

**THE WOMEN CONDITION AND THEIR STRUGGLES  
DEPICTED BY CHARACTER NAWI AND NANISCA  
IN *THE WOMAN KING* MOVIE: A HISTORICAL APPROACH**

**A FINAL PROJECT**

**Presented as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
to Obtain the Sarjana Sastra Degree  
in English Literature**



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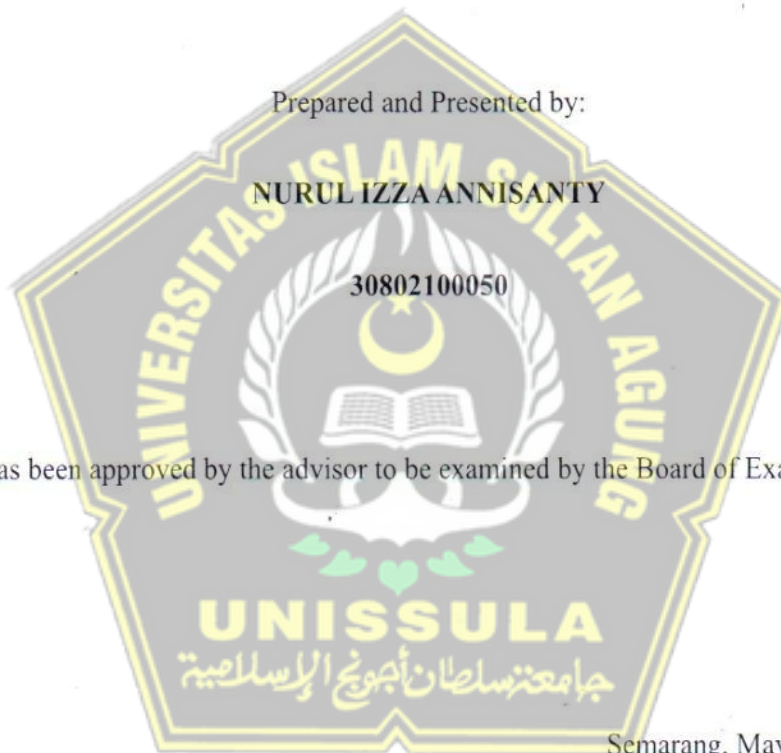
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Semarang, May 20<sup>th</sup> 2024

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Advisor

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On January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2024

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## STATEMENT OF WORK ORIGINALITY

Hereby, I honestly declare that the undergraduate thesis I wrote does not contain the work of other people, except those which were cited in the quotation and the references, as scientific paper should. If my statement is not valid in the future, I absolutely agree to accept an academic sanction in the form of revocation of my paper and my degree obtained from the paper.

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Nurul Izza Annisanty

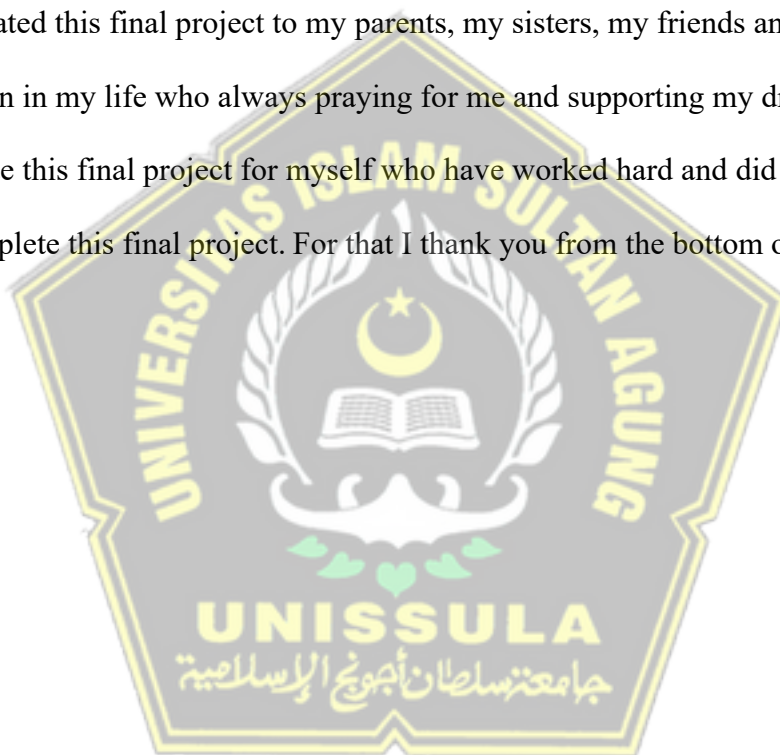
## **MOTO**

“What’s yours will find you.”

-Ali Ibn Abi Thalib-

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicated this final project to my parents, my sisters, my friends and every single person in my life who always praying for me and supporting my dreams. I also dedicate this final project for myself who have worked hard and did not give up to complete this final project. For that I thank you from the bottom of my heart.



## ABSTRACT

**Annisanty, Nurul Izza. 30802100050.** The Women Condition and Their Struggles Depicted by Character Nawi and Nanisca in *The Woman King* Movie: A Historical Approach. Final Project of Language and Communication Science. English Literature Program. Sultan Agung Islamic University Semarang. Advisor : Afina Murtiningrum, S.S.,M.M.,M.A.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the condition of women in the 1800s in the Dahomey Kingdom through a movie directed by Gina Prince Bythewood entitled *The Woman King*. This research explains that there are these strata of the society in the movie, including Slaves, Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), and Kpojito. This research also discusses the women's struggle portrayed by the characters Nawi and Nanisca in fighting for their lives in terms of raising their strata.

This research uses a qualitative method by combining the library research method with a historical approach for data analysis. The data came from the movie *The Woman King* and the movie script as primary data, and references from several journals and books as secondary data. The steps were taken to collect the data, such as watching movies, reading movie scripts, identifying data, classifying data, and reducing data.

This research resulted in two discussions. The first discussion is about the condition of women in West Africa in the 1800s in the movie *The Woman King*, with the background place in the Dahomey Kingdom. The condition of women in the movie *The Woman King* has three strata, they are Slaves, Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), and Kpojito. Their life in the Dahomey Kingdom environment in the 1800s differed according to their strata. The second discussion concerns with Dahomey Kingdom women's struggle to improve their lives by being brave enough to make decisions to determine the direction of their lives and always doing the best in their life. Evidence of women's struggle for their lives is described by the characters Nawi and Nanisca. The character Nawi is described as slaves who struggles to become an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), and the character Nanisca struggles for her living as an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) who is then trusted to be a Kpojito.

**Keywords:** Amazon Dahomey, Slave, Agojie, Kpojito, *The Woman King*



## INTISARI

**Annisanty, Nurul Izza. 30802100050.** The Women Condition and Their Struggles Depicted by Character Nawi and Nanisca in *The Woman King* Movie: A Historical Approach. Skripsi Program Studi Sastra Inggris Fakultas Bahasa Dan Ilmu Komunikasi. Universitas Islam Sultan Agung Semarang. Pembimbing : Afina Murtiningrum, S.S.,M.M.,M.A.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis keadaan perempuan pada tahun 1800an di Kerajaan Dahomey melalui film yang disutradari oleh Gina Prince Bythewood yang berjudul *The Woman King*. Penelitian ini menjelaskan terdapat beberapa strata masyarakat yang terdapat dalam film tersebut, antara lain Slaves, Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) dan Kpojito. Penelitian ini pun membahas tentang perjuangan perempuan yang digambarkan oleh tokoh Nawi dan Nanisca dalam memperjuangkan kehidupannya pada strata mereka.

Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan menerapkan metode penelitian kepustakaan dibantu dengan pendekatan sejarah dalam analisa data. Data berasal dari film *The Woman King* dan naskah film sebagai data primer, dan referensi beberapa jurnal dan buku sebagai data sekunder. Adapun langkah yang dilakukan untuk mengumpulkan data, seperti menonton film, membaca naskah film, mengidentifikasi data, mengelompokan data, dan mereduksi data.

Penelitian ini menghasilkan dua pembahasan. Pembahasan pertama yaitu perihal kondisi wanita di Afrika Barat pada tahun 1800an pada film *The Woman King* yang berlatar belakang Kerajaan Dahomey. Kondisi wanita dalam film *The Woman King* dibedakan menjadi tiga strata, yaitu Slaves, Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) dan Kpojito. Kehidupan yang mereka jalani di lingkungan Kerajaan Dahomey pada tahun 1800an berbeda berdasarkan strata mereka. Kemudian pembahasan kedua yaitu tentang perjuangan wanita Kerajaan Dahomey dalam meningkatkan kehidupan yang mereka jalani dengan berani mengambil keputusan untuk menentukan arah hidup mereka dan selalu melakukan yang terbaik pada kehidupan mereka. Bukti wanita memperjuangkan kehidupan yang mereka jalani dibuktikan pada gambaran tokoh Nawi dan Nanisca. Tokoh Nawi digambarkan sebagai budak yang berjuang untuk menjadi Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), dan tokoh Nanisca berjuang untuk kehidupannya sebagai seorang Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) yang kemudian dipercaya untuk dapat menjadi seorang Kpojito.

**Kata kunci:** Amazon Dahomey, Budak, Agojie, Kpojito, *The Woman King*

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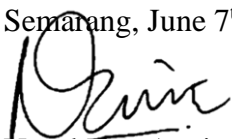


during my studies and were always there in every process that I went through.

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I do realize this final project is far away from perfection. Thus, any suggestions and criticism will be very meaningful for this final project. Lastly, I hope that this final project could benefit to anyone who reads it.

Semarang, June 7<sup>th</sup> 2024

  
Nurul Izza Annisanty

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of The Study

History in literature is often found in works that are considered historical literature. In this case, historical facts are used intentionally or unintentionally by the author as a building block of the work. However, it is important to realize that even though there are historical elements in a literary work, there will always be elements of fiction or imagination. According to Guerin, “sees a literary work chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of author’s life and times or the life and times of the characters in the work” (51). Past events that are described in literary works are often related to the depiction of a society in the past. The state of society that can be described as such is the condition of women around the 1800s.

The position of women has often been debated from ancient times until now. Many people still think that women occupy the second strata in society. This means that there are still many who believe that women are considered unable to be stronger, smarter, and more prosperous than men. This phenomenon is often referred to as gender injustice, which is felt by women who think or are considered not to have equal rights. In society, women and men have their own behavior based on each individual. Several factors influence an individual's behavior toward another individual, such as how men/society behave towards women. According to Azwar, “various factors influence attitude formation, including personal experience, the culture of



others considered important, mass media, educational institutions or institutions, and religious institutions, as well as emotional factors within the individual” (8).

The culture of others is considered essential and is one factor that influences an individual's attitude. This is because culture is rooted in the ancestors who formed society itself. Based on Damen Louise's perspective, “culture is learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day-to-day living patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism” (367). It can be attributed to the fact that culture is a characteristic of a society obtained based on teachings passed down from generation to generation. According to E.B Taylor, “culture is something complex that includes knowledge of beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and others that are acquired by members of society” (19). In this regard, people's behavior can be influenced by society's culture.

For example, around the 1800s in Europe, the Industrial Revolution began. The Industrial Revolution was a period of change in industrial technology, from hand production to machinery. The work done by both men and women included Domestic Service, Cottage Industry, Factories, Agriculture, and Self-Employed. The shift from hand production to machinery impacted women's work, making women's fate better. As quoted by Ivy Pinchbeck, “over the previous centuries, under the handicraft and domestic systems, the greater part of their work was carried on in the home

and there taken for granted. And for much of their work prior to the Industrial Revolution, women themselves received no wages. It was only when new developments brought about the separation of home and workshop that a far greater number of women than ever before were compelled to follow their work and become wage earners in the outside world. By the division of labour which accompanied the reorganisation of industry, wage-earning occupations for women became more numerous, but their total contribution to productive work was not necessarily altered thereby. In the provision of food and clothing for instance, women had always played a great part, and specialisation in these branches merely resulted in new classes of workers performing in separate trades the multifarious tasks which previously had occupied women in their homes” (1). It is assumed that the Industrial Revolution produced women workers.

Another example is in one of the West African kingdoms called the Dahomey Kingdom, now Benin. In the same period, around the 1800s, In the Dahomey Kingdom, there was a culture of belief in the existence of twin gods whom they worshipped called Mawu-Lisa, who were depicted as male and female. With this belief, in the Dahomey Kingdom, there were two king positions: the male king was the heir to the kingdom, and the female king was someone chosen by the king, someone the king could trust to lead. With this, the people of Dahomey Kingdom assume that the position of men and women in Dahomey Kingdom is seen as equal, with a note for those who want to try hard.

Based on the premise, this study examines the movie. The movie *The Woman King* by Gina Prince Bythewood, set in West Africa, precisely the Dahomey kingdom in the 1800s, is based on a true story in which women can occupy a high position in social life based on their hard work. *The Woman King* is a new movie released in 2022 that depicts the condition of women in the Dahomey Kingdom and the struggles of these women. The characters that become the object of discussion are Nawi and Nanisca. The position of women in the movie is that of an enslaved person, as a female elite soldier, a.k.a Agojie, and a female king commonly referred to as Kpojito. They must fight to achieve a respected position in society, namely as an Agojie and Kpojito. Their struggle is based on their personality and attitude in defending the kingdom.

In the movie *The Woman King*, the effort made by women to get the chance to work can be seen clearly in the characters Nawi and Nanisca. Through the characters Nawi and Nanisca in the movie *The Woman King*, it can be depicted that they can get a position with high social status and be respected by the community, even though at first they were slaves, even one of them could get a position equal to the king. This movie depicts that women can be equal to men if they try hard. Although they benefited from the hereditary cultural conditions applied by society, they did pretty extreme training to achieve a high position.

The story in this movie is information that needs to be known to the public. There is a kingdom in Africa that uses and entrusts the position of military soldiers to a group of women who are generally considered weak.

Also, this has motivated women to try hard in any situation. Therefore, *The Women Condition and Their Struggles Depicted by Character Nawi and Nanisca in The Woman King Movie* is chosen as the title of this final project.

## **B. Problem of The Study**

Based on the limitation above, the problems of the study are stated as follows:

1. How are the women condition in West Africa 1800s as reflected in the movie?
2. How do Nawi and Nanisca struggle as the main characters to improve their lives as women

## **C. Limitation of The Study**

This study focuses on the historical exploration the situation of women in the social strata of society in the Dahomey Kingdom and then explaining how Nawi and Nanisca struggle, as the main characters in *The Woman King* movie, to improve their lives as women.

## **D. Objective of The Study**

According to the statement of those problems, the objectives of the study are stated as follows:

1. To analyze the woman condition in West Africa 1800s as reflected in the movie.
2. To explain the struggles of Nawi and Nanisca as the main characters to improve their lives as women

## **E. Significance of The Study**

This study is expected to be a reference for studying and analyzing historical literary works related to movies. It can improve and develop an appreciation of the study of literary works related to women. This research is also expected to benefit students, especially in the English Literature Department of Sultan Agung Islamic University, The Lecturers, and the other types of readers and help provide an overview of the living conditions of women in West Africa in the 1800s and their struggles in living their lives depicted through a movie entitled *The Woman King* directed by Gina Prince Bythewood. Furthermore, readers can understand that the life of a society can be influenced by a culture that is carried down from generation to generation as well as a condition or situation in the society itself.

#### **F. Outline of The Study**

This Final Project is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provides the introduction of an overview in the form and the reason for choosing the topic of this study that presents the background of the study, the problem of the study, the limitation of the study, the objective of the study, the significance of study and outline of the study. Then, Chapter Two includes a discussion related to the literature review that explains the theoretical basis in the form of basic concepts related to the object of research, which is the synopsis of *The Woman King* Movie, an analysis of the women's condition in West Africa 1800s and an explanation of women's struggles in the Dahomey Kingdom. Chapter three contains research methods, which deal with types of data, data organizing and analyzing data. Chapter Four includes a



discussion of the topic, which deals with analyzing the condition of women in Africa in the 1800s based on the movie *The Woman King*. It also explains the main character's struggle at each level of their social status based on the movie *The Woman King*. The last chapter is Chapter Five, which provides a conclusion and suggestions.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW ON RELATED LITERATURE

The second chapter is divided into two sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter focuses on *The Woman King* movie as the subject of this research. The second sub-chapter comprises related literature, including the theories underlying the research analysis of the study.

#### A. Synopsis of *The Woman King* Movie

*The Woman King* is a movie directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood. The movie premiered in September 2022 at the Toronto International Movie Festival. *The Woman King* movie is inspired by the true story of a kingdom in West Africa that employs women as its royal soldiers. The background shown in this movie is the West African region, precisely in the Dahomey Kingdom in the 1800s, which tells about the state of women in the Dahomey Kingdom who are considered equal by the people of the Dahomey Kingdom and the struggle of these women in dealing with things in their position and conditions at that time. The characters of actors and actresses are qualified in the character of a slave, female warrior Agojie, and female king Kpojito, who will be shown gradually in the process of achieving themselves, which will be played by Viola Davis as Nanisca and Thuso Mbedu as Nawi.

The movie *The Woman King* shows the society of Dahomey Kingdom. The Dahomey Kingdom itself is said to be one of the kingdoms in West Africa that conducted the slave trade. The slave trade was one of the main revenues for the Dahomey Kingdom. Besides that, the slaves owned by the Dahomey

Kingdom were used to pay tribute to the Oyo Kingdom as payment for the Oyo Kingdom's victory in defeating the Dahomey Kingdom. Warfare always occurred in the West African region. This is used to expand each kingdom, such as the Dahomey Kingdom. The many wars in the West African region mean that the Dahomey Kingdom suffers from a shortage of soldiers. Then, it recruits prospective soldiers from any circle, both former prisoners of other kingdoms as well as village girls who wanted to become soldiers. Even though they have been recruited as prospective soldiers, they must pass the various tests that have been determined. The movie also shows the influence of the king on society. In the movie, the Dahomey Kingdom is labeled by King Ghezo (John Boyega), who believes in the existence of twin female and male gods named Mawu-Lisa. The belief is that the position of the leader must be equal between men and women. The selection of a female king is determined based on the decision of a male king.

Nawi is assigned as a slave because her family sells her to a wealthy merchant. Nawi refused, which led her father to hand over to the king. With the surrender of young women to the king, they became his women and could not return to their families, and Nawi seized the opportunity to get away from her family. Nawi is directed to become a female soldier of Agojie on the condition that she passes the tests. Nawi prepared herself physically for the tests until she passed and became part of the Agojie soldiers. After becoming an Agojie, she destroyed the Oyo Kingdom, which was allied with Portuguese settlers at the time. Like any young girl, Nawi is attracted to one of the Portuguese boys.

However, being an Agojie with a man other than the king was a disgrace. With that in mind, Nawi tried to leave Malik (Jordan Bolger), instead sticking to her main goal of becoming an Agojie.

Nanisca, on the other hand, is a general of an elite group of female soldiers called Agojie, who work under the Dahomey Kingdom. At first, Nanisca was a young soldier who was captured by the Oyo Kingdom and used as their sex slave. However, she finally managed to escape from the Oyo Kingdom and rise to become an Agojie soldier again until she was appointed general. He always dedicated himself to the Dahomey Kingdom as a soldier and general. He tried hard to protect and prosper the people of the Dahomey Kingdom in attempting to attack and defeat the Oyo Kingdom, which was the kingdom that defeated the Dahomey Kingdom and made the Dahomey Kingdom always send tribute regularly. This made the King of Dahomey Kingdom, King Ghezo, believe in Nanisca. With the same vision and thoughts, King Ghezo appointed Nanisca as a Kpojito. There was opposition within the kingdom by the royal empress Shante (Jayme Lawson) at the time of Nanisca's appointment as Kpojito. However, Kpojito is a female king chosen by the king's decree. The existence of Kpojito is proof that King Ghezo has confidence in the existence of leaders occupied by men and women.

## **B. Review of Related Literature**

### **B.1. The Society in Dahomey Kingdom**

The movie *The Woman King* uses the Dahomey Kingdom as a background story. *The Woman King* was chosen as the object of research

because the story in the movie was inspired by a true story in West Africa, precisely in the Dahomey Kingdom in the 1800s, which made women participants in the kingdom's political, social, and economic life. Dahomey Kingdom is one of the many kingdoms in West Africa. Each kingdom fought wars to expand its territory. In expanding its territory and power, the Dahomey Kingdom waged wars against other kingdoms. In each war, a victorious kingdom would take some of the losers as slaves. These slaves were sold to Europe for weapons. The Dahomey Kingdom aimed to seize power and expand territory; it is written in Britannica that several kingdoms conducted wars, including the Oyo Kingdom, which attacked the Dahomey Kingdom to invade the coast, which was used as a trade route.

The Dahomey Kingdom's conquest of the Oyo Kingdom lasted for two phases (1724-1730 and 1738-1748). This made the Dahomey Kingdom a tributary of the Oyo Kingdom, which required the payment of tribute, as described by Augustus A. Adeyinka that, “after many paralyzing military expeditions by Oyo, Dahomey had no alternative to accepting humiliating terms from the Yorubas of Oyo in southwestern Nigeria. Dahomey was obliged to pay Oyo an annual tribute of 41 men, 41 virgins, 41 guns, 400 bags of cowries, and 400 corals” (541). However, according to Jeff Wallenfeldt, “as the wealth of the Oyo Kingdom increased, so did the political views of its leaders. Some wished to concentrate on amassing wealth, while others advocated the use of wealth for territorial expansion. This difference was not resolved until the Alaafin Abiodun (reigned c. 1770-89) conquered his opponents in a bitter



civil war and pursued a policy of economic development based primarily on the coastal trade with European merchants” (58). At the same time, the Dahomey Kingdom's economy began to improve. Then, according to Robin Law, “Gezo carried Dahomey to the peak of its military success, in particular, defeating her traditional enemy Oyo in 1823 and thereby ending the payment of tribute to that state. He also increased the scale of human sacrifices in Dahomey and greatly expanded the size of the standing army, turning the 'Amazons' into a regular contingent of the Dahomian field army” (252-253).

According to J. Lombard, in the Dahomey Kingdom, “King Ghezo placed himself as the supreme commander of the army. This army, as we shall see, was composed in the nineteenth century of a large contingent of female soldiers, the Amazons. He placed in his army female companies who usually acted as his bodyguards, who were devoted to him, and charged in the event of peace with his protection even within the place” (80). “In the second of the nineteenth century, there were two armies: a standing army of male and female warriors and a reserve army of all adult men and women capable of being arms. The king mobilized them in times of war. They consisted of two officers, ranked councilors, and commanded the army. The Gau, the commander-in-chief, led the right wing. During the campaign, he shared the prerogatives of the king. The Kposu, second-in-com-mand, led the left wing. In peace-time, the Gau came under the Migan, on the king’s right; the Kposu came under the Meu, on the king’s left” (87).

Quoted from Boniface I. Obichere, “the Kingdom of Dahomey was one of the unique kingdoms that allowed women to participate fully in the political, social, and economic life of the kingdom. The highest political offices were opened to females who belonged to the anato (free men or owners of the land). What is important is the fact that the position of importance accorded to women in Dahomean civilization originates directly from the immanent duality of Dahomean cosmology. Inherent in the concept of universal order was the interplay of male and female, which was in keeping with the duality that the Dahomeans attributed to all things” (5). “The duality refers to Mawu-Lisa, the female-male twin god in which the Dahomey people believe. Conceptually, twins treated as coadunate and, in practice, they are regarded as such. It was the belief in the unity of twins that resulted in the first Dahomean woman occupy” (5). According to J. Lombard, “the Society of the Kingdom of Dahomey consisted of four major categories were: royals-descendants of Abomey kings; officials or ‘caboceers’; free commoners or anato; and slaves” (74).

### **B.1.1. Slaves**

In the Dahomey Kingdom, as noted by Boniface I. Obichere, “slaves were at the bottom of the social hierarchy. There were several categories of slavery, and there were several methods by which people were enslaved. Some people were enslaved by kidnapping while others were captured in war. There were those who were born slaves and there were others who sold themselves voluntarily into slavery. Economic hardship compelled certain

persons to become slaves while there were those who were pawned by their families for purely economic reasons” (7). Another explanation, according to J. Lombard, “under the royal rule, is that no free-born Dahomean could be enslaved. There are several categories of slavery, including slaves who were designated for the royal sacrifices at the ‘annual customs’ which the king carried out in honour of his ancestor, another worked the royal plantations, a third the domestic slaves, was in a more favoured position because they usually became accepted as a member of his master’s family. They were presented by the king to notables and successful warriors as rewards for their services” (74).

Many slaves were traded and used as a source of income for the Dahomey Kingdom. The large number of slaves being traded was a factor that caused the population in the Dahomey Kingdom to decline, especially as there were fewer men than women. As explained by Patrick Manning, “enough women were lost that the remaining population was unable to replace them or their children. In addition, the loss of many more men than women left West Africa with a substantial shortage of men. Of the women who remained, many were in slavery. The result was the development of a new social system in which women were held in slavery within families. The system reinforced multiple marriage, concubinage, and sent women to work in areas beyond what had earlier been

their occupations” (109). As the Dahomey Kingdom is obliged to pay tribute, female slaves are used as a means of payment, as explained by Boniface I. Obichere, “several female slaves were sacrificed annually along with male slaves. Before Dahomey stopped the payment of tribute of Oyo in the time of King Ghezo, 44 female slaves were an integral part of the annual tribute package to Oyo” (18).

There is also slavery through marriage, as quoted by Joel Quirk & Benedetta Rossi; “the general custom in this country is that any young man of the age to get married must buy the one whom he wishes to marry. He makes arrangements with the parents of the young woman, and it is with them alone that the price is discussed. The young bride, irrespective of whether she is of free or slave status, is never consulted. One can say that here women are nothing but slaves” (253). According to Patrick Manning, “control of slave women and children became the prerogative of wealthy men throughout the region” (113). Thus, “a new social system developed, as substantial numbers of males were held in slavery. Slave families, too, changed. Now slave households developed, and they developed lineages subordinate to those of the masters” (113).

### B.1.2. Free Commoners

Free commoners are the original descendants of the Dahomey Kingdom who are in the position of civilians. According to J. Lombard, “in the rank above slaves, was held by the *anato* or free-born commoners. They were mostly farmers and artisans descended from indigenous families. They formed the backbone of the army, and many of them held minor official posts” (74). Also mentioned by Boniface I. Obichere, “a child born to an *anato* father, even if the mother was a slave, would not be considered a slave. They will be considered as children of free Dahomeans” (14).

### B.1.3. Officials

The officials are a government group that occupies the second highest strata in the Dahomey Kingdom. Among the group, the women who are part of the officials are Amazon Dahomey (Agojie). They are a group of female warriors belonging to the Dahomey Kingdom who are very strong and brave. The name Amazon Dahomey was originally a nickname from the French people who saw the figure of female soldiers belonging to the Dahomey Kingdom as similar to the legend of the Amazon tribe in Greek mythology. According to Robin Law, “European accounts regularly referred to the Dahomian female soldiers as 'Amazon',



and this convention is current today among francophone natives of Dahomey. In origin, of course, this was purely European terminology in Dahomian vernacular usage, the female soldier were called simply ahosi, or king's wives, a term applied genetically to all woman associated with the royal palace, or alternatively mino, meaning 'our mother'" (246).

In the government of the Dahomey Kingdom, according to George Ayittey, "the kings of Dahomey were assisted by a cabinet that consisted of the migam (prime minister); the meu (finance minister) created by Tegbesu; yavo-gan (viceroy of Whydah); the to-no-num (minister of agriculture); the agan (general of the army); and the adjaho (minister of the king's palace and the chief of police) which are class of officials. The most interesting and unique feature of the cabinet was that each of these posts had a female counterpart who complemented him but reported independently to the king" (203). According to David Ross, "the 'great' dignitaries were divided into senior and junior groups. The seniors (the Migam, Meu, Yeovogun, Gao, Kposu, Adjaho, Topo, Sogam and Akplogun). The juniors were usually called the first group's "second" or "lieutenants". Dahoman traditions state that the seniors were always commoners, suggesting that they were descended from Abomey area's pre-Agasuvi inhabitants. The seniors' great dignitaries may, to speculate, have been descended from the

warriors who led the original Abomey area statelet's military forces” (318). In the previous explanation, women are included in the social strata of the Dahomey Kingdom as a mighty army. Europeans called the Dahomey Kingdom's female soldiers *adogojie* or Amazon Dahomey.

The Amazon Dahomey is a unique class of women in the Dahomean civilization. They formed the crack force of the Dahomean army, forming a group of women renowned for their strength. The women in the Dahomey Kingdom recruited to become Amazon Dahomey came from women who were already accustomed to facing battles. Excerpted from L.M. Murtala, M. Hamza & A. Lawal, “The Dahomey Amazons were said to be originally a legion of elephant huntresses known as *gbeto* in the local Fon language started at around 1625 that were later developed into the Palace guards and soldiers in the 18th century. This theory can be true considering elephants live in the tropical forests of Africa and Asia; Dahomey was in the forest belt of West Africa. During Ghezo's period of rule, only women could be allowed into the palace at night. This was because, the coup he had carried out, made him need palace guards and such fierce bodyguards, even in the night when his male servants could not be allowed into the palace to check the turbulence and treachery of his subjects and to ensure his safety; their chief utility was to

prevent rebellion among the male soldiers as he (Gezo) set precedence in coups” (183-184).

Furthermore, “recruitment of Dahomey Amazons commenced by absorbing the huntresses into the army given their audacity, then later criminals, erring women in their husbands’ or fathers’ homes, captives, delinquents, princesses attracted to weapons, and hardened girls so that their personalities trait could be utilized. However, given the state of continuous war, voluntary enlistment was entertained, as well as the conscription of non-criminals. Dahomey had the policy of incorporating conquered people into her population. During Ghezo (1818-1858) recruitment and conscription, an exercise was conducted every three years, where an official would be sent to villages to conscript physically fit girls; the criteria were that the girls should be tall and agile; during Glele, it became annually. They were mainly recruited in the teen ages, though sometimes even as young as 8-10 years, and had to abandon their family and women folks to a military life under the king” (185). “The training was organized so that when they successfully passed out or graduated to serve the king, they became ruthless, insensitive to pain and mastered target accuracy, pain endurance, parades, discipline, wrestling, hand-to-hand combat, swiftness, magic, archery, and sometimes spending more than three months in the bush. They were recruited and trained to

be a reliable elite corps that could give their lives for their king” (186). Their ruthless and unforgiving traits are the Amazon Dahomey as warriors to protect the king and the Dahomey Kingdom.

#### **B.1.4. Royals**

The King occupies the highest stratum in the Dahomey Kingdom hierarchy. According to J. Lombard, in the Dahomey Kingdom, “a king's power was limited by ancient traditions, which were applied from generation to generation and were based on the respect given by royal ancestors that prevented violations of royal rules. Theoretically, the new king was chosen based on royal lineage. However, in practice, the new king was chosen based on his ability. Tradition required that the king-elect should be nominated by the two principal ministers, the Migan and the Meu. Their consideration in choosing a king was someone who was preferably the eldest-the mother's status was irrelevant, she might even be of foreign or servile origin” (78). Another tradition practiced is the belief in the twin deities Mawu-Lisa, where the King and a Kpojito (Woman King) occupy the same place and have the same position. As mentioned by Edna G. Bay, “in the early twentieth century, the Herskovites found Mawu and Lisa described variously as twins or an androgynous mother and son. In either case, they were a pair with contrasting attributes: female/male,

moon/sun, night/day, coolness/heat, older/younger, west/east. The joining of Mawu and Lisa was reminiscent of the ideological message established in the previous reign through the pairing of Aligbonon with Agasu and Kpojito Adonon with King Agaha: that power and authority derive from male-female pair with contrasting attributes. It is significant that in neither case was the pair a husband and wife, a relationship in which the female was considered to be dependent and subordinate. Moreover, Alignodon/Agasu, Adonon/Agaja, and Hwanjile/Tengbesu paired individuals from royal and commoner lineages” (95).

In the Dahomey Kingdom, all the penguhi were aho, wives or dependents of the king. The hierarchy of Dahomey Kingdom society places women as part of the kingdom with qualifications based on their social rank, their physical appearance, and how they fit into the inner circle of Dahomey Kingdom. Their ability to become part of the kingdom came from hard work, intelligence, and political acumen to rise to positions of prestige, power, and wealth. Among these aspects, a strong woman is usually a Kpojito or a government spouse. Some sources say that a Kpojito is described as a complement to the king and, in a sense, a king's twin. According to Edna G. Bay, “during the 18th century, Kpojito controlled the religious life of the people of Dahomey Kingdom. There was a civil war, but by the 19th century, the office

of Kpojito was slowly losing its power as the monarchy changed its conceptions of the spiritual underpinnings of its authority to focus increasingly on male-centered kingship. With this, the title of Kpojito was no longer the reward for women of proven ability and power; it could be offered as an honor to any woman of the king's choosing, including the biological mother of the monarch” (23).

## **B.2. The Struggles of The Women in Dahomey Kingdom**

Struggle is something someone does to achieve their goals or dreams. As explained by Kennedy, “Struggle mean everything is always up for grabs. Most struggles have already been won and lost. Struggles whose outcome can be predicted need not be undertaken to be lost or won. Some struggles need only be referenced to be won decisively. It takes courage, energy, and imagination to open what has been settled for reconsideration” (7). Struggle can be one of the reasons why people want to protect their life. As explained by Bernard (64), “human uses some strategies to protect his ego. He can fight by his repression, perceptual, denial and intellectualization. He can learn the positive things from his struggle. Each person realizes that he needs to struggle because he will be satisfied by his effort. Therefore, struggle for life is needed to attain the target of life and overcome the problems of life” (64). “Individuals also may consciously and rationally implement strategies that enable them to cope with stresses and problems in life” (64).



The discussion of struggle in this study is the struggle of women in West Africa, more specifically, the Dahomey Kingdom, in fighting for their lives with their circumstances amid society. The role of women is based on the social hierarchy that exists in society, where the king occupies the highest position, followed by the royal class, and slaves occupy the lowest position. Each of them has a struggle in running the life they are aiming for.

### **B.2.1. Slaves**

As those who occupy the lowest social hierarchy in the Dahomey Royal Society, slaves struggle to deal with the life they live. According to Boniface I. Obichere, “several studies discuss that slaves in Dahomey were traded and exchanged like property even though they had legal status as persons and not things. Slaves could inherit, acquire property, and even buy and own slaves. In some cases, slaves freed themselves and became completely free. Former slaves could occupy high social and political positions in Dahomey and even become ministers of state. Overall, slavery is regarded by Dahomeans as a social and economic accident and not as a result of inferiority. This is because many free people are related to people who are slaves. The Dahomeans argue that slavery is considered necessary by all people, although it is considered unfortunate. It is sanctioned by custom and tradition as well as the gods. "A slave does not own himself" was a common saying of the Fon” (18).

There was the regulation set by the Dahomey Kingdom about the shortage of women due to the war, as stated by Robin Law, “having been instituted by Gezo, and the conscription of free women as Amazons continued under Glele. Every girl to be brought to him before marriage, and if she pleases, he retains her in the palace. In addition to such conscription, the Amazon force was partly recruited from criminals; women taken in adultery and shrews who proved intolerable to their husbands were thus dashed to the King and duly enlisted” (253). “The existence of this regulation makes teenage slaves and some women who do not want to obey their husband's wishes have the opportunity to be free from their slave status. This can be fulfilled by becoming a female soldier or called Amazon Dahomey. In the rules, The Amazon force began to be recruited from free Dahomian women under the system of conscription adopted in the later reign of Gezo, were (or should be) cut off allegiance to their families, so that their loyalty would be devoted exclusively to the king. The recruitment of free women was associated with the increase in the size of the force when it began to be used in actual fighting in the 1840s” (253).

### **B.2.2. Free Commoners**

The people, free people, or *anato*, are the indigenous people of the Dahomey Kingdom. Their group could come from slaves who married into the native Dahomey community

itself. They lived their lives as traders. According to Boniface I. Obichere, “Dahomean women participated actively in the processes of production, distribution, and the acquisition of economic surplus and capital. It is commonly believed in Dahomean society that females in business have an uncanny sense of economic realities and that they can spot the point of diminishing returns with unbelievable accuracy. In many cases, Dahomean businessmen relied on the judgment of their female counterparts” (6). “They contributed significantly to social change and economic development in Dahomey” (7).

The traders were utilized as middlemen in the slave trade by the royal court. According to Robin Law, “the merchant was further enhanced when Dahomey became a middleman in the slave trade during the 1750s and 1760s, and a group of private merchants separate from the royal trading officials took over the handling of the slaves imported into Dahomey from the interior. Then, the king is recorded to have granted ‘the black traders’ the privilege of sitting on chairs, meaning probably that they were raised to the rank of ‘caboceers’ or statue officials-clear evidence of their rising status” (59).

### **B.2.3. Amazon Dahomey (Agojie)**

Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) are a group of soldiers from the Dahomey Kingdom who are included in the Official's strata. They

have several privileges from the kingdom. As with the story quoted by Stanley B. Alpern, “when Amazons, like all ahosi, walked out of the palace, they were preceded by a slave ringing a bell. The sound told every male to get out of their path, retire a certain distance and look the other way. Even women, it is said, had to back away and avert their gaze” (49). “The Dahomey Amazons (Agojie) have singing and dancing as their primary entertainment. Their dances use weapons as props and to stimulate attacks on enemies. Amazon Dahomey sang as they danced, or between dances, and their songs spoke of war: their willingness to die for their king, their eagerness to do battle, their superiority over men fighters, their own prowess and valor, the sin of cowardice, past and future victories, and so on” (107). As the Amazon Dahomey with the privileges they get, they have to pay for them with their lives of a more extraordinary privilege than other Dahomey women were to fight and often die in the service of the king, and they did so willingly.

In addition, they also have to abide by the rules. The main rule that Amazon Dahomey must abide by is not to have relations with men other than the king. Robin Law said “the Amazons were all legally married to the King. However, only a very few of them could expect actual sexual relations with their royal master- and indeed, there is some suggestion that those who were so favoured

were there upon effectively demobilized from active military service. At the same time, as wives of the king, they were prohibited from sexual relations with anyone else, adultery with a royal wife carrying the penalty of death. The practical effect, therefore, was that the women remained celibate as long as they were Amazons. This did not mean (as some times supposed) that they were all virgins, since some of course had been recruited through capture or judicial punishment, and had sexual experience prior to enlistment” (256).

Becoming a respected person is one of the desires of a slave in the Dahomey Workforce to become an Amazon Dahomey. But before becoming an Amazon Dahomey, they must take an exam specifically for prospective members of the Amazon Dahomey, in an excerpt from UNESCO Publishing written by Pat Masioni, Sylvia Serbin and Edouard Joubaud, “the Amazon Dahomey underwent very intensive training, comprised of drills and large-scale simulated attacks, in particular during the nineteenth century. The women soldiers thus became stronger, more flexible, more resilient and iron-willed. One of their goals, often expressed in their songs, was to outshine men in every respect” (16).

The main focus for the Dahomey Kingdom around the 1800s was to separate itself as a tributary status of the Oyo Kingdom. The Dahomey Kingdom sought to strengthen its

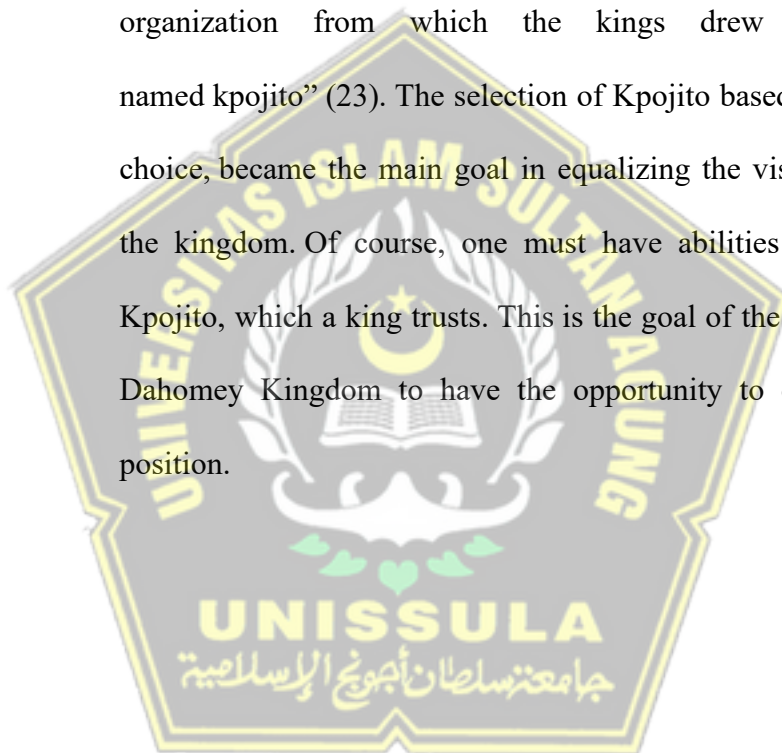
defenses, including forming the Amazon Dahomey army. With King Ghezo's position as supreme commander of the army, the Amazon Dahomey troops and the king formed a force in the coalition they formed to fight for their goals. According to Robin Law, “Gezo self-consciously sought to emphasize his military prowess in order to point the contrast with his predecessor and thus legitimate his usurpation of the throne. Gezo carried Dahomey to the peak of its military success, in particular defeating her traditional enemy Oyo in 1823 and thereby ending the payment of tribute to that state. He also increased the scale of human sacrifices in Dahomey, and greatly expanded the size of the standing army, turning the ‘Amazon’ into a regular contingent of the Dahomian field army” (252).

#### **B.2.4. Kpojito (Woman King)**

As the holder of the highest strata in the Dahomey Kingdom, equal to the king, Kpojito became a special title for women in the Dahomey Kingdom. Initially, it was beheld by ambitious princes and influential women in the Dahomey Kingdom. Then, they would reward one of their female allies with the title of Kpojito. However, according to Edna G. Bay, “hierarchy placed women within the strict ordering of the palace organization according to their manner of recruitment to the organization. The principle of advancement through merit provided a leavening of



hierarchy, for it allowed by dint of hard work, intelligence and political acumen to rise to positions of prestige and power within the palace. With the office of kpojito no longer the reward for women of proven ability and power, it could be offered as an honor to any woman of the king's choosing. There was no single office or rank within this large and complex organization from which the kings drew the women named kpojito” (23). The selection of Kpojito based on the king's choice, became the main goal in equalizing the vision in leading the kingdom. Of course, one must have abilities to become a Kpojito, which a king trusts. This is the goal of the women in the Dahomey Kingdom to have the opportunity to obtain a high position.



## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHOD

The third chapter discusses research methodology. It is a method of research that is used to collect data that is obtained to be analyzed to answer the problem formulation. This chapter focuses on Types of the Research, Data Organizing, and Data Analyzing Method.

#### **A. Types of The Research**

This study used qualitative research. It is a method of analysis that involves interpreting no numerical data. According to Creswell, “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, collecting data in the participant's setting, analyzing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes, and making interpretations of the meaning of data” (4).

This study used a qualitative research method because the data did not involve numerical data. The data was collected by describing dialogue among characters and sentences from the study object. The object of this study was an American historical action-adventure movie in 2022, *The Woman King*. This movie describes women in Dahomey Kingdom, West Africa, who told about the struggles of Nawi and Nanisca as the main characters of the movie, for their lives as women in Dahomey Kingdom.

The historical approach is also applied because of this study as inspired by the historical facts of the Dahomey Kingdom in 1800s. According to Busha, “the historical approach is defined as the relationship of the literary work to history. It is also defined as the impact of the work on history and the importance of historical knowledge in understanding a work and how history and literature inform affect each other become the main point of applying this approach” (91). The data was taken from the historical references of the 1800s Dahomey Kingdom compared to the movie *The Woman King*. It intends to find out and prove the existence of similar conditions between a literary work in the form of a movie and a historical fact.

## **B. Data Organizing**

### **B.1. Data Collecting Method**

The data collection process that analyzed in different ways were referred to as the data collection method. The data collection methods will be divided into five steps:

#### **B.1.1. Watching Movie**

The first step was watching the movie. This step was important part that intended to make it easier for the author to analyze the object to be studied in this research. The author could also more easily find out the points contained in the movie related to the problem.

### **B.1.2. Reading Movie Script**

The second step was reading the movie script. This step was also an important part in the analysis steps. It was consisted of plays on words, correct spelling of dialogue characters and the scenes. That used to understand the story and got the important elements that fit with the problems.

### **B.1.3. Identifying The Data**

After watching and reading the movie script, the next step was to identify the data. This step was carried out to find the parts of the movie that would be analyzed. These parts were data that included sentences, narratives, prologues, and dialogues related to the highlighted topics. Data identification was carried out by making notes on important parts, underlining, coding, and highlighting certain parts of the object related to the topic discussed in this study.

### **B.1.4. Classifying The Data**

After identifying the data, the fourth step the author took was to classify the data. Data classification was done by putting the data into a table called an appendix. The appendix is a format in the form of columns containing numbers, data, data forms, minutes, references, comments and formulation of problem answers. The columns filled with data in the form of sentences,

narratives, prologues, and dialog contained in the object of research.

#### **B.1.5. Reducing The Data**

After classifying the data, the last step the author did was to reduce the data. In this step the author reviewed the data and made improvements if there was data not in accordance with the object of research being analyzed. This step aimed to minimize the size or number of errors in the work of this research.

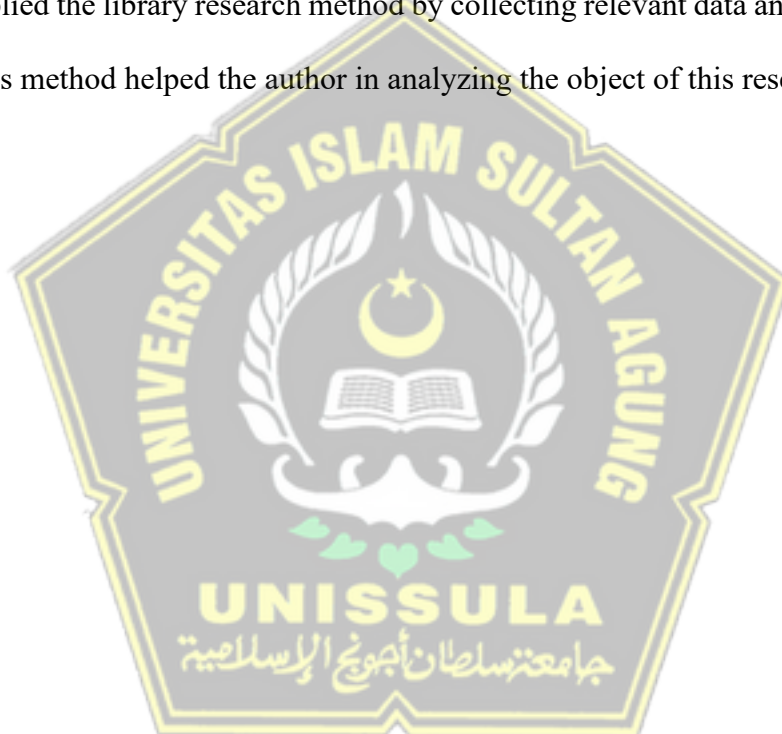
#### **B.2. Types of The Data**

There were two types of data sources that the author used in this research. First, primary data was the main source of information. Based on the object of this research, the primary data was *The Woman King* movie. In addition, the author used the movie script as supporting data for the primary data. The data was in the form of sentences, narratives, prologues and dialogs. The second type was secondary data, used to support the primary data. Based on information obtained from sources such as historical data on the lives of West African in the 1800s, especially in the Dahomey Kingdom, various international journals and books that were relevant to the theories used in this study.

#### **C. Data Analyzing Method**

In the data analysis method, the author applied the library research method. In the library research method, the author collected and reviewed data

and information in the form of theories and research obtained by reviewing various journals and books. The problems studied were based on the object of study of the movie *The Woman King*, in the form of the condition of women in the Dahomey Kingdom and the struggle of the main characters in living their lives as women in the Dahomey Kingdom. Based on the object of research, which was a movie inspired by a true story that occurred in the 1800s, the author applied the library research method by collecting relevant data and information. This method helped the author in analyzing the object of this research.





## CHAPTER IV

### FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This chapter describes the findings and discussions related to the formulation of the problem. This chapter focuses on how the woman condition in 1800s in *The Woman King* movie and how the main characters struggle to improve their lives as women.

#### **A. The Women Condition in 1800s in *The Woman King* Movie**

This sub-chapter focuses on analysis to answer the formulation of the first problem. This study describes the women condition in the 1800s in Dahomey Kingdom as depicted in the movie. The condition of women in Dahomey Kingdom is divided into four strata, as explained by J. Lombard that “the society of the Kingdom of Dahomey consisted of four major categories were royal-descendants of Abomey kings; officials or caboceers; free commoners or anato; and slaves” (74). However, in the movie, the women condition is depicted in three strata, because the free commoner strata were not described in any character in the movie. So, the three strata including Slaves, The Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) which is a group of officials or caboceers, and Kpojito which is a group of royal-descendants of Abomey kings. These images are shown in the female characters featured in the plot of the movie and based on the dialogues and narratives they deliver.

##### **A.1. Slave**

Slaves are the lowest level of strata in the Dahomey Kingdom. There are several categories or groups of slaves, as described by J. Lombard, “there are

several categories of slavery, including slaves who were designated for the royal sacrifices at the annual customs which the king carried out in honor of his ancestor, another worked the royal plantations, a third the domestic slaves” (74). In this category, there are female slaves involved.

Some slave girls are employed in the royal plantations. Since slaves were royal property, some wealthy men married slave girls to make use of their labor. This is because according to Patrick Manning, “slave labor was used for grain production, textiles, for leather work. Control of slave women and children became the prerogative of wealthy men throughout the region” (113). This is found in the movie *The Woman King* in the young female character Nawi who is about to be married off by her parents to a rich man.

**Mister Abade** : “I own three fields of palm trees. You will work. You do not talk to your husband?”

(Mister Abade slaps Nawi)

**Mister Abade** : “In my house, you will learn to obey.”

(Nawi push away Mister Abade)

**Moru** : “Nawi!”

“Forgive my daughter!” (00:10:10 – 00:10:35)

The sentence above describes a rich man named Mister Abade who comes to Nawi's family home. The man intends to marry Nawi and employ her in his palm oil plantation. Nawi is a young girl who comes from a family in the Dahomey Kingdom. She works in an oil plantation as a slave.

The Dahomey Kingdom is slave-producing in West Africa. They obtained slaves from the victory over the war they conducted to expand the kingdom's territory. The slaves were male slaves and female slaves, which then became the property of the Dahomey Kingdom. In the case of female slaves, any rich man who needs slave labor will marry the slave. As said by Joel Quirk & Benedetta Rossi, “in the Dahomey Kingdom any young man of the age to get married must buy the one whom he wishes to marry. He makes arrangements with the parents of the young woman and it is with them alone that the price is discussed. The young bride, irrespective of whether she is of free or slave status, is never consulted. One can say that here women are nothing but slaves” (253). This is the case for a young woman named Nawi, who hears news of her marriage from a trader in the market.

**Seller** : “Nawi, tell your mother to see me for the dress.”

**Nawi** : “What dress?”

**Seller** : “Your wedding dress. I will make you beautiful. Tell her.”

**Nawi’s Friend** : “They have made you another match?”

**Nawi** : “I don’t know what she’s talking about.”

(00:07:11 – 00:07:29)

The conversation above is an example of a marriage that is conducted without the consent of the bride-to-be. Nawi, who is currently at the market, is called by a market trader, who is making Nawi's wedding dress requested by

Nawi's mother. Nawi only heard about the wedding from the trader. Nawi does not know anything and does not even understand what the trader means.

The families in Dahomey Kingdom not only sell their daughters in marriage to rich men, but some of them sell their daughters as sex slaves. Authorized by Patrick Manning, “a new social system in which women were held in slavery within families. The system reinforced multiple marriage, concubinage, and sent women to work in areas beyond what had earlier been their occupations” (109). This led to many families that sell their daughters as sex slaves. Just like in the dialogue below:

Izogie : “The drills are a game. It is play, like when you were a child.”

Nawi : “I was not allowed to play. I was made to work.”

Izogie : “Such a sad tale.”

Nawi : “You don't know anything.”

**Izogie : “You know, when I had 14 years, my**

**mother put a sign out to sell my virginity.**

**The first man came, and I cried for my**

**mother, but she didn't come. The second**

**man came and complained of my tears, so**

**he beat me. The third man came, and I**

**burned him with an ember. Your family**

was cruel, as was my mother. It is enough to make you cry. But it is better to laugh. Yes?”

(00:25:30 – 00:26:30)

The dialogue above describes a woman named Izogie who is telling her past when she was young, that she was once a slave. This happens because Izogie is being sold and offered by her mother to men who want to use her as a sex slave. Some men come and take her and use her body. All Izogie can do is attack the man.

The practice of slavery carried out by the Dahomey Kingdom is not only utilized for the benefit of the kingdom. Several female slaves were used as a form of tribute payment by the Dahomey Kingdom to the Oyo Kingdom. According to Boniface I. Obichere, “several female slaves were sacrificed annually along with male slaves. Before Dahomey stopped the payment of tribute to the Alafin of Oyo in the time of King Ghezo, 44 female slaves were an integral part of the annual tribute package to Oyo” (18). The tribute is a form of payment made by a kingdom that loses a war against another kingdom. The example below is a dialogue of General Oba Ade, who is a general of the Oyo Kingdom who demands tribute from King Ghezo, because of the defeat that occurred in the Dahomey Kingdom.

**General Oba Ade** : “I am General Oba Ade. To esteemed regard of the king of Oyo. **Gifts for the Oyo Kingdom as is tradition.**”

King Ghezo : “Nanisca!” (Call Nanisca)

**Oyo’s Soldier** : “**This is less than ever before.**”

**General Oba Ade** : “**Did you think we would not see?**”

King Ghezo : “Did you think we would not see your hand in the raid of our village?”

**General Oba Ade** : “**To make up for your shortcoming, I will accept an addition to the tribute. 40 Agojie. Not too old.**” (00:39:29 – 00:40:17)

The form of tribute payment in the Dahomey Kingdom was for female slaves. However, in the movie *The Woman King*, General Oba Ade shows his greed by asking for more payment. This can be seen when he asks for the Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), as an additional payment for the tribute that must be paid.

## **A.2. Amazon Dahomey (Agojie)**

The Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) is one part of the government officials in the Dahomey Kingdom. The officials in the kingdom implement a political structure, where one position is occupied by both men and women. This is related to their trust. According to Robin Law, “this system of doubling offices



has been interpreted as an expression of “the immanent duality of Dahomean cosmology”, also expressed for example in the fact that the divine creation was attributed to a male-female partnership of gods, Mawu and Lisa” (255). The Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) are a group of female warriors who serve as the main soldiers of the Dahomey Kingdom.

The Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) come from a group of elephant hunters in West Africa, then the Dahomey Kingdom takes advantage and makes them into a group of female warriors. They are very strong and fearless in the face of war. According to L.M. Murtala, M. Hamza & A. Lawal, “the Dahomey Amazon were said to be originally a legion of elephant huntresses known as gbeto in the local Fon language started at around 1625 that were later developed into the Palace guards and soldiers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century” (183-184). The women's strength is the basic form of the power of the members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie).

**Nanisca** : “For 90 years, Dahomey has lived under the thumb of the Oyo! When it rains, our ancestors weep for the pain we have felt in the dark hulls of ships bound for distant shores! When the wind blows, our ancestors push us to march into battle against those who enslave us! When it thunders, our ancestors demand we rip the shackles of

doubt from our minds and fight with courage!

**We fight not just for today but for the future! We are the spear of victory! We are the blade of freedom! We are Dahomey!”**

(01:21:55 – 01:22:50)

The sentence above describes Nanisca who is part of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) who is giving a speech to the members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) in preparing for battle. Nanisca and the other members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) are female royal warriors, whose duty is to obey and protect the kingdom. They will do anything for the survival and integrity of the kingdom, such as fighting against the Oyo Kingdom and releasing the tributary status of the Oyo Kingdom, which is done by the Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), including Nanisca who is a member of the Amazon Dahomey (Agojie).

An Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) is required to be physically and mentally strong. In this regard, for the next recruitment of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) members, the Dahomey Kingdom applies physical and mental tests, which are open to women from anywhere. According to the explanation by L.M. Murtala, M. Hamza & A. Lawal, “recruitment into the Amazon Dahomey's regiment was initially meant to absorb the huntresses into the army given their audacity, then later criminals, erring women in their husband's or father's homes, captives, delinquents, princesses attracted to weapons, and hardened girls so that their personality trait could be utilized. However, voluntary enlistment was

entertained given the state of continuous war” (185). The Dahomey Kingdom does not place any requirements on the identity of the person who will become a member of the Amazon Dahomey (Agojie). The prospective members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) only need to prepare themselves physically to pass the exam as a member of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie).

(Tara talks to a prospective member Amazon Dahomey (Agojie))

**Tara** : **“Hey! You are a Mahi prisoner. That is all you will ever be”**

**Amenza** : “What did you say?”

**Tara** : “She killed our people.”

**Amenza** : **“You killed mine. Me, I also came here a captive. Do you think yourself better than me?”**

**Tara** : “No, Ajahi.”

**Amenza** : “If you make it through the final test, you are one of us. No matter where you come from.”

(00:32:10 – 00:32:35)

The describe above is a conversation between Tara and Amenza, who are members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie). The conversation explains that the requirement to become a member of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) is not based on one's origin. Amenza emphasizes her words, that it is passing the exam that determines whether or not a woman joins the Amazon Dahomey (Agojie).

### A.3. Kpojito

Kpojito is the highest stratum in the society of the Dahomey Kingdom. In Dahomey Kingdom, there are two kings, one male and one female. The existence of two kings in one kingdom comes from the trust in twin gods named Mawu-Lisa. According to Edna G. Bay, “the joining of Mawu and Lisa was reminiscent of the ideological message established in the previous reign through the pairing of Aligbonon with Agasu, and Kpojito Adonon with King Agaha, that power and authority derive from male-female pair with contrasting attributes. It is significant that in neither case was the pair a husband and wife, a relationship in which the female was considered to be dependent and subordinate” (95). The trust of a king influences his people. The people of the Dahomey Kingdom believed that Kpojito, a woman king, would lead the kingdom together with the king.

**Izogie** : “Do you think she has time to think about you?  
She is thinking about the world. **You know she may one day be the kpojito.**”

**Nawi** : “The woman king?”

**Izogie** : “Mmhmm. But we have not had one in so many years. His brother did not honor it, but **King Ghezo believes in tradition. In the twin gods, Mawu and Lisa. Woman and man.**”

**Equal. Ghezo will name a woman king. For the gods and the people.”**

- Nawi : “But is that what the miganon wants?”
- Izogie : “I cannot say. But in the palace, she is a legend. Captured as a young soldier. Given up for dead. But she returned, with the Oyo bastards’ kofes hanging by her belt.”

(00:33:37 – 00:34:30)

The dialogue between Izogie and Nawi illustrates that the traditions and trusts believed by the king and the people affect the structure of life in society. The trust is that there is a woman king who will lead the Dahomey Kingdom alongside the king. Kpojito or woman king in Dahomey Kingdom is a form of tradition from the king and people's trust in the twin gods Mawu-Lisa, which depicts a kingdom led by a man king and a woman king. What they discuss is the possibility of Nanisca's election as Kpojito. The assumption is that Nanisca is a legend in the Dahomey Kingdom that the king believes in. A Kpojito cannot be based on the personal desire of a woman, but the selection is based on the decision of the king of the Dahomey Kingdom.

The condition of women in the movie *The Woman King*, which is set in the Dahomey Kingdom, has similarities to the historical reality of the condition of women in the Dahomey Kingdom, West Africa in the 1800s. The social condition is differentiated based on the social strata in the Dahomey Kingdom,

which consists of the slave group, the Amazon Dahomey group (Agojie), and Kpojito. The free commoner stratum is not included, because it is not depicted by any characters in the movie. With the difference in strata, the condition of women in society has differences in what is experienced. The social condition of the society that places women in each literature is based on the Dahomey Kingdom's ancestral trust in the twin gods Mawu-Lisa, which influences the kingdom's political system and rules.

## **B. The Struggle of The Main Character of *The Woman King* Movie**

This sub-chapter focuses on the analysis to answer to second problem formulation. This study explains the struggles of Nawi and Nanisca as the main character to improve their lives as women. The life they fought for as slaves, amazon dahomey (agojie) and kpojito.

### **B.1. Nawi Character: From Slave to Amazon Dahomey (Agojie)**

In the Dahomey Kingdom, slaves have an opportunity to get freedom. The slaves in the Dahomey Kingdom were mostly prisoners of war of other kingdoms that lost their wars with the Dahomey Kingdom. According to Boniface I. Obichere, “slaves freed themselves and became completely free. Former slaves could occupy high social and political positions in Dahomey and even become ministers of state. Overall, slavery is regarded by Dahomeans as a social and economic accident and not as a result of inferiority” (18). This is shown in the movie *The Woman King*, where a young woman is trying to determine the direction of her own life to get out of slavery to herself.



In the movie, *The Woman King*, a character named Nawi is portrayed that she resisted when she was married off by her parents. Nawi's response makes Moru, Nawi's father, choose to hand Nawi over to the kingdom. This decision means releasing Nawi to no longer be part of the family and telling Nawi to fight for the kingdom. The statement of Nawi's father becomes a basic reference for Nawi to be able to escape the practice of selling slaves to her parents, in the name of marriage.

Moru : “I wish to give my daughter to the king. No husband will have her.”

Nawi : “I will not marry an old man who beats me.”

Moru : **“Go to war, then. You will understand what pain is.”** (00:11:01 – 00:11:25)

The kingdom's wide acceptance of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) members, not depending on any particular strata, made it a great opportunity for slaves like Nawi. According to Robin Law, “in addition to such conscription, the Amazon force was partly recruited from criminals; women taken in adultery and shrews who proved intolerable to their husband were thus ‘dashed to the King and duly enlisted’ (253). Every woman in the Dahomey Kingdom has that opportunity, and not by any particular social condition or strata.

The opportunity to become a member of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) is not determined by a certain stratum even a slave gets the opportunity. However,

there is a rule in it, which is that they must leave their previous lives, including their families. According to Robin Law, “the Amazon force began to be recruited from free Dahomian women under the system of conscription adopted in the later reign of Gezo, who were (or should be) cut off allegiance to their families, so that their loyalty would be devoted exclusively to the king” (253). The rules are sometimes overwhelming for those who are not ready to part with their families.

Nanisca : “I offer you and our people a choice. Any women who does not wish to stay, may leave.”

**(Nawi decided to stay in the ranks of the slaves, after listening to Nanisca's narration of the sacrifices that must be made when she becomes a female soldier, Agojie) (00:19:29 – 00:19:59)**

Nawi's response during Nanisca's announcement to the prospective members of the Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) was a form of Nawi's readiness to leave her family, and it is a form of Nawi's determination not to return to her family. This is due to Nawi's readiness to escape her family's slavery and become part of a group that can improve her life.

Before a candidate becomes a member of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), a special test is required. The exam is in the form of physical and mental tests that prospective Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) must have. Based on the UNESCO Publishing written by Pat Masioni, Sylvia Serbin and Edouard Joubeaud, “the

Amazon Dahomey underwent very intensive training, comprised of drills and large-scale simulated attacks, in particular during the nineteenth century. The women soldiers thus became stronger, more flexible, more resilient and iron-willed. One of their goals, often expressed in their songs, was to outshine men in every respect” (16). The test is a process to select prospective members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) who are physically and mentally ready to become members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie).

Izogie : “Fear not. Face it head-on. Relentlessly, we will fight.”

**Nawi and the Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) recruits assess their final exam to become a Dahomey (Agojie) Amazon. Nawi jumped from the high board to overtake her partner in the test.**

(00:58:38 -01:00:57)

As in the narrative above, which describes the final exam for Nawi and other young women, to become an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie). In the exam, Nawi describes her determination to be the best in taking the final exam for Amazon Dahomey (Agojie). She tries to push her limits to catch up. This is because her friend had overtaken her. The test is given by the prospective members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), in the form of thorny bush obstacles, skills in climbing tall buildings, competing with male soldiers, and ending with beheading a straw doll with one sword slash. This test is the first step towards becoming an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie).

The test for the prospective members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), is watched by the King and all the royal residents. A string of tests are successfully passed by the prospective members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) and ends with Nawi who manages to occupy the first position in completing the position of prospective members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie). Nawi's victory is appreciated by the king. The king feels proud that the next generation of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) members are mentally and physically strong. The king's appreciation is symbolized by the handover of the sword belonging to Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) as a symbol that the prospective members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) have successfully passed the test given.

King Ghezo : “To the victor! The gods will bless you. The gods will keep you save.”

(Nawi received the sword given by King Ghezo)

King Ghezo : “**Well done to all of you. You are the stongest warriors in Africa.** Welcome to the King’s Guard.” (01:01:30 – 01:01:53)

After the candidates are appointed as members of the Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), they will live in the palace with the king. In the palace of the Dahomey Kingdom, some rules must be obeyed by all residents of the palace. There is an absolute rule that must be obeyed by Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), which is not allowed to have relations with other men other than the king. This is because the position of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) is considered the king's wife.

According to Robin Law, “the Amazons were all legally married to the King. However, only a very few of them could expect actual sexual relations with their royal master- and indeed, there is some suggestion that those who were so favoured were there upon effectively demobilized from active military service. At the same time, as wives of the king, they were prohibited from sexual relations with anyone else, adultery with a royal wife carrying the penalty of death” (257). The narrative below, illustrates the determination of an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) to remain loyal to the king.

**(Nawi looked at Malik, then she walked away with the Agojie members, leaving Malik at the Port of Ouidah who was about to leave to return to his home country) (01:57:47 – 01:58:08)**

Nawi's response describes her rejection of a man who asks her to live with him and leave the Dahomey Kingdom. At first, Nawi had a relationship with a Portuguese immigrant man who came to Dahomey Kingdom named Malik. However, Nawi chooses to continue living her life as an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) in the Dahomey Kingdom, with all its rules that do not allow relationships with men except the king.

## **B.2. Nanisca Character: From Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) to Kpojito**

The Dahomey Kingdom has a female warrior named Amazon Dahomey (Agoje). The existence of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) is a form of the Dahomey Kingdom's trust in the twin gods Mawu-Lisa. This trust brings tradition to the

political practices of the Dahomey Kingdom, which places women as part of the government. According to Robin Law, “this system of doubling offices has been interpreted as an expression of ‘the immanent duality of Dahomean cosmology’, also expressed for example in the fact that the divine creation was attributed to a male-female partnership of gods, Mawu and Lisa” (254). This also applies to the position of king, where the Dahomey Kingdom places two kings, a male king and a woman king in the same position. The woman king is often referred to as Kpojito. The position occupied by women in the Dahomey Kingdom is not based on the social status or strata that a person has. A woman could achieve a higher social status, with their efforts and hard work. As mentioned earlier, when a slave becomes an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), it is also possible for an Amazon Dahomey to be able to occupy the highest strata of women in the Dahomey Kingdom as Kpojito. However, to become Kpojito, it is not only by effort and hard work. A woman can become Kpojito, but must be someone who is trusted by the king, because the selection of Kpojito is based on an absolute decision by a sitting king, to be able to carry out the vision of the kingdom together while serving as king in the Dahomey Kingdom.

An Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) gets special privileges and is highly respected in the Dahomey Kingdom. In the movie *The Woman King*, there is a rule that ordinary people are not allowed to look into the eyes of members of The Amazon Dahomey (Agojie). Stanley B. Alpern, “when Amazons, like all ahoisi, walked out of the palace, they were preceded by a slave ringing a bell. The sound told every male to get out of their path, retire a certain distance and



look the other way. Even women, it is said, had to back away and avert their gaze” (49). However, “they pay for this privilege by sacrificing their lives. Through their songs, the Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) often express their readiness to sacrifice for the king. Amazon Dahomey sang as they danced, or between dances, and their songs spoke of war: their willingness to die for their king, their eagerness to do battle, their superiority over men fighters, their own prowess and valor, the sin of cowardice, past and future victories, and so on” (107). In this way, the privilege earned by an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) is equal to their obligations in carrying out their duties.

**Nanisca : “We fight or we die. We fight for Dahomey, for our sisters, for our great king. You will be revered. You will be paid for your work. Your opinions will be heard. No tribe or kingdom in all of Africa shares this privilege. For this honor, we live out our lives in these palace walls. We take no husband. We will bear no children.”**

(00:18:38 – 00:19:22)

The privileges and sacrifices they have to do are experienced by Nanisca. It is explained by Nanisca that an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) has privileges that no other woman in the Dahomey Kingdom has. However, these privileges are not given for free by the kingdom, an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) must

protect and defend the kingdom, by fighting with other kingdoms or other enemies of the Dahomey Kingdom, which requires them to sacrifice their lives.

The sacrifice of an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) in the form of their life, is related to their duties as soldiers of the kingdom. Their main task as a warrior is of course to fight in guarding and protecting the kingdom. In the movie *The Woman King*, Nanisca along with Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), attempts to defeat the Oyo Kingdom. According to Robin Law, “Gezo carried Dahomey to the peak of its military success, in particular defeating her traditional enemy Oyo in 1823 and thereby ending the payment of tribute to that state” (252). The war that the Dahomey Kingdom wages aims to be free from the tributary status of the Oyo Kingdom.

**Nanisca** : “They are a day’s journey from our plateau. They will set up camp there. They expect us to defend ourselves from behind our walls. We are greatly outnumbered. Their size makes them arrogant and slow, like their guns. But you don’t need a gun to use gunpowder You just need a spark. **Sometimes a termite can take down an elephant. We will the war to them.**”

(01:20:29 – 01:20:587)

As in the narrative by Nanisca, who is a member of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) as well as the general of the royal army. They are getting ready to defeat the Oyo Kingdom. Nanisca and her forces prepare a resistance strategy, by setting traps in the Oyo Kingdom's shelter. Nanisca's preparations aim to protect the kingdom, which is her duty as an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie).

As mentioned earlier, the trust of the twin gods Mawu-Lisa brings an effect on the political system of the kingdom. This applies to the leaders in the Dahomey Kingdom. This trust makes the Dahomey Kingdom have two leaders, namely the male king and the woman king called Kpojito. In the movie *The Woman King*, the selection of Kpojito is based on the choice made by the king. The dialog below describes the conversation between King Ghezo and one of his consorts named Shante. Shante rejects the statement that the King chose Nanisca as a Kpojito because according to her Nanisca is just an ordinary soldier who does not deserve to be a Kpojito. The selection of a Kpojito comes from the absolute decision of a king. Thus, King Ghezo chooses Nanisca as a Kpojito, which is his own decision.

**King Ghezo** : “Kpojito is beloved of the people. She must be deserving of their admiration and their trust. We must share the same vision for our future. **A bold future. For that reason, I have chosen Nanisca.**”

Shante : “She is a common soldier.”

King Ghezo : “Will you sit down.”

Shante : “Ruined by the enemy.”

King Ghezo : “Sit down and be quiet!”

(01:36:24 - 01:36:54)

Kpojito's selection is based on the king's decision, with the aim that the king can share the vision of the kingdom with someone he trusts. As quoted by Edna G. Bay, “hierarchy placed women within the strict ordering of the palace organization according to their manner of recruitment to the organization. The principle of advancement through merit provided a leavening of hierarchy, for it allowed by dint of hard work, intelligence and political acumen to rise to positions of prestige and power within the palace. With the office of Kpojito no longer the reward for women of proven ability and power, it could be offered as an honor to any woman of the king’s choosing” (23). This means that every woman in the Dahomey Kingdom has the same opportunity to become a Kpojito, provided that it is someone who is trusted and directly chosen by the king.

Shante's objection to the king's decision does not make the king change his mind to make Nanisca as Kpojito. This is proven by announcing the decision to appoint Nanisca as Kpojito in front of the people of the Dahomey Kingdom. Nanisca's selection proves that the selection of Kpojito is only based on the absolute choice of the king.

**King Ghezo** : “We are a warrior people! And there is power in our mind... in our unity, in our culture. If we

understand that power, we will be limitless. My people, this is a vision I will lead. It is a vision that is shared. Heroes of Dahomey, behold the bravest of the brave, **appointed by King Ghezo, elevated to the sacred title of kpojito, Nanisca, the woman king.**” (2:00:45 - 02:01:29)

The narrative above describes King Ghezo announcing his decision to choose Kpojito. The announcement is made in front of the people of Dahomey Kingdom. Kpojito, who will lead the kingdom together with the king, is expected to have a vision that can be shared for the kingdom. With this announcement, Kpojito's election is ratified with King Ghezo mentioning Nanisca's name.

Every woman in every stratum in the Dahomey Kingdom has the opportunity to make her life choices. As in the case of the slave strata who want to fight to be able to escape from their life and then try to become an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), they are struggling hard to carry out their duties to become an Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), and some are chosen to become Kpojito. The struggles that women in the Dahomey Kingdom go through are portrayed through the characters of Nawi and Nanisca. They try hard with what they want to achieve, it is also related to the political principles of the Dahomey Kingdom,

that the women of the Dahomey Kingdom have the opportunity to be able to do in any strata, but must be accompanied by their efforts and hard work.





## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This chapter V provides the conclusion and suggestions. The conclusion highlights the result of the problem based on the research finding in chapter four related to the answers of the problem formulation and followed by suggestions.

#### A. Conclusion

The conclusion of the problem formulation in this study is based on the analysis in chapter four. This study analyses the women's condition in West Africa 1800s as depicted in the movie and explains the struggle of the main character as reflected in *The Woman King* movie. There are two conclusions from this study. The first conclusion is women's condition in West Africa 1800s found in *The Women King* movie, more specifically in Dahomey Kingdom, are divided into three strata, it is because the free commoner strata were not described in any character in the movie. These strata include Slave, Official and Royal. Within each of these strata, the conditions in which women lived their lives varied greatly. In the slave stratum, women are raped, married off for labor, sold, and used as tribute payments by the kingdom. The next stratum is official, one example is Amazon Dahomey (Agojie). They are female warriors of the Dahomey Kingdom who are very strong and often fight to protect the Dahomey Kingdom. An Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) can come from any background, including a slave. In the highest strata, there are royals. The position of a woman in the royal strata is a Kpojito. The existence of Kpojito is a form of the

Dahomey Kingdom people's belief in a male-female twin god named Mawu-Lisa, who is chosen based on the king's belief in that person.

The second is the struggles of the main characters to improve their lives as women. The main characters in this discussion are Nawi and Nanisca. They are trying to live their lives. The life they live is when they are slaves, Amazon Dahomey (Agojie) and Kpjito. At the time of becoming a slave, which is described by the character Nawi. Nawi tried to escape the shackles of slavery, by participating in the selection of prospective members of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie). After becoming a member of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), Nawi tried to carry out her duties and obey the rules. This must be carried out and obeyed by Nanisca, who is also a member of Amazon Dahomey (Agojie). The description of the character Nanisca is a General of the Amazon Dahomey (Agojie), who was later trusted by the King and chosen to be a Kpojito. The King's reason for choosing Nanisca is an absolute reason from the king which concerns trust in someone who can be trusted to lead the kingdom together.

## **B. Suggestions**

This research is still far from perfect; there are still many things that must be addressed by the future researchers. Based on the conclusion above, there are several suggestions that might be made to the readers. It suggests the next researcher to analyze the character of Izogie in *The Woman King* (2022) movie with the personality portrayed. With that movie, further research can also analyze cultural aspects such as symbols and rituals in West Africa in the 1800s.

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