

THESIS

SPEAKING WITHOUT PERMISSION: METAPHOR, MEDIA, AND THE FRAMING OF  
BLACK WOMEN'S VICE-PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP IN GHANA AND THE UNITED  
STATES

Submitted by  
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Colorado  
Fall 2025

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## ABSTRACT

### SPEAKING WITHOUT PERMISSION: METAPHOR, MEDIA, AND THE FRAMING OF BLACK WOMEN'S VICE-PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP IN GHANA AND THE UNITED STATES

In the course of four years, two Black women—one in the United States, the other in Ghana—accepted their nominations as vice-presidential candidates, rewriting expectations for leadership and representation. Through comparative rhetorical analysis, this thesis assesses how Kamala Harris and Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang used metaphors in their vice presidential nomination speeches to shape their political identities and how media outlets with differing ideological leanings interpreted or challenged these identities. I carefully combine metaphorical analysis and media framing analysis to examine how mainstream media outlets in the US and Ghana echoed or resisted their political identities. I argue that these speeches, while grounded in distinct cultural and political traditions, form a transnational subgenre of rhetorical performance that simultaneously responds to and reshapes dominant ideas of leadership. This thesis reveals how metaphors, media, and gender intersect to constitute Black women's political speech as both contested and constitutive across borders.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The Girl Who Can*— Ama Ata Aidoo

This thesis, like the defiant girls in Aidoo’s stories, exists because others believed I could and walked beside me until I achieved it.

First, to my advisor, Dr. Karin Vasby Anderson, you are the kind of mentor scholars dream of. I am deeply indebted to you for seeing potential in me and never letting me forget it. Your guidance throughout this thesis and your encouragement during my PhD applications have been priceless. You helped me become the scholar I was destined to be by supporting my voice and challenging my ideas. Thank you for being the kind of mentor I didn’t even know to pray for.

To my terrific committee members, Dr. Katie Gibson and Dr. Rosa Martey, thank you for engaging with my ideas with such thoughtfulness. Your feedback helped this thesis become clearer and stronger. A special thanks to Dr. Greg Dickinson for the hallway pep talk that always seemed to come at just the right moment.

I extend my profound gratitude to my undergraduate and national service supervisor, Dr. Akpeko Abgevade at the Department of Political Science, UG, for supporting me during my transition from Ghana to the United States. And to the entire faculty and my colleagues at the Department of Communication Studies, CSU, you created an intellectual home where I could struggle, grow, and thrive. To Peyton, in nearly every graduate class, you ensured I never felt like an outsider.

And to my proudest village: my parents, Agatha and Callistus, thank you for bringing me into this world and watching me become. Your sacrifices, your love, and your faith in me, even

when I felt small, have carried me. I owe it all to you. My guardian, Naomi Erskine, thank you for being my safe place. Thank you to my “US grandparents,” Papa Wolf and Mama Judy, who took me in as their own and have cared for me deeply. My siblings Ignatius, William, Prince, Ernestina, Kelvin, and Alberta, thank you for being so proud of me. Your “that’s MY sister” pride kept me going, especially on the days I wanted to quit. I carry your love with me always.

I would also like to thank Emmanuel for accompanying me throughout this entire academic journey. From undergraduate through this master’s thesis, you’ve been a source of inspiration. Your reminders to “try again” and your belief in me made all the difference. To Dr. Ohene-Otu, Esq., thank you for checking in on me and reminding me I’m capable, even on the hardest days. Dr. Oppon-Acquah, thank you for your calm wisdom and steady support. Not forgetting Mama Sylvia, my undergraduate school mother, thank you for offering me shelter when I needed it most. You helped take the burdens off my shoulders so I could focus.

To my people—Papa Ansah, thank you for your endless loyalty. Mercy and Daniel Briggs, thank you for holding me when I couldn’t keep myself up and cheering me on when I couldn’t. Martin and Benjamin, I appreciate your friendship. Priscilla and Praise, thank you for shaping the woman I am. You’ve been my roots, my mirrors, and my joy!

Finally, thank you to Kamala Harris and Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang, the two women whose narratives are at the core of this thesis. Every page was inspired by your bravery, your leadership, and your refusal to be confined. You have shown the world what can happen when women step up with purpose, just like *The Girl Who Can!*

And to everyone who ever said, “You can,” even when I wasn’t sure—I heard you. Thank you.

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## CHAPTER ONE-INTRODUCTION

On August 19, 2020, the Democratic Party in the United States made significant political declarations of inclusivity by picking a Black woman as its vice-presidential nominee. Likewise, the New Democratic Congress in Ghana chose a Black woman as its vice-presidential candidate on April 24, 2024. Both selections were expected to strengthen their positions and challenge incumbent administrations in the two countries. Moreover, in 2020 and 2024, two historic vice-presidential nominees marked a turning point in political representation: Kamala Harris in the United States and Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang in Ghana. Both women emerged as pioneers, expanding the frontiers of race, gender, and leadership in their countries. While their nominations were highly praised, the subsequent media coverage highlighted these women's hurdles and biases as they traverse public life. This study investigates how Kamala Harris and Prof. Naana Opoku-Agyemang's candidacies were portrayed in the US and Ghanaian media, exposing the interconnecting narratives that impact public perceptions of women of color in positions of political power.

In this thesis, I examine how women's political identities are produced and influenced by nomination acceptance speeches, campaigns, and media coverage. I compare two historic vice-presidential nominee acceptance speeches of Harris (2020) and Opoku-Agyemang (2024) and the subsequent media portrayal of them. I ask: How did the two candidates articulate their own identities in their acceptance speeches? During their vice-presidential campaigns, how did US American and Ghanaian media portray Kamala Harris and Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang as leaders at the crossroads of race, gender, and culture? And what do these portrayals imply about broader societal narratives and public expectations of women leaders in these two cultural

contexts? Using metaphorical and media framing analysis, intersectional feminism, and postcolonial theory to guide my study, I argue that Harris and Opoku-Agyemang constructed a political identity based on metaphors used in their vice presidential acceptance speeches to challenge gendered and racial narratives of leadership. However, their rhetorical autonomy is shaped—and often undermined—by media framings that reflect national concerns about power, women, and political legitimacy. By comparing their vice-presidential campaigns in two cultural contexts, this thesis demonstrates how Black women leaders must speak for themselves and against the structures available to them.

Harris, the first Black and South Asian woman on a major-party U.S. presidential ticket, used her acceptance speech to express her resilience and dedication to justice. In her speech, she referenced her ancestry, family, and the long road to equality, presenting herself as a symbol of progress and resilience.<sup>1</sup> However, her representation in American media quickly became a battleground for debates over her “authenticity” as a Black woman, with certain narratives depicting her as both an example of inclusiveness and an “outsider” to mainstream American politics. These opposing narratives highlight a contradiction in American society’s reaction to intersectional identities, particularly when race and gender are combined with political power.<sup>2</sup>

In Ghana, Opoku-Agyemang’s acceptance speech reflected themes of togetherness, compassion, and social reform, reflecting on her experience as an educator and public servant.<sup>3</sup> Her assertions, which highlighted inclusivity and her dedication to society, were carefully chosen to align with Ghana’s cultural norms of relational leadership. However, her image in Ghanaian media reflects her conflicting expectations as a woman leader in a country where tradition coexists with the longing for change. The media typically portrayed her as both a mother and a

modern leader, suggesting an underlying assumption that women leaders must embody traditional values while advocating for change.

This study contributes to the field of Communication Studies by analyzing candidate rhetoric and media portrayals, demonstrating how media frames reflect underlying societal ideals and cultural histories. Using a cross-cultural perspective, this study reveals the potential of media to reflect and enforce cultural boundaries carefully, defining who is viewed as legitimate in leadership and under what terms. This study emphasizes the necessity of knowing how history and cultural norms continue to impact narratives in political communication, particularly for women of color who take on leadership positions that threaten the existing quo. The study analyzes how citizenship is gendered in both the United States and Ghanaian contexts and responds to Raka Shome's call for more transnational feminist scholarship in Communication Studies.<sup>4</sup> Also, this study considers both global forces and local contexts, the aftermath of colonization for both the colonizer and the colonized, and the experiences of women with and without political privilege, addressing the impact of systematic sexism and misogyny on electoral politics.<sup>5</sup> Echoing what Ignacio Moreno Segarra and Karrin Vasby Anderson observed in their study of Spanish politics,<sup>6</sup> I believe that studying the political culture of Ghana allows us to see how "hypersexualized political rhetoric has affected a society with solid patriarchal values and more recent democratic views."<sup>7</sup>

Throughout this chapter, I briefly outline what feminist, postcolonial, and communication scholarship has revealed about women candidates in Western and non-Western settings. I then describe the critical method guiding this study, including postcolonial criticism, intersectional feminist rhetorical criticism, and metaphoric analysis. Finally, I also offer an overview of the chapters incorporated into the thesis.

## **Women Candidates**

### *Women Leaders and the Double Bind*

Kathleen Hall Jamieson defines the double bind as a “rhetorical construct that posits two and only two alternatives, one or both penalizing the person being offered them.”<sup>8</sup> Her research outlines the paradoxical expectations women leaders must navigate.<sup>9</sup> One of the most common double binds Jamieson observes for women in leadership is femininity/competence. This conception is challenging for women in politics, who are expected to demonstrate competence and intellect. Some scholars posit that “exhibiting feminine characteristics contradicts notions of competence.”<sup>10</sup> Other studies have also shown that another often-believed contradiction is that women are quiet and men are assertive, and if women demonstrate assertiveness, they are branded aggressive and unpleasant.<sup>11</sup> Women leaders who come across as overly assertive run the danger of being called “aggressive” or “unfeminine”; if they appear too nurturing, their competence may be questioned. Jamieson explains, “If she refuses to talk like a lady, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine; if she does learn, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion: in some sense, as less than fully human.”<sup>12</sup> The double bind as a rhetorical frame presents a difficulty for women politicians, as discourse frames that emphasize their femininity prevent them from being evaluated as competent leaders. Cultural expectations intensify this bind for public figures like Opoku-Agyemang and Harris, making their representations in Ghanaian and American media extremely difficult.

Deborah Tannen explores how communication styles impact opinions of competence and authority,<sup>13</sup> offering a critical expansion of Jamieson’s bind. Tannen’s study demonstrates that women are frequently socialized to interact in ways that promote inclusion and collaboration,

which are associated with “feminine” attributes.<sup>14</sup> However, these characteristics can be interpreted in leadership roles as inactivity or a lack of authority. In contrast, when women use direct or aggressive communication techniques, they are frequently viewed as “overstepping” gendered boundaries. Women politicians are especially susceptible to the double bind. Research indicates that women running as vice presidential and presidential candidates, such as Geraldine Ferraro and Sarah Palin, and Hillary Clinton, face different media coverage than men.<sup>15</sup> This understanding is essential for Harris and Opoku-Agyemang, whose public personas are created by media narratives that critique their communication choices in a gendered light. In US media, Harris’s assertiveness is reframed as “aggressiveness,” whereas Opoku-Agyemang’s relational approach is regarded through the lens of traditional femininity, stressing nurturance rather than competence. Similarly, Karrin Vasby Anderson and Kristina Horn Sheeler demonstrate how the media uses metaphor and narrative to promote stereotypes, portraying women in positions of power as either openly masculine or not authoritative enough.<sup>16</sup> This “symbolic double bind” restricts the identities that women leaders can openly adopt without facing criticism. Their study highlights the cultural and rhetorical constraints that shape public perceptions of women in executive roles.

### *Women Candidates in the US*

Women candidates in the US have made significant strides in terms of success and representation. Kathleen Dolan argues that “in the past, political parties primarily supported women in dire situations and reserved campaign funds for male candidates with a strong chance of winning.”<sup>17</sup> Instead, thousands of women have been witnessed running for and winning offices at almost all levels across the United States.<sup>18</sup> Every election year, the number of women candidates increases. On the other hand, it is assumed that women candidates comprise a far

smaller portion of the candidate population than the general population, that the public views these women through stereotypes, and that sex and gender considerations, though not permanently disruptive, are prevalent on the campaign trail.<sup>19</sup> Freddie J. Jennings and Calvin R. Coker posit that in recent times, there has been a decrease in the percentage of women's electoral successes in politics when comparing the country's high-power field gender representation statistics.<sup>20</sup> According to the Center for American Women and Politics, only 45 women have held US Senate positions since Hattie Caraway was elected from Arkansas in 1932.<sup>21</sup> The way we discuss women candidates could provide some reason, since some discourses can express a political climate unfriendly to women entering the world of politics.<sup>22</sup>

Communication scholars who study gender and media framing have found evidence of the femininity/competence double bind in media representation. For example, research has found that media narratives usually promote traditional gender roles, undermining women's perceived competence.<sup>23</sup> Justin Bonest Phillips emphasizes that negative political communication on social media exacerbates the gender gap, as women candidates are frequently subjected to harsher scrutiny and criticism than their male counterparts.<sup>24</sup> When women assert themselves in ways that go against traditional gender standards, this scrutiny can give the impression that they are less capable.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, how political discourse is framed influences how the general public views women candidates. According to Nikki Usher et al., political journalists frequently reinforce gender bias in their reporting, generating echo chambers that heighten negative stereotypes of women in politics.<sup>26</sup> This framing can hinder women candidates from fully participating in political discourse, as they may fear backlash for deviating from stereotyped feminine traits.<sup>27</sup> The repercussions of such media portrayals are considerable, as they not only undermine women's electoral performance but also add to a broader societal narrative that

doubts women's competence in leadership roles.<sup>28</sup> Women candidates' methods of communication sometimes deepen the double bind. Monic C. Schneider's research shows that women frequently adopt communication techniques that conform to established gender stereotypes, which can hinder their efficacy in conveying competence.<sup>29</sup> The tendency of women to adhere to gender norms could hinder their capacity to challenge the status quo and affirm their qualities.<sup>30</sup> Conversely, certain studies indicate that when women candidates adeptly manage these expectations, they may reduce gender stereotypes to gain voter support.<sup>31</sup> The influence of social media on political communication is significant and cannot be disregarded. Lingshu Hu and Michael W. Kearney's analysis of Twitter chats indicates that gender disparities in political discourse are significant, with women frequently encountering more obstacles in achieving recognition and respect in online political dialogues.<sup>32</sup> The digital environment might exacerbate existing biases, hindering women candidates from asserting their presence and authority.<sup>33</sup>

Research on women presidential candidates, specifically, is also relevant to this study. Women presidential candidates have challenged conventional norms and inspired a generation to conceive of a more inclusive democracy. Their candidacies highlight the complex nature of women's leadership in a traditionally male-dominated environment. Erika Falk analyzes the influence of media narratives on public perceptions of women presidential candidates, contending that media bias frequently diminishes women's legitimacy and electoral chances.<sup>34</sup> Dianne Bystrom and Daniela V. Dimitrova support this claim by emphasizing the unequal media attention afforded to women candidates relative to their male counterparts, indicating that women frequently doubt their competence.<sup>35</sup> For instance, Clinton was scrutinized for her "likability," her voice, and her physical appearance during her 2008 and 2016 presidential campaigns—less significant factors when evaluating her male counterparts. Lindsey Meeks notes that the media's

emphasis on a woman candidate's personal life detracts from substantive discussions regarding her policy positions, diminishing her credibility as a leader.<sup>36</sup> Shawn Parry-Giles thoroughly analyzed Hillary Clinton's media representation, highlighting how her gender affected her public persona and electoral opportunities.<sup>37</sup> Anderson argues that the transition from political spouses to presidential candidates, made by women such as Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Dole, highlights the deeply established gender norms and expectations in American politics.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Dolan's research on gender-stereotyped evaluations shows that individual beliefs toward women's representation can influence public support for women candidates.<sup>39</sup> This aligns with the findings of Dianna R. Mullet et al., who emphasize the importance of institutional support for women's leadership development, which can offset the challenges women candidates face.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, research demonstrates that economic fears might impair support for women candidates, as reported by Ryan F. Lei and Galen V. Bodenhausen, who discovered that such anxieties disproportionately affect perceptions of women in politics.<sup>41</sup> This highlights how women candidates have to negotiate not only gender biases but also broader socioeconomic conditions that influence voter behavior.

In many cases, the rhetorical strategies that women candidates employ are shaped by societal expectations, which restrict the effectiveness of some strategies. As seen with Geraldine Ferraro and Sarah Palin, the vice presidency has evolved into a significant role. Denise Bostdorff contends that male vice presidents must defer to their running mates and that the vice president position is fundamentally feminine. In Ferraro's instance, as the first major-party female vice-presidential contender, she had to demonstrate that she was tough enough on the ticket while still performing acceptable vice president submissiveness to the president.<sup>42</sup> So, the double bind had a role, but not in the same manner it does for women at the top of the ticket.

Hayley A. Liebenow et al. found that understanding gendered trait inferences is critical when evaluating candidates such as Kamala Harris.<sup>43</sup> Other than gender bias, the intersectionality of race and gender adds an element of complexity to the political experience of women of color. To understand the obstacles that Harris encountered, it is essential to understand the concept of “misogynoir,” which was developed to denote the distinctive discrimination experienced by Black women. Cecelia Cerja et al. argue that Harris’s campaign experienced both transparent and nuanced forms of racism and misogyny, which frequently intersected in a manner that made her political journey particularly challenging.<sup>44</sup> Harris’s mixed-race status imposes a dual weight of sexism and racism, distorting her public image. Katherine Clayton et al. examine the role of identity frames on support for multiracial politicians, highlighting that Harris’s racial origin affects voter perception.<sup>45</sup> Harris’s treatment by the media, which included inquiries regarding her racial identity and qualifications, serves as an illustration of the different and frequently more hostile expectations that Black women face in comparison to their white female or male counterparts. Thus, studies demonstrate that Black women in politics encounter many layers of prejudice.<sup>46</sup> This intersectionality distorts the public’s perspective and may diminish their power.<sup>47</sup> Understanding these relationships is crucial for promoting equal political representation.

### *Women Candidates in Africa*

The political landscape in Africa has witnessed significant transformations over the past few decades, particularly concerning the representation of women in political offices. Women’s organizations have been acknowledged as critical participants in increasing women’s political representation throughout Africa. Mi Yung Yoon highlights that these organizations provide critical training and tools for women who want to enter politics, encouraging leadership skills and political involvement.<sup>48</sup> In Botswana, Kenya, and South Africa, women's organizations

actively recruit women candidates to seek parliamentary seats, campaigning for their involvement in political processes.<sup>49</sup> Amanda B. Edgell adds to this by stating that gender quotas have been essential in raising the number of women in legislative posts, particularly in nations such as Rwanda and Mozambique, where legislative frameworks have been created to promote gender equality.<sup>50</sup> Belinda A. Stillion Southard's study emphasizes the relevance of women's agency in navigating political environments by showing how women use networks to promote their political engagement.<sup>51</sup>

Despite recent improvements, considerable challenges remain to women's political aspirations. Daniel Stockemer highlights socioeconomic variables, such as schooling and financial dependence on males, as critical barriers to women's political engagement.<sup>52</sup> Some researchers support this, emphasizing cultural attitudes and traditional behaviors that limit women's societal positions and consequently impact their political engagement.<sup>53</sup> This resonates with the study of Gevin A. Apatinga and Eric Y. Tenkorang, who investigate the obstacles to obtaining assistance for sexual abuse among women in Ghana, emphasizing the interplay between gender-based violence and political representation.<sup>54</sup>

One crucial question is whether gender quotas help to promote sustainable representation effectively. While quotas can help to expand the number of women in political roles, Amanda Edgell contends that they do not always result in significant representation or policy influence.<sup>55</sup> One crucial question is whether gender quotas help to promote sustainable representation effectively. While quotas can help to expand the number of women in political roles, Edgell contends that they do not always result in significant representation or policy influence.<sup>56</sup> To Apatinga and Tenkorang, quotas must be complemented by more general democratic reforms to guarantee that women's opinions are heard in the political scene.<sup>57</sup> Some research has analyzed

the link between descriptive representation and substantive representation and proposes that more women in politics will result in changes in policy agendas supporting women's rights.<sup>58</sup> Although women's organizations and gender quotas have enhanced representation, persistent societal norms and organizational barriers still restrict women's political engagement.

### **Postcolonial and Feminist Theory**

Edward Said's *Orientalism* was instrumental in unveiling how the West constructed the East as an exotic, inferior "Other" to justify its dominance.<sup>59</sup> Said said that Western portrayals of the East were neither neutral nor objective but closely linked to imperial authority. The creation of the "Orient" as a unique and inferior entity served to legitimize colonial rule and maintain the idea of Western supremacy. Said's critique of representational approaches criticized how the West depicted the East, exposing the power dynamics contained in these cultural narratives. As he asserts, "Orientalism was a Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."<sup>60</sup> This viewpoint is aligned with Kwame Nkrumah's anticolonial rhetoric in Ghana, in which he portrayed independence as a chance to re-envision African identity with agency and pride. Said's critique of these representational practices reveals the power dynamics at work in colonial narratives.<sup>61</sup>

In her seminal article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak proposes the concept of the "subaltern" marginalized communities frequently silenced in the prevailing discourse of postcolonial and colonial contexts.<sup>62</sup> What Spivak calls "epistemic violence" has been the repression of subaltern voices, especially women's, due to the colonial era's linguistic and legal restrictions.<sup>63</sup> This analysis of the creation of knowledge leads scholars to ask whether even postcolonial ideologies could serve to repress these underrepresented groups. Culturally specific feminist frameworks are necessary, according to Spivak's

observations and those of African feminists like Wangari Maathai, who urge African voices to regain agency in discourse instead of conforming to narratives imposed from without.<sup>64</sup>

Confronting the inflexible binary of colonizer and colonized, Homi K. Bhabha proposed hybridity,<sup>65</sup> which highlights the fact that colonial identities are dynamic and subject to ongoing negotiation, enabling the formation of new hybrid identities that challenge the colonizer's inflexible grasp on cultural conceptions.<sup>66</sup> Kundai Chirido's analysis of "micro nationalism" in Africa resonates with this notion of identity construction; the latter attacks the Western nation-state model imposed on African societies. Contesting that African societies are weaker due to their diversity, Chirido argues that many African identities flourish inside more decentralized "micronations" that fight against monolithic state frameworks.<sup>67</sup>

Although postcolonial theory has been essential in analyzing colonial legacies, it initially neglected gendered realities, especially the twin oppressions imposed by colonial and patriarchal structures. Postcolonial feminism addresses this deficiency by contesting colonial power dynamics and Western feminist paradigms that inadequately represent the complexities of non-Western women's experiences. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" challenges Western feminisms that generalize non-Western women as submissive and dominated, hence maintaining a colonial viewpoint.<sup>68</sup> Mohanty advocates for culturally specific feminist rhetoric that respects the agency and circumstances of postcolonial women.<sup>69</sup> In a similar vein, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving* by Lila Abu-Lughod questions the Western feminist storyline that depicts Muslim women as objects waiting to be freed.<sup>70</sup> Abu-Lughod argues against oversimplified stories of oppression and rescue in favor of a more complex approach considering these women's agency within their diverse cultural backgrounds.<sup>71</sup>

Belinda Stillion Southard's research underscores the significance of self-representation in postcolonial feminism, analyzing how women in these contexts employ rhetoric to counteract local patriarchy and the enduring effects of colonial misrepresentation.<sup>72</sup> Southard contends that African women and other non-Western feminists utilize distinct rhetorical strategies to assert their agency and foster solidarity, establishing a basis for intersectional, transnational feminist movements that are culturally specific yet globally interconnected.<sup>73</sup> Her findings correspond with Spivak's concerns regarding the subaltern voice and reinforce Wangari Maathai's promotion of local sovereignty and cultural pride as expressions of female agency.<sup>74</sup>

Some scholars, like Raka Shome and Radha Hegde, have argued that postcolonial methods may enhance our understanding of cultural identities and media representations. Communication Studies would benefit from including varied feminist viewpoints.<sup>75</sup> They also stress the necessity of culturally distinctive feminist analysis. According to Shome and Hegde feminist theory should stop trying to generalize and start considering regional specifics when addressing gender issues.<sup>76</sup> This means putting gender issues in the perspective of each region's history, society, and politics. Chirindo argues that African communities should be able to define their own identities and frameworks for progress through self-representation and rhetorical sovereignty, which is emphasized in the work of Maathai and other African feminists.<sup>77</sup> In light of globalization, their inquiry shows that it is critical to consider how gender, class, and race interact.<sup>78</sup>

African feminists have broadened the concept of intersectionality to address how colonial and patriarchal history significantly impacts women in African countries. Maathai expands on this intersectional approach with her concept of "micronations," calling for political agency and empowerment based on recognizing Africa's ethnic and cultural diversity in governance

institutions. Local sovereignty should be prioritized in Maathai's vision of African self-determination, which opposes the colonial-era imposition of homogenized national identities.<sup>79</sup>

My study enhances the existing scholarly discourse by analyzing the media framing of vice-presidential candidates in the US and Ghana and identifying the similarities and differences within these distinct cultural contexts.

### **Critical Methods**

When Harris and Opoku-Agyemang took the stage to accept their nominations for vice president, they prepared speeches that aimed to showcase their identities and values as well as their visions for the future. How does the media's interpretation and portrayal of these self-portraits influence public perception? This study assesses those depictions by examining these acceptance speeches and their coverage in the media in both the United States and Ghana. My research questions are: (1) How did the two candidates articulate their own identities in their acceptance speech? (2) During their vice-presidential campaigns, how did US American and Ghanaian media portray Kamala Harris and Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang as leaders at the crossroads of race, gender, and culture? (3) What do these portrayals imply about broader societal narratives and public expectations of women leaders in these two cultural contexts?

The study uses metaphoric and framing analysis to examine the acceptance speeches of two women candidates and investigate media outlets' portrayal of Harris and Opoku-Agyemang and its implications for race, gender, and leadership. Using intersectional feminist and postcolonial critique helps to assess how the media shapes narratives about women in leadership roles that either mirror or challenge norms.

The primary texts for this study are the vice-presidential acceptance speeches delivered by Harris and Opoku-Agyemang in 2020 and 2024, respectively, and the media coverage that

followed. The speeches represent expressions of self-definition, while the media portrayal illustrates how these self-representations are perceived within ideological contexts. Additionally, the speeches represent crucial moments in which each candidate establishes the tone, articulates her role, and engages with national and cultural expectations. Each speech provides a glimpse into the candidate's rhetorical strategy, shaped by her identity, her candidacy's historical significance, and her party's expectations, coupled with external media framing, providing a comprehensive view of how race, gender, and national identity influence the rhetorical construction of each candidate's public image.

### *Acceptance Speeches*

In 2020, Harris positioned herself as a symbol of strength and justice as the first Black and South Asian woman to be part of a U.S. presidential ticket. Her speech focuses on principles fundamental to the American story, particularly those related to inclusivity and equality. The speech analysis is derived from the video of her acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention Night 3 on August 19, 2020.<sup>80</sup> Opoku-Agyemang's 2024 acceptance speech had a comparable impact in Ghana, although in a different historical and cultural context. In an area where colonial history is still felt, she speaks of development and unity while challenging gender norms with her campaign. Opoku-Agyemang's speech analysis is based on the video of her acceptance speech on April 25, 2024.<sup>81</sup> The two speeches from Harris and Opoku-Agyemang are self-framing exercises essential to understanding each candidate's public persona.

### *Media Outlets as Framing Agents*

In order to discern media framing strategies, I examine three media outlets per speech from the US and Ghana. These chosen media outlets reflect a variety of ideological viewpoints, helping to provide a broad picture of how the American and Ghanaian media form narratives

about these women candidates. The study focuses on the headlines and contents of the articles. The new articles are selected using a date-bound search, focusing on coverage from August 19 to September 19, 2020, for Harris and April 24 to May 24, 2024, for Opoku-Agyemang. I analyze articles within one month after their acceptance speeches. Both hard news and editorial content are analyzed to obtain a thorough understanding of the media portrayal.

For media framing of Harris's speech, I assess coverage from the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times* due to their ideological diversity, which includes liberal, conservative, and centrist viewpoints. Also, while their audiences and backgrounds differ, these outlets are significant participants in today's media scene. Furthermore, news websites are critical for analysis since, despite a significant readership decrease in traditional daily newspapers, the overall news industry has expanded due to the availability of online coverage.<sup>82</sup> The combination of these news outlets enables me to assess the range of media framing tactics in the United States. For coverage of Opoku-Agyemang, I examine coverage from the *Daily Guide*, the *Herald*, and the *Ghanaian Times* in Ghana. These news outlets offer many perspectives on Ghana's media environment, reflecting centrist, left-leaning, and conservative viewpoints. The *Ghanaian Times*, which is more centrist, represents mainstream popular mood; the *Herald* is in favor of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which is the political party of Opoku-Agyemang and therefore would be in favor of her. The *Daily Guide* is affiliated with the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the opponent of the NDC, and is more likely to be more critical of Opoku-Agyemang's candidacy.

#### *Framing and Metaphoric Analysis*

Robert M. Entman argues that "irrespective of its precise use, the concept of framing consistently provides a means to characterize the strength of a communicating text."<sup>83</sup> Framing

and metaphoric analysis are my primary methods, led by intersectional and postcolonial critiques, to bring depth to the interpretation. I am interested in knowing how the media portrays these two women candidates when reporting on their acceptance speeches and narratives the coverage makes available to the audience. Framing refers to purposefully highlighting specific features of an issue while minimizing others, like how a picture frame can focus or de-emphasize specific elements of a photograph.<sup>84</sup> Framing occurs at four crucial points in any communicative process: the communicator, the communicative text or message, the recipient (or audience), and the broader society.<sup>85</sup> Since audiences frequently rely on the most easily accessible information to inform their decisions or interpret social events, understanding framing is essential because it effectively shapes their perceptions.<sup>86</sup> Although the audiences undoubtedly return some degree of cognitive agency, framing can substantially impact this autonomy when faced with unclear situations.<sup>87</sup> According to Ryan J. Philipps, since the 1980s, communications academics have used framing analysis more frequently,<sup>88</sup> and it is used to analyze a variety of discourses, such as public discussions, advertising, and policy.<sup>89</sup> As such, I use framing analysis to analyze the trends in how the media have framed Harris and Opoku-Agyemang in their political vice presidential acceptance speeches. However, one crucial way rhetorical scholars identify frames is through metaphoric analysis. With this, I employ metaphoric analysis to identify the frames of Harris and Opoku-Agyemang by the media.

A metaphor is a method of creating a specific meaning in the mind of an audience by using the relationship between the tenor and vehicle, the idea or subject being defined, and the image through which this idea is conveyed.<sup>90</sup> Robert L. Ivie contends that, in political media, metaphors function enthymematically, motivating the public to provide premises on topics that remain unsaid but agreed upon.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Kenneth Burke notes that the arrangement of

vehicles in a body of a discourse “necessarily directs the attention into some channels rather than others,” therefore affecting one terministic perspective.<sup>92</sup> This implies that, language is not only a passive conduit for communication; it actively influences mind, perception, and interpretation. Reality is shaped and understood in a particular way through metaphors, as the language used constructs that understanding. This reality can transform when different linguistic tools are employed to structure it.<sup>93</sup>

Metaphors are essential to “language, perception, and persuasion; therefore, critically examining their role in a discourse helps explain how it impacts individuals.”<sup>94</sup> Ivie’s metaphoric criticism paradigm encourages discovering and studying metaphoric groups that share meaning and approximate one of the rhetor’s main conceptual pictures. As these vehicle groups become more refined, the critic examines their interaction throughout the text to determine how they function as a system of conceptual metaphors, where groups co-occur, how they accommodate each other, which dominates, and what lines of argument they inspire.<sup>95</sup> I analyze the metaphoric themes within the acceptance speeches made by the two women candidates, as well as those that emerge in the media coverage of each candidate. This lends insight into how each woman’s political identity was developed and debated in the media.

#### *Intersectional Feminist and Postcolonial Critiques*

Intersectional feminism and postcolonial criticism, in addition to metaphoric and framing analysis, help to better understand the media portrayal of the two women politicians. This demonstrates how Harris’s identity as a woman of color (Black and Asian) is created explicitly within the American racial and gender hierarchy and how Opoku-Agyemang’s identity as a Ghanaian woman leader intersects with cultural and historical expectations in a postcolonial African context.

Kimberlé Crenshaw is most recognized for her theory of intersectionality, which explains how overlapping oppressive institutions can produce various forms of discrimination and offer various paths to political activity.<sup>96</sup> Crenshaw argues that traditional feminist and antiracist movements typically focus on single categories of oppression, such as gender or race, ignoring the complicated realities of women of color who endure intersecting forms of discrimination.<sup>97</sup> Harris and Opoku-Agyemang are both at intersections of race and gender, resulting in different public representations shaped by various social biases. I believe using intersectional feminist theory helps to directly investigate these compounded biases, gaining insight into how the media portrays these leaders based on their complex identities as women of color. Traditional single-axis approaches, which focus on either race or gender, would overlook the complex interaction of these identities within cultural settings that shape leadership, authority, and public expectations in various capacities.

Intersectionality allows the study to capture compounded discrimination, the specific ways Harris and Opoku-Agyemang may endure scrutiny that other leaders do not, simply because they are both Black women. In the United States, for example, Harris's portrayal in mainstream media frequently reflects "misogynoir," a type of prejudice that targets Black women specifically and mixes racial and gender biases. Harris's representations frequently emphasize her competence with her racial and gender identities, hinting that her qualifications must be explained or defended. Opoku-Agyemang's experience as a woman politician in Ghana is also shaped by overlapping race and gender expectations complicated by a postcolonial setting. Through intersectional critique, this thesis examines how Ghanaian media portrays Opoku-Agyemang's role in ways that connect with or reject colonial legacies and societal norms, shedding light on cultural narratives that would otherwise remain hidden.

Finally, using postcolonial critique, informed by Said's ideas on Orientalism<sup>98</sup> and Mohanty's feminist postcolonial work,<sup>99</sup> is critical for understanding how Opoku-Agyemang's identity as a female leader in Ghana may be shaped by colonial or neocolonial influences, particularly in international and conservative Ghanaian media. The study examines whether Opoku-Agyemang's leadership is framed by colonial stereotypes and whether the media's portrayal maintains or contradicts stereotypes typically associated with African leadership in global narratives. Postcolonial critique exposes how Ghanaian female leaders are represented in frameworks that may reflect colonial biases by evaluating language that implies traditional or exoticized depictions.

### **Overview of Chapters**

In the following chapters, I examine how Harris and Opoku-Agyemang built rhetorical identities during their vice presidential nomination speeches and how the media in the United States and Ghana framed those identities. Through comparative rhetorical analysis, this thesis assesses how Kamala Harris and Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang used metaphors in their vice presidential nomination speeches to shape their political identities and how media outlets with differing ideological leanings interpret or challenge these identities. I carefully combine metaphorical analysis and media framing analysis to examine how mainstream media outlets in the US and Ghana echoed or resisted their political identities.

Chapter Two examines Harris's 2020 vice-presidential nomination acceptance speech and corresponding journalistic framing in the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times*, determining how US media with diverse political orientations frame her candidacy. The chapter analyzes the themes of pioneer, resilience, and community, demonstrating how Harris's representation is affected by intersecting identities and influenced by

American cultural norms. This chapter reveals the unique narratives constructed by each outlet, exposing patterns of “misogyny” and intersectional prejudice in both conservative and liberal portrayals.

Chapter three analyzes Opoku-Agyemang’s 2024 vice-presidential acceptance speech and corresponding journalistic framing. The chapter examines how Opoku-Agyemang positions herself within Ghanaian cultural and political expectations while navigating traditional gender stereotypes. The chapter reveals the three themes: steward and national healer, feminine power, and accountability as political integrity used by Opoku-Agyemang in her acceptance speech to shape her political identity. It also investigates her media representation in the *Daily Guide*, the *Ghanaian Times*, and the *Herald*, evaluating how these outlets interpret her identity and leadership within a postcolonial African context.

The fourth chapter, my conclusion, focuses on bringing the two analyses together, comparing Harris and Opoku-Agyemang’s depictions to demonstrate shared and unique patterns in their media narratives. The conclusion incorporates a comparative analysis emphasizing the different cultural lenses through which each woman’s identity is produced and how American and Ghanaian media reflect broader social ideals. The chapter investigates how intersectional and postcolonial critiques enriches our knowledge of these portrayals, providing insight into how media framing reinforces or challenges cultural biases. Beyond the specific instances of Harris and Opoku-Agyemang, the study allows me to determine whether research done on US women candidates is relevant in a Ghanaian context. The chapter highlights the study’s broader implications for understanding how identity is produced across cultural boundaries, reflecting on its contributions to rhetorical theory, political communication research, scholarship on media framing, and intersectional feminist research. It also discusses the

limitations and recommends areas for future analysis, including cross-cultural evaluations of media depictions of women leaders. My goal is to give readers a more complete understanding of the challenges Black women candidates face as politicians and symbols of broader social currents. These currents reflect both progress and opposition inherent in the modern political scene.

The following chapter examines Harris's 2020 vice presidential nominee acceptance speech, analyzing the influence of metaphors and media framing in prominent US media outlets on her political identity.

## CHAPTER TWO- KAMALA HARRIS AND THE METAPHORS OF BELONGING: FRAMING POLITICAL IDENTITY IN A TIME OF RECKONING

Greetings America. It is truly an honor to be speaking with you. That I am here tonight is a testament to the dedication of generations before me. Women and men who believed so fiercely in the promise of equality, liberty, and justice for all.<sup>100</sup>

With these remarks, Kamala Harris, the first Black and Asian American to be nominated to serve as vice president for the Democratic Party, thrust herself into the limelight for what would go on to result in a historic United States presidential election.

In this chapter, I closely read Harris's vice-presidential nomination acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, Night 3. I examine how she responded to the rhetorical pressures of the time, including the historic nature of her candidacy, the racial reckoning following George Floyd's murder, and the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic. I also consider how Harris's identity as the first Black and Asian woman selected for vice president by a major party influenced her political identity and the expectations around her campaign. Using metaphors of pioneering, resilience, and community, Harris placed her campaign in a larger national struggle, becoming both a representative of past achievements and an agent for future reform. Yet, while her speech created a strong intersectional identity based on historical continuity and collective progress, media coverage responded in uneven ways—at times echoing her themes, but also simplifying, reframing, or missing out on important parts of her rhetorical message. Harris's speech and the media response indicate how hard it was for Harris to convey her political identity on her own terms.

In the pages that follow, I begin by describing Harris's identity and providing historical context about her rhetorical situation. Next, I analyze her vice-presidential nominee acceptance speech and conclude by analyzing the media's coverage during her campaign.

### **Historical Context**

On August 11, 2020, Joe Biden announced Harris as the presumptive vice-presidential nominee following a thorough vetting procedure. Her selection was the inaugural instance in US American history where an African American and an Asian American woman was nominated for a major party's vice-presidential ticket. Following Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro in 1984 and Governor Sarah Palin in 2008, Harris became the third woman to obtain the vice-presidential nomination for a major US political party.

Harris was born to two immigrants of Black and South Asian descent on October 20, 1964, in Oakland, California.<sup>101</sup> Her father, Donald Harris, of Jamaican descent, was an economist and professor at Stanford University; her mother, Shyamala Gopalan Harris, an Indian, was a breast cancer researcher. According to Harris, her name is “‘comma-la,’ like the punctuation mark,” which means “lotus flower.”<sup>102</sup> Her name pays homage to an essential symbol in the Indian culture.<sup>103</sup> Having been raised in a middle-class family, Harris spent most of her childhood in Berkeley, where she attended a Black Baptist church and a Hindu temple, an indicator of the two cultural influences on her childhood. Harris and her younger sister, Maya, were raised primarily by their mother after their parents' divorce, where they were instilled with a strong sense of justice and an identification with the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>104</sup>

Harris's personal life has also played a part in building her public persona. She is married to lawyer Douglas Emhoff, who would become the first Second Gentleman in the history of the

United States, again mirroring the historicity of her vice-presidential candidacy. Harris added two stepchildren, Cole and Ella, from Emhoff by her marriage. They affectionately refer to her as “Momala.” Co-opted into public use by her, the nickname adds more to her stature as a leader and a family woman, with a touch of personality to her political life.<sup>105</sup>

Harris’s education and early career established the foundation for her political life. She attended Howard University, a historically Black college and university (HBCU). She became a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, the nation’s oldest Black sorority, and obtained a bachelor’s degree in political science and economics. She later became the first HBCU graduate chosen as vice president. Harris then proceeded to the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, where she received her law degree. Her time at Howard solidified her ties to Black political and activist networks that would later form a significant component of her political constituency.

After passing the California bar exam in 1990, Harris was employed as a deputy district attorney in Alameda County, California. In 1998, she became an assistant district attorney, ultimately leading the Career Criminal Division and prosecuting cases of sexual assault, robbery, burglary, and homicide. In 2000, she transitioned to San Francisco City Hall, addressing neglect and child abuse cases while representing the Family and Children’s Services Division.

From 2004 to 2011, Harris served as the District Attorney of San Francisco, which marked the beginning of her political career. She subsequently rose to the position of Attorney General of California from 2011 to 2017, accumulating 26 years of experience as a prosecutor in the state. Harris was elected to the Senate in 2016 and subsequently became the junior US Senator from California. Harris’s announcement of her 2020 presidential campaign during her first senatorial term, comparable to the ascent of former President Barack Obama to the national political stage, propelled her into the national spotlight.

Harris's political career has also been subjected to rigorous scrutiny. During her time as the San Francisco district attorney, she was criticized for failing to disclose information regarding a police laboratory technician who had been accused of deliberately sabotaging laboratory work. According to Lara Bazelon, Harris endorsed legislation that stipulated that parents of consistently truant children could be prosecuted despite concerns that such a law would disproportionately affect communities of color.<sup>106</sup> Harris also has been known for her "tough on crime" stances since the 1990s, something that has made her controversial in the Democratic party.<sup>107</sup> For instance, in 2014, she appealed an Orange County judgment that declared the death penalty unconstitutional, opposed a bill that mandated her office to investigate homicides involving police officers, and declined to endorse regulations mandating that police officers wear cameras.<sup>108</sup> Left-leaning organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), criticized her.

The discussion regarding her record in wrongful conviction cases was perhaps the most noteworthy. In many high-profile cases, Harris fought to preserve convictions in cases where technicalities prohibited the introduction of additional evidence that could have influenced court outcomes or sentencing. A significant example is the case of George Gage, an electrician who was charged and convicted in 1999 of sexually assaulting his stepdaughter, despite having no prior criminal record.<sup>109</sup> Despite allegations that his stepdaughter fabricated her testimony in order to secure his conviction, Gage continues to be imprisoned as a result of technicalities.

Harris's record, however, is not entirely terrible from a progressive perspective. Harris declined to call for the death penalty in a case involving the assassination of a police officer during her tenure as district attorney.<sup>110</sup> She also executed a practical initiative that enabled first-time nonviolent offenders to effectively complete meticulous vocational training in exchange for

their charges being dismissed.<sup>111</sup> She also was granted an award for resolving congestion in the evaluation of rape evidence.<sup>112</sup>

Harris attracted much attention challenging Trump administration officials during her tenure in the Senate, serving on the Senate intelligence and judiciary committees. Her examination of Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein in 2017 resulted in Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr and several male senators chastising her for cutting off the witness, hence generating allegations of sexism.<sup>113</sup> After she challenged Judge Brett Kavanaugh to name legislation allowing the government to control the “male body,” abortion rights advocates praised her interaction with him during his Supreme Court confirmation hearings.<sup>114</sup> The investigation launched during the confirmation hearings resulted in President Trump characterizing Harris as “extraordinarily nasty.” upon her nomination as Biden’s vice-presidential candidate.<sup>115</sup> She drew accolades in 2019, when she questioned Attorney General William Barr on conclusions from the Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election, also known as the Mueller Report, concerning Russian interference in the 2016 election.<sup>116</sup> Among other important events during Harris’s brief senate term include voting to convict President Trump on both charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress during his first impeachment hearing and proposing a measure making lynching a federal hate crime.<sup>117</sup>

Early in her Senate tenure, Harris began to consider running for president; she announced her campaign on January 21, 2019.<sup>118</sup> Initially drawing about 20,000 people to her first campaign rally in Oakland,<sup>119</sup> she began her journey with great initial appeal. Her campaign also raised \$1.5 million in the first 24 hours, matching Bernie Sanders’s daily total from his 2016 presidential campaign.<sup>120</sup>

A report from Rebecca Morrin stated that Harris shot high in the polls both nationally and in Iowa after her performance in the first Democratic presidential debate in June 2019.<sup>121</sup> Following Biden's remarks about his ties with segregationist legislators and his opposition to integrated busing in the 1970s, she challenged him in that discussion over the subject of race, claiming that his points of view had been "hurtful." Polls taken later ranked her among the top Democratic presidential contenders.<sup>122</sup>

Meanwhile, Harris's early success faded. During the second Democratic debate, Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) criticized her prosecutorial record and called for an apology.<sup>123</sup> She later admitted that her position on busing and the federal government's role in shaping local policies was similar, making her attack on Biden appear disingenuous.<sup>124</sup> Liberals have heavily scrutinized her record as a prosecutor. She was ambiguous about her ideology, initially supporting Medicare-for-all but later releasing a plan that did not eliminate private insurance.<sup>125</sup> Any progress she might have had shifted to other candidates. Biden remained the frontrunner and received strong support from African American voters, while Senator Elizabeth Warren focused on corporate accountability and structural change. Mayor Pete Buttigieg emerged as a moderate alternative.<sup>126</sup> According to Li Zhou, Harris's campaign was hindered by sexism and racist assumptions due to her status as a Black woman.<sup>127</sup> She eventually dropped out of the race on December 3, 2019, due to a lack of funds.<sup>128</sup>

Despite her lost presidential campaign, there was talk that Harris may join Biden's ticket. In May 2019, members of the Congressional Black Caucus considered Biden-Harris a "dream ticket."<sup>129</sup> During a campaign rally in New Hampshire, Harris joked that Biden would be an "excellent running mate" for her.<sup>130</sup> When she departed the race, Biden lauded Harris as a "first-rate candidate."<sup>131</sup> Many analysts believed Harris was the frontrunner in the "veepstakes" as soon

as Biden became the presumed nominee. Chris Cillizza, a CNN political analyst, consistently placed Harris as the top choice for running mate in his weekly vice-presidential rankings.<sup>132</sup> Some viewed Harris's inclusion on the ticket as a "diversity hire,"<sup>133</sup> a means of rallying liberal support and giving Biden's mostly uncharismatic and risk-averse campaign momentum.<sup>134</sup>

During the summer of 2020, the killing of George Floyd at the hands of police officers fueled calls for Biden to choose a Black woman as his running mate.<sup>135</sup> Floyd's murder heightened calls for structural changes and a renewed emphasis on racial equality. In this context, Biden's prior pledge to choose a woman as his vice-presidential candidate<sup>136</sup> was reframed as a pressing need for racial representation, with Black women activists and political leaders advocating for the inclusion of a Black woman on the ticket.

These factors led to Harris's consideration as a vice presidential candidate, generating chances for her to exhibit why she seemed the most suitable match for Biden as his running mate.<sup>137</sup> Harris has the crucial legal training to assert her authority in mastering the legal system, and her identity as a woman of color granted her a distinctive perspective on the judicial system in the United States.

Having examined circumstances relevant to Harris's identification as a candidate and the historical context of her vice-presidential nominee candidacy, I will now proceed to the analysis section of this chapter. In this section, I discussed how Harris articulates her identity in her vice-presidential nominee acceptance speech and how the themes of pioneer, resilience, and community were echoed in her speech.

### **Harris's Speech Analysis**

Harris delivered her vice-presidential nomination acceptance speech on August 19, 2020, during the Democratic National Convention, becoming the first Black and South Asian woman to

be nominated by a major party. Harris spoke about overcoming obstacles, progress, and shared responsibility in a racially awakening nation reeling from the economic crisis and COVID-19 pandemic. Her speech successfully equated political vision and personal narrative by using metaphors to emphasize the broader significance of her historic candidacy. She positioned herself as a political leader yet also as part of a continuum of social change, drawing on historical campaigns for equality and collective action in the future. Using metaphors of pioneering, resilience, and community, Harris placed her campaign in a larger national struggle, becoming both a representative of past achievements and an agent for future reform.

### *Pioneer*

Harris was named a vice-presidential “first” after her announcement as Biden’s vice-presidential running mate. Despite the fact that women have been seeking the presidency since before they gained the right to vote in the United States, their history is marked by a string of “firsts”: the first woman of color to run for president, the first woman of color to be a third-party nominee; the first “serious” woman presidential contender; the first woman to be included in televised presidential debates; the first woman to be a frontrunner in a major-party presidential primary; and the list continues. Harris is no exception. In reality, women political trailblazers frequently are cast in the “first-timer/frontrunner double bind,” where their novelty is valued so highly that they are constantly required to demonstrate their viability rather than being acknowledged as seasoned, respectable leaders.<sup>138</sup> There are two possible interpretations of the metaphor at work when women candidates present themselves as trailblazers or are presented as such by the media. A pioneer is an individual who leads the way in accomplishing something new, creating opportunities for others to follow. Although they often encounter challenges, their perseverance helps smooth the path for future generations. In electoral politics, the pioneer

metaphor is frequently associated with Western ideals, highlighting themes of frontier resilience, self-reliance, and heroic masculinity.<sup>139</sup> “Pioneer” is probably the most common metaphor used to identify a woman politician, especially women governors and candidates for the US American presidency and vice presidency. Harris was the first Black woman vice-presidential nominee of the Democratic Party in US America and has many other firsts lining her biography.

Harris’s vice-presidential acceptance speech presented a sharp awareness of the rhetorical dangers of the pioneer metaphor, as she took the pains to shift the frame away from “firstness” and towards continuity. Rather than embracing the rugged individualism so commonly attributed to pioneering, she connected her nomination to collective struggle:

That I am here tonight is a testament to the dedication of generations before me. Women and men who believed so fiercely in the promise of equality, liberty, and justice for all.<sup>140</sup>

This statement undermined the individualist assumptions embedded in the pioneer metaphor by situating her candidacy in a line of historical precedents rather than characterizing it as an isolated breakthrough. Although one of the most significant constraints of the pioneer metaphor is that it makes each woman candidate’s rise an abnormal, standalone event rather than part of an emerging political path,<sup>141</sup> Harris’s rhetoric mitigated this effect by framing her nomination as a normal progression rather than an exception.

Her invocation of earlier Black women leaders—Mary Church Terrell, Fannie Lou Hamer, Shirley Chisholm—made this reframing even more powerful: “We’re not often taught their stories. But as Americans, we all stand on their shoulders.”<sup>142</sup> By recalling those names, Harris expanded the pioneer frame beyond one individual pioneering action to a broader historic movement, allowing her to bypass the isolationist implications of being a first. Sheeler and Anderson argue that one of the most significant flaws of the pioneer metaphor is that it conceals collective political progress, reinforcing the idea that each woman candidate must “break

barriers” in isolation rather than stand on the shoulders of past successes.<sup>143</sup> Harris actively subverted this construction by using the standing-on-shoulders metaphor to locate her candidacy within a larger fight for representation.

When Harris accepted the Democratic party’s vice-presidential nomination and gave her vice-presidential nominee speech at DNC on Night 3 on August 19, 2020, she represented herself metaphorically and literally as a Black pioneer. In her speech, Harris’s statements extended significantly beyond the mere recognition of her groundbreaking candidacy. Harris opened her speech by likening her nomination to the more significant battles of individuals fighting for equality and justice. Her reference to the “dedication of generations before me”<sup>144</sup> served as a defense of her pioneering position and a call to action for US Americans. This positioned her candidacy not as an individual achievement but as an element of a continuum of collective progress. I argue that Harris’s statements transcended the mere recognition of her groundbreaking candidacy. Harris stated her intention to make good use of her position to provide opportunities for others in the country, thus making her presence in the office not just symbolic but also meaningful. Harris emphasized the structural obstacles that she is standing up against, asserting:

This week marks the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment. And we celebrate the women who fought for that right. Yet so many of the Black women who helped secure that victory were still prohibited from voting, long after its ratification. But they were undeterred.<sup>145</sup>

Similarly, although she is “first,” her capability to lead is suspect until she can prove herself. Harris’s image as a storyteller advanced populist and progressive appeals, emphasizing the progress of race and gender while honoring the legacy of past pioneers. During her speech, she made mention of the metaphor, “standing on shoulders,” to invoke and pay homage to Black women leaders.<sup>146</sup> Harris noted “We’re not often taught their stories. But as Americans, we all

stand on their shoulders.”<sup>147</sup> While she said, “They paved the way for the trailblazing leadership of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton,”<sup>148</sup> she called upon a tradition of leaders who broke down barriers before her. Harris’s “standing on shoulders” is genuinely humble and communal. It acknowledges that her candidacy was made possible by others who came before her—figures who, at the time, broke down barriers and opened up new paths. Thus, Harris honored her predecessors while grounding her leadership in memory of shared struggle. Just like I.A. Richards contends, metaphors function enthymematically, motivating the public to provide premises on topics that remain unsaid but agreed upon. Harris’s use of “standing on shoulders” serves not just as a historical device but also encourages the audience to consider the implicit premises that made her argument compelling.

Harris deepened her pioneer theme by describing her mother as a “25-year-old Indian woman...who probably could have never imagined that I would be standing before you now.”<sup>149</sup> This statement reflects the multicultural and intergenerational aspects of her leadership and also showcases the systematic barriers that her family has overcome.

Harris’s use of the pioneer metaphor echoed her part in shattering stereotypes and admitted the difficulties of being the political “first.” The pioneer frame positioned her to be a forward thinker. When she stated that, “This moment is not just about me. It’s about all of us,”<sup>150</sup> it redirected attention from her own achievements to the wider implication of her nomination for the nation’s identity. This vision can appeal to people in many underrepresented groups in the United States. Her statement, “That I am here tonight is a testament to the dedication of generations before me,”<sup>151</sup> struck an emotional chord as confirmation of hardships and an example of possibilities for collective progress.

The pioneer theme was enhanced and broadened when Harris referenced the Black “women and the generations that followed worked to make democracy and opportunity real in the lives of all of us who followed . . . And these women inspired us to pick up the torch, and fight on.”<sup>152</sup> Torches were famously associated with white racists after white supremacists carried tiki torches during the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, North Carolina, that resulted in racist violence and killed a peaceful protestor. Harris reclaimed that imagery by invoking the authority of her foremothers and the metaphor of “passing the torch.” Her statement indicated the move from celebrating past achievements to underlining the ongoing duty of the present generation. According to Raymond Gozzi, Jr, the first step in interpreting metaphors is to identify metaphors present in conversation.<sup>153</sup> The metaphor of the “torch” is dynamic, implying togetherness, continuity, and forward progress. It emphasizes that progress is not static but involves active participation from every generation. By framing progress as a relay race in which each generation builds on predecessors’ work, carrying the torch forward represents continuity and collaborative effort.

The pioneer metaphors Harris used in her acceptance speech combined to create a cohesive narrative. By casting herself as a “trailblazer,” she acknowledged the historic achievements of her candidacy. Yet the “standing on shoulders” and “passing the torch” imagery highlighted the continuity of women’s collective achievements.

Harris’s framing was designed to present her as a symbol of change rather than only as a politician. Simultaneously, the metaphors subtly deflected criticism and focused instead on the bigger narrative of progress the Biden campaign sought to project. A second component of this narrative emphasized in Harris’s speech was resilience.

## *Resilience*

In her acceptance speech, Harris presented resilience as both an individual and a collective trait. For example, she reflected on her mother's suffering as she stated, "Like so many mothers, she worked around the clock to make it work—packing lunches before we woke up—and paying bills after we went to bed."<sup>154</sup> This specific example of resilience humanized Harris as a leader shaped by hardship. Her mother's resilience became a stand-in for the principles Harris advocates—determination, selflessness, and hope in the face of hardship. The resilience theme was strengthened by this intensely personal framing, which showed how individual perseverance may have a cumulative impact on larger change. The resilience metaphoric cluster focused on her ability to push for equality among US Americans. It centered around a shared understanding of hardship and the determination to move forward. Harris stated:

Make no mistake, the road ahead will not be easy. We will stumble. We may fall short. But I pledge to you that we will act boldly and deal with our challenges honestly. We will speak truths. And we will act with the same faith in you that we ask you to place in us. We believe that our country—all of us, will stand together for a better future. We already are.<sup>155</sup>

This statement casts progress as a journey. The metaphor of a "road" implicitly encompasses challenges, twists, and turns, yet it is linked with an unreserved determination to continue journeying in the same direction. Her statement further strengthened this impression, "We will stumble. We may fall short. But we will act boldly and deal with our challenges honestly."<sup>156</sup> The stumbling metaphor enhances the journey's complexity, highlighting that progress is non-linear and characterized by setbacks necessitating recovery and further effort. These metaphors work together to form a complex narrative. The "road" signified the continuous nature of advancement; the tripping acknowledged the difficulties of the process; and the recovery emphasized the tenacity needed to continue. Here, the interaction of these metaphors

presented resilience as an active, dynamic attribute that moves individuals and communities forward. A further factor that contributed to the “road” metaphor’s power is the cultural resonance it possesses. There is a strong connection between the idea of a road, which frequently represents opportunity, self-discovery, or community hardship, and US Americans’ depiction of their national story.

Harris also emphasized resilience when she discussed the racial violence with which Black Americans routinely contend. She stated, “We’ve gotta do the work. For George Floyd. For Breonna Taylor. For the lives of too many others to name. For our children. For all of us. We’ve gotta do the work to fulfill that promise of equal justice under the law. Because none of us are free...until all of us are free...”<sup>157</sup> Harris mentioning the names of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor allowed her speech to reflect specific realities of racial injustices. This established a connection between resilience and the battle for structural reform. US American citizens were positioned as active participants in a common struggle rather than passive receivers of her vision, making her speech both empowering and inclusive. Harris urged:

So, let’s fight with conviction. Let’s fight with hope. Let’s fight with confidence in ourselves, and a commitment to each other. To the America we know is possible. The America, we love.<sup>158</sup>

The statement about Floyd and the call to fight together to make America a better place is grounded in the imperative realities of racial injustice, resulting in a dual resonance. Harris encouraged US Americans to perceive themselves as essential to a broader narrative of resilience, whether through personal challenges, communal efforts, or systemic advocacy. She presented a vision centered on shared values and the necessity of their restoration following Donald Trump’s administration. She lamented that “the constant chaos leaves us adrift. The incompetence makes us feel afraid. The callousness makes us feel alone.”<sup>159</sup> She offered an

alternative, saying “we may not agree on every detail, but we are united by the fundamental belief that every human being is of infinite worth, deserving of compassion, dignity and respect.”<sup>160</sup> Harris also stated that “none of us are free...until all of us are free.”<sup>161</sup> This statement lends support to the social construction of resilience. It extends the concept of resilience into the world of communal responsibility, highlighting the fact that solidarity is necessary for the journey toward equality. Resilience is reimagined not as a solo undertaking but as a collaborative effort that binds individuals to a greater goal.

### *Community*

The theme of community was integral to her address. Harris invoked the “Beloved Community,” an idea developed during the Civil Rights Movement and popularized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>162</sup> Harris envisioned the nation as “a Beloved Community—where all are welcome, no matter what we look like, where we come from, or who we love.” This depicted the community as an inclusive and aspirational goal, with core ideals of justice, decency, and mutual respect. Thus, Harris connected her leadership to a historical legacy of moral growth, enabling the public to consider themselves as co-creators of this vision. In addition, by presenting the “Beloved Community” as one in which “all are welcome, no matter what we look like, where we come from, or who we love,” Harris offered an updated version of Dr. King’s original vision that implicitly acknowledged issues such as immigrant and LGBTQ+ rights. Harris expanded the scope of the discussion to include gender, sexual orientation, immigrant status, and other kinds of identification, in contrast to Dr. King’s articulation, which focused mainly on issues of racism and class.

Harris’s emphasis on inclusivity also acknowledged the ongoing struggles for equality in areas that have gained greater prominence since the Civil Rights Movement. By expanding the

boundaries of the “Beloved Community,” Harris made the metaphor relevant to a broader and more diverse group of followers. Furthermore, Harris connects the “Beloved Community” concept to specific goals. Harris’s use of this metaphor is not only symbolic; rather, it is closely related to an actual civic duty, upholding the civic engagement tradition that Dr. King highlighted. When encouraging US Americans to “organize our neighbors and get out the vote,”<sup>163</sup> she elevated the “Beloved Community” to a dynamic and participatory ideal. This adaptation emphasizes that accomplishing this vision will need a team effort, which is consistent with her overall theme of shared responsibility.

Harris was eager to foster a feeling of community among the people of the United States by advocating for the coming together of people of all different classes, ethnicities, and socioeconomic levels simultaneously. She did this by telling US Americans to vote for “A president who will bring all of us together—Black, White, Latino, Asian, Indigenous—to achieve the future we collectively want.”<sup>164</sup> As a Black candidate for vice president, she intended to use her position to build and promote possibilities for accomplishment, making her presence in the office more than simply symbolic but also significant.

Harris ensured a sense of community in her speech and throughout her campaign. To define her vision of communal identity, shared responsibility, and inclusive growth, she incorporated the community metaphor into her thinking. In her speech, she invited US American citizens to consider themselves active players in building a more just and equal society through metaphors that revolved around connectivity, togetherness, and belonging. For instance, she urged “People of all ages and colors and creeds who are, yes, taking to the streets, and also persuading our family members, rallying our friends, organizing our neighbors, and getting out the vote.”<sup>165</sup> As an individual who sees herself as one of the marginalized people in US America,

she is focused on ensuring a sense of belonging to other individuals who also see themselves as marginalized. However, she involves individuals of all races, colors, genders, classes, religions, etc. to come together as one people.

The theme of community is central to her rhetorical strategy, emphasizing the interconnected fates of individuals and communities. Harris's statement, "We rise and fall as one,"<sup>166</sup> in her speech encapsulates the interconnectedness of individuals within a shared national identity. By presenting the US as a collective entity, Harris stresses that growth and failures are common experiences that need collaboration and unity. This symbol of rising and falling together emphasizes the importance of unity in confronting systemic issues, framing community as both a moral ideal and a practical tool. In addition, the importance of this connection becomes even more apparent when crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic are considered. Individuals' health and well-being are linked to the health of the community. No one is secure until everyone is safe, which is a true statement that is both profound and straightforward. Not only does this framing recognize the problems that many people are going through, but it also encourages the audience to view themselves as people who are a part of a communal obligation to rise together.

Harris extended the definition of family beyond blood ties to include her chosen family and the larger community. She mentioned people who influenced her childhood and those who still support her. That strategy depicted the family as a network of mutual support and connection. Harris stated: "Family is my husband Doug, who I met on a blind date set up by my best friend. Family is our beautiful children, Cole and Ella."<sup>167</sup> Harris's references to her own family emphasized how family can be created by ties that cut across bloodlines. She offered a relevant picture of family life by including her spouse and children as part of her basic support

system. But Harris’s definition of family extended beyond her own house. She honored those from her history who had an influence on her principles and identity, stating, “Family is Mrs. Shelton—my second mother who lived two doors down and helped raise me.”<sup>168</sup> This inclusion of Mrs. Shelton, a neighbor who stepped into a caregiving role, challenged traditional definitions of family by emphasizing the importance of community connections. It suggested that family is not confined to those we are born to but includes those who stand by us, guide us, and support us throughout our lives. This redefinition makes Harris’s rhetoric more inclusive, reflecting the realities of many US Americans who rely on extended networks of care. Her statement: “Family is my sister. Family is my best friend, my nieces and my godchildren”<sup>169</sup> highlights the diversity within her own family network, symbolizing the variety and inclusivity she wishes to see mirrored in the national community.

Harris made a clear link between personal ties and group duty by placing family inside the bigger metaphor of community. In her speech, the family becomes a microcosm of the larger society—a network of people shaped by mutual care and common goals. Her expanded definition of family reinforced her broader message that community thrives when individuals support one another. One can argue that Harris’s rhetorical move to include the chosen family also reflects the cultural and societal shifts in how family is understood today. Many Americans, particularly those in LGBTQ+ communities, immigrant families, and other marginalized groups, often rely on chosen families for emotional and practical support. By emphasizing this inclusive vision of family, Harris acknowledged these lived realities and affirmed their validity. This rhetorical choice not only broadened her appeal but also positioned her as a leader who understands and values the diversity of her audience’s experiences.

Finally, Harris’s statement also indicated how personal connections could influence public beliefs. Regarding the people who helped her form her life—such as “Mrs. Shelton”—Harris connected her personal development to the common values she advocates. This interaction highlighted her belief that family and community are overlapping spheres of influence working together to grow individuals and promote society instead of distinct entities.

The metaphors Harris used throughout her speech yield insight into the political identity she sought to create. Harris employed metaphors of pioneering, resilience, and community, placing her campaign within a larger national struggle and becoming both a representative of past achievements and an agent for future reform. In order for this identity to be reinforced in the public mind, however, it needed to be reflected in media coverage of the speech. In the next section, I assess how three journalistic outlets echoed or challenged these themes in their coverage of Harris’s DNC address

### **Media Framing of Kamala Harris**

The media plays a crucial role in politics by framing candidates for the public. In this section, I analyze the portrayal of Kamala Harris in three significant US media outlets—the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*—following her nomination acceptance speech and during her campaign. I argue that these three outlets echoed Harris’s three themes in her speech.

#### *The Washington Post* Analysis

The *Washington Post*’s coverage of Harris’s vice-presidential nomination acceptance speech echoed the pioneer, resilience, and community themes she emphasized in her address.

#### *Pioneer*

The pioneer theme emerged clearly in the *Washington Post's* hard news coverage of Harris's speech. Harris was dubbed a pioneer by the media even before she became a vice-presidential nominee. The *Washington Post* quoted Angela D. Alsobrooks, who said, "Harris was making history as the first Black woman to serve as district attorney in San Francisco."<sup>170</sup> This adds to Harris's credentials as a pacesetter. One *Washington Post* headline announced, "Harris gives convention historic heft; Harris makes history as VP nominee"<sup>171</sup> after DNC Night 3. Additionally, the *Washington Post* captured the remarks of Glynda Carr, chief executive of Higher Heights, saying, "In the history books, you will see a generation of leaders that will tie back to this moment of Kamala Harris,"<sup>172</sup> and referring to Harris's nomination as a "culture shift moment."<sup>173</sup> Another article stated: "Harris, 55, stepped into her place in history on the third night of the Democratic Party's mostly virtual convention."<sup>174</sup>

The *Washington Post* coverage reinforced her status as a Pioneer through individual word choices. It used terms like "trailblazing" and "first."<sup>175</sup> This was highlighted in one of the *Washington Post* articles, which stated that Harris "became the first woman of color to accept the nomination for vice president from a major political party."<sup>176</sup> Also, the article "Alsobrook, a longtime friend of Harris, hails her historic run for VP"<sup>177</sup> used the term "first" while describing Harris's political career as district attorney and discussing her vice-presidential bid.<sup>178</sup> It also highlighted the responsibilities and tasks ahead of her as she embarked on becoming the first-ever woman vice president as a woman of color. In the beginning paragraph of its article, the *Washington Post* reported, "Trailblazing pick energizes party."<sup>179</sup> This emphasized that the decision by the Democratic Party to choose Harris as their vice-presidential candidate had created excitement and enthusiasm within the party. Harris's pick was seen as fresh, bold, and capable of inspiring and revitalizing the party.

Many articles focused on Harris's identity and background when describing her Pioneer status, identifying her as a daughter of two immigrants of Jamaican and Indian descent. For example, one article stated: "Kamala D. Harris, the Black daughter of immigrants from India and Jamaica, on Wednesday became the first woman of color to accept the nomination for vice president from a major political party."<sup>180</sup> The report by the *Washington Post* emphasized how Harris's heritage and upbringing have shaped her identity and played a significant role in her becoming the first Black woman and Asian American to be on a major-party ticket in the US America.<sup>181</sup> Essentially, her diverse roots and experiences are seen as a key factor in her historic political achievements.

### *Resilience*

The *Washington Post* framed Harris's multiracial identity as both a site of struggle and a source of strength. The article "Kamala Harris is expanding the way Americans think about multiracial identity" used the phrase "struggled to categorize her"<sup>182</sup> to demonstrate voters' challenges in identifying Harris's racial identity. Harris addressed these preconceptions by presenting challenges as chances to demonstrate resilience and self-definition.

Harris's speech effectively used metaphors of determination, action, and justice, which were reflected in the *Washington Post's* coverage. One article quoted Harris saying, "We're at an inflection point. The constant chaos leaves us adrift. The incompetence makes us feel afraid. The callousness makes us feel alone. It's a lot. And here's the thing: We can do better and deserve so much more."<sup>183</sup> Harris described the political moment as unstable by utilizing words like "inflection point" and "adrift," stressing the need for strong leadership based on persistence. Another significant thing the *Washington Post* did was include Harris's quote: "I got a stroller's-eye view of people getting into what the great John Lewis called 'good trouble.'"<sup>184</sup> It served as

textual reinforcement to her speech, supporting her affiliation with past justice movements.

Harris also advised Alsobrook that her (Harris's) mother always said, "It's not as important to be the first at something as it is to perform the job with such excellence that you shall not be the last."<sup>185</sup> This statement operated on historical continuity, linking Harris's narrative to a broader tradition of Black women breaking barriers.

### *Community*

Articles from the *Washington Post* also paralleled the theme of community in Harris's speech. When reporting on Harris's speech, the *Washington Post* used the words in her nomination acceptance speech that indicated her passion for community and belonging among Americans, thus presenting her as a leader whose success depends more on coalition building and collective representation than on individual accomplishment. For example, one article stated, "Harris said she is 'committed' to 'a vision of our nation as a beloved community - where all are welcome, no matter what we look like, where we come from, or who we love.'"<sup>186</sup> This echoed Harris's view of the community as an inclusive and aspirational ideal, with core ideals of justice, decency, and mutual respect. *Washington Post* reporter Robin Givhan stated, "Harris attended Howard University, known to many as the 'Black Harvard' and to the senator, as an institution that 'very directly influenced and reinforced - equally important - my sense of being.'"<sup>187</sup>

Harris's community-focused political identities are reflected in the statements, which position her as a representative of a diverse shared experience rather than an independent political personality. One article cited Pawan Dhingra, a professor of American Studies at Amherst College, who contended that Harris represents "a different kind of Asian American . . . One who is really powerful . . . who believes in coalition-building across minority groups to achieve change."<sup>188</sup> This particularly resonated with Harris's focus on unity and the power found

in many communities working together. The article also highlighted that “during the joint address with Biden, Harris recalled how her immigrant parents met in Oakland while participating in a civil rights demonstration, the kind to which they’d later bring her along.<sup>189</sup>” This evoked Harris’s connection with activist groups reveals the intergenerational transmission of social and political advocacy, emphasizing that her leadership is a continuation of prior justice movements. In essence, the *Washington Post* reinforced her relationship with traditionally Black institutions like Howard University and Alpha Kappa Alpha,<sup>190</sup> her ability to unite different groups, and her early experiences seeing protests in Oakland and Berkeley. She also demonstrates how her leadership is solidly grounded in common struggle and collective identity through her relationships with Asian American and Caribbean groups and other Black women leaders.

The *Washington Post* also highlighted Harris’s dedication to the community through her attempts to assist others. One article highlighted Harris’s commitment to supporting other Black women in politics by talking about her position as mentor and support system for Angela Alsobrooks. “I am here for you,”<sup>191</sup> Harris said to Alsobrooks. “Anything you need,”<sup>192</sup> emphasizing the idea of togetherness and interconnectedness in the political setting.

#### *Additional Media Coverage*

The *Washington Post* often showed Harris’s tenacity in facing political and racial challenges. An article by the *Washington Post* reported Harris’s statement, “This virus has no eyes, and yet it knows exactly how we see each other and how we treat each other. And let’s be clear, there is no vaccine for racism.”<sup>193</sup> This article emphasized Harris’s resilience in confronting institutional injustices and supported her capacity to squarely fight political and social barriers. Yet, the *Washington Post* gently twisted this image by asking if Harris’s resiliency

qualified as political adaptation. The *Washington Post* did not portray her resilience as simply an act of moral strength; instead, it recognized her ability to move strategically in political environments.

Additionally, in some instances, when the *Washington Post* described the pioneering nature of Harris's candidacy, they did so in a way that questioned her authenticity, situating her as an "outsider" in American politics. For instance, when asked at a public event by a reporter how she describes herself, Harris responded, "I describe myself as a proud American."<sup>194</sup> However, the *Washington Post* reported, "It is the root of the California senator's identity as someone born to parents who emigrated from Jamaica and India, the connective thread between her becoming the first Black woman and first Asian American on a major-party ticket."<sup>195</sup> That same article noted, "Harris, who has said she identifies with her Indian heritage and being Black, told the *Washington Post* last year that people have struggled to categorize her since she first ran for office."<sup>196</sup> She responded, "My point was: I am who I am," she said. "I'm good with it. You might need to figure it out, but I'm fine with it."<sup>197</sup> When taking all the above statements together, the *Washington Post's* coverage celebrated Harris's historical identity as a symbol of inclusiveness and diversity. However, it also exposed the disparity in US American politics by referring to Harris as an outsider, not a true American, since both parents are from countries and descent other than America. When Hillary Clinton ran on a presidential ticket, the media did not address her race or cultural background as a marker of authenticity. Clinton was considered part of America; Harris, however, was treated as an outsider breaking into the traditional white and male-dominated political scene.

Similarly, the *Washington Post* addressed how the media sometimes struggled to describe Harris's heritage, pointing out how various media sources "waffled between descriptors" while

classifying her identity.<sup>198</sup> This evoked concern for Harris's ongoing need to defend her identity. The coverage also supported the idea that she does not fit into the political mainstream in the United States. However, Joe Biden noted, "Her story is America's story."<sup>199</sup> Also, according to the University of Texas at Austin political science professor Tasha Philpot, Harris's credentials gave her "a sense of authenticity."<sup>200</sup> To Philpot, Harris significantly benefitted from having endorsement when voting blocs were divided, and Black women were among the most dependable and powerful.<sup>201</sup> These quotations by the *Washington Post* bolstered her authenticity even though the above quotes challenged her authenticity. The *Washington Post's* coverage paralleled its liberal editorial approach, portraying Harris as a symbol of progress and inclusivity, and echoed the themes of Pioneer, Resilience, and Community. However, unlike the *New York Times*, which essentially portrayed Harris as a political unifier, the *Washington Post* subtly questioned how she fit into the American political landscape by undermining her authenticity.

#### The *New York Times* Analysis

The *New York Times* coverage of Harris's speech at DNC Night 3 reflected the three themes in her nominee acceptance speech and represented her positively in the US American media's most prestigious newspaper.

#### *Pioneer*

The *New York Times* reported that women of color appreciated how Harris broke the status quo and paved the way for others to follow. One article's standfirst stated: "In Kamala Harris, many women of color see a successful vice-presidential candidate standing atop a mountain of firsts."<sup>202</sup> The statement affirmed Harris as a true pioneer paving the way for people of color, especially women, to follow and challenge the existing norm where whites dominate presidential and vice-presidential tickets.

Additionally, Harris changed the US American political narrative, set a record for women of color, and projected the potential of women of color. For instance, one of the articles by the *New York Times* quoted Hamlin, an Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority sister of Harris's from South Florida, saying "Finally . . . the country sees us, sees who we are, sees what we can do."<sup>203</sup> The line "Finally . . . the country sees us"<sup>204</sup> implied that Harris's nomination represented a watershed moment for women of color and that the recognition has been long overdue.

The headline "On Centennial of Suffrage, Nods to Harris and History"<sup>205</sup> clearly corresponds with the theme of Pioneer used in Harris's speech. The *New York Times* pointed out the importance of the day Harris gave her nominee acceptance speech. August of 2020 was the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment, the Constitutional amendment that extended voting rights to white women. Harris's acceptance speech on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020, brought recognition to women of color. The article stated:

As America marked the centennial of the 19th Amendment, Wednesday night's installment of the Democratic National Convention embraced the milestone for women's suffrage, with nods to the movement's complicated history—only white women won the vote at first—and tributes to women who had "broken the marble ceiling," in the words of the first female speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi.<sup>206</sup>

The article continued to frame Harris as a Pioneer by reflecting on Harris's statement, which exposed the loophole in women's suffrage. So many of the Black women who helped secure that victory were still prohibited from voting long after its ratification," Ms. Harris said. "But they were undeterred. Without fanfare or recognition, they organized and testified and rallied and marched and fought not just for their vote but for a seat at the table. These women and the generations that followed worked to make democracy and opportunity real in the lives of all of us who followed."<sup>207</sup>

The article “In Accepting Bid, Harris Warns U.S. is at Crossroads,”<sup>208</sup> begins with, “As a barrier-breaking candidate,” which affirmed the pioneer theme in Harris’s acceptance speech. It described Harris as a barrier breaker with the potential to break another barrier if she someday becomes the president of the United States. The article stated, “Kamala Harris stood before the Democratic Party on Wednesday as the bridge between a moderate generation of leaders and younger liberals on the rise, balancing the obligations of promoting Joseph R. Biden Jr. while offering herself to someday lead the party into a post-Biden era.”<sup>209</sup> The article charged Harris with the extraordinary weight of expectations placed on her as a leader.

The *New York Times* focused on metaphor to draw more attention to Harris’s identity and the milestones she has achieved in US American politics. “First” was intentionally used to represent or describe Harris as a pioneer. For instance, the article’s lede paragraph stated, “Kamala Harris is a lot like her, a first-generation daughter of immigrants pursuing the American dream.”<sup>210</sup> Similarly, the article quoted Carol Kim, an Asian American union organizer in San Diego, saying, “She is one of us.”<sup>211</sup>

The *New York Times* accurately captured Harris’s representation during her acceptance speech, emphasizing the symbolic significance of her vice-presidential candidacy. One of the articles noted that Harris carried “an extraordinary set of hopes and expectations”<sup>212</sup> due to her role as a “barrier-breaking candidate and as the running mate to a 77-year-old nominee.”<sup>213</sup> While this framing acknowledged the historical nature of her candidacy, it also reduced her political relevance to a symbol rather than a leader by centering coverage on what Harris represents rather than on her policies, decision-making, or governance skills. This narrative risked making discussions of her actual contributions secondary to her identity. For instance, the *New York Times* highlighted that during the Democratic National Convention, Harris was

expected to emphasize her background and the historic nature of her candidacy.<sup>214</sup> This focuses on identity, while significant, often overshadows discussions of her policy record and leadership qualifications.

### *Resilience*

The *New York Times*'s coverage of Harris's nomination in the days after her speech intensified the theme of resilience. Harris's emphasis on resiliency was repeated in the articles "On Centennial of Suffrage, Nods to Harris and to History,"<sup>215</sup> "Finally the Country Sees Us': Women of Color Cheer Harris's Rise,"<sup>216</sup> and "In Accepting Bid, Harris Warns U.S. is at Crossroads."<sup>217</sup> The *New York Times* emphasized the particular ideas Harris sought to portray in her address by presenting her as a historical figure of persistence, recognizing the structural obstacles she has encountered, and highlighting the pressures imposed on her.

The article noted that Harris's nomination was "a moment long overdue."<sup>218</sup> This reinforced Harris's precise point in her speech—that progress is sometimes slow, complex, and dependent on those who came before us. The phrase also positioned Harris's campaign in the more significant historical battle for women's rights. By linking Harris to the centenary of women's suffrage, the article enhanced her resilience that her place on the ticket is not only about her but also about the generations of women whose resiliency made it possible.

Harris's nomination was evidence of Black women's political resiliency as much as a historic first step. Hamin, a sister Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority member, pulled the emotional weight of this moment in her response: "Finally . . . the country sees us, sees who we are, sees what we can do."<sup>219</sup> Her words reflected the long-standing struggle for recognition and opportunity that Black women have faced in leadership and governance. The emphasis on "finally" suggested perseverance through decades of exclusion, while the phrase "sees what we

can do” asserted that their capabilities have always existed but have been historically overlooked. Framing Harris’s candidacy in this way, media coverage supported the notion that her victory was about the endurance, tenacity, and resiliency of the women she represents rather than only shattering stereotypes. The *New York Times* also referenced Nicole Sanchez, a Chicana consultant, who observed, “It’s the twin devils of racism and sexism. . . . We are told our whole lives to educate ourselves and work hard—God forbid it actually works, we get told we’re asking for too much.”<sup>220</sup> This passage closely aligns with Harris’s theme of resilience: acknowledging the persistence of barriers while simultaneously rejecting them as insurmountable.

Along with her theme of resilience, the *New York Times* highlighted how Harris positioned herself as a fighter against injustice. The article “In Accepting Bid, Harris Warns U.S. Is at Crossroads” quoted Harris’s speech, “There is no vaccine for racism.”<sup>221</sup> This metaphor, which likened racism to an illness that must be actively fought rather than passively endured, helped reinforce her broad message of resilience in the face of systemic inequity. The *New York Times*’s decision to spotlight this phrase underscored its alignment with her rhetorical framing.

The *New York Times* portrayed Harris as a candidate burdened by extraordinary expectations. For instance, their article noted, “Ms. Harris carries an extraordinary weight of expectations from her party to rise to the demands of leadership.”<sup>222</sup> This was evident in her speech when she framed herself not only as a candidate but also as a symbol of resilience during an important moment in history. The *New York Times* continued the discussion of resilience as a fundamental concept of governance rather than only an individual characteristic. Their article reported Harris’s statement, “We must elect a president who will bring something different, something better, and do the important work.”<sup>223</sup> This positioned Harris and Joe Biden as the leaders most qualified to lead a country under crisis.

The *New York Times* also reinforced how Harris used resiliency to criticize the Trump government. It quoted her as saying, “Donald Trump’s failure of leadership has cost lives and livelihoods.” She continued. “The constant chaos leaves us adrift. The incompetence makes us feel afraid. The callousness makes us feel alone. It’s a lot.”<sup>224</sup> That quotation emphasizes the need for capable leadership—directly reflecting the resilience theme of her speech.

### *Community*

By characterizing her nomination as “long overdue,”<sup>225</sup> the *New York Times* emphasized that Harris’s inclusion on the ticket was not just about her but about the culmination of a long, collective fight. According to a report by the *New York Times*, many women said Harris’s historic nomination was “a moment long overdue even while acknowledging the historic run by Hillary Clinton four years ago.”<sup>226</sup> This was not just a factual declaration. It echoed Harris’s argument. That same theme was expressed later in the article. When the reporters noted how many women considered her triumph as their own. The article stated: “In Harris, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate and California senator, each of the women said they saw someone familiar.”<sup>227</sup> As noted above, union leader Carol Kim remarked on Harris’s pioneering status. That same quotation emphasized community when Kim said, “She is one of us.”<sup>228</sup> This paralleled what Harris said when she mentioned women whose names are often left out of history books but whose contributions permitted Harris to run for office, such as Constance Baker Motley, Shirley Chisholm, and Fannie Lou Hamer. The speech and the *New York Times*’s coverage both support the idea that this moment is not unique to any one person but rather to a whole community.

The *New York Times* described Harris as someone who bridged various Democratic Party divisions, expressing the belief that US America is stronger when it comes together: “Kamala

Harris stood before the Democratic Party on Wednesday as the bridge between a moderate generation of leaders and younger liberals on the rise.”<sup>229</sup> This affirmed Harris’s assertion of US America as a community that must unite during times of crisis and discuss identity-based communities. This was more than simply emotional cliches. It was a purposeful counterpoint to the division that marked the Trump administration that Harris had emphasized in her address. She urged that the US should be:

A country where we may not agree on every detail, but we are united by the fundamental belief that every human being is of infinite worth, deserving of compassion, dignity, and respect.<sup>230</sup>

Just as Harris positioned herself as someone who could unite people, the *New York Times* positioned her candidacy as a unifying force. The *New York Times* reinforced Harris’s call for unity and collective action in its coverage of her speeches. The article featured her statement: “We must elect a president who will bring something different, something better, and do the important work,”<sup>231</sup> emphasizing her focus on community and shared progress. The article also included her appeal for inclusivity: “A president who will bring all of us together—Black, white, Latino, Asian, Indigenous—to achieve the future we collectively want. We must elect Joe Biden.”<sup>232</sup> She believed and called for unity as one people regardless of color. This echoed her idea of community by promoting inclusion, shared goals, and collaborative action. Harris’s use of multiple racial groupings implied unity across diversity, but the phrase “the future we collectively want”<sup>233</sup> emphasized that development is dependent on everyone working together. The *New York Times*’s decision to draw attention to the statement confirms Harris’s message that the election is about national solidarity, not individual ambition.

*Additional Media Framing*

Beyond strengthening Harris's theme of Pioneer, Resilience, and Community, the *New York Times* also challenged the political identity of Harris in its coverage. Harris's record was challenged. For instance, the *New York Times* articles acknowledged the criticism of Harris's law enforcement background, particularly among progressives who perceived her criminal justice record as inconsistent with the broader struggle for racial justice. The *New York Times* observed:

some of the most persistent doubts came from liberal voters, including Black and Latina women, who criticized her law enforcement record as a prosecutor and the impersonal way in which she has spoken about race.<sup>234</sup>

This subtly undermined Harris's vision of a "Beloved Community" by posing the question: Can an individual with a history of "tough-on-crime" stances serve as a unifying figure for communities historically impacted by policing? This contrasts with the *Washington Post*, which mostly avoided discussing critiques of Harris's past policy decisions. Meanwhile, the *Wall Street Journal* reinforced a more skeptical conservative perspective by framing these concerns as evidence of Harris's establishment ties.

#### The *Wall Street Journal* Analysis

The *Wall Street Journal* reported Harris's pioneering and resilience themes in its coverage. However, the theme of community highlighted in Harris's speech was not echoed in the *Wall Street Journal's* coverage.

#### *Pioneer*

The *Wall Street Journal* framed Harris's nomination as part of a larger movement of Black politicians gaining momentum in historically white-dominated arenas. It noted that "Black candidates have begun winning more House seats and statewide offices... a departure from decades in which Black political power was rooted largely in minority communities."<sup>235</sup> This affirmed Harris's statement, "Women like Mary Church Terrell and Mary McLeod Bethune.

Fannie Lou Hamer and Diane Nash. Constance Baker Motley and Shirley Chisholm . . . They paved the way for the trailblazing leadership of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.”<sup>236</sup> The *Wall Street Journal* reinforced Harris’s self-portrayal as a major historical figure—a candidate and a symbol of political transformation—by tying her candidacy to a greater movement of Black political success.

Despite being a conservative outlet, the *Wall Street Journal* also underscored Harris’s image as a trailblazer, frequently highlighting her historic status and reinforcing her pioneer narrative in public consciousness. The unprecedented nature of Harris’s candidacy was repeatedly highlighted in the *Wall Street Journal*. For instance, one of its articles reported that “Sen. Kamala Harris accepted the Democratic vice-presidential nomination -- and became the first Black woman to hold that position...”<sup>237</sup> This directly aligns with Harris’s statement which she made during the acceptance speech, “That I am here tonight is a testament to the dedication of generations before me.”<sup>238</sup> This complemented Harris’s statement, which was the momentousness of her candidacy, presenting it not only as a personal achievement but as a historic moment in history.

Similarly, in its coverage of her speech, the *Wall Street Journal* article “Black Candidates Gain New Political Ground”<sup>239</sup> reinforced Harris’s pioneer theme. The article highlighted that “Joe Biden chose Harris as his running mate ‘in part on the premise that she would energize Black voters while drawing support across racial lines’ and emphasized her status as ‘the first Black woman and first woman of Asian descent to be nominated for vice president by a major party.’”<sup>240</sup> This framing correlated with Harris’s words in her speech when she acknowledged the importance of earlier trailblazers.”<sup>241</sup> By recognizing these aspects of Harris’s candidacy, the *Wall Street Journal* placed her in a broader context of historic firsts and political breakthroughs.

The *Wall Street Journal* actively crafted Harris's image as a political pioneer by placing her within a broader historical context of trailblazers. The article emphasized her association with the immigrant experience and Black political leadership, acknowledging that she "paid homage to her mother, an Indian immigrant, and to Black women who paved the path for her."<sup>242</sup> This aligned with Harris's efforts to present herself as the successor in the lineage of groundbreaking leaders. As previously discussed, she effectively used personal narratives to highlight her connections to historical pioneers, emphasizing that her candidacy exceeded personal achievement and aimed to continue the sacrifices and victories of those who came before.

### *Resilience*

A common thread in the *Wall Street Journal's* articles was demonstrating how Black candidates have had to persevere, push further, and work despite barriers; the *Wall Street Journal* supported Harris's theme of resilience—not only for herself but also for Black leaders over time. Harris did not hold back when speaking about the difficult facts. She noted the great, systematic obstacles Black women, immigrants, and underprivileged groups have encountered: "Yet so many of the Black women who helped secure that victory were still prohibited from voting, long after its ratification. But they were undeterred."<sup>243</sup> That last line of the statement, "But they were undeterred."—is the essence of resilience. The struggle was real, but they kept going. This was in parallel with the report made by the *Wall Street Journal* detailing how Black politicians are winning elections in areas where they historically had little opportunity. One article stated:

Black candidates have begun winning more House seats and statewide offices... a departure from decades in which Black political power was rooted largely in minority communities.<sup>244</sup>

The article also acknowledged that although many Black politicians encountered significant resistance, they continued to run, even when, for example, “Winning a House seat hasn’t been the political stepping stone for Black candidates in the way it has been for white politicians.”<sup>245</sup> Harris also noted that “Without fanfare or recognition, they organized, testified, rallied, marched, and fought—not just for their vote, but for a seat at the table.”<sup>246</sup> Both statements emphasized the struggles of past generations.

The *Wall Street Journal*’s coverage also showed Harris’s resilience—her refusal to back down from difficult fights despite criticism and opposition. The article “The Republican Convention: Biden, Harris Reject GOP Criticism About Civil Unrest” characterized both Biden and Harris as soft on crime on Thursday and condemned President Trump’s handling of the unrest.<sup>247</sup> The article illustrated how Harris and Biden faced attacks from their opponents and, instead of backing down, they remained determined and battled back. Also, her statement: “Make no mistake, we will not let these vigilantes and extremists derail the path to justice,”<sup>248</sup> covered by the *Wall Street Journal*, showed how she is ready to seek justice and fight the previous system. Thus, Harris’s strong opposition to forces which she believes to be dangers to democracy and justice will help to underline this. She presents some groups—probably those engaged in voting suppression, political violence, or anti-democratic actions—as impediments to development by calling them vigilantes or extremists. This linguistic decision not only emphasizes her will to maintain justice but also establishes her as a champion of democratic values in contrast to a “previous system” that, subtly, may have allowed or encouraged such threats. Her language helps her to connect with a larger historical battle for fairness and democratic integrity by supporting her as a leader ready to take forceful action against forces aiming at undermining civil rights and justice.

### *Additional Media Framing*

The article “Democrats Nominate Harris In a Historic Selection for VP”<sup>249</sup> emphasized Harris’s political connections, including her law enforcement experience and association with Biden. Still, it did not devote significant attention to her grassroots community involvement. The *Wall Street Journal* portrayed her as a political insider rather than a community-driven leader by underplaying her community-based activism and emphasizing her establishment credentials.

An in-depth analysis of the *Wall Street Journal*’s three articles on Harris’s vice-presidential nominee acceptance speech reveals a noticeable lack of the community theme central to her rhetorical action. While Harris rhetorically positioned “community” at the center of her political identity by tactically placing it at the forefront, the *Wall Street Journal* coverage did not explicitly reflect this theme. The *Wall Street Journal*’s politically conservative editorial orientation favors individualistic analysis over a communitarian worldview. The absence of community as a primary framing theme in the *Wall Street Journal* reporting indicates that although Harris utilized this subject as a rhetorical approach, it did not influence all media outlets’ portrayal of her candidacy similarly.

This disparity in framing prompts critical questions on how media outlets deliberately emphasize or downplay certain rhetorical elements based on their institutional viewpoints. Although media like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* may have addressed Harris’s reference to community more explicitly, the editorial stance of the *Wall Street Journal* reflects wider ideological and structural trends in political journalism. My analysis recognizes both the existence of certain themes in Harris’s speech and the varying degrees of engagement by different media outlets in their coverage of these themes.

## Conclusion

Harris's speech was historic, breaking glass ceilings for women in politics as the first woman of color to be nominated as vice president of the Democratic Party. Harris redefined political leadership in terms of being a pioneer, being strong, and being part of a community. She positioned her candidacy as part of a larger fight for justice and representation, drawing on the legacies of Black women, civil rights activists, and her multicultural background. However, the media response showed that this narrative was not always preserved. While the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* often used her framing, they also made her message less clear by focusing too much on her identity or questioning her authenticity. The *Wall Street Journal* ignored her vision for her community, favoring a more individualistic portrayal. These diverse ways of framing indicated how Harris's efforts to shape her political identity were mediated by the institutional inclinations of political media.

In the next chapter, I analyze the negotiation metaphors and identity within Ghanaian political discourse, specifically Opoku-Agyemang's candidacy for the vice presidency in 2024.

### CHAPTER THREE- OPOKU-AGYEMANG’S CALL TO RESTORE: STEWARDSHIP, FEMININE POWER, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND MEDIA FRAMING IN GHANAIAN POLITICS

“The purpose is the opportunity to hold our country together, again; to heal Ghana.”<sup>250</sup>

This statement by Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang during her vice presidential nomination acceptance speech meant more than just wanting to be a vice president. It called for a vision of leadership based on moral clarity, an understanding of history, and a government that worked to fix things. Instead of using just celebratory remarks to celebrate her candidacy, Opoku-Agyemang based her speech on a collective plea to heal a broken nation, rebuild public trust, and reestablish ethical leadership at a time when institutions were falling apart.

In this chapter, I argue that Opoku-Agyemang constructed a political identity based on moral stewardship, feminine power, and accountability using metaphors to reframe political power and ethical responsibility. However, the media’s selective engagement of these themes, particularly the erasure of her feminist power metaphors and blunting of her accountability discourse, reveals discursive discomfort with transformative women’s leadership in Ghanaian politics.

The first phase of the chapter begins with a close reading of Opoku-Agyemang’s 2024 vice-presidential nominee acceptance speech. I examine the political and historical context of the period and how it offered Opoku-Agyemang the opportunity to perform the rhetorical tasks needed for a vice president in support of the presidential candidate. I also seek examples of Opoku-Agyemang using metaphors in her speech, highlighting the themes that echoed her political identity. In the second phase, I examine the media coverage of Opoku-Agyemang

during her 2024 campaign. I then seek examples of how the media echoed or challenged three themes in her speech that define her political identity.

### **Historical Context**

Former President John Dramani Mahama formally declared Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang as his running partner for the National Democratic Congress (NDC) on March 7, 2024, seconding her vice-presidency nomination. Opoku-Agyemang became the first woman in Ghana's political history to get a major party's vice-presidential candidacy twice with this choice. Though her 2020 choice was much praised for its symbolic relevance in breaking women's boundaries, the 2024 nomination indicated a purposeful increase in her political legitimacy, experience, and leadership potential. Unlike in 2020, when she was relatively new to frontline politics, in 2024, she stood as a more seasoned, credible, and strong political figure.

Opoku-Agyemang was born on November 22, 1951, at Cape Coast, the regional capital of the Central Region of Ghana. Her upbringing in Cape Coast—historically the cradle of formal education in Ghana and the hub of colonial interaction—built her strong identification with education, service, and cultural heritage. Opoku-Agyemang is the “darling girl” of the region.<sup>251</sup> Her connection to the region is further strengthened by her secondary education at Wesley Girls' School and her university degree from the University of Cape Coast.

Opoku-Agyemang's public persona is shaped by her life as a divorcée, mother, and grandmother. She is divorced from Professor Edmund Opoku-Agyemang, a University of Cape Coast professor.<sup>252</sup> This makes her the first running mate in Ghana without her spouse, who could have become the first Second Gentleman in Ghanaian history, mirroring the historicity of her vice-presidential candidacy. Opoku-Agyemang has three children, two male and one female; Kweku Opoku-Agyemang, Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang, and Adwoa Opoku-Agyemang.<sup>253</sup> Just

like Opoku-Agyemang, all her three children have obtained doctoral degrees in various professional fields and have achieved academic excellence, carrying on the tradition of scholarly achievement and social influence. In addition to the family's accomplishments, Dr. Kwabena's spouse, Dr. Ama Opoku-Agyemang, is likewise a notable academic. All three siblings began their academic careers at the University of Ghana, where they obtained their undergraduate degrees, as proof of the intense intellectual foundation they received in their home country. This outstanding academic accomplishment is evidence of the work ethic and educational values that Opoku-Agyemang has instilled in her children. It also shows Opoku-Agyemang's impact and commitment to education.<sup>254</sup> Each child with a doctorate and a successful career embodies the adage, "When you educate a man, you educate one person, but when you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation."<sup>255</sup>

Opoku-Ayemang's political life was formed and influenced by her early career and education. As previously mentioned, Opoku-Agyemang completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Cape-Coast, and her primary and senior education at Aburi Girls' and Wesley Girls' School. She later pursued her master's and doctorate degrees in English Literature from York University, Canada.<sup>256</sup>

Opoku-Agyemang's experience as a highly successful academician and educator connects well with Ghana's educated population. The education sector substantially influences the country's political dynamics, which cannot be ignored. She has devoted more than 40 years of her career to the classroom.<sup>257</sup> In 1986, she became a lecturer at the University of Cape-Coast School of Humanities and Legal Studies, where she taught literature and oversaw the English Department. Finally, she reached the coveted post of professor in 2001.<sup>258</sup>

Within her long and successful academic career, she has held many positions, such as Head of Department, Dean of Faculty, Academic Director, and, most famously, as the first female Vice Chancellor of a state university in Ghana in 2008.<sup>259</sup> African News reported that her tenure as Vice Chancellor was distinguished by significant reforms, from infrastructural improvements to gender equity initiatives within the institution.<sup>260</sup> Her leadership not only boosted UCC's standing, but it also set a precedent for women in academia to advance to leadership positions.<sup>261</sup>

From 1998 to 2002, she oversaw more than 20 Boards and Committees, including the Academic Committee of the Ghana Council for Tertiary Education and the Council of the University College of Education, Winneba. She was also the coordinator of the Specialist Program in English Language and Ghanaian Culture for USO Volunteers from 1991 to 1993.<sup>262</sup> Opoku-Agyemang was among the five professors nominated to give speeches at the 200th Anniversary of the End of Slavery at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in March 2007. She was Ghana's representative on the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in October 2009, and they chose her again for a second term.<sup>263</sup> She became the President of the Forum for African Women Educationalists, which she has been a part of since 2014.<sup>264</sup>

She transitioned from academics to politics, serving as Ghana's Minister of Education from February 2013 until January 2017.<sup>265</sup> During her tenure as Minister of Education under President Mahama, Opoku-Agyemang worked to improve enrollment, enhance teacher training, and make education more inclusive. She pushed to ensure impoverished kids received free secondary education, school lunches, and uniforms. She also worked to improve literacy, particularly

among girls in northern Ghana.<sup>266</sup> For instance, a report by Francis Kokotse captured a statement by the Hon. Sam Okudzeto Ablakwa, the deputy Minister of Education, who said:

as minister of education, Opoku-Agyemang successfully championed reforms such as the conversion of polytechnics into technical universities, the upgrading of colleges of education into tertiary institutions, and a reduction in teacher absenteeism from 27% to 7%.<sup>267</sup>

According to Okudzeto Ablakwa, “it was during her time that the ministry abolished the quota system at the colleges of education, which led to enrolment increasing from 9,000 to 15,400 . . . Opoku-Agyemang helped to increase student loan beneficiaries from 13,833 in the 2012-13 academic year to 24,951 in 2015-16.”<sup>268</sup> She cemented her reputation as an exceptional teacher and educationist. Opoku-Agyemang collaborated with stakeholders throughout the education spectrum, from students and teachers to professors, university administrators, and education CSOs, establishing herself as a renowned presence and brand in the field.

Just as others praised her for her good role as the Minister of Education, she was also criticized. She was criticized by Yaw Buaben Asamoah, the director of communication for the New Patriotic Party (NPP), during her first nomination as the 2020 running mate of Mahama under the ticket of the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Buaben Asamoah said, “Opoku-Agyemang did not have a track record of fighting for women and their welfare.”<sup>269</sup> This referred to Opoku-Agyemang’s endorsement, as education minister, in 2016 of the pardon for three individuals—a radio broadcaster from Montie FM in Accra and his two panelists—who received four-month jail sentences for threatening judges.<sup>270</sup> The individuals vowed to sexually assault Chief Justice Georgina Theodora Wood and murder other justices involved in a case against the Electoral Commission of Ghana.<sup>271</sup>

Opoku-Agyemang was first selected as Mahama’s running mate in 2020, becoming the first woman running mate for a major political party in Ghana. Her selection came with mixed

reactions from the Ghanaian populace. For instance, a report from University World News by Kototse stated that, “ Her nomination has been generally welcomed, with feminist groups in particular arguing it may have finally ‘broken the glass ceiling.’”<sup>272</sup> The same article also stated that, “Her former deputy minister of education, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, praised her as ‘a great role model,’ a distinguished scholar, a woman of integrity and a true nationalist.”<sup>273</sup> The NDC ultimately lost in the 2020 general elections, even though Opoku-Agyemang used her track record as an educator and reformist for the campaign. She vowed to persist in enhancing access to education and opportunities for all Ghanaians.

Although the NDC commends her accomplishments and competencies, the reaction from senior members of the ruling NPP has been notably sexist.<sup>274</sup> The majority leader and Minister of Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, while speaking to the media expressed that:

When I first heard, I thought he was going to settle on Dr. Duffuor or Nii Moi because they are economists and finance experts of considerable standing so either of them could have done it . . . but you ask yourself what value is this woman going to add to that ticket. Calm woman; a woman of poise and balance. She speaks good English but is it good enough to satisfy the ticket . . . but let’s assume that John becomes the President and the next day he is no longer, is this woman capable of being described as the President of the republic? and that has nothing to do with her person. I’m talking about the quality in governance that could affect and effect this country, is she that person? I don’t think so at all.”<sup>275</sup>

Also, John Boadu, the NPP general secretary, made a remark that went viral across various social media platforms. According to him, “only ‘Kayayees’<sup>276</sup> will wave at Prof Opoku Agyemang when she moves around.”<sup>277</sup>

Ursula Owusu-Ekufu, the communication minister and member of Parliament for Ablekuma West Constituency emphasized that “gender advocates cannot vouch for her contribution to the cause of women empowerment in the country.”<sup>278</sup> These claims are sexist since they cannot establish that Opoku-Agyemang cannot be vice-president or president if

necessary. Their awful snobbery seemed to focus more on anti-womanism than vice-presidential qualities.<sup>279</sup>

Despite her party's loss, she was retained as Mahama's running mate under the NDC ticket in 2024. A report by the Ghana News Agency stated that:

Former President John Dramani Mahama, Flagbearer of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), has decided to retain Professor Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang as his Running Mate for the 2024 presidential election, according to highly placed sources in the Party.<sup>280</sup>

In a communiqué that was signed and issued by the General Secretary of the National Democratic Coalition (NDC). Mr. Fiifi Fiavi Kwetey stated that the nomination process was conducted in accordance with Article 45 of the party's constitution.<sup>281</sup> Fiavi Kwetey's communiqué captured Mahama's expression: "Her integrity, dedication, and vision for a better Ghana make her the ideal candidate to join me in leading our party to victory in the upcoming elections."<sup>282</sup> The NDC highlighted:

Professor Opoku-Agyemang's nomination underscores the party's commitment to inclusiveness, diversity and empowering women for leadership. With "extensive qualification and experience," the former educator brings "a wealth of knowledge and expertise" that forms a formidable team with Mahama.<sup>283</sup>

Fiavi Kwetey further stated that, "the pairing of poised to introduce the bold and progressive vision for the future of Ghana."<sup>284</sup> She was seen as a safe bet.<sup>285</sup>

The background of Opoku-Agyemang had an impact on her 2024 vice-presidential nominee candidacy. As previously mentioned, Opoku-Agyemang hails from the Central region and had her education there. The Fante culture in her area, famous for producing intellectuals and national leaders, gave her a cultural context for her subsequent public service. Opoku-Agyemang has lived in the Central Region for over four decades and contributed to its

intellectual environment as a famous university teacher and the first female Vice Chancellor of UCC.<sup>286</sup>

From a political standpoint, the Central Region is distinctive. With its checkered voting history, it is dubbed a swing zone since it is unaffiliated with any political party. According to Citi Newsroom functions “as a decisive bellwether in presidential elections . . . to multiparty democracy in 1992, the region has consistently aligned with the winning presidential candidate.”<sup>287</sup> However, in a developing democracy like Ghana, where ethnic and communal connections continue to influence elections, the nomination of Opoku-Agyemang, a cherished daughter of the Central Region, has far-reaching ramifications for the region’s electorate.<sup>288</sup> In addition to her expertise, her candidacy connects well with people both inside and outside the region.

Knowing the electoral dynamics of the Central Region is essential for any political candidate aspiring to attain national office in Ghana.<sup>289</sup> For Opoku-Agyemang, using her regional identification involves more than just symbolic representation; it necessitates addressing the community’s distinct developmental demands and concerns. Interacting with local communities, advocating for policies that align with regional goals, and cultivating trust are vital elements of a plan designed to obtain electoral backing from this vital region. The region gained considerable advantages from selecting running mates from the NDC party, with the late Professor John Evans Atta-Mills becoming the third president of the Fourth Republic.<sup>290</sup> The late Paa Kwesi Amisah-Arthur was the running mate of the party.

These political, rhetorical, and regional dynamics combined in 2024 to transform Opoku-Agyemang from a competent running mate candidate to a strong national leader in her own right. Her selection represented a meeting point of academic seriousness, cultural authenticity, and

strategic political viability—attributes which made her a compelling candidate on the NDC ticket and an influential voice on the democratic experience of Ghana.

The next section analyzes how Opoku-Agyemang established her political identity through metaphoric framings of care, transformation, and continuity, given the historical and political background of her candidacy and the reasons for selecting the 2024 vice-presidential nominee acceptance speech over the 2020 speech.

### **Opoku Agyemang’s Speech Analysis**

In her vice presidential nomination acceptance speech, Opoku-Agyemang established a political identity anchored in moral stewardship, feminine power, and accountability. In my analysis, I highlight examples of metaphors used in Opoku-Agyemang’s speech to frame her vice presidential political identity.

#### *Steward and National Healer*

Opoku-Agyemang adopted the steward and national healer persona in her inaugural acceptance speech on April 24, 2024. Speaking in a political environment defined by institutional deterioration, economic downturn, and cynicism, she condemned celebratory narratives about making history or personal glory. Instead, she framed her candidacy in a solemn mission to help restore Ghana’s moral compass, and she framed the upcoming election as a critical opportunity for ethical restoration and public accountability. Opoku-Agyemang’s speech emerged less as a campaign rally than as a moral address to a broken nation, making clear that her leadership was defined by ethical accountability and a restorative vision.

Meeting the need to be a moral steward and national healer dedicated to saving the country from its current dangerous state, Opoku-Agyemang used metaphors of injury, restoration, and resilience to position Ghana as a broken but recoverable nation and herself as a

leader grounded in justice, humility, and historical consciousness. For instance, she likened the general election not in terms of party power or personalities (not as just a matter of regime change) but as an avenue to “hold our country together again; to heal Ghana.” The use of healing as a metaphor was not by chance. It came up repeatedly in the speech with intensity and weight; she cast Ghana as a wounded, fragmented body requiring not conquest but care. She emphasized this notion by referencing how past generations “picked up the broken pieces and carefully, strategically, sewed them back.” Opoku-Agyemang imagined the country as both fragile and reparable—a vision grounded in patience, wisdom, and deliberate work. She did not pose as a charismatic savior; instead, she positioned herself as a moral caregiver. That is, Opoku-Agyemang promised repair rather than rescue. Her sewing of broken pieces linked her leadership to the patient, a careful job of mending, echoing traditional maternal forms of care. Her identity as a moral steward shows here: someone who identifies pain, acknowledges it, and provides healing based on moral commitment rather than clichés.

Opoku-Agyemang’s appeal to healing was rooted in accountability: “We must be passionate about justice... about stamping out corruption.” She did not offer a vague call to unity. However, she identified specific institutional betrayals—nepotism disguised as meritocracy, hypocrisy disguised as objectivity—and directly linked the country’s “near insolvency” to a failure of ethical leadership. Kenneth Burke’s idea of terministic screens<sup>291</sup> explains how her language revealed one moral vision while rejecting another. She saw manipulation, elitism, and impunity, whereas others saw silence or normalcy. Through contrast, she framed her leadership as a corrective voice of moral clarity in a landscape of decay.

Opoku-Agyemang also criticized the ruling administration by using her metaphors of moral direction. She stated that “Ghana Without Aid has turned to Ghana Without Compass,”

suggesting a loss of strategic vision and ethical orientation. By contrast, what Opoku-Agyemang did was skillfully situate herself and the NDC as capable of restoring direction—providing what she described elsewhere as “the armor of principles, selflessness, of compassion, of truth, of sacrifice.” Additionally, the metaphor of armor changed power in moral rather than military terms. It elicited virtue instead of might to build a foundation of leadership based on character rather than force. Her moral claims grew stronger when she contrasted her rhetorical humility with the “unrestrained impunity” she attributed to the current regime. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s study on conceptual metaphor framing devices that shape how people make sense of abstract ideas provides a valuable framework for examining how political language affects public perception,<sup>292</sup> particularly in the case of Opoku-Agyemang. In this case, concepts like “healing” and “compass” are not ornamental but serve as foundational tools for envisioning governance.

Opoku-Agyemang used the healing metaphor as a fundamental political concept rather than a catchphrase. Her leadership is shown as stewardship—steady, modest, and responsible—rather than as a spectacle. This moral frame has become a potent political tool for a country looking for competence and conscience. Additionally, she presented her identity through a gendered lens, emphasizing feminine power, relational leadership, and care as key elements of government.

### *Feminine power*

A section of her speech was centered around women, women’s empowerment, women’s equality, and women’s economic freedom. Opoku-Agyemang dedicated part of her speech to calling to the general populace the need to involve women in government administration, and she demonstrated feminine power throughout her speech. She celebrated feminine power, not as symbolic novelty, but as a profound and rooted form of leadership. Opoku-Agyemang framed

her gender as a source of strength, relational wisdom, and economic insight. Rather than treating her nomination as merely historic, which was true, she redefined what it meant to be a woman in politics, grounding her appeal in competence, collective progress, and maternal responsibility.

When Opoku-Agyemang expressed her relationship with politics in her speech, she created a room where she worked much like a concerned citizen looking to make the Ghanaian government a better servant of the people, especially women. She was needed to provide the needs of women, “we will pay special attention to issues and challenges faced by women in all walks of life.” She then described “the flexibility offered within the context of a 24-hour economy must hold special attraction for women, for obvious reasons,” as highlighted in their (NDC) 2024 manifesto. The manifesto describes the party’s vision and plans for the 2024 general elections and contains a proposal to establish a 24-hour economy. She suggested more extended maternity leave and called for flexible working arrangements in the 24-hour economy—policies deliberately framed with women in mind. These were not just policy positions but expressions of visionary politics that prioritized care and unpaid work. In calling on known Ghanaian sources—market women, mothers, and the iconic Esther Ocloo—she constructed a gendered ethos of competence, continuity, and care.

Opoku-Agyemang additionally referenced women’s labor, innovation, and societal contribution. When discussing her output and assuring John Dramani Mahama of choosing her as his running mate, she emphasized that “women are also capable of high achievements,” highlighting that their accomplishments derive from a “reservoir of strength, determination, and mental acuity.” While this was met with the sound of applause from the audience present, it should be noted that Opoku-Agyemang stated these as facts that she has held many leadership and ministerial positions. Opoku-Agyemang, however, used this experiential knowledge as a

selling point for voters to find her a trustworthy leader capable of serving and contributing to the administration of Ghana when her party is voted into power. Opoku-Agyemang's words also praised the different epistemic gifts of women and gender equality. Her leadership style did not follow male norms of authority; instead, she bolstered a dialogic, social kind of power grounded in the everyday experiences of Ghanaian women.

Opoku-Agyemang also linked gendered experience and economic wisdom. In proposing the "Women Development Bank," she insisted that "women must become millionaires too, through hard work, as the men do." Opoku-Agyemang candidly challenged deep-seated systems of economic exclusion that have long disenfranchising women in capital, markets, and decision-making. The declaration restores aspiration for Ghanaian women as a right founded on labor, merit, and opportunity rather than as an exception or luxury, thus reinforcing the value of women's entrepreneurship. Her remark that "women do not need handouts, we need a hand up" encapsulated her philosophy of empowerment, founded on dignity, not dependency. By doing this, she identified women neither as victims nor exploiters. She rejected paternalistic charity in favor of calling for structural change that would empower independence. This language represented her general economic theory—relational but strong: empowerment had to be based on dignity, not reliance. She cast women as active architects of Ghana's future rather than passive consumers of prosperity.

The rhetorical appeal to women as builders and stabilizers was at the core of Opoku-Agyemang's approach. When she asserted that "when women prosper... there is better stability and peace at home,"<sup>293</sup> she redefined economic empowerment as not only a matter of justice but also of national interest. Opoku-Agyemang thereby framed the economy with a gendered ethical imperative, whereby growth is measured not only through GDP or trade surpluses but also by the

degree to which women, families, and communities thrive. This framing challenged technocratic and masculinist bias in economic reporting, shifting care, cooperation, and security into the policy effectiveness foreground.

Her invocation of “Esther Ocloo” was particularly emphatic and deliberate. Ocloo was more than a historical figure—she symbolized indigenous feminist praxis, a pioneer in African business, and an early advocate for financial inclusion. Renowned for founding Women’s World Banking and for growing from a small home-based marmalade production to a position of global economic leadership, Ocloo embodied the values Opoku-Agyemang espoused: resilience, innovation, and community building. In calling upon Ocloo, Opoku-Agyemang called upon an indigenous, profoundly Ghanaian heritage of women-driven economic transformation, not based on Western feminism or foreign aid models, but on resourcefulness and resilience.

Ocloo’s legacy added historical depth and cultural legitimacy to Opoku-Agyemang’s vision for a Women’s Development Bank. It implies that this proposal was not a novel departure but a continuation of a long-established Ghanaian feminist-economic tradition. Ocloo had championed systems change in how financial institutions involved women, demanding access to capital, business training, and markets.

Drawing on this context, she stretched the metaphor of women’s power from home to politics and the economy. Women were not caregivers and mothers in her speech alone, but innovators, economic drivers, and moral guides. This was against Western, elitist, and masculinist definitions of leadership that extol individualism, competition, and hierarchy. Instead, she advocated a relational, communal model of leadership—one legitimated not by domination but by cooperation, and not by charisma but by service. It is aligned with postcolonial feminist theories that call for leadership based on cultural specificity, historical

memory, and gendered experience. Additionally, this framing resonated with postcolonial feminist theorists such as Obioma Nnaemeka, who assert that African women's leadership cannot be reduced to Western liberal feminist scripts. Opoku-Agyemang's speech reflected a distinctly Ghanaian feminist ethic that fused care, resilience, and socioeconomic vision. Her invocation of "trading associations and cooperatives" as governing bodies for the Women Development Bank also demonstrated a politics of inclusion rooted in everyday realities. She confirmed women's experiences from all socioeconomic backgrounds, transforming their daily work into political awareness.

Opoku-Agyemang's speech presented female leadership as honest government rather than symbolic representation. Her focus on relational power, economic inclusion, and maternal logic questioned patriarchal norms and confirmed women's importance to national progress. She did not want acceptance despite her gender; instead, she urged women to be acknowledged for their ongoing power, knowledge, and national achievements.

Her speech transitioned seamlessly from the ethic of care and collaboration to a harsh critique of state corruption, mismanagement, and betrayal. This shift exposed the third predominant theme in her political identity construction: accountability as a fundamental leadership principle.

#### *Accountability as Political Integrity*

Fitting with the rhetorical role that Opoku-Agyemang aimed to fill for Mahama, she specifically focused on attacking the incumbent party for its abysmal performance during its regime. I will first discuss Opoku-Agyemang's response to Bawumia's statement on being just the driver's mate in the current administration. Opoku-Agyemang rejected the term "driver's mate," which enhanced her political image. During his 2024 campaign tour to become the next

president of Ghana, Alhaji Mahamudu Bawumia, the vice president of Ghana, made known that he was just the driver's mate when Ghanaians questioned him about the economic crisis in Ghana. Bawumia denied responsibility for contributing to the country's economic hardship since he was just a "mate" on had little or no control over the affairs of the state and took orders from his boss, the president. He had expressed concern for Ghanaians to vote him into power and "full handle the steer," stating that he was just the driver's mate and could not do much to save the country if not given the full mandate as the driver. This allowed Opoku-Agyemang to counter with her confrontation with his statements.

"And, at the time of reckoning, HE John Dramani Mahama, I will not, in the advancement of self-serving ambition, declare to the world that I was only the driver's mate."<sup>294</sup> Her statement challenged assumptions about the ceremonial and often sidelined role of vice presidents. In Ghanaian political culture, where running mates are frequently viewed as appendages to the presidential figure, this metaphor was both a rejection of passivity and a bold declaration of shared leadership and responsibility. It reinforced her political identity as unwilling to abdicate responsibility or retreat from accountability. Rather than portraying herself as a symbolic figure, she asserted her role as a co-governor, fully aware of the ethical implications of power and partnership.

A second opportunity that Opoku-Agyemang took to confront the government's failure was shaped by her frequent satirical framing of the state of the government. For instance, she referenced "excavators and aboboyaa tricycles that can fly swifter than nkconfem,"<sup>295</sup> using humor and irony to ridicule political deceit and the absurdity of corruption. She used personification to characterize the failed National Cathedral (a national place of worship for Ghanaian Christians) that the incumbent government spent millions of dollars to build but

eventually dug holes and abandoned the project as “multi-million-dollar dugout” with “a hole in utter shock,” highlighting the disgrace of misrepresenting poor infrastructure as divine thanksgiving. These words were diagnostic instruments that revealed the decline in popular confidence and distrust brought on by elite dishonesty. In these moments, Opoku-Agyemang spoke directly to the frustrations of ordinary Ghanaians, invoking the kinds of imagery that resonate deeply with local realities.

Opoku-Agyemang also provided a thorough list of governmental failures and corruption, including “Covid money shared for partisan political campaign purposes,” “unemployment that has jumped from 8 to 14%,” and the “cedi [Ghanaian currency] that won’t be tamed.” Her listing of these shortcomings was not arbitrary; it followed a tradition of epideictic rhetoric meant to provoke public opinion by identifying transgressions of typical principles. She talked of the necessity of rescuing “Ghana from the precipice of destruction,” as well as of rescuing the country from “incomprehensible greed” and “normalizing corruption.” These imageries portrayed the current government system as morally blind and institutionally decaying.

Opoku-Agyemang did not hesitate to tackle the institutions head-on. While speaking to the Electoral Commission (EC), she said: “EC, I address you directly: it is in the national interest, and your own, that you make transparent what has been and is going on at your establishment. The truth will not be suppressed. You cannot be so independent as to disregard the people who validate your existence.” She conceptualized accountability not in the context of political partisan convenience, but as a civic “responsibility.” Her speech reached a climax with a redefinition of politics: “Politics is about fighting injustice, hunger, hopelessness, arrogance, selfishness, unbridled greed, corruption, state capture, disrespect of fellow human beings.”<sup>296</sup> This was more than just a slogan; it was a profound moral framework. To Opoku-Agyemang,

politics was not simply the act of securing power. It was reclaiming ethical leadership, institutional integrity, and public trust.

Opoku-Agyemang's speech proved accountability to be more than a campaign promise. It was a defining part of her political identity. She presented leadership as the responsibility of one's history, and acknowledgement, and bravery as a moral duty through the lenses of inverted ethics, metaphors of reckoning, and retelling truths. In doing so, Opoku-Agyemang was able to differentiate herself from the status quo while simultaneously appealing to the Ghanaians' desire for restoration, transparency, and principled leadership.

After discussing the rhetorical situation as it pertained to Opoku-Agyemang's identity as a candidate, I now transition into the media analysis portion of this chapter. In this portion, I will discuss how the media addressed Opoku-Agyemang's political identity and how its coverage supported and challenged Opoku-Agyemang's campaign.

### **Media Framing of Opoku-Agyemang**

The media played a crucial role in framing Opoku-Agyemang's political identity. In this section, I analyze the coverage of Opoku-Agyemang across three Ghanaian media outlets: the *Daily Guide*, the *Ghanaian Times*, and the *Herald*, following her nomination acceptance speech and during her campaign. I argue that these three outlets reinforced and undermined Opoku-Agyemang's three themes in her speech.

#### *The Daily Guide* Analysis

The *Daily Guide*, a privately owned outlet with a well-established pro–New Patriotic Party (NPP) editorial stance, took a strong opposing stance to Opoku-Agyemang's vice-presidential nomination speech. The *Daily Guide's* coverage of Opoku-Agyemang selectively

resonated with her speech and political identity; however, it subverted it by associating her with Mahama, so depicting her as morally compromised.

### *Steward and National Healer*

The *Daily Guide* rejected Opoku-Agyemang's healing and stewardship framing in its coverage. In the article headlined "A Failed Rebranding Project (1)," <sup>297</sup> her nomination was not treated as a moment of collective healing but as part of a desperate "rescue mission agenda" backed by "academia, media, and civil society" acting as partisan cheerleaders.<sup>298</sup> The article questioned the authenticity of her appeal, describing her speech as rhetoric but empty on policy direction. Such language reframes Opoku-Agyemang's call for moral renewal as political camouflage.

The *Daily Guide*'s removal of the healing metaphor's symbolic complexity and urgency is what truly distinguishes it. The "A Failed Rebranding Project (1)" article interprets the speech as a cynical response to public disappointment, rather than as a moment of stewardship. It frames the demand for "resetting Ghana" as an ironic betrayal, given Mahama's history. This mischaracterization is in stark opposition to the "stewardship and national healer" theme that is the foundation of her speech. Her nomination just functioned to rebrand a discredited administration and meant to repaint a scandal-stained campaign in softer, more tones. The article reported that Opoku-Agyemang's "rebranding was the purpose of the Wednesday's event."<sup>299</sup> The phrase "a failed rebranding project" diminishes the rhetorical value of the "driver's mate" metaphor. The article concentrated on Mahama. For instance, the same article stated:

Hello John Mahama, please are you the same person who ruled Ghana from 2012 to 2016, during which Naana Jane was your Minister of Education? Under your watch, former President Mahama, Ghanaians endured about five years of dumsor<sup>300</sup> leading to loss of livelihoods in every home.<sup>301</sup>

Entman's framing theory is key in this context; by highlighting Mahama's illicit conduct and neglecting Opoku-Agyemang's rhetorical agency, the article creates a terministic screen that diminishes her leadership to mere symbolic decorum. Additionally, the metaphorical vision of "healing Ghana" was eclipsed by a motif of "recycling failure," rhetorically demonstrating how media framing can undermine even the most emotive appeals.

All three articles omitted references to her achievements, political vision, or policy agenda. She was depicted solely in connection with Mahama and the NDC—never as an independent entity. This discursive collapse reflects what Kimberlé Crenshaw characterized in intersectional feminist analysis, which underscores how women leaders of color are doubly burdened:<sup>302</sup> their identities are constantly mediated by dominant political or institutional connections. In this instance, Opoku-Agyemang's servant leadership paradigm—rooted in collective responsibility, ethical guidance, and compassion—was completely overshadowed by narratives of male dominance and political permanence. This framing highlights prevailing trends in Ghanaian political journalism, wherein women's representation in leadership is often regarded as derivative, contingent, or merely symbolic. Her metaphor of co-leadership is thereby not only overlooked but systematically rendered worthless in significance.

The *Daily Guide's* coverage highlights a conflict between portraying Opoku-Agyemang's demand for ethical, servant-oriented leadership and perpetuating gendered, political restrictions. While her rhetorical appeals attempted to portray her as a moral and capable co-leader, the media's framing tactic re-inscribed her within the confines of a tainted political past, thus undermining the rhetorical force of her steward frame.

*Feminine power*

The *Daily Guide* coverage of Opoku-Agyemang after her nomination speech did not overtly emphasize her feminine power. Opoku-Agyemang's speech deliberately positioned women as builders, stabilizers, and economic actors, referencing Esther Ocloo as a symbolic cornerstone of feminist, indigenous leadership. The media outlet did not entirely cover her gendered framing or ideas for women, like the flexible 24-hour economy, Women's Development Bank, or a maternal leave form that would benefit women.<sup>303</sup> However, the article "Election 2024 Presents An opportunity To Rescue Ghana- Prof Opoku-Agyemang" indirectly transmitted the larger ethos of caring, dignity, and moral healing that supports her feminist ethic. The article repeated her pledge to "invite everyone to the 'onerous task of rebuilding a broken Ghana, of restoring hope, in a manner that the NDC is capable of doing by their history and achievements.'"<sup>304</sup>

The metaphors used by Opoku-Agyemang were also taken from the history of Ghanaian women's rights. In alluding to Esther Ocloo, she put herself in the sight line of indigenous women entrepreneurs and women who have led innovations. The reference was not just a metaphorical device; it was an attempt to ground economic justice in local, decolonial memory. As one of Ghana's most recognized women entrepreneurs, Ocloo embodied the kind of transformative leadership Opoku-Agyemang wished to reclaim. But the *Daily Guide* omitted this summons. The outlet missed the history she used in building her presence as she sought to reinterpret her as Mahama's proxy. This lack of rhetorical accuracy flattened her postcolonial feminist argument and made her sound like a synonym for symbol only. Postcolonial feminists like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak<sup>305</sup> have long demonstrated how elite nationalist discourse uses women quite frequently as symbols of continuity without historically attributing agency to them

as often as they should. In this case, the *Daily Guide*'s silence made it even worse that women's history is often left out of political conversations.

While Opoku-Agyemang had articulated a feminist ethic of care and justice, the *Daily Guide* media framing did not allow for any narrative space for that identity. She was never described in terms of any of the gendered metaphors that she invoked—no stabilizing homes, no enabling market women, no empowering businesswomen. Instead, she was framed repeatedly as a strategic player—brought on to soften the image of the NDC and negate Mahama's baggage. Opoku-Agyemang's emphasis on female power, responsibility, and caring was overshadowed by traditional attack journalism targeting Mahama's history. This type of minimization is representative of patriarchal framing, wherein women politicians are only accepted if they are used for male-dominated campaign agendas. The article, "A Failed Rebranding Project,"<sup>306</sup> accused the NDC of using her to sanitize "a failed political project,"<sup>307</sup> treating her leadership not as substance but decoration. The dissonance between her self-presentation and her presentation in the media reveals a discursive violence: her feminist imaginary was not debated—it was deleted. This was not only an issue of oversight. As previously stated, the Ghanaian media environment disregards gendered contributions, particularly those expressed by women in politics. This is a prevalent strategy to diminish feminist engagement. The *Daily Guide* perpetuated a masculinist political framework by neglecting to recognize the gender-specific policies expressed by Opoku-Agyemang.

#### *Accountability as Political Integrity*

The *Daily Guide* echoed Opoku-Agyemang's accountability as a metaphor of political integrity through the prominent quoting of her rejection of being merely a "driver's mate." In the article titled "NDC Jane Naana Hits Bawumia Over Driver's Mate Comment,"<sup>308</sup> the *Daily*

*Guide* quoted Opoku-Agyemang’s phrase verbatim without derision: “I will not... declare to the world that I was only the driver’s mate.”<sup>309</sup> This metaphor strategically redefined the vice presidency as a point of shared accountability instead of just passive support. The article neither framed the phrase negatively nor questioned her right to make such a statement, so allowing the metaphor to permeate public discourse. As Lakoff and Johnson posited that metaphors are not only ornamental but also cognitive;<sup>310</sup> they shape public understanding. The metaphor enabled her to define herself not as a political adjunct, but as a responsible co-pilot—one who accepts public accountability. Additionally, by using the culturally significant metaphor, Opoku-Agyemang challenged Ghana’s male-dominated political structure. In a political space where running mates or vice presidents are often seen as ceremonial placeholders, her statement offered a feminist reclamation of political voice.

#### *Additional Media Framing*

Even within the overall tone of the coverage, Opoku-Agyemang’s actions for accountability were rendered by guilt-by-association. Her speech emphasized collective responsibility, moral accounting, and institutional change. But no attempt was made by the *Daily Guide* editorial to disengage her from the history of the NDC; rather, it highlighted that her nomination was a component of an insincere effort to regain good name. From a postcolonial feminist standpoint, this move was particularly damaging. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty<sup>311</sup> and Crenshaw<sup>312</sup> have argued, women of color politicians are excluded from political subjectivity and instead subsumed into men-influenced institutional histories. In essence, Opoku-Agyemang’s rhetorical labor—to position herself as a moral subject capable of contesting Ghana’s governance crisis—is erased. Rather, she is discursively subsumed into the history of the NDC, rendering her speech performative at best, complicit at worst.

The article, “NDC Jane Naana Hits Bawumia Over Driver’s Mate Comment,” also reflected this gendered minimization. Although the piece quoted her response to Bawumia’s “driver’s mate” metaphor, it reframed her rebuttal not as a claim to shared leadership or feminine accountability but as political sparring.<sup>313</sup> Since the article echoed her accountability theme by failing to contextualize the “driver’s mate” comment within her broader appeal to co-leadership and women’s competence, the article divested the metaphor of its transformative potential. What was meant to challenge symbolic subordination is rendered flat, robbed of its gendered critique.

The *Daily Guide*’s coverage of Opoku-Agyemang’s speech revealed a partisan-opposition rhetoric climate in which her metaphorical calls to action were either stripped of critical force or reconstructed as political shortcomings. In contrast, the *Ghanaian Times* offers a quite different framing posture. As a state-owned media organization with past affiliations with the NDC, its coverage establishes a more liberal discursive space—one in which Opoku-Agyemang’s leadership, feminine agency, and accountability themes would resonate more than dissent. This next section analyzes how the *Ghanaian Times* reacted to the three metaphorical themes of her speech, whether its coverage reinforced, recontextualized, or nuanced the political identity she sought to build. The shift from oppositional reframing to rhetorical amplification illuminates how partisan media spaces enable feminist leadership and postcolonial political discourse.

#### The *Ghanaian Times* Analysis

The *Ghanaian Times* painted a more positive and encouraging picture of Opoku-Agyemang. There are still subtle silences, even in the sympathetic framing, especially when it comes to her feminist economic metaphors and her discourse about direct institutional accountability. This analysis examines how her three dominant themes were reinforced or muted across the three articles.

### *Steward and National Healer*

Because the *Ghanaian Times* was a state-owned media outlet with a history of the NDC, its coverage established a more liberal discursive space. The *Ghanaian Times* needed to bolster Opoku-Agyemang's identity and image. The *Ghanaian Times* channeled its energy to bolster Opoku-Agyemang's leadership. Using Opoku-Agyemang's nominee acceptance speech, the *Ghanaian Times* echoed Opoku-Agyemang's theme of steward and national healer. The article "Mahama touts credentials of Prof. Opoku-Agyemang,"<sup>314</sup> acknowledged and praised Opoku-Agyemang's "unparalleled integrity" and framed her as one whose "credentials were unmatched and her passion for Ghana's development was unwavering,"<sup>315</sup> while Mahama asserted that she will help "reset" the country.<sup>316</sup> The *Ghanaian Times* cited these as examples of Opoku-Agyemang as "a dedicated public servant" ever willing to help Mahama "deliver his campaign promises."<sup>317</sup> While reporting the comments made by Aseidu Nketsiah (NDC party chairman) and Fiifi Kwetey (NDC party secretary), the *Ghanaian Times* described Opoku-Agyemang as someone who would "bring relief to the country."<sup>318</sup>

The *Ghanaian Times* continued with its positive coverage of Opoku-Agyemang. In an attempt to restore Ghana and make the country better as a steward and moral healer, Opoku-Agyemang "made the call when she visited the Madina District Office of the EC, to have first-hand information on the limited voters registration,"<sup>319</sup> and encouraged party fellows and participants in the Central Region, "to remain committed to the cause of the party, . . . for winning power in the December elections."<sup>320</sup> Opoku-Agyemang continued to encourage and advise "the EC to listen to discerning voices offering advice."<sup>321</sup> The article stated that, according to her, this would lead to "creating a positive and genuine atmosphere for credible and

acceptable voter register.”<sup>322</sup> These examples aligned with her self-presentation as a moral steward.

Next, I will provide examples of when the *Ghanaian Times* tackled the feminine power theme of Opoku-Agyemang in its coverage.

### *Feminine power*

Fitting with the rhetorical role that the *Ghanaian Times* sought to fill for Opoku-Agyemang, it focused significant attention on statements by Mahama and some officials in the NDC, such as Aseidu Nketia, in affirming inclusiveness and showcasing the potential of Opoku-Agyemang as the preferred running mate. The article, “Mahama Touts Credentials of Prof. Opoku-Agyemang,”<sup>323</sup> reported Mahama’s statement of “Prof. Opoku-Agyemang’s passion for empowering women and young people,” stating that “she understood the importance of creating an economy that worked well for all.”<sup>324</sup> Mahama expressed his “confidence that Prof. Opoku-Agyemang was embodying the dreams and aspirations of every Ghanaian, particularly women.”<sup>325</sup> This is where Opoku-Agyemang’s feminine power to ensure the narrative of inclusivity could be evident and relate to. Additionally, the *Ghanaian Times* then reported Aseidu Nketia’s narrative that Opoku-Agyemang is “a seasoned academia and politician, who brings a wealth of experience to the party’s ticket.”<sup>326</sup> Aseidu Nketia’s remark was in connection with Opoku-Agyemang’s statement that “women are also capable of high achievements.” In this context, Opoku-Agyemang defied all odds to become an innovator and a moral guide to Ghanaians.

Building on the *Ghanaian Times*’ service to further emphasize and celebrate Opoku-Agyemang’s feminine power, the *Ghanaian Times* provided coverage of Opoku-Agyemang during her speech delivery. Invoking the feminine power metaphoric theme, the *Ghanaian Times*

reported Opoku-Agyemang saying, “women were capable of high achievement, adding that she was ready to support the NDC flagbearer’s vision of ensuring prosperity for all Ghanaians.” To this, Opoku-Agyemang concluded that, “by re-nominating her, Mr Mahama had shown his commitment to promoting inclusivity.”

While ensuring to prolong the current nationwide limited voter registration to compensate for the time wasted at the start of the exercise, Opoku-Agyemang “gave the assurance that the NDC would assist prospective first-time voters to exercise their civic responsibility.”<sup>327</sup> Here, the *Ghanaian Times* echoed Opoku-Agyemang’s feminine power by framing her gender as a relational wisdom and also established a link where she acted more like a concerned citizen aiming to make the government of Ghana a proper servant of the people (Ghanaians).

#### *Accountability as Political Integrity*

Opoku-Agyemang’s most dominant metaphoric theme—her framing of accountability as political integrity—is selectively reinforced. One article stated, “As a loyal native of the region, Professor Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang resolved to make sure the region turns green by winning convincingly in both the presidential and parliamentary elections.”<sup>328</sup> Here, Opoku-Agyemang took full responsibility as a native of the Central Region to bring glory to the region when voted into power. In addition, her efforts to win the hearts of the electorate and help her party attain the ultimate seats in the general elections showed dedication as a faithful servant of the party. This was also in line with her framing of the vice presidency as a space of shared leadership, where she was willing to sacrifice and work hand in hand with the flagbearer (Mahama). In other words, she was aware of the ethical implications of power and partnership.

In addition to the task of reinforcing Opoku-Agyemang's theme of accountability as political integrity, the *Ghanaian Times* reported that Opoku-Agyemang suggested that the Electoral Commission as a public entity, "must have the time for people's concerns as well as raise the leverage on public education as to why certain things should not be encouraged such as the act of bussing people to other communities to register to vote."<sup>329</sup> According to her "this would be the surest way to ensure that the EC captures the names of qualified citizens on the register, to fairly participate in the election of their political leaders."<sup>330</sup> With these examples highlighted by the *Ghanaian Times*, it reflected how Opoku-Agyemang used experiential knowledge as a selling point for voters to find her as a trustworthy leader willing to ensure smooth and fair elections.

By referencing Mahama's statement in one of its articles, the *Ghanaian Times* developed a portrayal of Opoku-Agyemang's theme of political integrity. In the article, Mahama "extolled Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's virtues, saying her integrity was beyond question," and added that "she would bring a much needed sense of accountability and transparency to government."<sup>331</sup>

Sharing honorable and intimate stories and using experiential knowledge of Opoku-Agyemang are all examples of how the *Ghanaian Times* reinforced Opoku-Agyemang's political identity in its coverage of her during her campaign. I do criticize that the *Ghanaian Times* spent significant time challenging Opoku-Agyemang's political identity.

#### *Additional Media Framing*

Aside from strengthening Opoku-Agyemang's themes of steward and national healer, feminine power, and accountability, the *Ghanaian Times* also challenged Opoku-Agyemang's political identity in its coverage. For instance, her framing of democracy as a moral right and electoral systems as moral instruments was undermined. Her claims in the speech—such as "the

truth will not be suppressed”—were softened in the article “Extend Limited Voters Registration – Prof. Opoku-Agyemang,”<sup>332</sup> where her assertive rhetoric was reframed as a diplomatic appeal. The media thus resonated with her presence as a moral figure, but dulled the edge of her healing metaphors, presenting her as dutiful rather than transformative.

If there is a metaphorical theme systematically suppressed in the media coverage, it is Opoku-Agyemang’s feminine power. Her speech unapologetically reinscribed femininity as political power. She proposed a “Women’s Development Bank,” invoked the memory of Esther Ocloo, and promoted economic empowerment with metaphors like “women do not need handouts; we need a hand up.” These metaphors were not ornamental; they remade what leadership, economics, and power meant through a postcolonial feminist politics.

But none of the three articles comes close to these metaphorical claims. The assertion in the article “Mahama touts credentials of Prof. Opoku-Agyemang”<sup>333</sup> that “women are capable of high achievement” was presented as a one-line affirmation, devoid of policy content. There was no call to the 24-hour economy, the ethics of maternal care, or her criticism of patriarchal economics. The article “Professor Opoku-Agyemang commits to turn C/R green”<sup>334</sup> cited her commitment to her birthplace, but without connecting this caretaking of the region to her feminist praxis of care and relational leadership. That the exclusion is not by chance—a systemic discomfort with women’s economic metaphors infusing classic notions of value, capital, and meritocracy.

This type of media coverage—termed mild containment—is not resentful yet still unfavorable. It validates her value but not her voice. It acknowledges her existence but not her ideology. Thus, although the *Ghanaian Times* does not overtly criticize her metaphors as certain

partisan media, especially the *Daily Guide*, may, it still engages in a wider rhetorical practice that undermines the radical and feminist potential of Black African women in politics.

Continuing with Opoku-Agyemang's media analysis, I turn to the discussion of the *Herald* outlet, whose coverage encouraged Opoku-Agyemang as a political candidate. The *Herald's* editorial stance was in favor of the NDC hence, it had a positive coverage of Opoku-Agyemang.

#### The *Herald* Analysis

The *Herald's* coverage of Opoku-Agyemang's vice-presidential nomination acceptance speech echoed the steward and national healer, feminine power, and accountability as political integrity themes Opoku-Agyemang highlighted in her address.

#### *Steward and National Healer*

Articles from the *Herald* paralleled the theme of steward and national healer in Opoku-Agyemang's speech. The *Herald* endorsed this metaphor by portraying her as dedicated to "a progressive and inclusive Ghana," and as an individual who would tour the country, "witnessing the suffering and listening to the cries and lamentations of Ghanaian electorates."<sup>335</sup>

The *Herald*, in its article "Limited voter registration: EC must consider extending deadline – Naana Opoku-Agyemang," gestured toward Opoku-Agyemang's dedication to the well-being of citizens by pushing for longer registration periods because of technological problems. She expressed concern that "everybody registers," and that the Electoral Commission "must make up for that time."<sup>336</sup> Opoku-Agyemang continued, "If it is an extra day, it should be restored. Whatever it is, if it is a couple of hours . . . to ensure that we facilitate the process so as not to frustrate people."<sup>337</sup> These examples affirmed the civic acts of stewardship that Opoku-Agyemang exhibited.

By addressing her campaign, the *Herald* was further emphasizing Opoku-Agyemang's feminine power through its coverage.

### *Feminine Power*

Opoku-Agyemang's feminine power was a persistent topic in the article "Professor Naana Opoku-Agyemang pledges inclusive growth and economic empowerment of women,"<sup>338</sup> which quoted her at length. The *Herald* dedicated an entire article to addressing the feminine power of Opoku-Agyemang. When reporting on Opoku-Agyemang's speech, the *Herald* used the words in her nomination acceptance speech that indicated her commitment "to empowering women in the country, particularly in the business sector."<sup>339</sup> For instance, this was highlighted in the article, "Professor Naana Opoku-Agyemang pledges inclusive growth and economic empowerment of women,"<sup>340</sup> which stated "She stressed the crucial role "women play in driving economic growth and development of the country."<sup>341</sup> According to the article, Opoku-Agyemang "pledged to champion initiatives that would provide greater opportunities for Ghanaian women entrepreneurs."<sup>342</sup>

The *Herald* quoted her: "Women must become millionaires too, through hard work, as the men do . . . Women do not need handouts. We need a hand up."<sup>343</sup> This attested to her metaphor of women's empowerment as structural, merit-based, and respectful. It underscored her appeal for a genuine Women's Development Bank, which she beautifully linked with Ocloo's legacy. According to the article, "Referencing the achievements of entrepreneur Esther Ocloo, Professor Opoku-Agyemang encouraged the revival of the dreams and actions of successful entrepreneurs as models for aspiring business owners."<sup>344</sup> The article quoted Ocloo by name, preserving the cultural importance and feminist tone of Opoku-Agyemang's oration. In addition, her claim that "Women are the backbone of our society"<sup>345</sup> underscored her metaphor of women

as builders and not beneficiaries—fundamental to her political identity. Unlike the *Daily Guide* and the *Ghanaian Times*, which did not properly echo the feminine power theme in their coverage, the Herald chose to amplify a message that was both unified and acceptable to the public. This decision likely served two goals: it strengthened the party's progressive image while avoiding more profound transformative critiques she made in her speech, like her calls for institutional and economic reform and her challenges to patriarchal systems. By doing this, the article avoided her ideological claims while showcasing her symbolic power as a woman leader. This reveals a type of rhetorical containment, highlighting gender in ways that are both inspirational and ideologically restrained. It also serves as an example of how partisan media may control public opinion by promoting gender as an identity while downplaying its political implications.

The *Herald*, in its article, “NDC officially outdoors Opoku-Agyemang today,”<sup>346</sup> described her as “the first woman on a major party’s ticket,” and stated that “her gender puts her in the limelight.” The article claimed that “many believe her selection... will bring a lot to the recognition of women in all aspects of leadership,” and quoted her saying, “you have respected women; the women of Ghana will not forget.” The article linked her experience and education to her credibility, which reinforced the idea of merit-based feminine leadership. The article allowed Opoku-Agyemang’s ethos to be expressed through quoting her self-identification as a woman who “understands the challenges” and the discussion of the symbolic and historic characteristics of her candidacy.

The following media analysis demonstrates how Opoku-Agyemang’s theme of accountability and political integrity, as echoed by the media, impacted her political identity.

#### *Accountability as Political Integrity*

As previously discussed, Opoku-Agyemang’s speech ardently highlighted political accountability, accusing Vice President Bawumia of using a metaphor of a “driver's mate” and revealing governmental corruption with terms such as “multi-million-dollar dugout” and “armor of truth.” Her metaphors portrayed responsibility not only as bureaucratic efficiency but as ethical integrity. The article titled “Limited voter registration: EC must consider extending deadline – Naana Opoku-Agyemang”<sup>347</sup> reflected this subject by discussing her direct appeal to the Electoral Commission. She contended that the EC ought not to “frustrate individuals,” and should contemplate “extending the timeline.”

The *Herald* reframed Opoku-Agyemang’s accountability theme through a technocratic lens. In the article, “NDC officially outdoors Opoku-Agyemang today,”<sup>348</sup> the article cited her promises of “youth empowerment,” “quality education,” “reform of institutions,” and “equal opportunities based on meritocracy.” It also included her plea for civic responsibility and peaceful participation in the electoral process. These distinctly reflected her metaphoric theme of political integrity, which she defined as truth-telling and ethical leadership.

While metaphors showed how her political identity was rhetorically constructed, the extended framing devices, through linguistic tone and representational emphasis, play an equally fundamental role in defining her visibility and agency. It became necessary to go beyond the metaphorical framings and examine how the *Herald* positioned Opoku-Agyemang within dominant political discourse: as a symbolic icon or a supportive extension of her presidential running mate. This additional layer of framing revealed how the outlet undermined the rhetorical agency she worked so hard to establish for herself in her speech.

#### *Additional Media Framing*

The article, “Limited voter registration: EC must consider extending deadline – Naana Opoku-Agyemang”<sup>349</sup> echoed her steward and national healer theme in its reporting of her direct appeal to the Electoral Commission. As previously stated, Opoku-Agyemang argued that the EC should not “frustrate people” and should think about “extending the timeline.” Yet her metaphorical indictment— “the truth will not be suppressed”—was lost. Her statement was in neutral language, losing the moral force of her challenge to institutional cover-up.

The *Herald* was similarly cautious and very selective in its coverage of Opoku-Agyemang. Due to its editorial stance, as one in favor of the NDC (Opoku-Agyemang’s political party), it was overly protective of Opoku-Agyemang’s coverage. The *Herald* used a soft tone to address her speech and reported stories that would sell Opoku-Agyemang to the Ghanaian population. For example, in the article “NDC officially outdoors Opoku-Agyemang today,” it reported that Opoku-Agyemang aimed to “witnessing the suffering” of Ghanaians; however, it did not include any metaphors from her speech, such as “Ghana Without Compass” or “armor of truth.” Opoku-Agyemang’s critique of the regime’s corruption and leadership failure was muted. In addition, the article “Professor Naana Opoku-Agyemang pledges inclusive growth and economic empowerment of women”<sup>350</sup> was solely centered on Opoku-Agyemang’s theme on feminine power. The article spoke positively about her feminine empowerment but failed to highlight the other two themes she addressed in her speech. This resulted in not having a full representation of Opoku-Agyemang’s political identity.

Opoku-Agyemang’s rhetorical power of accountability as political integrity was watered down or cleansed in the *Herald*. While her public role was reported, her rhetorical force, most importantly, her challenge to political complacency and elite corruption, was contained. The media reinforced the theme in tone but challenged its power by removing its critical metaphors.

## Conclusion

By employing strong narratives to frame her background and articulate shared experiences, Opoku-Agyemang adopted compelling metaphorical *themes* throughout her speech. By the end of her address, she had forged connections with Ghanaians through her identity work, challenged and confronted attacks against Bawumia, strengthened Mahama's candidacy, and reinforced her belief in Mahama as a candidate for his contributions to making Ghana a better place, providing justification for why she views him as the capable leader to heal and restore Ghana. However, the media's selective engagement with these themes, particularly minimizing her feminist power metaphors and diluting her accountability discourse, reveals a discursive discomfort with transformative women's leadership in Ghanaian politics. For instance, the analysis of the *Herald's* coverage showed that even outlets supportive of her political agenda reflected these metaphors selectively, opting for symbolic affirmations over more profound ideological engagement. Although the *Herald* stressed her depiction as a woman leader, it often undermined her critiques of institutional failure and structural inequality. This editorial pattern highlighted the limitations of party support for revolutionary political discourse. Ultimately, Opoku-Agyemang's rhetorical performance serves as a case study on how African women leaders navigate visibility, credibility, and ideological depth in electoral politics.

## CHAPTER FOUR- CONCLUSION: VICE-PRESIDENCY AS GENRE: BLACK WOMEN'S RHETORICAL LEADERSHIP ACROSS BORDERS

There are slightly more women than men in the world – 52 per cent of the world's population is female but most of the positions of power and prestige are occupied by men . . . We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls, 'You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful but not too successful, otherwise you will threaten the man.'<sup>351</sup>

Kamala Harris and Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang sought the success that Chimamanda N'gozi Adichi talked about. They cracked and broke a glass ceiling that had historically hindered women's access to the vice presidential position in both the United States and Ghana. This thesis has examined how they used their rhetorical skills to seek the second-highest position in both the United States and Ghana.

At the time of writing this thesis, no woman has been elected President of Ghana or the United States. Harris and Opoku-Agyemang have been nominated for vice president by major political parties in the United States and Ghana, respectively. These two women came from clearly different cultural and historical backgrounds and served in government at distinct moments in history. Each accepted their party's nomination and embarked on a groundbreaking campaign for the vice president. Harris and Opoku-Agyemang changed the world of politics in the United States and Ghana. This was established on the foundation of the growing feminist movements that were occurring around them, as well as on their constant desire to advance themselves further in public service in both Ghana and the United States.

In this thesis, I argue that Harris and Opoku-Agyemang enacted their gendered political identities in their speeches using metaphors grounded in national restoration, collective responsibility, and ethical leadership. Harris used themes of pioneer, resilience, and community within a racially charged US American context. In a postcolonial Ghanaian context, Opoku-

Agyemang defined her campaign using moral stewardship, feminine power, and accountability. My analysis assessed the degree to which each woman's message was reflected in media coverage of their speech. I concluded that cultural and partisan filters mediated each woman's rhetorical agency, either amplifying or distorting their voice.

Harris used her identity as the daughter of immigrants, sister, black woman, and mother, emphasizing narratives from her childhood and personal experiences. Harris criticized the Trump administration, encouraged a collective bond among US Americans, and worked to build a level of rapport to encourage voting for Biden.

Harris employed pioneer, resilience, and community metaphors in her vice presidential nomination acceptance speech to establish her political identity, moving from "firstness" to continuity and collective advancement. By recalling her path to the vice-presidential nomination, she reframed the pioneer metaphor using metaphors of continuity, such as "passing the torch" to future generations and "standing on the shoulders" of predecessors. Harris rooted her identity in collective historical struggle rather than separating herself as a unique individual — referring to Mary Church Terrell, Fannie Lou Hamer, Shirley Chisholm to place her candidacy in a line of historical precedents rather than characterizing it as an isolated breakthrough.

Harris built the theme of resilience by casting herself as a symbol of change rather than as just a politician. Her use of metaphors deflected criticism and focused instead on the bigger narrative of progress that the Biden campaign sought to project. Harris's resilience was based on her mother's sacrifices and the broader struggle for racial justice in the United States, which focused on her family story. The road metaphor, "we will stumble... but act boldly," provided a shared vision of perseverance.

Finally, by evoking the “Beloved Community,” the community metaphor emerged, connecting her to the ethical heritage of the Civil Rights Movement. She framed politics as relational and inclusive by extending the concept of family to encompass communities of support and chosen kin. This rhetorical strategy underscored a political agenda rooted in care, collective intent, and multiracial unity. It also enabled Harris to establish social connections, rather than personal goals, as the ethical basis of her leadership.

Harris’s metaphors were mostly reflected in her media coverage, especially in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. She was presented as a trailblazer, a leader with dignity, and a unifier. Yet the media’s response did not always preserve her political identity. While the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* often used her framing, they also made her message less clear by focusing too much on her identity or questioning her authenticity. The *Wall Street Journal* neglected her vision for her community, favoring a more individualistic portrayal.

Opoku Agyemang used her identity as a woman, mother, and an educationist to challenge the incumbent party (The NPP-New Patriotic Party) and the electoral commission of Ghana, highlighting the idea that she would restore Ghana from the broken pieces, take full accountability for her actions, and work hand in hand with John Dramani Mahama to make Ghana a better place to live when voted into power.

Opoku-Agyemang’s vice presidential nomination acceptance speech used metaphors of moral stewardship to establish her identity. Opoku-Agyemang framed herself as a national healer rather than a symbolic first, avoiding celebratory rhetoric in favor of moral seriousness. To her, Ghana was a wounded country in need of moral healing. Her leadership is shown as stewardship—steady, modest, and responsible—rather than as a spectacle.

Opoku-Agyemang stretched the metaphor of women's power from home to politics and the economy. To her, women were not caregivers and mothers, but innovators, economic drivers, and moral guides. Drawing from Ghanaian feminist traditions and the legacy of Esther Ocloo, her celebration of feminine power repositioned women as change agents rather than passive beneficiaries of progress. She centered on relational power, economic inclusion, and maternal logic to question patriarchal norms and confirmed women's importance to national progress.

Regarding accountability, she used metaphors of blindness, deception, and moral decay to directly criticize the government's shortcomings. To Opoku-Agyemang, leadership was the responsibility of one's history, acknowledgement, and bravery as a moral duty through the lenses of inverted ethics, metaphors of reckoning, and retelling truths. In doing so, Opoku-Agyemang was able to differentiate herself from the status quo while simultaneously appealing to the Ghanaians' desire for restoration, transparency, and principled leadership. She rejected the idea of symbolic passivity when she challenged the "driver's mate" metaphor her opponent (Mahamudu Bawumia) used, asserting her equal capacity to lead.

There was conflicting media coverage in Ghana. Her themes of feminist power and moral stewardship were echoed by the *Herald*, but the *Daily Guide* discredited her rhetorical agency by portraying her as a means of achieving Mahama's comeback. The *Ghanaian Times* took a more moderate stance, sometimes suppressing or flattening her metaphorical interventions while at other times supporting her themes.

Both women shaped their political identities using gendered metaphors that aimed at establishing legitimacy, empathy, and moral authority. They challenged traditional power structures—Harris through historical inclusion and coalition-building; Opoku-Agyemang through care ethics and decolonial responsibility. Both women emphasized continuity and moral

validity by referring to ancestral, cultural, and collective memories. Harris referenced United States civil rights history and symbolic kinship, and Opoku-Agyemang drew upon Ghanaian feminist history and community-oriented ethics. Both candidates used their speeches to address complicated ideas about gender and political power. Harris and Opoku-Agyemang both changed the meaning of “firstness” by linking their campaigns to the work of generations of women who came before them. They raised the value of the work done by Black and African women and based their legitimacy on service, remembrance, and hope. Harris’s use of the “Beloved Community” and Opoku-Agyemang’s talk of national healing both used maternal, restorative, and community metaphors.

Harris and Opoku-Agyemang had different backgrounds. These women had diverse experiences, distinct governmental responsibilities, varied familial structures, different historical periods, and cultural backgrounds. But these women faced the same problems that are specific to their gender: they had to act out a gendered version of their identity, which meant that they had to fit into the roles that society expected them to play. Thus, both women must first fulfill the known responsibilities required of male vice presidential candidates, including endorsing the presidential candidate and addressing criticism directed at them but also contend with the gendered expectations imposed upon them. These overlapping expectations reveal how gender structures political communication, often leading to their speeches being compared to each other, something rarely seen with speeches by male vice-presidential candidates.

The two speeches of Harris and Opoku-Agyemang constitute and establish a unique genre: acceptance speeches delivered by women vice presidential candidates. The speeches by these two women conform to the genre of nomination speeches delivered by vice presidential candidates; however, it can be argued that they possess a distinct genre of their own. Both Harris

and Opoku-Agyemang's speeches, characterized by their similarities in substance and the metaphors used, establish the genre of nomination speeches delivered by women candidates for the vice presidency in the United States and Ghana.

The media framing of these women exposed the enduring biases that often shape political representation for women of color. Both women were featured in partisan-aligned media, which echoed their metaphors and supported their campaigns. On the other hand, oppositional or centrist outlets questioned their legitimacy, watered down their metaphors, or focused on their connections to their running mates. In all circumstances, gendered and racist frames remained—the media occasionally emphasized their identity more than their rhetorical substance.

The media environments they inhabited also differed significantly. The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, two major United States outlets, mostly agreed with Harris's metaphors of pioneering and community. However, they sometimes made her seem more like a symbol of diversity than a policy thinker. Harris faced questions about ideological authenticity. But the overall tone of her media coverage still acknowledged her rhetorical accomplishments and trailblazing status. In Ghana, Opoku-Agyemang's rhetorical power was more openly challenged. The *Herald* praised her as a mother reformer, but the *Daily Guide* undermined her speech by linking her to John Mahama and disregarding her feminist framing.

By examining the metaphors used in the acceptance speeches of both Harris and Opoku-Agyemang to shape their political identities, I enriched our understanding and contributed to existing literature on these women candidates and their speeches. Thus, this thesis enriches the understanding of how metaphors and political identity intersect in both non-Western and Western political contexts, particularly focusing on the leadership performances of women as viewed through the analytical lenses of gender, race, and postcolonial theory

This thesis has demonstrated how women candidates proactively redefine their symbolic positions by situating their candidacies inside culturally rooted metaphors. As previously stated, Harris's metaphors of pioneering and community underscore the positioning of women of color in US politics within the broader narrative of civil rights history. Opoku-Agyemang draws from Ghanaian traditions of women's leadership, economic fairness, and moral responsibility. These two cases show that women's candidacies are not only symbols of progress for women; they are also carefully prepared pieces of writing that are distinctive to their cultures and context.

Additionally, this thesis has demonstrated that rhetorical criticism can be expanded by integrating non-Western political discourse into our scholarly analysis. Most rhetorical studies of women politicians focus on U.S. or European political figures and often do not pay much attention to African women leaders. The thesis examined Opoku-Agyemang's speech and media coverage to demonstrate how Indigenous values like care, responsibility, and community leadership can be used as persuasive tools in political communication. It also brought African feminist thought into rhetorical criticism. This forces Communication Studies to move away from its old ways of thinking and include opinions and ways of speaking from the Global South.

In a country where education about gender issues is not widely available,<sup>352</sup> it is not surprising that the majority of people are less knowledgeable about gender issues. Their understanding of feminine power and gender is likely to have been shaped by their socialization in a patriarchal and postcolonial society. Based on this, I argue that Opoku-Agyemang's nomination acceptance speech provided a chance to educate both insiders and outsiders of the movement about feminism. Yet, instead of using this as a chance to teach about women's political power, mainstream media used Opoku-Agyemang's speech and campaign to forward their political agenda.

This thesis offers Communication Studies new insights into the portrayal of gendered political leadership outside the Euro-American context, emphasizing the significance of contextually embedded rhetorical forms. Opoku-Agyemang's feminist ethos was established from within the sociocultural environment of Ghana, where moral leadership is historically and linguistically gendered in complicated ways. In addition, Opoku-Agyemang's rhetorical approach presents a distinct paradigm of women's leadership founded on moral clarity, Indigenous cultural references, and restorative ethics. Instead of repeating Western feminist ideas about empowerment or visibility, her metaphors are based on Ghanaian histories of women in charge of the government and public moral authority. For instance, the leadership traditions of Queen Mothers (these are matriarchal heads with civic authority within the various Akan tribes in Ghana), the political and economic organizing of market women, and the resistance legacies of people like Yaa Asantewaa. These metaphors are not only symbols; they evoke moral leadership, societal rehabilitation, and a mindfulness of the past.

While existing work has universalized the assumptions about women's candidacies, the instance of Opoku-Agyemang compels scholars to avoid universalizing assumptions about women's candidacies and to acknowledge the local traditions, moral frameworks, and socio-political contexts that influence how women talk, lead, and are represented. It prompts a rethinking of feminist rhetorical criticism as a complex, decolonial, and culturally responsive practice.

It is my goal that this thesis serves as a basis for future research opportunities into the media coverage of speeches and campaigns delivered by these women and future women who are standing for political office. The thesis has also demonstrated that the media do not only serve as translators but also as gatekeepers of metaphorical meaning. Harris's metaphors were

generally echoed by the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, although they were occasionally reduced to tokenistic representation. Opoku-Agyemang's metaphors were echoed by the partisan outlets, specifically the *Herald*, and undermined by the oppositional outlets like the *Daily Guide*. Such trends reveal how metaphors, especially those involving gender or morality, are vulnerable to media distortion. Examining these suggests that metaphor must be regarded not only as a rhetorical performance, but as a mediated action whose reception is necessarily ideological.

While doing this thesis, it reminded me that where we stand shapes what we see. My identity—shaped by my socialization in Ghana, my current academic training in the United States, and my feminist commitments—positioned me uniquely yet not without tension in examining Harris and Opoku-Agyemang. Both women embodied politically racialized yet symbolically powerful subjectivities. In the thesis, my challenge was to analyze them, but to do so with key accountability and critical reflexivity.

When I examined Harris, I saw a version of Black womanhood that I respected and related to; yet, I was keenly aware that I was not an African American. I do not share the historical, affective, and political legacies of slavery, segregation, or civil rights struggles in the United States. My identity as a Black woman comes from my life on the African continent, rooted in the culture, traditions, and social history of Ghana. While I recognized Harris's metaphors of resilience, community, and belonging, I also knew that my context shaped how I understood them. There were times when I questioned whether I had the authority to write and examine her experience. This experience demonstrated the discomfort that often arises when studying a cultural context from the outside, even when some form of connection exists. At the same time, my continental identity allowed me to notice the transitional resonance that may have

been overlooked, such as the collective metaphors of familiarity and caregiving present in Black diasporic feminist traditions.

This reflection highlights a critical limitation of metaphorical analysis: its success is often dependent on the critic's cultural familiarity with the rhetorical context. Because metaphors are culturally grounded, their resonance is not always accessible to an outsider. While my analysis of Harris benefited from research and comparative insight, I found that I was especially advantaged when analyzing Opoku-Agyemang's metaphors because I shared many of the cultural, social, and moral reference points in her speech. On the other hand, interpreting Harris's metaphors required more research and sometimes felt less intuitive, since they were based on histories and traditions outside my experience. What this taught me is that metaphoric analysis requires more than recognizing rhetorical language—also sensitivity to the way that metaphors sound within specific cultural contexts.

Opoku-Agyemang's connection felt more personal. I shared her national identity, some cultural reference points, academic orientation, and commitments to gender equality. Yet, I knew I could not assume full identification. I am an Asante-Akan, specifically from the Ashanti region (known to be one of, if not the most powerful, regions in Ghana)—historically regarded as politically dominant and culturally authoritative in Ghana. Opoku-Agyemang is Fante, from the Central region of Ghana, a group associated with intellectual leadership but not always given political weight. Those regional and ethnic dynamics affect how women are seen in Ghana. I had to reflect: Was I seeing her clearly, or through the lens of my cultural assumptions? I realized that Opoku-Agyemang's metaphors—the ones about stewardship, healing, and moral responsibility—resonated deeply with me. They echoed the kinds of leadership I was raised to admire, but they also reflected a kind of strength that is quiet, steady, and often undervalued. In examining her, I

also found myself writing about my journey—about what it means to be a Ghanaian woman in academic and public spaces, balancing visibility with vulnerability. I saw how both Opoku-Agyemang and Harris face scrutiny—not just because they are women in politics, but because their identities carry expectations and stereotypes that they must navigate and resist. This thesis is very challenging. Being both an insider and an outsider to these two women I studied meant I had to keep asking questions—not just about them, but about myself. What do I bring to the study? What do I overlook? What do I assume? These questions were sometimes uncomfortable, but always necessary. They helped me stay honest. This thesis has taught me that positionality is not a weakness. It is a source of insight—if we approach it with care. Being an insider can help us recognize subtle meanings. Being an outsider can help us ask questions others might miss. Both positions have value, and both require humility.

### **Opportunities For Future Research**

This thesis is my contribution to the ongoing discourse on women’s candidacy for political office in the United States and Ghana, the rhetoric employed by vice presidential candidates, mainstream media coverage, and the gendered expectations imposed on women in our patriarchal society.

Since this is merely my contribution to the scholarship, there are certain limitations to it. Because of my positionality as an Akan/Asante, I write with a shared national identity with Opoku-Agyemang, but complicated by regional, ethnic, and historical differences. As someone outside the African American experience, my analysis of Harris is shaped by admiration, solidarity, and distance. This means that this thesis, just like any other study, has been written with the limitation of my perspective overshadowing it. However, these frames do not discredit the work; rather, they ground it in a specific standpoint. As Chimamanda N’gozi Adichie argued,

women are taught to shrink themselves from a young age in order to be smaller.<sup>353</sup> For instance, when a woman campaigns for a position, her very presence on the ballot is a rejection of the expectation that she shrink herself. In a similar vein, this thesis resists shrinking and insists that scholars, most especially African feminist scholars, deserve to speak, interpret, and contribute to scholarship with confidence and complexity. In addition, by discussing how women might reject societal binds that urge them to shrink, we can advocate a shift in the status quo for women in politics. So, this thesis inspires a call to action to address sexism, particularly in politics, and to construct arguments that push us to adjust conditions to fit women, rather than requiring women to adapt to fit situations.

This thesis makes clear how important work on African women politicians is. More work in this area is crucially needed. Future studies may examine the use of metaphor and story by African women leaders in national and regional political communication. These women—whether they are market leaders, queen mothers, or activists—have a big impact on politics, but people frequently do not pay attention to how they speak. Their voices provide a more valuable insight into African political life.

Since both the United States and Ghana are democratic countries, comparative analyses of African and diaspora women leaders across various nations with different governmental systems would be valuable. Thus, subsequent studies may encompass leaders from South Africa, Kenya, Liberia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Examining these environments may explain the influence of colonial history, religion, race, and gender expectations on political discourse.

Rhetorical scholars must also assess the suitability of methods we employ for African situations. A lot of rhetorical criticism is based on Western ideas, such as linear argument, secular thinking, and the idea of human authority. But African politicians typically use stories,

proverbs, folktales, spiritual values, communal ethics, and symbols. We require more approaches that embody these values—capable of discerning silence, analyzing symbols, understanding proverbs, and interpreting collective identity. Decolonial and African-centered rhetorical frameworks will facilitate scholars' understanding of African women's rhetorical methods on their terms. Scholars, especially those not from Africa, should think about who they work with, who they cite, and who they listen to. African women scholars and intellectuals must not be just footnotes; they should be collaborators in the construction of ideas. Not only is it fair to build more egalitarian and ethical research networks, but it also improves the work.

We also need to do more research on how the media in African nations portray women politicians. Partisan media frequently disregard or misrepresent women's voices, as demonstrated in this thesis. Researchers should examine how these tendencies show up in various elections and on different media platforms. This research would enhance understanding of the interplay between gender, media, and power within African democratic discourse.



## NOTES

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