



DESTIGMATISING DISABILITY IN THE GHANAIAN SOCIETY: A SOCIAL MODEL ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN MARTIN OWUSU'S *THE LEGEND OF AKU SIKA*

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ABSTRACT: *There is a global issue of discrimination against persons with disabilities, including the visually and hearing impaired and those physically challenged. In Ghana, systemic stigma persists despite advocacy and constitutional protections, arising from cultural beliefs and colonial legacies. This study examines the role of theatre in destigmatising disability within the Ghanaian society through a critical analysis of Martin Owusu's play The Legend of Aku Sika. It provides a lens to interrogate how narratives can challenge harmful stereotypes and reframe societal perceptions of disability. Utilising the social model of disability theory, it critiques exclusionary norms while advocating for inclusive futures. The study revealed that the play humanises disability through empathetic characterisation, cultural re-signification, and communal redemption arcs, positioning literature as a catalyst for social transformation. It is concluded that theatre can serve as an effective tool for disability advocacy in Ghana through culturally grounded storytelling.*

KEYWORDS: Disability, destigmatisation, theatre, inclusiveness, misconceptions.



INTRODUCTION

Disability representation in African theatre historically has not been given much impetus in society. It is often shrouded in silence, pity, or perceived and judged as a curse. In Ghana, deeply rooted cultural beliefs and traditional practices often link physical challenges or deformities to spiritual curses or ancestral punishment. By this belief, they continue to reinforce the marginalisation of persons with disabilities. When such representations appear in dramatic texts or performances, they are frequently fraught with stigma, portraying disabled characters as burdens, villains, or tragic figures. This prevailing narrative perpetuates societal exclusion, limits understanding, and stalls efforts toward inclusion and equality. However, theatre seems to be a potent force and platform for cultural interrogation and social change. It has the capacity not only to reflect society but to reform it.

In Owusu's *The Legend of Aku Sika*, it offers a rare and powerful departure from stereotypical portrayals. Thus, the play brings to the fore a character who, regardless of her physical challenge, is endowed with beauty, intelligence, virtue, and strength. Indeed, the development and treatment of the protagonist, that is, Aku Sika, is quite revolutionary since it gives impetus to the issue of disability as not just a burden but a dignified and unique piquancy to improving the communal worldview of the Ghanaian to embrace all as one big family. In effect, Owusu's *The Legend of Aku Sika* sets the audience to rethink entrenched cultural norms, acknowledging and recognising the impediments society has created all in the name of belief systems and practices on people with disability.

Therefore, in appreciating and understanding the representation and role of disability in Ghanaian theatre as a tool for social change, resistance, and inclusion, the following questions were asked. How are persons with disabilities stereotyped and marginalised through cultural beliefs, customs, norms, and traditions, and in what ways do these socio-cultural frameworks perpetuate stigma? Furthermore, the study examines the transformative potential of theatre by asking: How does Martin Owusu's *The Legend of Aku Sika* function as an advocacy tool to challenge entrenched discrimination and reimagine disability beyond social prejudices?

To address these questions, the study utilised a qualitative approach hinged on textual analysis. The play *The Legend of Aku Sika* served as the primary source of data. It is analysed through the lens of the Social Model of Disability propounded by Oliver (1983).

People with disabilities are those who “have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, which interact with various barriers, and may hinder their full and effective participation in society” (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD] (2006). While making up a significant fraction of the global population, people with disabilities frequently lack access to services and have their needs ignored (Thomas, 2005; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2009).

Persons with Disabilities can be found all over the world. They are largely marginalized and not represented in the socio-economic, cultural, and political spheres of society (Fitzgerald, 2023). According to Fougeyrollas and Beauregard (2001), the paradigm is merely a lens for viewing disability, with some causes being given systematic precedence over others. The disability study focuses solely on the type of disability, the child's perspective, and the social setting. Using the play, *The Legend of Aku Sika* as a source of entertainment, social criticism, cultural contemplation, and individual expression are just a few of the many purposes that



theatre fulfills. The play, as an embodiment of theatre, has the potential to be an effective instrument for community development, education, and healing. *The Legend of Aku Sika* uses narrative to examine human experiences, question viewpoints, and promote empathy on the theme of discrimination against persons with disabilities.

There are difficulties for persons with disabilities all around the world, since it is difficult to define what constitutes a disability. Disability has been created in the developed world context across all spectrums. However, this offers little assistance to underdeveloped nations trying to remove barriers related to disabilities. The lack of knowledge about the status of individuals with disabilities and the policies that ought to be put in place to address their impairment is primarily due to this. This circumstance makes the comparison difficult, which limits discussion and research on cross-country topics. As a result, the study's goal is to determine whether the members with disabilities are effectively managed and treated as being part of the society we live in. The play *The Legend of Aku Sika* can be used to encourage audiences to think about other viewpoints, advocate for change, and increase awareness of significant issues on the rise of discrimination and marginalization against people living with disability.

Ghana's 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution provides for the universal human rights of all Ghanaians. The Constitution ensures that the interests of the PWD against all kinds of discrimination, marginalization, and violence are protected and encouraged. PWDs should not be exposed to any form of preferential treatment. Article 29 of the Constitution specifies that, as far as possible, all public places shall have the necessary facilities to ensure that PWDs have access to public places. The Constitution also allows for special benefits for PWD in the field of industry and jobs. To preserve these liberties and freedoms, the government shall pass legislation for the preservation of the rights of the disabled. In order to conform to the Disability Act 2006, the Disability Act 2006 was passed. Despite legislative protections, stigma, marginalization, and restricted access to basic services like work, healthcare, and education remain commonplace for people with disabilities in Ghana. This is caused by a number of things, such as societal perceptions, false beliefs about disabilities, and insufficient application of current rules and regulations. This study uses a critical analysis of Martin Owusu's play *The Legend of Aku Sika* to investigate how theatre might help destigmatize disability in Ghanaian society.

In order to comprehend the subtleties of modern society, postcolonial literature must be studied. We can learn more about the challenges and experiences of oppressed communities, as well as the ways that power dynamics are upheld and contested by studying theatre as a reflection of society, specifically in the Ghanaian context. *The Legend of Aku Sika* gives historically marginalized voices a forum by presenting counter-narratives that subvert prevailing ideologies and discourses (Sawant, 2012).

Additionally, *The Legend of Aku Sika* positions itself among postcolonial literature, which promotes intercultural communication and sharing. It questions the idea of a single, universal story and celebrates the multiplicity and hybridity of cultures and languages (Zhang, 2023). It promotes empathy and understanding across many tribes and cultures by encouraging readers to examine and confront their own assumptions via the examination of various viewpoints and voices (Thamarana, 2015).

Our goal in this study is to investigate theatre's applicability to modern society, as the study focuses on *The Legend of Aku Sika*. We investigate the themes of discrimination and



stigmatization as social critiques that surface from Martin Owusu's *The Legend of Aku Sika* as a postcolonial text. Additionally, the study examines how the text addresses current concerns and adds to ongoing discussions about disability discrimination and stigmatization. The ultimate goal of this research is to show that theatre is an essential instrument that helps us to interact with the complicated reality of our world and strive toward a more inclusive and just society, rather than merely being an academic endeavour. This paper, therefore, examines how Owusu's play contributes to destigmatising disability by portraying it through empathy, cultural re-signification, and social inclusion.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Disability

Fougeyrollas and Beauregard (2010) suggest that the paradigm is simply a lens for interpreting disability, with the systematic prioritization of some causes to ignore others. Disability research involves experiencing disability only from the child's perspective, the form of disability, and the social context. On the other hand, models are not only a definition of impairment and how to attenuate the adverse effects of disability, but also how the disability can affect functionality. There are various models that have a different focus on understanding disability; whilst each can be important for a specific area of study, there is no model that offers a sufficient understanding of how disability functions as a whole (Bricout *et al.*, 2004). These models must be used as tools to explain disability and not as a collection of discrete constructs. Basically, there are two main disability types: the medical model and the social model.

According to Drake (2011), the goal of the medical model is to prevent, treat, and manage ailments in order to ameliorate or eliminate the cause of the ailment. For instance, stamina training for a child with cerebral palsy helps to lessen the barriers encountered at each of the child's developmental stages. This, however, offers a vital advantage for intervention for the child with a disability, only to the point where there are signs of a pathogenic process. For developmental disability, this is not always tenable because even when there is a clearly established medical diagnosis or where the diagnosis is unclear like in the case of autism spectrum disorder, there isn't any particular palpable medical intervention to assuage the symptoms associated with the disability and therefore the only option left for children with disability and their families is to adapt to the disability which primarily focuses on the person-environment interaction (Bricout *et al.*, 2014). The medical model, however, is not suited for this interaction (person-environment) due to the factors actively influencing disability (Fougeyrollas & Beauregard, 2010).

According to Asch (2001), the social model or the minority model of disability is one of the most effective models used for ensuring the full participation of persons with disability. However, the limits of these rights are currently the focus of disagreement as well, especially when some practices and services are challenged with expensive modifications (Bricout *et al.*, 2004). The social paradigm classifies the accommodations that are sought for children with disability to the same degree as accommodations were given for children without disability. The model acknowledges the importance of the political, social, and institutional framework in helping people with disability to live independently (Barton and Armstrong, 2001). This study uses a critical analysis of Martin Owusu's play *The Legend of Aku Sika* to investigate



how theatre might help de-stigmatize disability in Ghanaian society. It offers a prism through which to examine how stories might refute negative preconceptions and alter how society views people with disabilities.

The measurement of disability has important implications for law and policy. There is no universally accepted definition for disability. There are, however, a number of conceptual models that guide measurement. No model can encompass all the dimensions of disability, but different models serve different purposes and provide useful perspectives on disability in a given context (Palmer, 2012). Disability represents a complex process and is not a single, static state. It refers to the outcome of the interaction of a person and his/her environment (physical, social, cultural, or legislative) and represents a measure of the negative impact of environmental factors on one's ability to participate. The complexity of the concept has resulted in the proliferation of statistics on disability that are neither comparable nor easy to interpret (Madans, Loeb & Altman, 2011). In this study, Martin Owusu's play *The Legend of Aku Sika* is critically analyzed to see how theater might help de-stigmatize disability in Ghanaian society. It offers a prism through which to examine how stories might revise society's views of disability and dispel damaging prejudices.

Disability is perceived to be caused by physical impairments resulting from disease, injury or health conditions. Impairment leads directly to the loss of bodily and social functioning. Hence, interventions are primarily medical, including rehabilitation and institutional care, as well as social assistance programmes such as special education, vocational training, and social welfare (Palmer, 2012). Through sympathetic characterization, cultural re-signification, and collective redemption arches, *The Legend of Aku Sika* humanizes disability and positions literature as a force for social change.

Although useful, serving both political and empowerment interests, the social model proponents have been criticized for neglecting the centrality of the real experience of disabled people. One of the key critics, Bury (2019), contended:

I do not believe that the 'social model' has really engaged with the real issues facing the vast majority of disabled people, and, despite its rhetoric and undoubted attractions for some, it has not produced a cogent approach which can serve the real practical needs of disabled people, or indeed the research community (p.1075).

The play's portrayal of disability, its criticism of exclusionary standards, and its support for inclusive futures are all decoded in this article. According to the study, *The Legend of Aku Sika* humanizes handicap through collective redemption arches, cultural re-signification, and sympathetic character development, establishing literature as a force for social change. Despite the criticisms against the social model, its importance lies in an outlook to reduce the burdens and barriers to PWD.

Disability, stigma, and gender in Ghana

There is evidence of stigma in Ghanaian homes, schools, and healthcare facilities (Avoke, 2002; Baffoe, 2013). Gender exacerbates marginalisation. That is, disabled women encounter preconceptions regarding marriageability, parenting, and sexuality (Mitra, Posarac, & Vick, 2013; Opoku et al., 2017). Consequently, in traditional contexts, albeist narratives may be gendered, subjecting women's bodies to stricter scrutiny and moralising physical differences



(Oppong-Asare, 2019). This intersection of gender and stigma is openly addressed in *The Legend of Aku Sika*, which has a crippled female protagonist and provides an essential counter-image to the “tragic, impure, or cursed” feminine body (Goffman, 1963; Barker, 2011).

Theoretical Underpinning

The study was underpinned by the Social Model of Disability theory propounded by Oliver (2013). The social model theory basically is a socially constructed phenomenon that emphasises the need to focus on the social aspects of disability in the context of how the physical and social environment imposes limitations upon certain categories of people (Maldorado, 2013). In essence, it is framed in the context of society and the environment.

Accordingly, Oliver (2013) posits that social model theory is a way of viewing the world developed by disabled people. To be referred to as disabled, it is the society that has created or constructed barriers largely through cultural and belief systems of the said tradition and people’s attitudes to difference, such that it is assumed that People with disability (PWD) cannot do certain things.

The significance of the social model of disability helps in recognising the barriers that make PWDs' lives harder or difficult. In essence, removing them creates equality and offers disabled people more independence, choice, and opportunity to feel a part of society.

Furthermore, the social model of disability, as explained by Buder and Perry (2024), asserts that disability is only disabling when it prevents someone from doing what they want or need to do. This assertion, in their opinion, denies the responsibility meted out to society as the agents of burdening PWDs. They argue that the environment must have a concrete approach in integrating PWDs into it and change how society perceives them.

Contrastingly, society appears to be at the centre of marginalising people with disability. This is because individual limitations are not necessarily the cause of disability. Rather, it is the society’s failure to provide or create the enabling environment to ensure they are seen as persons able and not burdens or evils to be active participants in the society. Thus, theatre a tool for social change, is seen as a unique creative approach needed in shaping attitudes, behaviours, perceptual connotations, and policy changes driven by human rights and principles of equity.

Consequently, the Social Model of Disability theory provides a critical tool for deconstructing how *Legend of Aku Sika* reveals and resists the cultural construction of disability in Ghana. It also advocates for reducing social barriers and fostering inclusion through principles like non-discrimination, universal accessibility, and environmental normalisation (Maldonado, 2013). This will then promote values such as human dignity, freedom, and equality.



METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach rooted in the interpretive design (Maher, 2025; Wiesner, 2022). It examined how the *Legend of Aku Sika* reflects, challenges, and reshapes cultural perceptions of disability within the Ghanaian theatrical space. The qualitative data collection instruments and analysis used comprised textual analysis. Textual analysis, as both a qualitative data collection and an analytical tool, is quite familiar to researchers in cultural and literary studies. It is based on numerous factors such as originality, creativity, inspiration, history, and the cultures in which we live or learn (Mensah, 2023; McKee, 2003). The study adopts a qualitative textual analysis, examining the characterisation, symbols, and themes in Owusu's *The Legend of Aku Sika* through the lens of the Social Model of Disability. Textual analysis is a sort of qualitative analysis based on interpretive methodologies that focuses on a text's underlying ideological and cultural assumptions (Mensah, 2023). This allowed for a deep reading of the play's language, characters, and themes with the focus on how disability was constructed, represented, and problematized in the narrative. Additionally, a contextual approach was utilised to situate the play within Ghana's historical, cultural, and socio-political realities. This, in turn, acknowledged the intersection of indigenous beliefs and contemporary discourses.

Again, the data was analysed thematically and contextually. The thematic analysis allowed for the identification of notable themes deduced from the text that are related to disability stigma, resistance, and empowerment. Similarly, the contextual interpretation was premised on the textual findings within the scope of Ghana's socio-cultural milieu, guided by the epistemology of the Social Model of Disability theory.

Synopsis of *The Legend of Aku Sika*.

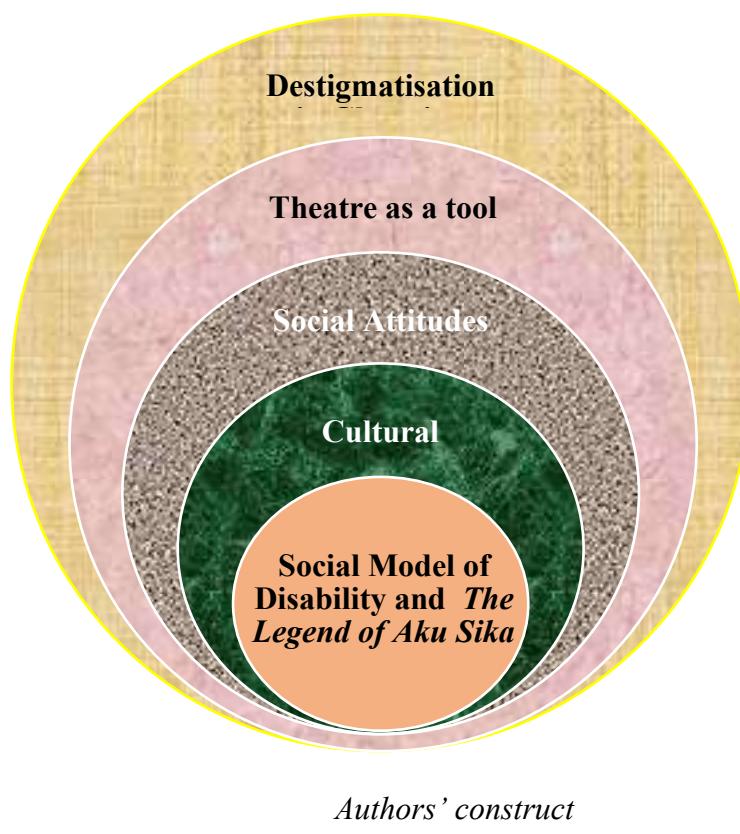
The play is a tense and tragic comedy that entails sad moments and joy. The play revolves around Aku, a beautiful teenage woman who has been deformed in her left arm since her infancy due to an accident, and lost both parents at a young age, and finds no joy in her life. An Old woman, who is Akua's grandmother, has been Akua's source till that age. The King, on the other hand, is the throned ruler of the kingdom who is blindly in love with Aku and risks his throne to save his love for Aku of her deformity and also to prove his challenging wife, Nanayere Ama, wrong about what she says about Aku. Finally, Aku's hidden arm is revealed before the citizenry to be full, made of golden bracelets and bangles, dazzling, while the king gets married to Aku and spares the life of Nanayere. Nanayere Ama is confronted by a man concerning her husband the king who is violating traditional custom by marrying another woman who is deformed. Aku is referred to as an orphan girl who killed her mother for giving birth to her and destroyed her father, whose grief ended his life. Nanayere reports the issue to Okyeamme, seeking the shameful dethronement of the king if he is wrong, and for her to be killed if Aku is not deformed on her left arm. Yaa, the king's younger sister insists and decides to be behind his brother, the king, no matter the circumstance. The queen mother asks Nanayere if she has seen Aku's deformed arm. Elders exclaim that if Aku is deformed by birth or accident, it's still a deformity, and she is needed to prove the king right or Nanayere wrong. Yaa and Okyeame visit Aku in her home to tell her about the issue running in the palace, and her presence is needed to save the Situation of the king. Aku narrates to Yaa and Okyeame on how she became deformed in her infancy after she lost her mother at birth and the sudden death of her father. "*I was born complete like any child that crawls, falls, cries, and laughs*". Aku

runs from the house after Okyeame and Yaa had left, trying to kill herself, but hears her grandmother calling and runs afar. She is being restored on her left arm by the spirit python she meets by the road, and honors the king's visitation and proves before the citizenry her golden arm as the king becomes happy and blissful. Nanayere gets ashamed, but being spared by the king, marries Aku peacefully.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the study focused on how the play, *The Legend of Aku Sika*, constructs disability, challenges cultural and social barriers, and contributes to the process of destigmatisation in Ghanaian theatre. Accordingly, the study developed the Social-Theatrical Model of Disability to guide the analysis of the data gathered with gleanings from the theory and literature reviewed.

Figure 1. Social-Theatrical Model of Disability (STMD)



This model pivots on Oliver's Social Model of Disability but is reinterpreted through the play *The Legend of Aku Sika* and the Ghanaian cultural context. The model depicts how Aku Sika dramatizes the journey from cultural stigma through representation and theoretical reframing toward theatre as resistance and ultimately destigmatisation.

There are disparities in the fight against discrimination, be it race or disability. In these days of human rights agitations and fight against racial discrimination, we still imbed in us



discrimination against people with disability which we have been crippled due to our tradition and customary rites.

In *The Legend of Aku Sika*, Owusu, the playwright, portrays a figure of Aku not just as a miraculous healing of her hand but as an exposure of the culture that discriminates against people with disability. At the onset, the Sage presents the destinies of the characters in the play. The belief that every man is predestined to experience his life is a myth that holds the core of the Akan society. As the Sage rightly put;

Living in the wisdom of your ancient existence,
Guiding unseen the ensure foot of the hunter
And the uncertainties of our birth... (Scene 1, p. 2)

This declares an uncertain destiny that is not of the choice of the living and yet unborn. It will not be the fault of a person born with disability or who accidentally becomes physically handicapped. Aku in the play is not born with physical disability but meets her accident at a tender age when her father sets a trap - a jack it was - 'that renders Aku to lose an arm.

In the Ghanaian cultural milieu, especially the Akan society, the customs and belief systems often associate physical impairments with spiritual connotations. In other words, these impairments are seen or referred to as 'musu' (curses), taboos, or ancestral punishments. This assertion is evident in the lines as delivered by Elder 2 as

Nana, is this true or false?

You know our sacred tradition regarding this taboo ...
First, is it true that you have decided to marry Aku?
And second, is she deformed? (Scene 2, pp. 18-19)

In Owusu's *The Legend of Aku Sika*, he exposes this mindset through the reactions of the court and the larger community towards the character Aku Sika's physical challenge (deformity). At the court, Nanayere and the Elders vehemently opposed the idea of the King choosing Aku Sika as a wife due to her deformity. Despite her moral uprightness, wisdom, beauty, and intelligence as asserted by the King, Aku Sika's worth was questioned because of her supposed impaction. This reflects what the social model of disability identifies as attitudinal barriers. It stigmatises views rooted in cultural traditions that see disability as deviant or undesirable. Consequently, Aku Sika suffers rejection, which does not arise from her physical state but from the social meanings imposed upon the community. Similarly, how the framework of the society regarding PWD is constructed. For instance, a critical look at the assertion articulated by the character Man in *The Legend of Aku Sika* adds credence to the society's construction of disability. He (Man) serves as a catalyst in the unfolding drama surrounding Aku Sika's deformity, actively stoking the flames of discontent. This is what he intimates:

The King plans to violate traditional customs by marrying a woman who is also deformed. Another woman who is deformed. Do you know this? (Scene 2, p.13)

This claim made by the character Man instigates, perpetuates stigma, and reinforces the community's prejudices against individuals with disabilities. His assertion appears as a weapon to ostracise and discriminate against marginalised people.



Another theme that emerged from the data is social attitudes and the politics of exclusion. The framework or the structure of traditional Ghanaian society for defending and/or upholding their norms is quite regimental. The playwright metaphorically utilises the royal court to represent the Ghanaian society where norms, customs, and practices are enacted and upheld. Aku Sika, the character, was faced with stiff opposition with regard to her marriage to the King. It was an outright rejection by the community members due to her disability. This is evident in the following lines spoken by the Sage:

...Beauty that dazzled the eye;
 Eyes that charmed and melted the heart of stone
 And humility of the soul that calmed
 The stormy mind graced this maiden.
 Young men dared not approach her for her hand.
 for fear of embarrassing rejection (Scene 1, p.9).

The Sage, as a narrator and representation of the community, his lines enunciates the tragic irony of Aku's situation. The qualities that she possesses are not seen by would-be suitors. Even if they see, societal stigma and prejudice surrounding her deformity prevent connections from forming. In effect, the fear of rejection rooted in society's prejudices further excludes her, illustrating the profound impact of discrimination on individual lives and relationships.

Accordingly, the social model of disability once again depicts the unbending institutional and social structures that marginalise, and not necessarily the issue of disability or impairment. This Owusu (1999) utilises to critique society's compromises and misguided judgment of people, especially disabled persons like Aku Sika. Therefore, the use of the court challenges the moral ineptitude of the society and flaws the argument surrounding Aku Sika's deformity.

The findings excluded theatre as a locus of transformation and resistance. The data showed that theatre has a special place in society. In the larger context of justice, morality, leadership, gender stereotyping, culture, and traditions, theatre acts as a mirror for society, reflecting human nature and condition. In light of *The Legend of Aku Sika*, theatre in this context becomes a vehicle for cultural resistance. The playwright, in his thoughts, stages disability as a human situation that requires solutions to the problems of injustice, exclusion, and dehumanisation of fellow humans rather than as a spectacle of sympathy. Through the use of conflict skillfully woven into the plot and dramatic irony, such as "Those Odomankoma will bless will not be helpless forever", the audience is confronted with society's prejudices toward PWDs. By using character empathy once more, the playwrights immerse the audience in the realm of emotional intelligence and critical thinking skills, which have the ability to upend established power structures and reverse social hierarchies. As a result, the social model idea transfers accountability from the individual to the community. The audience is thus challenged to address the societal structure that marginalises Aku Sika and, consequently, those who face comparable difficulties rather than concentrating on her particular situation.

Aku Sika is presented as an empowered individual who resists being labelled by societal stereotypes, rather than a passive victim of stigma. Her personality is quite strategic and articulate, and she is ethically resolute. Notwithstanding criticism, her insistence on her worth represents what the social model advocates: that people with disabilities should not be reduced to objects of charity but rather recognised as citizens with rights, capacities and goals



(Maldorado, 2013; Oliver, 1983). Consequently, her unexpected triumph, both in terms of royal acknowledgement and public sympathy, represents the reclaiming of agency. The arc of her character defies the tragic disability cliché in favour of a story of empowerment and transformation.

Ultimately, Owusu employs the play *The Legend of Aku Sika* to aid in destigmatising disability by amplifying his voice within the discourse of those with disabilities in society. He presents an alternative narrative to conventional and colonial interpretations of disability. Aku Sika is depicted as whole, competent, and virtuous rather than pitiable.

The King proclaims:

Three months on the throne, I am already dissatisfied with my people! (Scene 2, p. 15)

This statement reflects the King's perspective on an upcoming dispute regarding differing customs related to disability, but it is interpreted as a continuation of the rivalry that existed prior to his ascension to the throne. As his sister, Yaa, refers;

What do you expect after a dirty contest of mud-slinging and blatant bribery between ambitious would-be kings, whose only right to the throne was the possession of ill-gotten wealth with which they could buy the very throne they wish to sit on? (Scene 2, p.15).

Yaa is currently unable to address the discriminatory aspects; however, the King aims to change societal perceptions, highlighting the necessity for a compassionate king who can implement societal changes irrespective of wealth, ambition, and outdated customs that require reform.

Nanayere, based on the information from Man, discloses the king's own choice of a disabled wife. Even the Queen Mother decides to create detitanation;

I asked the question: where is she deformed? ...

...Is this deformity from birth or due to some misfortune of human accident? (Scene 2, p. 19)

This Elder 4 answers;

It does not matter whether it is a birth defect or accidentally inflicted. A deformity is a deformity. (Scene 2, p. 19)

The guardians of culture, tradition, and norms adhere to the traditional ways, overlooking the dynamic nature of culture. Certainly, the Queen Mother appears to recognise a potential for change alongside the King and his sister, Yaa. Disability is not inability.

Sincerely, the King distinguishes between those who are physically deformed and those who are morally and spiritually deformed, as the latter's presence in leadership tends to cause more mishaps.

...There are so many of us in this kingdom, including would-be Kings and power-thirsty corrupt men and women, who are morally and spiritually deformed. Yet, society seems to sanction the moral bankruptcy and spiritual cancer and rather seek out and humiliate the pure



heart, whose physical make-up is neither a social crime nor a measure of human imperfection. We (by our custom) consider the physically blind and lame deformed, and yet we ourselves do not see truth and cannot walk three upright yards in life's journey.

...But if I had met her before ascending this ancestral throne. I would have married her ten times if I had discovered that she was physically short of limb... (Scene 2, p. 19-20).

The core of the tradition and culture is connected to our beliefs about what cannot be changed. In our current times, we must consider numerous evolutions. Yaa, the king's sister, stood by him to defend Aku, showing that disability is a strength, not an inability.

My brother, I have promised to be behind you... (Scene 3, p. 21).

In the Akan clan, a person with a deformity often faces wrongful accusations stemming from misfortunes and predetermined destiny. The community believes that Aku's disability caused the death of his mother during childbirth and the untimely death of his father.

Aku recalls when she wants to end her life:

Forgive me, Grandmother, forgive me for the agony of pain...

I am responsible for the agony of my family... (Scene 3, p. 28)

Certain affiliations are associated with disabled individuals, suggesting that they often possess evil spirits that bring undesirable omens to both their families and the wider community. The community views her as a harmful presence that seeks to destroy the family into which she is introduced. Such a stereotyped epidemic has to be disregarded, though, on the premises of custom and tradition; there are reasons based on myth.

With the above, we reconcile the need to reconsider the culture that exists to dismantle the plight of people with disabilities in our community. One can have all the necessary physical parts of a human but may lack certain aspects of embodiment that foster growth and development. *The Legend of Aku Sika* by Martin Okyere Owusu exemplifies a cultural restoration that promotes a new era free from discrimination based on physical disability.

This study examines Martin Okyere Owusu's play *The Legend of Aku Sika*, emphasising its impact on transforming ideas of disability within Ghanaian theatre and society. It presents a Social-Theatrical Model of Disability pertinent to Ghanaian culture, highlighting that stigma originates from traditional ideas associating impairments with spiritual taboos. The play demonstrates that the obstacles encountered by those with disabilities are societal rather than intrinsic, urging a critical reassessment of these perspectives. Theatre is seen as a vehicle for resistance and contemplation, fostering empathy and societal transformation. Aku Sika's persona contests the tragic story of handicap, affirming agency and rights. The play examines antiquated traditions, advocating for a cultural shift towards acknowledging capabilities that transcend physical constraints, while the Social-Theatrical Model functions as a framework for promoting disability justice and inclusion within theatre. It advocates for destigmatization, encouraging society to utilise the arts as a transforming instrument for justice and inclusiveness.



CONCLUSION

Society stereotypes disability of a person's disability to indicate the presence of evil, being unfit, and a spiritual sense of destruction and bad omen. In the play, *The Legend of Aku Sika*, Owusu carefully addresses the issue of spirituality with regard to disability. Queen Mother questions to place the distinction between naturally deformed and accidentally deformed. Notwithstanding, the custom, culture, and tradition that has stereotyped disability is still embraced by the Elders to denounce anyone with disability not being recognized as a member of the royal family. Aku, in the play, represents all the disabled in society to inform society that there is an extraordinary impact they, the disabled, can make beyond the people we deem fit. The play further exposes the unthinkable stereotype of inability based on disability. The strength of the mind, beauty, and ability do not have anything to do with physical disability.

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