is evident when Mrs. Ghamogha and other women gather at the chief's palace to make their voices heard in Kibaaka. During the celebration of International Women's Day, Mrs. Ghamogha declares:

Fellow sisters we are not only celebrating women's day  
decently we are not only celebrating like women who have  
been oppressed we are celebrating like women who have

found their voice and freedom in MANDJARA and the law. We are celebrating like women who want to open the bush and clear thorns on the path.....Decree number 95 has unbolted the lock with which our lips were sealed. By the strength of this declaration (tosses the paper in the air), traditional borders are broken. (2014, p. 109–110)

In Tang's (2000), *Tua* serves as a symbol of women's empowerment, providing *Ewa* with money to start a business so that *Ewa* can support herself and her baby. She does not stop there but also seeks assistance from the Ministries of Social Affairs and Women's Affairs. By making women financially independent, power is vested in them to take actions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible due to fear of being deprived of financial support by their husbands. This reflects what Kabeer (2005) defines as empowerment, the process through which individuals who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such capacity, particularly through access to resources and agency. Financial independence, therefore, becomes a critical pathway to autonomy and decision-making power.

Female-to-female empowerment in these two texts is manifested primarily in financial and educational ways. Through economic support and encouragement toward education, women help one another to challenge structures that perpetuate dependence and subordination.

### **3.2 Educational Empowerment**

Education is a key factor in women's empowerment, prosperity, development, and welfare. There remains persistent inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors of life within patriarchal societies. To challenge stereotypical roles in society, women must fight for their rights. The strength to engage in such a struggle often emerges through empowerment, which is closely linked to education. In this vein, it is important to raise women's educational level. According to the OECD

(2022), access to quality education enhances women's agency, economic independence, and participation in decision-making processes, thereby contributing significantly to gender equality.

In Tang's (2000), Ewa's success in the GCE Advanced Level examination represents a significant victory for the female child. Her academic achievement deconstructs the claim that a woman's place is in the kitchen and challenges the idea of relegating women to the background or treating them as commodities to be exchanged in marriage. The joint efforts of Tua and the Ministries of Women's Affairs and Social Affairs are portrayed not only as instruments of financial empowerment but also of educational empowerment. It is from the 30,000 francs given to Ewa by these ministries that she establishes a business and registers in an evening school. Granny also embodies educational empowerment, volunteering to sponsor Ewa's schooling, stating, "I will be able to sponsor Ewa in a typing school if you won't mind" (2005, p. 18). Through these collective efforts, the text demonstrates that education functions as both a tool of resistance and a pathway toward autonomy and social transformation.

In Lola's (2014) MANDJARA functions as an institution and a viable platform for the empowerment of women by educating them and helping them understand some of the injustices perpetrated against them under the guise of tradition. Mrs. Ghamogha uses this platform to challenge traditional norms that forbid women from purchasing landed property in their own names. She resists and defies patriarchal boundaries by eloquently outlining the services provided by MANDJARA to society:

The training MANDJARA provides is one that helps all category of People to become useful to the society and themselves. We teach cookery lessons, we teach the jobless especially the school drop-outs how to produce and sell palm oil, akra, youghurt, kwacoco, puff-puff and egusi pudding (p.142).

Through this initiative, empowerment is seen not merely as ideological resistance but also as practical capacity-building. Norris (2020) emphasizes that women's empowerment requires access to education, skills training, and institutional support systems that enhance participation and agency in public life. MANDJARA therefore represents both economic and social empowerment by equipping women with productive skills and collective consciousness.

In another way, Lola presents Mrs. Ghamogha as an example of what women can become when they are educationally empowered. Her actions are motivated by her education, which enables her to distinguish between constructive traditions and oppressive practices carried out under the cover of culture. Thus, Lola portrays her as an ideal woman for modern society, one who combines cultural awareness with critical consciousness and agency.

### **3.3 Economic Empowerment**

Women increase their economic rights to resources and their power to make decisions that benefit themselves, their families, and their communities through empowerment. In Lola's (2014), Mrs. Ghamogha empowers herself financially and, in essence, uses the MANDJARA foundation to empower other women. Mrs. Ghamogha purchases land in her own name and is issued a land certificate, an action her husband, Shey Ghamogha, strongly opposes. He claims that in their community, "...land belongs to the man" and that "land is power"; therefore, if a woman owns land in Kibaaka, she shares power with men (2014, p. 16). As a result, Shey Ghamogha insists that the land title be transferred to his name. He perceives her financial independence as a threat to his authority and seeks to seize everything she has acquired.

This representation reflects what Kabeer (2005) describes as empowerment, the process by which individuals who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices gain access to resources and agency. Ownership of land in this context symbolizes not only economic security but also decision-making power. Mrs. Ghamogha's resistance, therefore, challenges entrenched patriarchal control over economic resources.

Likewise, in Tang's (2000), Tua is portrayed as an economically empowered social worker determined to ensure that Ewa achieves financial independence from her husband. Initially, she offers assistance and advises Ewa not to rely solely on her husband for financial support after Ewa complains of hunger. Through this intervention, Tua encourages Ewa to engage in small-scale business activities, thereby promoting self-reliance. Economic empowerment thus becomes the foundation for broader social and personal transformation:

**Tua:** Don't depend solely on your husband for financial support; do something. In this way, you will be able to provide food for yourself and for your baby.

**Ewa:** How?

**Tua:** Start a small business, a woman should not rely on her husband for everything

**Ewa:** I don't have money

**Tua:** How much will you need?

**Ewa:** 2000frs

**Tua:** What will you do with 2000FRs?

**Ewa:** I will sell puff puff and beans

**Tua:** Are you sure?

**Ewa:** Certainly

**Tua:** Alright, wait for me. I will be back in five minutes (exits, she returns and hand over 10.000frs to Ewa). You asked for two thousand francs. I have given you ten thousand francs. Spend the money wisely. I don't want to hear any noise either from you or your baby (P. 31).

The next time Ewa is beaten by her husband, Tua engages the assistance of the Ministers of Social Affairs and Women's Affairs to reinstate Ewa's financial independence. The dialogue unfolds as follows:

**Tua:** You are very lucky. The Honorable minister of women affairs and the Honorable      minister of social affairs have given you money to start a small business.

**Ewa:** Really!

**Tua:** Don't be too excited. It's just thirty thousand francs

**Ewa:** Just? That's too much (P. 32)

It is from this money that Ewa generates income to sponsor herself through school and to refund the bride price paid on her behalf by Ajoh. Through these actions, Tanyi Tang and Lola make a significant contribution to the liberation of women from patriarchal bondage. Their contributions are economically centered: for a woman to be liberated from socio-cultural and political bondage, she must first be financially empowered and, secondly, be educated to understand and assert her rights.

This literary representation aligns with broader empirical findings on women's empowerment. As noted in *The State of Women's Participation and Empowerment* (Norris, 2020), empowerment must be understood as multidimensional, incorporating economic independence, civic engagement, and decision-making capacity. The report emphasizes that women's autonomy, particularly access to economic resources and decision-making power, is fundamental to overcoming structural barriers that perpetuate gender inequality. Thus, Ewa's financial and educational advancement reflects what contemporary scholarship identifies as empowerment in policy and decision-making, where women gain agency over their life choices and participation in public life.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

This study has provided a comprehensive overview of the work and discussed the findings presented. It has also synthesized the major arguments and analytical insights generated from the examination of women's representation and empowerment in Lola's (2014) & Tang's (2000). The findings were verified from a dual perspective: first, in relation

to the research questions that guided the study, and second, in relation to the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the research. Through this analytical framework, the study has demonstrated that both playwrights critically expose the socio-cultural, economic, and political structures that sustain women's subordination while simultaneously dramatizing mechanisms of resistance and empowerment.

The findings reveal that women's marginalization in the texts is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies embedded within tradition, culture, and institutional practices. Women are denied equal access to land ownership, political participation, education, and economic resources. These literary representations reflect broader continental realities where structural inequalities continue to limit women's participation in governance and development processes (IRI, 2016). Furthermore, the study has shown that empowerment in the texts is multidimensional, economic, educational, legal, and collective. As emphasized in continental policy frameworks, sustainable gender equality requires women's access to decision-making power, economic autonomy, and institutional inclusion (African Union, 2008).

The implications of these findings are significant. First, they confirm that literary works function as powerful tools for social critique and transformation, particularly in contexts where tradition is used to justify gender inequality. Second, the study underscores that empowerment must go beyond symbolic representation to include tangible access to resources and agency. Norris (2020) argues that women's empowerment is incomplete without substantive participation in political and institutional decision-making structures. This position resonates strongly with the struggles dramatized by Mrs. Ghamogha and Ewa, whose resistance strategies illustrate the necessity of both economic independence and educational advancement as prerequisites for broader socio-political emancipation.

Based on these findings, the study recommends sustained sensitization on gender equality, enforcement of anti-discriminatory legislation, and increased investment in women's education and economic empowerment programs. Policymakers, community leaders, and civil society organizations must collaborate to dismantle structural barriers that perpetuate gender-based exclusion. Furthermore, traditional institutions should be re-examined and reformed to promote inclusivity without necessarily erasing valuable cultural heritage.

Finally, while this study has focused on two selected Cameroonian dramatic texts, further research may expand the scope to include other African literary genres, such as novels, poetry, and film, to explore broader representations of women's empowerment across cultural contexts. Comparative studies between Anglophone and Francophone African literature may also provide deeper insight into regional variations in feminist expression. Additionally, empirical research examining the real-life impact of women's empowerment initiatives in Cameroon would complement literary analyses and strengthen interdisciplinary engagement between literature, gender studies, and development policy.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms that the liberation of women from socio-cultural, economic, and political marginalization is not merely a literary concern but a developmental imperative. True societal transformation requires structural reforms, educational advancement, economic empowerment, and institutional inclusion principles consistently emphasized in continental gender equality frameworks (African Union, 2008; Norris, 2020). The dramatization of resistance in *The Lock on My Lips* and *Ewa* therefore contributes meaningfully to ongoing conversations on gender justice and women's empowerment in Africa.

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