



# Navigating Epistemological and Methodological Challenges: A Theoretical Framework for African Women's Studies in Ghana (2021–2026)

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46

**Nana Ama Asante**

*University of Ghana, Legon*

*Department of Advanced Studies, Water Research Institute (WRI)*

**Dr Susan Harrison**

*Department of Advanced Studies, Water Research Institute (WRI)*

*Department of Advanced Studies, University of Ghana, Legon*

Correspondence: [nasante@gmail.com](mailto:nasante@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

This theoretical framework article addresses persistent epistemological and methodological challenges within African Women's Studies in Ghana, focusing on the period 2021–2026. It contends that the field remains constrained by the uncritical application of Western feminist paradigms, which frequently marginalise the lived realities and indigenous knowledge systems of Ghanaian women. Through a critical desk-based analysis of contemporary scholarly literature, policy documents, and Ghanaian research outputs, the article deconstructs these prevailing approaches. It proposes that a transformative theoretical framework must be grounded in an African feminist epistemology. This foundation necessitates centring Ghanaian women's own narratives, integrating indigenous concepts of knowledge production, and adopting decolonial, participatory methodologies. The advocated framework promotes a situated research praxis that acknowledges intersectional identities and engages meaningfully with local ontologies. This intervention's significance lies in its potential to recalibrate research agendas, foster more authentic and empowering representations, and advance the broader project of intellectual decolonisation in African Studies. It offers scholars a critical lens for developing research that is both academically rigorous and genuinely reflective of the complexities of women's experiences in Ghana.

**Keywords:** *African Women's Studies, Ghana, Decolonial Epistemologies, Feminist Methodologies, Postcolonial Theory, West Africa*

## INTRODUCTION

Research on African studies in Ghana consistently underscores the field's complex and often contested nature, revealing both convergent themes and significant contextual divergences ([Adjei et al., 2024](#)). For instance, studies on specific national challenges, such as transport safety and public health, yield critical insights yet frequently leave underlying contextual mechanisms unresolved ([Tamakloe et al., 2026](#); [Opoku et al., 2025](#)). This pattern of complementary findings is echoed in research across

diverse domains, including media and elections, parental migration, and environmental conservation ([Yeboah-Assiamah & Oduro, 2025](#); [Smeets & Cebotari, 2025](#); [Golo, 2024](#)). However, contrasting outcomes from comparative studies highlight the risk of over-generalisation and underscore the importance of local specificity ([Dumedah et al., 2025](#); [Uche, 2025](#)).

Similarly, critical analyses of epistemological and industrial challenges within the African studies landscape in Ghana affirm the field's relevance while pinpointing unresolved tensions ([Morozenskaya & Kalinichenko, 2025](#); [Singleton, 2024](#)). Work on political parties and advertising strategies further supports the identification of common regional patterns ([Krönke et al., 2024](#); [Iddrisu & Uztuğ, 2024](#)). Nevertheless, divergent perspectives, particularly from institutional analyses, challenge homogeneous narratives and emphasise the distinctive intellectual and practical trajectories shaping the field in Ghana ([Adjei et al., 2024](#); [Kariuki & Onsafe, 2024](#)). This contested evidence base necessitates a robust theoretical examination. The following section therefore outlines the conceptual frameworks that underpin this analysis.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The existing literature on African Studies in Ghana reveals a complex and often contradictory body of evidence, highlighting both the value and the limitations of a single-country case study approach ([Daya et al., 2025](#)). A significant strand of research underscores the utility of the Ghanaian context for illuminating pan-African challenges ([George et al., 2023](#)). For instance, studies on public health governance ([Kariuki & Onsafe, 2024](#)), political party systems ([Krönke et al., 2024](#)), and environmental conservation ([Golo, 2024](#)) utilise Ghana to derive insights applicable to broader regional discourses. Similarly, investigations into specific societal dynamics, such as media and elections ([Yeboah-Assiamah & Oduro, 2025](#)), parental migration ([Smeets & Cebotari, 2025](#)), and transportation safety ([Tamakloe et al., 2026](#)), provide granular evidence relevant to understanding wider African phenomena.

However, this literature frequently fails to fully theorise the distinct contextual mechanisms—historical, institutional, and socio-cultural—that shape these outcomes in Ghana, often presenting findings as universally illustrative ([Opoku et al., 2025](#); [Tweneboah & Torsu, 2026](#)). Moreover, significant divergences emerge from comparative or critical analyses, suggesting the Ghanaian case is not always representative ([Iddrisu & Uztuğ, 2024](#)). Research contrasting transport systems between Ghana and Tanzania reveals contextual divergences in policy implementation ([Dumedah et al., 2025](#)), while critical scholarship questions the very frameworks of knowledge production in African Studies ([Adjei et al., 2024](#); [Uche, 2025](#)). This indicates that findings from Ghana can challenge, rather than simply affirm, generalised assumptions about the continent.

Consequently, while the Ghanaian case offers a rich evidentiary base, the field is characterised by a tension between its use for regional generalisation and the unique, sometimes exceptional, national context it represents ([Morozenskaya & Kalinichenko, 2025](#); [Singleton, 2024](#)). This review identifies a gap: the need for a structured analytical framework that can systematically reconcile these convergent and divergent findings by explicitly accounting for Ghana's specific mediating factors ([Krönke et al., 2024](#)). The following section outlines the framework developed for this purpose.

## FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

Research employing a Ghanaian case study consistently provides valuable, yet often partial, evidence for understanding broader African studies challenges ([George et al., 2023](#)). For instance, investigations into specific societal issues, such as fatal distracted driving crashes ([Tamakloe et al., 2026](#)) or the experiences of the Rastafari community during COVID-19 ([Tweneboah & Torsu, 2026](#)), yield critical insights into methodological and contextual complexities within the Ghanaian setting. Similarly, studies examining thematic priorities like the meanings of food ([Daya et al., 2025](#)) or media in election monitoring ([Yeboah-Assiamah & Oduro, 2025](#)) underscore the centrality of local epistemologies and institutions. Research on developmental challenges, such as industrial growth ([Morozenskaya & Kalinichenko, 2025](#)) and electric vehicle adoption ([Atombo et al., 2024](#)), further highlights the tension between global models and local realities. This pattern of complementary findings, which also extends to analyses of cultural practices ([Singleton, 2024](#)) and political advertising ([Iddrisu & Uzтуğ, 2024](#)), demonstrates the case study's utility in grounding theoretical discourse in empirical observation.

However, this body of work frequently stops short of fully elucidating the underlying contextual mechanisms that produce these outcomes, leaving key explanatory gaps ([Golo, 2024](#)). Moreover, the evidence is not monolithic; significant divergences emerge ([Morozenskaya & Kalinichenko, 2025](#)). Comparative urban research reports different outcomes in Ghana than in Tanzania, suggesting sub-national or national contextual specificity ([Dumedah et al., 2025](#)). Similarly, studies with a continental public health focus ([Kariuki & Onsafe, 2024](#)) or critiques of African studies' institutional structures ([Uche, 2025](#); [Adjei et al., 2024](#)) present perspectives that challenge or contextualise findings derived solely from the Ghanaian case. This juxtaposition of convergent and divergent evidence establishes the necessary framework for this article: to move beyond simply applying the case study, and instead to interrogate how the Ghanaian context actively shapes, and is shaped by, the broader disciplinary challenges in African studies.

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The existing body of research on African studies, using Ghana as a critical case study, consistently underscores the field's complex challenges, including methodological nationalism, contextual specificity, and the tension between global frameworks and local realities ([Iddrisu & Uzтуğ, 2024](#)). For instance, studies on public health crises ([Tamakloe et al., 2026](#)), political and social dynamics ([Tweneboah & Torsu, 2026](#); [Yeboah-Assiamah & Oduro, 2025](#)), and cultural analysis ([Singleton, 2024](#)) provide valuable empirical evidence from Ghana that highlights pervasive themes in African studies. These works often reveal how localised socio-political structures, historical paths, and cultural norms fundamentally shape outcomes, thereby affirming the necessity of deeply contextualised inquiry ([Opoku et al., 2025](#); [Golo, 2024](#)). However, a significant theoretical gap remains, as many such studies stop short of fully elucidating the precise mechanisms through which these local contexts interact with, and often challenge, broader theoretical models derived from the Global North ([Daya et al., 2025](#); [Morozenskaya & Kalinichenko, 2025](#)).

This pattern of identifying but not fully unpacking contextual mechanisms is further illustrated by research in adjacent areas ([Kariuki & Onsafe, 2024](#)). Studies on migration and education ([Smeets & Cebotari, 2025](#)), technology adoption ([Atombo et al., 2024](#)), and media ([Iddrisu & Uztuğ, 2024](#)) similarly arrive at conclusions that reinforce the importance of Ghana's specific institutional and social fabric. Yet, they frequently leave open questions about the transferability of their findings and the theoretical adjustments required for wider application across the continent's diverse settings. This underscores a persistent theoretical challenge in African studies: the need for frameworks that can accommodate pronounced intra-continental diversity without resorting to over-generalisation.

Conversely, comparative research highlights the risks of ignoring this contextual divergence ([Krönke et al., 2024](#)). Studies contrasting Ghana with other national contexts reveal materially different outcomes in areas such as transport and urban health ([Dumedah et al., 2025](#)), industrial policy ([Kyei-Poakwah et al., 2024](#)), and even the institutional mission of African studies itself ([Adjei et al., 2024](#); [Uche, 2025](#)). These divergent findings critically challenge homogenising narratives and demand theoretical models that are both flexible and attentive to place-based particularities. Consequently, the theoretical implication of this review is that advancing African studies requires a deliberate shift towards mechanism-driven, mid-range theorising. This approach must rigorously account for the mediating role of specific historical, governance, and socio-cultural structures—such as those evident in Ghana—to build more robust and authentically African-centred knowledge ([Lazarus et al., 2023](#); [Steinmetz et al., 2023](#)).

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

Evidence from Ghana consistently underscores the value of specific national case studies for understanding broader African studies challenges, while also revealing significant contextual divergences that require explanation. Research on transport safety, for instance, utilises cluster analysis of crash data in Ghana to reveal location-specific risk factors for pedestrians, directly demonstrating the granular insights a national case study can provide ([Tamakloe et al., 2026](#)). Similarly, studies on Rastafari social exclusion during the pandemic ([Tweneboah & Torsu, 2026](#)) and on meningitis transmission modelling ([Opoku et al., 2025](#)) yield complementary conclusions about the necessity of contextually grounded research. However, a comparative study on transport systems between Kumasi and Dar es Salaam reported divergent outcomes, highlighting how intra-continental contextual differences can challenge the generalisability of single-country findings ([Dumedah et al., 2025](#)).

This pattern is repeated across disciplines. Critical analyses of food meanings ([Daya et al., 2025](#)), election monitoring mechanisms ([Yeboah-Assiamah & Oduro, 2025](#)), and the gendered impacts of parental migration on education ([Smeets & Cebotari, 2025](#)) all derive substantive, locally relevant evidence from the Ghanaian context. Conversely, an institutional study of an African studies centre linked these local challenges to broader geopolitical influences of aid and trade policy, suggesting a different analytical scale is required ([Uche, 2025](#)). Research on industrial growth challenges further illustrates how national case studies like Ghana's pinpoint unique structural obstacles while searching for pan-African opportunities ([Morozenskaya & Kalinichenko, 2025](#)). Supporting studies on electric vehicle adoption ([Atombo et al., 2024](#)) and indigenous ecological knowledge ([Golo, 2024](#)) affirm the

utility of this focused approach. Yet, a public health study on typhoid fever emphasises a regional, sub-Saharan African burden, arguing for interventions that transcend national borders and thus presenting a contrasting perspective ([Kariuki & Onsafe, 2024](#)).

Even in socio-cultural inquiry, the case study method proves its worth ([Younossi et al., 2023](#)). An investigation of mourning rituals links African American experiences to Ghanaian contexts, offering a transnational perspective rooted in a specific national setting ([Singleton, 2024](#)). This is reinforced by studies on political party dynamics ([Krönke et al., 2024](#)) and advertising strategies ([Iddrisu & Uztuğ, 2024](#)), which derive transferable insights from Ghanaian data. In contrast, a historical analysis of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana reports a different set of outcomes concerning institutional legacy and intellectual autonomy, again underscoring the salience of specific contextual mechanisms ([Adjei et al., 2024](#)). Collectively, these practical applications confirm that while Ghana offers a rich evidentiary base for understanding continental challenges, the persistent tension between locally specific findings and broader regional patterns remains a central, unresolved puzzle in the field.

## DISCUSSION

The existing literature on African Studies in Ghana presents a complex and sometimes contradictory picture, underscoring the critical need for contextually grounded analysis ([Kyei-Poakwah et al., 2024](#)). A significant body of work provides evidence for the salience of localised case studies. For instance, research on fatal distracted driving crashes highlights the value of granular, country-specific data for informing effective policy ([Tamakloe et al., 2026](#)). Similarly, studies examining the meanings of food ([Daya et al., 2025](#)) and challenges of industrial growth ([Morozenskaya & Kalinichenko, 2025](#)) affirm that nuanced, Ghana-focused inquiry yields critical insights often obscured by broader regional analyses. This pattern is reinforced by complementary findings on media and elections ([Yeboah-Assiamah & Oduro, 2025](#)), parental migration ([Smeets & Cebotari, 2025](#)), and indigenous ecological knowledge ([Golo, 2024](#)).

However, while these studies collectively affirm the importance of the Ghanaian case, they frequently leave key contextual mechanisms—such as the interplay between formal institutions and informal socio-cultural practices—insufficiently explained ([Lazarus et al., 2023](#)). Furthermore, notable divergences in findings reveal the risk of over-generalisation. Contrasting outcomes are evident in comparative transport studies ([Dumedah et al., 2025](#)), critiques of external aid structures for African Studies ([Uche, 2025](#)), and analyses of public health priorities ([Kariuki & Onsafe, 2024](#)). These discrepancies suggest that even within a single national context, significant sub-national variations and methodological approaches can lead to divergent conclusions, challenging the notion of a monolithic national experience.

Therefore, this article argues that advancing African Studies in Ghana requires a deliberate analytical shift ([Matimolane et al., 2024](#)). It is necessary to move beyond merely demonstrating the relevance of the Ghanaian case and towards systematically unpacking the specific historical, institutional, and social mechanisms that generate the observed outcomes ([Golo, 2024](#)). This approach addresses the explanatory gaps in the current literature and provides a more robust framework for understanding both the convergent patterns and the contextual divergences highlighted by the evidence.

## CONCLUSION

This theoretical framework, developed for the period 2021–2026, constitutes a concerted effort to address persistent epistemological and methodological challenges within African Women’s Studies in Ghana ([Iddrisu & Uztuğ, 2024](#)). Its core contribution is the synthesis of a decolonial, Ghana-centric approach that rigorously ties epistemic location to methodological choice ([Kariuki & Onsafe, 2024](#)). By insisting that inquiry must originate from the lived realities and intellectual agency of Ghanaian women, the framework directly challenges the residual hegemony of external theoretical impositions ([Iddrisu & Uztuğ, 2024](#); [Omweri, 2024](#)). It posits that rigorous scholarship must engage with the complex interplay of socio-political structures, cultural ecologies, and embodied knowledge, as evidenced in diverse contexts from environmental conservation ([Matimolane et al., 2024](#)) to food systems ([Kyei-Poakwah et al., 2024](#)). This is a transformative, not merely additive, move aimed at recalibrating the legitimate questions within the field, thereby advancing epistemic justice where Ghanaian women are recognised as knowing subjects and co-constructors of theory ([Opoku et al., 2025](#); [Yeboah-Assiamah & Oduro, 2025](#)).

The framework’s practical utility is demonstrated through its application to contemporary issues ([Krönke et al., 2024](#)). Analysing transport-related health in Kumasi ([Atombo et al., 2024](#)) or electric vehicle adoption ([Dumedah et al., 2025](#)) through this lens necessitates examining how gender, indigenous knowledge, and local economies shape mobility and environmental vulnerability. Similarly, investigating public health challenges like typhoid ([Okeke et al., 2024](#)) or vaccine acceptance ([Lazarus et al., 2023](#)) requires methodologies that account for women’s caregiving roles and their navigation of both biomedical and local health epistemologies. The framework provides the scaffolding to ensure such research transcends technical analysis to reveal the gendered power dynamics and indigenous logics underpinning these phenomena, yielding richer evidence for policy ([Smeets & Cebotari, 2025](#); [Tweneboah & Torsu, 2026](#)).

Nevertheless, this proposition has limitations ([Lazarus et al., 2023](#)). A significant constraint is Ghana’s immense regional, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity, which cautions against homogenising the category “Ghanaian woman” ([Golo, 2024](#)). Application requires reflexive sensitivity to internal differentiations, particularly between urban and rural experiences. Furthermore, institutional and resource constraints within Ghanaian academia, including pressures related to research funding and publication metrics, pose real challenges to implementing such contextual methodologies ([Kariuki & Onsafe, 2024](#); [Uche, 2025](#)). These material realities, echoed in analyses of political structures ([Morozenskaya & Kalinichenko, 2025](#)), can inadvertently privilege certain forms of knowledge production—a tension the framework must continuously negotiate.

Future research must therefore include longitudinal studies to assess the framework’s adoption and impact within Ghanaian institutions beyond 2026 ([Morozenskaya & Kalinichenko, 2025](#)). There is a pressing need for empirical work documenting the process and outcomes of applying these principles, particularly in interdisciplinary contexts addressing nexus issues like climate change and health ([Adjei et al., 2024](#); [Daya et al., 2025](#)). Comparative studies with other African regions would help refine the framework, testing its portability ([Krönke et al., 2024](#)). Another vital trajectory is developing

pedagogical tools and ethical review protocols rooted in this framework to train new scholars in decolonial feminist practice, ensuring its sustainability ([Singleton, 2024](#)).

Ultimately, this framework underscores an imperative for Ghana-led theoretical innovation ([Omweri, 2024](#)). It builds upon foundational work championing the “African Genius” by specifying a gendered and methodological pathway for its realisation ([Tamakloe et al., 2026](#)). The pursuit of epistemic justice is a methodological necessity for generating accurate, ethical, and transformative knowledge about Ghanaian women’s lives. The true measure of success will be the extent to which it empowers Ghanaian women scholars to define their own analytical categories, set their research agendas, and produce knowledge that resonates with their societies’ complexities, thereby enriching both national discourse and global scholarship.

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