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‘...No Man’s Land...’: Eno Barony’s navigation of Ghana’s male-dominated rap scene

ABSTRACT

This study explores the lyrical content and themes in Eno Barony’s debut album, Yaa Asantewaa, examining how she navigates the male-dominated Ghanaian rap scene as a female artist. Through textual analysis and the lens of hip hop feminism, the research investigates Eno Barony’s use of braggadocio, metaphors and gender as tools to assert her identity and challenge patriarchal norms within the industry. The album’s conceptual framework is rooted in the historical account of Nana Yaa Asantewaa an Asante Queen Mother who fearlessly fought against British colonial rule. Eno Barony draws parallels between herself and Nana Yaa Asantewaa, employing imagery and symbolism to inspire and empower African women. The study examines Eno Barony’s multifaceted representation of women, her use of beef as a means to showcase her lyrical prowess and her fluid approach to gender in her lyrics. By analysing tracks such as ‘Yaa Asantewaa’, ‘Beauty & the Beast’, ‘No Yawa’ and ‘King of Queens’, the research explores Eno Barony’s ability to subvert gender roles, assert her dominance and carve out a space for herself in the Ghanaian rap scene. The study contributes to the broader discourse on

KEYWORDS

Braggadocio
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gender roles
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Nana Yaa Asantewaa
lyrical prowess

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1. Society of spectacle.

female representation within hip hop culture, emphasizing the importance of Eno Barony's work in challenging gender norms and amplifying the voices of African women in the rap industry.

INTRODUCTION

The Ghanaian rap scene, a gendered space, has historically marginalized and under-represented women since the emergence of Hiplife (Osumare 2012),¹ a fusion of rap and highlife, in the early 1990s. Despite efforts by female artists to navigate and penetrate this male-dominated industry, they have often found themselves relegated to the peripheries of mainstream culture, struggling to establish a lasting presence and maintain career longevity comparable to their male counterparts. The gender disparity within the Ghanaian rap scene has resulted in a dearth of prominent female voices and has limited the diversity of perspectives and experiences represented in the genre. This phenomenon highlights the need for a critical examination of the structural and societal barriers that hinder women's full participation and recognition within the Ghanaian rap industry, as well as the development of strategies to foster a more inclusive and equitable creative space.

In recent years, Eno Barony (born Eno Adjoa Amankwah Nyame Adom), a female emcee, has emerged as a prominent figure in the Ghanaian rap scene, challenging the male-dominated landscape and asserting her presence alongside her male counterparts. Prior to her official debut in 2014, Eno Barony honed her skills in the underground rap circuit, actively participating in numerous rap cyphers and battles. These experiences laid the foundation for her subsequent success in the mainstream industry. With the release of her two albums, *Yaa Asantewaa* (Barony 2020) and *Ladies First* (2021), Eno Barony has demonstrated her artistic prowess and established herself as a formidable force in Ghanaian rap. Her rise to prominence serves as a testament to her talent, tenacity and ability to navigate the gender-biased industry, paving the way for greater female representation and empowerment within the Ghanaian rap scene. Eno Barony's success not only highlights her individual achievements but also underscores the importance of creating spaces and opportunities for women to thrive in male-dominated creative fields.

Eno Barony's achievements in the Ghanaian music industry have been formally recognized through prestigious accolades. In 2020, she was awarded the Best Female Rap Performance Award by the African Muzik Magazine Awards (AFRIMMA) (Myjoyonline 2020), an annual music award event dedicated to spotlighting the best African music talent. This recognition was followed by another significant milestone in 2021 when Eno Barony became the first female emcee to win the Best Rap Performance Award at the Vodafone Ghana Music Awards (VGMA) (BBC News 2021), a coveted award ceremony held for entertainers in Ghana. These awards have solidified Eno Barony's status as a trailblazer in the Ghanaian rap scene, earning her titles such as the 'Mother of Rap', 'Rap Goddess' and the 'King of Queens'. Her accomplishments not only showcase her individual talent and dedication but also serve as a beacon of inspiration for aspiring female rappers in Ghana and beyond. Eno Barony's success challenges traditional gender norms within the rap industry and highlights the importance of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of women in male-dominated creative fields. Her accolades contribute to a shifting narrative that empowers and encourages more women

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Figure 1: Press photograph of Eno Barony (3Music.tv).

to pursue their artistic aspirations and claim their rightful place in the music industry.

In 2021, Eno Barony’s contributions to the Ghanaian music industry were further acknowledged when she was included in the 3Music Awards Top 30 Women in Music list (Dadzie 2021). Notably, she was the sole female representative from the rap genre, highlighting the scarcity of women in this male-dominated field (Dadzie 2021). Eno Barony’s lyrical prowess and impact on the rap scene have also been recognized by her peers, including two of Ghana’s most prominent rappers, M.anifest and Sarkodie. In a conversation between the two artists, when asked about their top female rapper, both M.anifest and Sarkodie unanimously acknowledged Eno Barony as the leading female rapper whose lyrical skills remain unrivalled (WhatsTrendingGh TV 2020). Furthermore, in a documentary on Hiplife in Ghana, M.anifest recounted his initial encounter with Eno Barony in the studio, admitting that she had outperformed him lyrically, leading him to exclaim, ‘Oh my goodness, who is this one?!’ (MyJoyOnline 2023: n.pag.).

These endorsements from established male rappers underscore Eno Barony’s exceptional talent and the respect she has garnered within the industry. Her ability to not only compete but also surpass her male counterparts challenges the gender stereotypes and barriers that have long plagued the rap scene in Ghana. Eno Barony’s recognition by her peers and industry accolades serve as a testament to her skill, dedication and the growing acknowledgment of women’s contributions to the rap genre in Ghana.

The patriarchal structure of Ghana’s rap industry has severely limited women’s participation and longevity in the scene, with pioneers like Aberewa Nana and Mzbel achieving initial breakthroughs but struggling to maintain sustained careers. In a documentary on Hiplife in Ghana, rapper M.anifest candidly acknowledged this systemic gender bias, aversing that the industry

is unfortunately sexist and highlighting how late-night studio sessions create environments where women can be taken advantage of, ultimately discouraging their participation in the rap scene (BBC News Africa 2023). The intersectionality of gender with other social factors further complicates female artists' navigation of this space. Class significantly impacts career trajectories by determining access to crucial resources like recording studios and radio airplay, while sexuality is frequently weaponized as a delegitimizing tactic. Eno Barony's experience exemplifies this latter phenomenon; she was deliberately mislabelled as transgender by male competitors attempting to undermine her legitimacy as a female rapper. In a 2021 interview, she directly addressed these attacks, stating: 'Some Ghanaian men think I'm a transgender girl because of how I rap [...] they can't believe a woman can rap that way' (I Am Oxide 2021). This experience illustrates Whitney's (2012) observation that female rappers must constantly negotiate their identities against systematic attempts to delegitimize their presence in hip hop spaces. As Whitney (2012) argues that, women's identity in hip hop is not fixed but constantly negotiated and rearticulated in response to shifting power dynamics, a process clearly evident in Barony's strategic reclamation of her identity in the face of gendered attacks on her authenticity.

Despite Eno Barony's notable success and recognition within the Ghanaian rap scene, there remains a paucity of scholarly research focusing on the lyrical content and texts present in her music. This study aims to address this gap by conducting a textual analysis of Eno Barony's debut album, *Yaa Asantewaa*, to illuminate how she navigates the male-dominated rap space and asserts her identity as a female artist. Textual analysis, as a methodological approach, seeks to uncover the relationships among social life, speech and text (Fairclough 2003). By examining the lyrical content of Eno Barony's album, this study will delve into the portraits she constructs through her music and the recurring themes that emerge. The theoretical framework of hip hop feminism will be employed to ground the analysis, as it provides a lens through which to understand how young Black women utilize the hip hop arena to assert themselves, develop feminist identities and critique the patriarchal dominance prevalent in the rap scene (Morgan 1995; Tyree and Williams 2021). Through this exploration of Eno Barony's lyrics, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on female empowerment and representation within the Ghanaian rap industry, shedding light on the strategies employed by female artists to challenge gender norms and carve out spaces for themselves in a male-dominated field. By situating Eno Barony's work within the context of hip hop feminism, this study seeks to highlight the significance of her contributions to the ongoing dialogue surrounding gender, identity and power dynamics within the Ghanaian rap scene.

Hip hop feminism emerged as a critical framework that addresses the complex and often contradictory relationship between feminism and hip hop culture. Joan Morgan, who coined the term in her groundbreaking 1999 book *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*, describes hip hop feminism as a framework that 'fucks with the grays', acknowledging the messiness and contradictions inherent in navigating patriarchal spaces as women who love hip hop (Morgan 1999: 59). Durham et al. (2013) further characterize hip hop feminism as a cultural, intellectual and political movement rooted in the lived experiences of women of colour from the post-civil rights and hip hop generations who view culture as a crucial arena for political action to confront, resist and organize communities against systems of oppression and exploitation.

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Pough (2004) theorizes hip hop feminism as establishing discursive sites where young African American women can critically express their lived experiences and analyse the intersectional effects of gender discrimination, racial prejudice and socio-economic marginalization through their participation in hip hop culture. As Clark (2018) elucidates in her scholarship on African feminisms, this theoretical framework facilitates critical examination of the performative strategies through which women artists enact feminist disruptions within their creative practices by unveiling and subverting patriarchal structures through the very artistic mediums traditionally employed to reinforce those systems. Hip hop feminism thus provides a lens through which to understand how female emcees like Eno Barony navigate the contradictions of participating in and critiquing a patriarchal art form.

BRAGGADOCIO: ‘THE LIZARD WHO JUMPED HIGH FROM THE IROKO TREE’

The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said [s]he would praise [her]self if no one else did.

Igbo proverb (Achebe 1959: 21)

In her comprehensive survey and analysis of hip hop in Africa, Clark (2018) discusses the diverse strategies employed by female rappers across the continent to showcase their lyrical prowess and assert their presence in the rap scene. Among these strategies, the use of metaphors, symbolism and wordplay emerge as key elements in their artistic expression. Moreover, Clark (2018) emphasizes the significance of braggadocio, a fundamental aspect of rap culture, which is frequently employed by women as they navigate and establish themselves within the male-dominated rap industry. This assertion of confidence and self-promotion through braggadocio serves as a means for female rappers to challenge gender stereotypes and claim their space within the genre.

In the specific context of the Ghanaian rap scene, the local languages themselves offer a fertile ground for the use of imagery and metaphors, which are deeply ingrained in the linguistic and cultural fabric of the country. The richness of local languages in Ghana allows female rappers to draw upon a vast reservoir of figurative language and cultural references to craft their lyrics and convey their messages effectively. By harnessing the power of these linguistic tools, Ghanaian female rappers not only showcase their lyrical skills but also connect with their audiences on a deeper cultural level, reinforcing their authenticity and relevance within the local rap scene. Clark’s (2018) observations underscore the importance of recognizing and analysing the diverse strategies employed by female rappers in Africa, particularly in Ghana, as they navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the male-dominated hip hop industry. By examining the use of metaphors, symbolism, wordplay and braggadocio in their lyrics, researchers can gain valuable insights into how these artists assert their identities, challenge gender norms and contribute to the evolving landscape of African hip hop culture.

Braggadocio, a tool employed by rappers to boast about their prowess and assert their dominance in a self-congratulatory manner, serves as a powerful tool for artists to establish their presence and command attention within the rap scene (Clark 2018). However, when utilized by female emcees,

braggadocio often reveals a complex dynamic in which these artists simultaneously challenge and align themselves with the patriarchal powers they critique. Tyree and Williams (2021) illuminate this paradox in their analysis of rap diss songs among Black women rappers in the United States, citing examples such as Queen Latifah's warning to 'wack niggas' to secure their girlfriends and the mutual dissing between Azealia Banks and Angel Haze, both Black queer women, based on their identities.

Despite this apparent contradiction, braggadocio remains a crucial means by which female rappers assert their agency, celebrate the power of femininity and draw attention to their lyrical craft. By employing this rhetorical device, female emcees carve out a space for themselves within the male-dominated genre, challenging the prevailing gender norms and expectations (Clark 2018). The use of braggadocio allows female rappers to subvert the patriarchal structures that have historically marginalized their voices and experiences, reclaiming their rightful place within the rap industry. Moreover, the deployment of braggadocio by female rappers serves as a testament to their resilience and determination in the face of systemic barriers and discrimination. By boldly asserting their skills, achievements and identities through self-aggrandizing lyrics, these artists not only demand recognition for their talents but also inspire and empower other women to follow in their footsteps. In this sense, braggadocio becomes a powerful tool for fostering solidarity and creating a sense of community among female rappers, even as they navigate the complexities of aligning themselves with the very patriarchal powers they seek to critique and dismantle.

This apparent paradox epitomizes Morgan's (1999) conceptualization of hip hop feminism as a theoretical framework capable of navigating the inherent complexities and contradictions within Black women's engagement with hip hop culture. Durham et al.'s (2013) analysis further illuminates this phenomenon, positing that female rappers' employment of braggadocio functions dialectically – simultaneously resisting masculine hegemony while strategically accommodating genre conventions. The synthesis of traditionally masculine rhetorical strategies with distinctively feminine sensibilities enables female emcees to cultivate what Brown (2013) theorizes as liminal domains of productive tension, discursive spaces wherein gender norms undergo simultaneous reinforcement and subversion. This complex negotiation of gendered performance within hip hop allows artists like Eno Barony to operate within established generic parameters while simultaneously contesting and reconfiguring these parameters through their artistic interventions.

Braggadocio, a prominent feature in rap music, is also deeply rooted in African cultural traditions. Its significance is exemplified in the Igbo proverb cited at the beginning of this section, which likens the rapper employing braggadocio to a lizard that jumps from the tall Iroko tree and nods to itself in self-congratulation for its impressive feat. This proverb highlights the inherent nature of self-praise and acknowledgment of one's accomplishments within African cultures. The use of braggadocio can also be observed in various African epic traditions, such as the Sundiata epic, where Sundiata's griot Balla Fasséké extols the achievements of Sundiata, 'the son of the buffalo', during his confrontation with the tyrant ruler Soumaoro Kanté who is eventually defeated laying to the foundation of the empire of Mali in the thirteenth century.

Braggadocio as a form of praise serves to remind the warrior of their great lineage and to encourage them to face the challenges ahead with courage

and determination. Similarly, in the epic of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, the Queen Mother of Edweso in the Asante empire during the late nineteenth century, despite the defeat of the Asante and the subsequent exile of the Queen Mother, she is celebrated for her bravery as the woman who stood fearlessly in front of the cannon’s barrel. These examples demonstrate the cultural significance of braggadocio in African storytelling and its role in uplifting and inspiring individuals in the face of adversity.

In the context of rap music, braggadocio serves as a powerful tool for rappers to assert their identity, showcase their skills and establish their relevance within the competitive rap scene. By employing braggadocio, rappers not only draw attention to themselves but also challenge other emcees, demonstrating their superiority and commanding respect from their peers and audience. This article aims to examine how Eno Barony, a prominent female rapper in Ghana, utilizes braggadocio in her craft. By analysing her lyrics and performance style, this article explores how Eno Barony navigates the male-dominated rap industry, asserts her agency and celebrates her achievements through the use of braggadocio. The analysis is grounded in the cultural context of African storytelling traditions and seeks to illuminate the ways in which Eno Barony uses braggadocio to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding gender, power and identity in the Ghanaian rap scene.

ANALYSIS OF YAA ASANTEWAA: THE ALBUM

The album’s conceptual bedrock lies in the historical account of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, the Asante Queen Mother of Edweso, whose pivotal role in galvanizing the Asante nation’s warrior men to defend their sovereignty against the ignominious demands of the colonial government in 1900 remains etched in the annals of history. The colonial authorities had issued a litany of demands, chief among them the surrender of *Sika Dwa Kofi*, the Golden Stool, which embodied the very soul and quintessence of the Asante nation (Boahen 2000). In the face of these denigrating demands, the convened Elders in the courtyard remained mute, until Nana Yaa Asantewaa, in an act of unparalleled valour, rose to her feet and delivered an impassioned clarion call, beseeching the men to take up arms and fight to preserve the soul of their nation from the clutches of British colonial hegemony (Brempong 2000). Her intrepidity and leadership in this watershed moment have been immortalized in a widely sung Ghanaian folk song, which stands as a testament to the indelible legacy of the Asante Queen Mother and her seminal role in the resistance against the yoke of colonialism. The song’s lyrics not only extol her valour but also serve as a potent reminder of the Asante people’s indomitable spirit and unwavering resolve in the face of oppression, and the cardinal importance of safeguarding one’s cultural patrimony and national identity. This is the lyric of the song:

Ɔko ahi ko (She fights a battle of contempt)
Yaa Asantewa (Yaa Asantewaa)
Ɔbaa basia a (The woman)
Ɔgyina ɔperemo ano (Who stands in front of the cannon)
Woaye bi ama yen ooo (You have done something [impressive] for us)

Eno Barony positions herself within this conceptual framework, drawing parallels between her role as a woman in the male-dominated rap scene and

that of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, who stood at the forefront of the Asante nation's resistance against British colonial rule. Just as Nana Yaa Asantewaa fearlessly faced the proverbial barrel of the cannon in her defiance of the colonial forces, Eno Barony stands ready to confront her male counterparts and the patriarchal landscape that defines the rap industry. This comparison is further emphasized through the album's cover art, which depicts Eno Barony adorned in a fugu war costume, replete with amulets and wielding a long-barrelled gun. The backdrop of the image features a dungeon, evoking the historical context of Nana Yaa Asantewaa's struggle against the British colonial forces.

Through this visual representation, Eno Barony establishes a symbolic connection between her own artistic endeavours and the legacy of the Asante Queen Mother, highlighting the ongoing battle against gender-based oppression and the assertion of female agency within male-dominated spaces. The juxtaposition of Eno Barony's contemporary struggle in the rap scene with Nana Yaa Asantewaa's historical resistance serves to underscore the enduring nature of women's struggles for equality and recognition across time and context. Within the context of the rap sphere, Eno Barony perceives herself as a modern-day embodiment of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, drawing a powerful parallel between her own artistic journey and the legendary Queen Mother's historical legacy. This symbolic association was vividly demonstrated during a stage performance of the album, where Eno Barony made a dramatic entrance, emerging from a coffin. Reflecting on this performance, Eno explained:

The whole concept behind the act was the resurrection of Yaa Asantewaa. I'm the Yaa Asantewaa of the rap game in Ghana. Yaa Asantewaa fought for her empire. When the kings were taken to exile, she stood in front of the men and went for the battle.

(Ghanaweb 2017: n.pag.)



Figure 2: Yaa Asantewaa, Eno Barony, album cover, 2020.

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This statement serves as a clear articulation of Eno Barony’s deliberate intent to align herself with the Queen Mother of Edweso within the arena of rap, drawing upon the historical narrative of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s bravery and leadership in the face of adversity. By positioning herself as the ‘Yaa Asantewaa of the rap game’, Eno Barony not only asserts her own agency and prowess as a female rapper but also invokes the spirit of resistance and empowerment embodied by the Asante Queen Mother. This symbolic resurrection of Nana Yaa Asantewaa within the contemporary context of the rap industry underscores Eno Barony’s commitment to challenging gender norms, asserting female power and carving out a space for women’s voices in a predominantly male-dominated field.

Eno Barony’s deliberate reclamation of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s legacy represents a quintessential manifestation of what Durham (2010) theorizes as a fundamental praxis within hip hop feminist epistemology: the reclaiming and revising of cultural narratives of historical Black female figures as a means of creating empowering counternarratives. This methodological approach facilitates a dialogical relationship between historical and contemporary feminist resistance, enabling contemporary hip hop feminists to construct a genealogical continuity with precedent iterations of Black female resistance. Simultaneously, this practice engenders discursive spaces wherein contemporary expressions of female agency can be articulated, legitimized and mobilized within present-day sociopolitical contexts. Through this strategic invocation of historical feminist iconography, Barony situates her artistic intervention within a broader transnational and trans-historical tradition of Black female resistance, thereby augmenting the sociopolitical resonance and cultural authority of her performative critique.

The album commences with a track titled ‘Yaa Asantewaa’, in which Eno Barony offers a compelling narrative of the historical figure, highlighting Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s pivotal role in rallying the Asante nation to war in the face of the men’s silence. Eno Barony’s lyrical portrayal emphasizes the critical moment when Nana Yaa Asantewaa emerged as a leader, rising to the occasion when all hopes seemed lost and there appeared to be no one willing to guide the nation against the affronting demands of the British colonial forces. Through her powerful storytelling, Eno Barony underscores the significance of Nana Yaa Asantewaa’s leadership and bravery in a time of crisis, when the Asante nation found itself at a crossroads, faced with the prospect of surrendering its cultural and spiritual heritage to the colonial authorities. The track serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of the Asante Queen Mother, celebrating her as a symbol of resistance, resilience and the indomitable spirit of the Asante people in the face of oppression. By opening the album with this powerful narrative, Eno Barony sets the stage for her own artistic journey, drawing upon the historical example of Nana Yaa Asantewaa to assert her own agency and leadership within the contemporary context of the rap industry.

Mmerε a na ahunu aka (The time when fear kept)
Yεn mmarima ahyε dan mu (Our men locked in their rooms)
Anka Asanteman reƿo ooo nso (The Asante nation almost fell but)
Ɔbaa bi baaεε (There arose a woman)
 Where the men were shaking
 That is when she awakened
 She stood blow to blow
 Till the end of the action

In this lyrical passage, Eno Barony accentuates the courageous nature of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, employing braggadocio as a rhetorical device to paint a vivid picture of the Asante Queen Mother facing the British imperial forces head-on. Despite the historical reality that the Asante nation ultimately lost this war and Nana Yaa Asantewaa was exiled to the Seychelles, never to return (Kuba 2018), Eno Barony's portrayal focuses on the Queen Mother's unwavering determination and bravery in the face of adversity. The lyrics depict Nana Yaa Asantewaa as standing firm until the very end, even as the men of the Asante nation retreated and locked themselves in their rooms. This powerful imagery serves as a metaphorical representation of Eno Barony's own position within the male-dominated rap space.

By likening herself to Nana Yaa Asantewaa, Eno Barony asserts her own resilience and determination to overcome the challenges posed by gender-based discrimination and marginalization within the industry. The fear that keeps the men indoors in the historical narrative becomes a symbol for the barriers and obstacles faced by female rappers in the contemporary context. Eno Barony positions herself as a force of change and revitalization, rising to save the rap game from decline. Through her music and her unapologetic presence, she challenges the status quo and carves out a space for women's voices and experiences to be heard and valued within the rap community.

In the second verse of 'Yaa Asantewaa', Eno Barony transitions into a reverential mode, pouring libations to honour Nana Yaa Asantewaa and extolling her bravery. This act of veneration serves to underscore the historical significance of the Asante Queen Mother and her enduring legacy as a symbol of female empowerment and resistance. Eno Barony skilfully employs the epic narrative of Nana Yaa Asantewaa as a vehicle to address her fellow African women, utilizing the Queen Mother's experience as a source of inspiration and a model worthy of emulation. The lyrics highlight the fact that within African histories, there are numerous examples of women rising to the occasion and leading wars when men remained silent. This observation serves to emphasize the immense power and potential that reside within women, a power that can still be tapped into and harnessed in contemporary contexts.

Eno Barony's message is one of empowerment and encouragement, urging her fellow women to draw strength from the example set by Nana Yaa Asantewaa and other historical figures who have demonstrated the capacity of women to lead, fight and effect change in the face of adversity. By invoking the spirit of Nana Yaa Asantewaa and situating her story within a broader narrative of female agency and resistance, Eno Barony seeks to inspire a new generation of African women to tap into their own inner strength and assert their voices in the pursuit of gender equality and social justice. In this poignant lyrical passage from her 'Yaa Asantewaa' track, Eno Barony raps:

Sɛ Yaa Asantewa kɔkoo (If Yaa Asantewaa fought)
Gyee Asanteman de sii ne srɛ so (To save the Asante nation)
Ennɛɛ me nua ɔbaa (Then my sisters)
Wo nso wobetumi aɣɛ biribiara (You also can achieve anything)
 [...]
 Let us all rise
 Let all women rise
 Let all African women rise

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Eno Barony's 'Yaa Asantewaa' track serves as a powerful rallying cry for African women, deftly employing imagery, symbology and braggadocio to encourage them to tap into the immense power that lies within. The song's lyrical content and thematic elements work in harmony to create a compelling narrative that resonates with the struggles and aspirations of contemporary African women, while simultaneously drawing upon the rich historical legacy of female resistance and leadership embodied by the figure of Nana Yaa Asantewaa. Through her evocative use of language and her skilful manipulation of cultural symbols, Eno Barony crafts a message that is at once empowering and unifying, urging African women to recognize their own strength and potential, and to come together in solidarity to effect change in their lives and communities. The track's braggadocious tone, tempered by its deep respect for the historical figure of Yaa Asantewaa, serves to underscore the importance of female agency and self-assertion in the face of adversity, while also highlighting the enduring relevance of African women's resistance and leadership across time and space. Ultimately, 'Yaa Asantewaa' stands as a testament to the transformative power of music as a vehicle for social and political commentary, as well as a means of inspiring and mobilizing marginalized communities in the pursuit of justice and equality.

In the second track of her debut album, 'Beauty & the Beast', Eno Barony (2020) engages in a dialectical self-representation, navigating the complex dynamics of being a female emcee in a male-dominated industry. By referring to herself as the 'Baddest girl', Eno Barony simultaneously embraces and subverts traditional notions of feminine allure, asserting her own unique brand of power and agency within the rap scene. This self-proclaimed title serves as a testament to her confidence and self-assuredness, as well as her willingness to challenge and redefine societal expectations of femininity. However, Eno Barony's self-representation is not limited to mere displays of feminine charm; rather, she emphasizes that she is not to be underestimated or taken lightly. The juxtaposition of beauty and the beast in the track's title suggests a duality in her persona, hinting at a fierceness and formidability that belies her outward appearance. This dialectical approach to self-definition allows Eno Barony to navigate the complexities of being a female artist in a male-dominated space, asserting her own power and agency while simultaneously subverting and challenging gender stereotypes.

Through her lyrical prowess and unapologetic self-expression, Eno Barony carves out a unique space for herself within the rap landscape, one that embraces both her femininity and her strength and refuses to be defined by limiting societal expectations. Her self-representation as a dialectic serves as a powerful statement of resilience and empowerment, encouraging other female artists to embrace their own multifaceted identities and to fearlessly assert themselves in the face of adversity.

Mofeeli me suro me (Y'all fear and love me)

All eyes on me

Nipa baako (One person)

I am the beauty and the beast

In 'Beauty & the Beast', Eno Barony employs braggadocio as a rhetorical device to celebrate her prowess and establish herself as a formidable force in the rap industry. If the previous track served as a rallying cry, this one

functions as combat music, designed to send a clear message to other rappers that Eno Barony is not to be underestimated or challenged. Through her lyrical dexterity and self-assured delivery, she asserts her dominance and demands respect from her peers. However, Eno Barony's address is not limited to other rappers; she also takes aim at the industry as a whole. When she rhymes, 'If the contract doesn't work for me/ I will breach it', she boldly declares her autonomy and refusal to be bound by unfavourable terms or conditions. This statement serves as a powerful assertion of her agency and her willingness to prioritize her own interests and values, even in the face of industry pressure.

Through her self-centred approach, Eno Barony actively carves out a space for herself within the male-dominated rap sphere, seeking to cement her influence and establish her own rules of engagement. Eno Barony's work challenges the patriarchal nature of the music industry by presenting image and a self which centres a feminist perspective. This in turn helps to make space for more feminist representations and offers important lessons for women in Ghana and beyond. Drawing from her performances, lyrics and interviews, one comes to see a multifaceted nature which shines through her ability to maintain a charming poise while simultaneously projecting an aura of fearlessness and formidability. This duality speaks to her adaptability and resilience as a female artist in a challenging and often hostile environment. By embracing both her beauty and her beast, Eno Barony presents a complex and nuanced self-representation that challenges simplistic gender stereotypes and expectations.

Ultimately, 'Beauty & the Beast' serves as a powerful statement of Eno Barony's uncompromising commitment to her craft and her unwavering determination to succeed on her own terms. Through her lyrical prowess, self-assured delivery and unapologetic stance, she inspires other female artists to assert their own agency, challenge industry norms and fearlessly pursue their artistic vision. In the track 'No Yawa', Eno Barony (2022) further explores the multifaceted nature of womanhood, presenting a more relaxed and accommodating persona in contrast to the combative stance showcased in her previous tracks. Here, she expresses a willingness to surrender herself to men who possess material wealth, suggesting a shift in her priorities and a different facet of her identity as a woman.

Eno Barony's lyrics in this song reinforce the societal notion that masculinity is intrinsically linked to financial success, as evidenced by the Akan saying *Sika ne barima* ('Money is/makes the man'). Here, money is seen as that which crowns masculinity. She advises men lacking in this material wealth to abandon their pursuit of women and instead focus on accumulating resources. This perspective highlights the pervasive societal pressure on men to achieve financial stability as a prerequisite for romantic success and social status. It also reinforces capitalism's impact on gender roles.

The chorus of 'No Yawa' emphasizes this point, with Eno Barony repeatedly urging, 'Chale, put your money where your mouth is' (2022). This refrain serves as a challenge to men, demanding that they back up their words and intentions with tangible financial gestures. It also underscores the transactional nature of some relationships, where women's affections and sex are seen as commodities to be earned through material means. Furthermore, Eno Barony's lyrics suggest that women can be both the cause and consequence of men's material accumulation. When she states, '[t]he fraud boys are online/ Because we like the "barons"', she implies that some women's preference for wealthy partners may drive men to engage in fraudulent activities to meet

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those expectations. This observation highlights the complex interplay between gender roles, financial pressures and the potential for criminal behaviour in pursuit of status and relationships. Consider when Eno Barony raps:

Mmaa yeabrɛ ne anum dwa (Women are tired of empty promises)
Ehyɛ w’ataaso deɛ wobete pa (Money will give you access to sex)
 [...]
 Obi atu galamsey ade akɛ me car (Someone bought a car for me with
 proceeds from illegal gold mining)
Wo na wode w’ano befeɛ ho akɔdi kwa (But you want to have sex for free)

In ‘No Yawa’, Eno Barony aligns herself with the capitalist and patriarchal ideologies that equate a man’s worth with his material possessions and financial success. By reinforcing the notion that one’s manhood is intrinsically tied to their material gains, she perpetuates a societal narrative that places immense pressure on men to achieve financial stability as a means of validating their masculinity. Moreover, the track engages in the objectification of women, presenting them as commodities to be acquired through material means. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this portrayal is not devoid of Eno Barony’s agency and, by extension, the agency of women in general.

A closer examination of her lyrics reveals that she is acutely aware of the material value placed on her body and is unwilling to offer herself without compensation. This stance, while problematic in its perpetuation of transactional relationships, also highlights women’s negotiation of their own worth within a society that often reduces them to objects of desire. Eno Barony concludes the song by offering advice to men who frequent the gym solely to attract women, urging them to redirect their efforts towards financial gain. She likens wealth to having a pot-belly, stating, ‘I want a pot-belly to rub my hands on, not bones’. This statement, while superficial and potentially reinforcing unhealthy body standards, underscores the prevailing societal preference for men who display outward signs of financial success, even at the expense of physical fitness.

In the song ‘King of Queens’, Eno Barony shifts from her previous display of vanity to showcase her lyrical prowess and assert her dominance as a serious emcee. The title itself, ‘King of Queens’, is a moniker that Eno Barony adopts, and it carries a controversial connotation. By assuming the role of a ‘King’ in a traditionally male-dominated sphere, she subverts gender norms and positions herself as the superior ruler over other emcees, particularly the men in the rap scene, who are relegated to the status of ‘Queens’. The track features a collaboration with male rapper Medikal (Samuel Adu Frimpong), and their dynamic can be interpreted as a battle song, a common element in hip hop culture. Battling in hip hop serves as a competitive act between emcees, allowing them to showcase their skills and assert their dominance over one another. In this context, Medikal’s presence on the track can be seen as a representation of the ‘Queens’, while Eno Barony, through her lyrical dexterity and self-celebratory manner, assumes the title of ‘King’. By challenging traditional gender roles and hierarchies within the rap scene, Eno Barony asserts her agency and establishes herself as a formidable force in the industry. Her self-proclaimed title of ‘King of Queens’ is a bold statement that demands recognition of her talent and challenges the male-dominated status quo. Through her lyrics, she subverts the patriarchal power structures that often marginalizes female artists.

Moreover, by engaging in a battle-like dynamic with Medikal, Eno Barony showcases her willingness to directly confront and compete with male rappers on their own terms. This display of confidence and skill further solidifies her position as a serious emcee, capable of holding her own against the best in the industry. Consider when Eno Barony said:

Mempɛ sɛ mɛblow mɛ horns (I don't want to brag)
Nanso nokwɛ da hɔ a (But if the truth is apparent)
Wontumi nkatakata so (You cannot hide it)
Ntwɛn sɛ mɛyɛ funu (While waiting for me to die)
Ansa na mabɔ pause (So I can pause)
 I am the best emcee, I am the best emcee
 No doubt, No doubt

By assuming the role of 'King', Eno Barony further asserts her dominance and supremacy within the rap scene. She issues a stark warning to all other rappers, declaring that she wields the crown and has no intention of relinquishing it. This bold proclamation serves as a provocation, challenging other emcees to contest her position at their own peril. Through such techniques, Eno Barony effectively feminizes her potential rivals, undermining their masculinity and questioning their ability to compete with her on equal terms.

The imagery of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, the legendary Asante warrior queen, is invoked to underscore Eno Barony's resilience and determination. Just as Nana Yaa Asantewaa rose to lead her people in the face of adversity, Eno Barony positions herself as a formidable force in the rap game, ready to fight to the very end against any emcee who dares to challenge her supremacy. This symbolic association with a powerful female figure from African history serves to reinforce Eno Barony's status as a trailblazer and a champion for women in the male-dominated world of hip hop.

Moreover, by feminizing her competitors and aligning herself with the legendary Nana Yaa Asantewaa, Eno Barony subverts traditional gender roles and expectations within the rap scene. She challenges the notion that masculinity is a prerequisite for success in hip hop, instead asserting that her unique blend of feminine power and lyrical prowess is more than sufficient to secure her position at the top of the game. Eno Barony's provocative stance and willingness to engage in lyrical battles with any challenger serve as a testament to her confidence and skill as an emcee. By openly inviting competition and asserting her readiness to defend her crown, she demonstrates her unwavering commitment to her craft and her determination to maintain her position as the 'King of Queens'.

THE GENDERED ART OF BEEF

In the realm of hip hop, 'beef' refers to the conflicts and rivalries that emerge among emcees (Sweet 2005). When approached constructively, beef can be seen as a healthy addition to the rap game, providing a platform for emcees to engage in lyrical sparring and prove their superiority through their mastery of language and flow. In this context, beef serves as a catalyst for growth and innovation, pushing emcees to elevate their craft and showcase their skills in the face of competition. However, beef also has the potential to devolve into unhealthy and even dangerous territory (Sweet 2005). When conflicts escalate beyond the realm of lyrical battles, they can lead to physical altercations and

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violence, endangering not only the emcees themselves but also their fans and the broader community. This darker side of beef highlights the need for a delicate balance between fostering a competitive spirit and maintaining a sense of respect and restraint within the hip hop scene (Sweet 2005).

In the Ghanaian rap landscape, it is not uncommon for emcees to engage in beef as a means of defending self-proclaimed or fan-appointed titles, such as being the best rapper, a God Emcee or a King. These verbal exchanges serve multiple purposes, including asserting dominance, promoting new projects and cementing an emcee's legacy within the industry. Fortunately, in the Ghanaian context, beef tends to be relatively short-lived and rarely escalates into physical violence, allowing it to remain a skilful art form when deployed strategically.

As Eno Barony navigates the Ghanaian rap scene, she adeptly employs beef as a tool to illuminate her lyrical prowess and draw attention to her craft. With the precision and cunningness of a spider weaving its web, she carefully constructs her verbal attacks, often targeting male emcees. When her lyrical traps successfully ensnare a prey, she seizes the opportunity to inject her potent, venomous bars into the rap game, showcasing attempts at asserting herself as a formidable emcee. Eno Barony has earned a reputation for being at her best when provoked, demonstrating how impactful she is in the diss arena. As a result of Eno Barony's formidable reputation and lyrical prowess, many male emcees in the Ghanaian rap scene have chosen to avoid engaging in direct conflicts with her. This reluctance to respond to her provocations can be seen as a tacit acknowledgement of her skill and a desire to preserve their own reputations, as a loss in a battle against a female emcee could be perceived as particularly damaging to their credibility within the male-dominated industry.

However, in a notable departure from this trend, the rapper Medikal openly addressed Eno Barony's talent in a radio interview. Despite acknowledging her gender, Medikal asserted that Eno Barony is 'dope', a term used to describe a highly skilled and impressive rapper. He further elaborated on his respect for her abilities, stating that she even surpasses many male emcees in terms of her lyrical output and consistency. Interestingly, Medikal followed this praise with a direct challenge to Eno Barony, expressing his intention to 'lash the girl' in a lyrical battle. He explicitly dismissed the potential influence of 'feminist and women empowerment' movements on his perspective, suggesting that he would not be swayed by considerations of gender in his assessment of her skills.

Subsequently, Medikal released a track titled 'Warning', in which he employed expletives to disparage both male emcees and Eno Barony while simultaneously promoting his forthcoming album. This move can be interpreted as a strategic attempt to generate controversy and attention for his project, leveraging the power of beef to create buzz within the rap community. Medikal's decision to openly challenge Eno Barony, despite his earlier acknowledgement of her talent, highlights the complex dynamics at play within the Ghanaian Hip hop scene. While his initial praise suggests a genuine respect for her abilities, his subsequent actions demonstrate a willingness to engage in provocative behaviour and potentially undermine her credibility as a means of furthering his own interests. Eno Barony's response to Medikal's provocative track 'Warning' came in the form of a similarly titled diss song, also named 'Warning'. This particular song is noteworthy for the way in which Eno Barony strategically employs gender as a weapon in her lyrical attack.

Through clever wordplay and metaphorical associations, she skilfully undermines Medikal's masculinity and asserts her own dominance in the rap battle.

One of the most striking examples of this gender-based attack is Eno Barony's comparison of Medikal to a vagina and the plant *Mimosa Pudica*. The Twi name for this plant, which is known for its sensitive leaves that fold inward when touched, contains the word 'vagina'. By drawing this parallel, Eno Barony effectively feminizes Medikal, suggesting that he possesses traditionally feminine qualities and is vulnerable to her lyrical touch. The line 'when I touch you/you will fold' serves as a powerful metaphor for Eno Barony's ability to dominate and subdue Medikal through her superior lyrical skills. By implying that he will crumble and retreat like the leaves of the *Mimosa Pudica* when confronted with her verbal prowess, she asserts her own strength and resilience in the face of his challenge.

This clever use of gender-based imagery and wordplay is a testament to Eno Barony's ability to subvert traditional gender roles and expectations within the male-dominated rap industry. By turning Medikal's own words and actions against him and using femininity as a tool for asserting her dominance, she effectively undermines his credibility and exposes the fragility of his masculinity. Moreover, Eno Barony's strategic deployment of gender in her diss track highlights the ways in which female emcees often have to navigate a complex and often hostile landscape, where their gender is simultaneously a target for attack and a source of strength and resilience. By embracing and weaponizing her femininity, Eno Barony demonstrates her ability to thrive in this environment and assert her place as a formidable force in the Ghanaian hip hop scene. Eno Barony also intervenes in gender roles in this song, circumventing the dependency of women on men. She makes it known that her role as a female emcee will not stop her from any competition:

Adeɛ beɛ wo (Something will happen to you)
Biribi bebiri w'ani so (You will be slapped in the face)
Se woaso woaforofoafofofo a (If you have reached your creeping stage)
Ɛbefono wo. Fa firi me so (Get away from me)
Me ne wo nni competition (We have no competition)
Wope nso a yede befee so (But if you call it we would battle)
Kane no na ɔbaa ɛ tuo (In the past, women bought guns)
de to ɔbarima dan mu (And they kept them in the rooms of men)
Seesei deɛ ɛbo yeataa so (But now it is strapped to our thighs)

In an act of hip hop feminism, Eno Barony subverts the Akan saying that encouraged women's dependence on men. She asserts that the gun, once bought by women and kept in men's rooms, is now strapped to women's thighs, signalling a shift in power dynamics and attitudes. Female emcees, too, are to be feared. Eno Barony further weaponizes masculinity and its links to manhood against her contender, Medikal. She warns him, 'When I bounce on you/you go remain impotent', suggesting that engaging in a battle with her will result in a loss of his manhood and potency. Despite the creative use of gender as a weapon, she goes on to mention that rap is a genderless art. This is in response to Medikal's emphasis on her gender in the rap game.

Rap no get respect (Rap has no respect)
Emfa ho ne wo gender (It is genderless)
Anybody go fit throw a punch (Anyone can throw a punch)

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We living on a land with no laws
 No man's land
 Nobody be landlord

In her declaration, Eno Barony asserts that gender has no place in the realm of rap, emphasizing that an artist's success is determined by their dexterity and talent rather than their gender identity. Through clever wordplay, she refers to the rap scene as 'No man's land', drawing a parallel to the contested border regions in Africa, where small pieces of land serve as transitional zones between territorial states. This metaphor highlights the idea that the rap scene should be a neutral space where gender does not grant any inherent advantages or disadvantages.

Eno Barony extends her lyrical jabs to Sarkodie, who is often referred to as the 'Landlord' of the Ghanaian rap scene. By stating 'Nobody be landlord', she challenges the notion of male dominance and ownership within the industry, particularly targeting Sarkodie's perceived position as the 'King' of rap in Ghana. This creative wordplay not only reinforces her message of gender equality in the rap scene but also serves as a direct challenge to the established hierarchies and power structures within the Ghanaian hip hop community.

Eno Barony's fluid and strategic use of gender in her rap lyrics demonstrates her creative power and ability to navigate the male-dominated rap space in Ghana. By employing braggadocio and gender as a weapon, she effectively feminizes male emcees, challenging their masculinity and asserting her own dominance within the industry. However, this enables complicity and tension as she sometimes perpetuates some of the patriarchal and capitalistic norms to make her point. At other times, however, Eno Barony skillfully collapses gender barriers, inserting herself fully into the rap scene and claiming her rightful place among her male counterparts. This fluidity in her approach to gender allows Eno Barony to make assertions and address issues that her male colleagues may not be able to tackle as effectively. Her unique perspective and creative use of gender enable her to reach a wide range of audiences, resonating with both men and women in different ways. However, her lyrics asserting the rap scene to be a genderless or neutral space is far from the truth. For the intersection of class, gender and sexuality impacts one's hip hop career as highlighted above.

Eno Barony's sophisticated tactical deployment of gender within beef tracks exemplifies Whitney's (2012) theoretical formulation of hip hop feminism's politics of articulation; a framework wherein female identity within hip hop contexts remains intrinsically mutable, perpetually negotiated and rearticulated in response to fluctuating power configurations. Her fluid oscillation between feminine embodiment and masculine performativity manifests Pough's (2004) conceptualization of 'bringing wreck', a rhetorical intervention through which Black women systematically dismantle conventional expectations while simultaneously engendering novel possibilities through their performative spectacularity. Through her strategic mobilization of gender as both offensive and defensive apparatus, Barony epitomizes hip hop feminism's methodological commitment to navigating, inhabiting and ultimately transforming problematic discursive spaces from within. This strategic approach to gender performance within contested cultural territories enables the articulation of complex feminist critiques while maintaining legitimacy within genre-specific contexts.

When targeting male listeners, Eno Barony appropriates the language and style typically used by male rappers, subverting traditional gender roles and asserting her own power and skill. This approach challenges the male-dominated nature of the rap industry and forces her male counterparts to acknowledge her as an equal and formidable opponent. Simultaneously, Eno Barony uses her platform to give voice to the experiences of women, addressing the stereotypes and challenges they face within the rap sphere. By speaking directly to female listeners, she encourages and inspires them, fostering a sense of solidarity and empowerment among women in the industry.

CONCLUSION

In her debut album *Yaa Asantewaa*, Eno Barony presents a multifaceted representation of the African woman, challenging traditional stereotypes and showcasing the diversity of women's experiences and identities. This article has argued that Eno Barony utilizes braggadocio, metaphors and a fluid approach to gender to assert her identity, challenge patriarchal norms and amplify the voices of African women in the rap industry. Through her lyrics, she portrays a courageous woman who is willing to fight head-on in the face of adversity, even as men retreat and lock themselves indoors. This powerful imagery subverts gender roles and expectations, highlighting the strength and resilience of African women.

Moreover, Eno Barony presents a dialectic woman, one who embodies both charm and fearlessness, and who embraces the vanity that comes with material success. However, this vanity is not portrayed as a weakness but rather as a form of agency and self-expression. This multifaceted representation of women in Eno Barony's work is consistent with the findings of Clark (2018), who notes that African female rappers often distinguish themselves from their male counterparts by presenting women in a more nuanced and complex manner. The intersectionality of gender, class and sexuality also presents itself in the practice of hip hop as it impacts an artist's career and audience. We have looked at the impact of gender in this article, but the impact of class and sexuality calls for further studies.

Eno Barony's artistic corpus exemplifies Love's (2012) conceptualization of hip hop feminism as a complex political apparatus that, despite its inherent contradictions, provides women with the capacity to engage meaningfully with hip hop while concurrently interrogating its structural limitations and ideological inconsistencies. Her multidimensional portrayal of African womanhood is a progression from critique of patriarchal structures towards the generative construction of nuanced models of Black womanhood that encompass complexity, contradiction and holistic representation. Through her methodical deployment of braggadocio, performative gender fluidity and strategic confrontational positionality, Barony demonstrates the efficacy of hip hop feminist praxis as a theoretical toolkit enabling female artists to establish authoritative presence within masculinist domains while simultaneously reconfiguring the ontological possibilities of gender performance within these contested spaces. This sophisticated negotiation of identity politics within the Ghanaian hip hop landscape illustrates the transnational applicability of hip hop feminist methodologies in articulating localized expressions of female empowerment.

Throughout the album, *Yaa Asantewaa*, Eno Barony employs braggadocio as a means of establishing herself and carving out a space in the male-dominated rap scene in Ghana. Despite *Yaa Asantewaa* being her debut

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album, Eno Barony brings with it a force that demands attention and respect, asserting her presence as an artist to be reckoned with. This use of braggadocio and self-assertion is a common tactic employed by artists to call attention to themselves and maintain relevance in the competitive world of rap music. Eno Barony's strategic use of these tactics, combined with her unique perspective and powerful lyrical content, positions her as a formidable presence in the Ghanaian rap scene. By challenging gender norms, representing the diverse experiences of African women and asserting her own artistic identity, Eno Barony contributes to the ongoing evolution of hip hop culture in Ghana and beyond. Her debut album *Yaa Asantewaa* serves as a testament to her skill, creativity and commitment to using her platform to amplify the voices and stories of African women in the rap industry.

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This article was researched and written to the standards of Intellect's Ethical Guidelines: <https://www.intellectbooks.com/ethical-guidelines>. No approvals or subject consent were required.

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