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Editorial Note

With this issue we inaugurate a new feature of the *Research Review*. From now on all articles will be prefaced by Abstracts in both English and French. We are grateful to the Embassy of France in Ghana for making this possible, and for supporting the publication of this issue.

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ASANTE QUEEN MOTHERS: PRECOLONIAL AUTHORITY IN A POSTCOLONIAL SOCIETY

Beverly J. Stoeltje

Abstract

While the Asantehene and the Asantehemmaa are well known figures in Ghana, less familiar are the many queen mothers who function in parallel roles to chiefs in every Asante town and paramountcy. Ignored by the British and generally bypassed by modern Ghanaian leaders, queen mothers have nevertheless continued to serve their constituencies faithfully. More recently, however, globalization has discovered them, and external sources are beginning to seek them out for local projects. Yet, queen mothers continue to face serious obstacles as a precolonial female authority in a postcolonial society.

Résumé

Bien que le Roi et la Reine des Asante soient très connus au Ghana, la plupart des Reines-mères qui jouent parallèlement les rôles de chefs dans tous les milieux Asante sont moins reconnues. En dépit du fait qu'elles sont ignorées par les Britanniques et non reconnues en général par les leaders ghanéens actuels, les Reines-mères continuent de servir loyalement leurs chefferies. Cependant, le concept de la mondialisation a très récemment permis de les redécouvrir. C'est ainsi que des organisations étrangères commencent à les repérer pour des projets locaux. Après tout, les Reines-mères font toujours face à de sérieux problèmes par le fait qu'elles constituent un pouvoir féminin précolonial dans une société postcoloniale.

Introduction

No longer absent from representations of the Asante people, queen mothers are being discovered by the global media as well as scholars. Of particular interest is an August 2000 article in GEO magazine of Germany. GEO sent journalist Carmen Butta and photographer Sibylle Bergemann to Ghana for the express purpose of documenting Asante Queen Mothers, and their extensive article in a special issue devoted to the subject of women and men, old myths and new roles, claims a significant space for queen mothers on the contemporary global stage.

This article will consider the Queen Mother's role and responsibilities in the political system of the Asante as it is articulated by individuals who hold these positions, recognizing that they fulfill very specific functions while at the same time they bring to life images that express key concepts in the culture.¹ The term *ahemmaa* (sing., *ahemmaa* pl.) in Twi refers to the female leaders who parallel the male chiefs (*ahene* sing., *ahene* pl.), in the indigenous political system known as chieftaincy. The term for chief or queen mother combines with the name of a specific location (or "stool" as it is known) to create the full title. The king of the Asante is then the *Asantehene*, and the queen mother of the Asante is the *Asantehemmaa*. The same linguistic rule applies throughout the Akan cultures, so the queen mother of the paramountcy and the town of Offinso is the *Ofensohemmaa*, and the chief of Offinso is the *Ofensohene*.

Although colonial forces aggressively ignored queen mothers and other female leaders in Africa, and the forces of modernization generally have failed to acknowledge them, queen mothers are certainly conscious of their own significance as female leaders.² The GEO article features the Queen Mother of

¹This work derives from the author's ethnographic research on Asante Queen Mothers carried out in the Ashanti region in 1989-90 on a Fulbright Research Fellowship and subsequently.

²R.S. Rattray, anthropologist and British colonial administrator for the Ashanti, wrote in 1923,

all of the Asante, the *Asantehemmaa*, and the paramount queen mother of Offinso, the *Ofensohemmaa*, an educated woman who was an elementary school teacher before she became queen mother. The *Asantehemmaa*, Afaa Kobi Serwaa Ampem II, who has been on the stool since 1977, has many accomplishments to her credit, but perhaps she might consider her most impressive one to be her son, the *Asantehene*, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II. When the king's stool became vacant in 1999 because "a great tree had fallen,"³ the *Asantehemmaa* nominated her son, the youngest of her five children, to be placed on the stool. Being the son of the Asante Queen Mother defined him as an ideal candidate according to his lineage, but in addition he possessed qualifications that ranked him high by the standards of the modern world. A resident of London as well as Kumasi at the time of his nomination, he is well educated and has achieved success in the business world. After lengthy discussions by the council, kingmakers, the royal family, government officials, and indeed a large portion of the Ghanaian population, he was selected from several qualified candidates to become the new king. Subsequently, elaborate enstoolment ceremonies, attended by thousands of the Asante people in the Kumasi stadium, confirmed the new *Asantehene* as Osei Tutu II. Immediately he established himself as an effective king with a vision and the ability to implement it. Among his most notable achievements, launched soon after his enstoolment, the Asante Educational Fund seeks to improve education in the Ashanti region generally and to aid students in their efforts to advance their education.

The *Offinsohemmaa*, Ama Serwah Nyarko, the queen mother of the paramountcy of Offinso, came on the stool in 1987. She has traveled to Germany in recent years where she spoke to women's organizations interested in development in Africa; she then hosted these women when they came to visit Ghana, but she has also been to Amsterdam to visit her constituency there. Not the only traveling queen mother, others too visit their constituencies in New York, Chicago, Toronto, London, and Amsterdam. Because they are trained in leadership and the exercise of authority, they are eager to step onto the global stage, whether educated or not, because they know that increased knowledge of the world, especially through travel, further legitimizes their authority.

Not restricted to those who live in their village or town and fulfill their responsibilities on a daily basis, the title and signification of this role has been expanded to apply to female leaders in the markets who settle disputes among the sellers (Clark 1994), and in more recent years a variation with a special title has been created that allows a town to honour (and claim) one of its own daughters who has achieved high status outside of the town or village. In this latter instance, the home town of a woman who has achieved success in government or through business in the urban areas, endows her with the title of honorary Queen Mother, acknowledging her success and linking her to the home town in the hopes that she will assist them in efforts to move forward.

To consider the role of queen mothers in contemporary Ghana we benefit from the discourse developed by Africanist scholars and the educated elite in the last decade of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century, a critical perspective that looks to both the past and the future. Consistent with this perspective we raise the question, what is the significance of this pre-colonial

To-day the Queen Mothers are unrecognized by us...In other words, the Ashanti have simply accepted the fact that our system seemed to take no official cognizance of women as a power in the family and in the State, and therefore did not question our methods. Now I feel certain we have here a tremendous potential power for good in these old mothers of Africa;... Surely if we that is, the Government, do not in some small measure give the respect and honour that has always been the Queen Mothers' right and the Queen Mother is to an Ashanti the personification of motherhood we cannot be surprised if her children follow our example (Rattray 1923: 84-85).

Concerning chieftaincy in post-independence states, Effa Okupa writes, "The role of the Queen mother and Kingmakers had fallen into disrepute during the colonial rule, but was activated post-independence." (Okupa 1998: 28).

³The phrase, "a great tree has fallen," is a euphemistic metaphor (an example of indirection), used to refer to the passing away of a specific *Asantehene*, in this case Opoku Ware II., and it also indicates that the Asante people are in mourning.

institution in a post-colonial society? Like a Member of Parliament who asked me if, in my opinion, chieftaincy served any good purpose in contemporary Ghanaian life, there are Ghanaians who question whether the institution of chieftaincy is useful in contemporary Ghana. Yet, there are many others, both educated and uneducated, who place a high value on it. More generally, throughout Africa debates over gender, authority, and social change are frequently shaped into an opposition between *custom* and *modernity* or a conflict that sets *culture* against *human rights*. Achille Mbembe has recently introduced new terms to replace these dichotomies and transcend their limitations (Mbembe 2001). He argues that *cosmopolitanism* and *nativism* transcend the limitations of the more commonly used terms. But more importantly, he argues that African identities are not captured by these concepts but are composed and stylized and ultimately rearranged around central signifiers which function both as images and illusions. Inviting the analyst to transcend facile oppositions, he urges us to grasp the spring of tension, the lines of escape and the paradoxes inherent in African identities.

Turning to the Asante once again, paradox occurs in such abundance that it seems to constitute the norm. Wearing traditional cloth, Asante women and men gather at the palace of the king (the Asantehene) or the Queen Mother of Asante (the Asantehemmaa) for courts, funerals, durbars and other special occasions. Simultaneously, and within this context, however, they are pursuing the goals of modernity as seriously as any business person in a Western suit. These paradoxes, deeply enmeshed in contemporary Asante, are negotiated through the institution of chieftaincy and the practices of custom as performed. Through the weekly meetings of courts, the frequent large-scale funerals, and regularly occurring rituals, Asante **perform their culture**, as one chief explained to me. In the process of performance, identity is embodied, affirmed, and paradoxes are temporarily resolved. Although they still function as political leaders within Asante culture, the role of queen mothers, and chiefs, defines them as signifiers of the institution of chieftaincy, and they affirm Asante identity in the performance of their role. A plethora of academic studies have demonstrated that identity, like ethnicity, becomes important when significant changes occur in a social/cultural group, especially those involving power and authority, and a consciousness of identity develops, attracting attention to the unique features that define and name the people. At the time when such a consciousness develops, signs and signifiers of identity are identified, intensifying or modifying previously held signs, or creating new ones entirely but linking them to the past. Characteristic of signs, according to Peter Bogatyrev and Roman Jakobson, is the capacity to represent several ideas at once and therefore to fulfill several semiotic functions at the same time. However, one semiotic function may be dominant over others, and functions may shift, so that the dominant function of a sign may change when circumstances change (Bogatyrev 1976: 20-32; Jakobson 1971: 82-87). Moreover, according to Volosinov (1973: 23-24), different social interests may use the same sign for different ideological purposes, leading to refraction, distortion, conflict, or even crisis over meaning and function.

Focusing on Queen Mothers as a sign of Asante female authority, in this article I will explore their role from the perspective of performance, directing attention to actual situations and events and particular individuals. The performance approach focuses on individuals at a specific moment in time who enact their roles in certain defined situations and settings, taking account of the fact that others are aware of performance and will respond to it. This approach attends carefully to context as well, including the relevant historical, social, political, and economic conditions affecting a set of circumstances.

Moreover, a performance approach shifts the focus of analysis from an abstract idea of an institution that operates according to a set of rules to the actual practices of the participants. This approach may represent a challenge to those who prefer to concentrate attention on a set of rules and guidelines, oral or written, as the explanation for what they do. Understandably, many formerly colonial peoples develop standardized responses for anthropologists and other outsiders who wish to carry out "work" in their culture. But these "texts" only represent an abstract system, or a system of some previous era, and though they can be useful for certain purposes, they do not inform us of what is actually taking place in the present set of circumstances. Recognizing that the performance approach attempts to understand specific people in the context of their actions, and that individual humans can function as signs and that those signs have different functions which **must** undergo change, this article views Queen Mothers as a sign of Asante female authority at a **moment** in time when paradox and irony are much in

evidence, and their functions are certainly undergoing modification, and, consequently, the meaning of the sign itself is also changing.⁴

The Asante, one of the several societies who constitute the larger cultural group known as the Akan, are located in the Ashanti region of Ghana. This article focuses on Asante queen mothers, but the political system of which they are a part characterizes all of the Akan peoples located in southern Ghana and Ivory Coast. In the Ashanti Region every town, village or division has a queen mother and chief who serve as traditional authorities. Each local chief and queen mother belongs to a division, headed by a paramount chief and queen mother, and all of the divisions together complete the Asante culture. At the top of this hierarchy sit the King and Queen Mother of the Asante, the *Asantehene* and the *Asantehemmaa*. This principle of replication of the political system from the top of the pyramid to the bottom distinguishes the Akan from many other kingdoms in Africa, and it also ensures that every individual has a direct link to a political leader, who has a direct link to a superior. A development of some interest in recent years is the fact that patrilineal ethnic groups who are not related to the matrilineal Akan, and who have not had queen mothers in the past, have begun incorporating them into their systems as well.

This form of leadership has been characterized as a dual gender system by scholars, or one with gender parallelism (Okonjo 1976; Sudarkasa 1987). Central to the dynamics of chieftaincy and to the identity of every individual member of the culture is the kinship system which is matrilineal. That is to say, one's family and one's clan are defined through the mother's line, and if one is to be a queen mother or a chief, one must be descended from a royal ancestress through the mother. Not only are political leadership and kinship defined by the precolonial cultural system, but it integrates other institutions and practices, including religion, gender, law and land use. Recognized locally as "Custom," and sometimes labeled "traditional rule" or "traditional authority,"⁵ queen mothers and chiefs are involved in all domains of custom, while at the same time they are engaged in adapting to postcolonial society

Queen mothers of the Akan have their own stools. Among all of the Akan peoples the stool symbolizes power and authority just as the throne does in European monarchies. Thus when it is said that a queen mother "has her own stool," the reference is that she has her own power. She occupies her stool on the basis of her own qualifications. This distinguishes Akan female leaders from many others in Africa who derive their power from their relationship to a chief. Among the Akan both a queen mother and a chief must be members of the same royal family. Each stool has a royal family associated with one of the seven or eight clans, and the chief and queen mother will belong to that royal family. In some instances the queen mother may, in fact, be the biological mother of the chief (as with the current *Asantehemmaa* and *Asantehene*), but more often they are aunt and nephew or uncle and niece, or, frequently they are cousins; they can also be sister and brother. The current *Dwabenhene* and *Dwabenhemmaa* are sister and brother, and the previous *Dwabenhemmaa* was the biological mother of the chief. When a queen mother's or a chief's stool becomes vacant, a new queen mother or chief is selected by the royal family and/or the chief, and enstooled. They never assume their positions simultaneously and certainly cannot ever be married to each other as they must be members of the same family.⁶

A queen mother's duties reflect her relationship to the chief and, equally as important, her responsibility for the welfare of women in her domain. She is also the embodiment of motherhood and is thus considered to be the mother of her clan in her town and consequently the mother of the chief. She possesses knowledge and wisdom as the mother of the clan and is expected to impart that wisdom to the chief on a regular basis. This knowledge and wisdom legitimates her authority; it includes the genealogy of the royal family and political wisdom as well. She exercises her moral

⁴ For a more thorough discussion of the performance approach as applied to Asante Queen Mothers, see Stoeltje: 1995; 1997a; 1997b).

⁵ For a complete description of the system as well as the system used by the people of Northern Ghana, see Kwame Arhin's (1995) brief but thorough work entitled *Traditional Rule in Ghana: Past and Present*.

⁶ This information was provided by the *Dwabenhene* who also points out that it is a longstanding tradition in Juaben (*Dwaben*, an important paramountcy) for the queen mother to be the biological mother of the chief.

authority officially as an advisor to the chief on matters of tradition and religion, but also on secular affairs. In addition she is the nominator of the chief. When a chief's stool becomes vacant, she nominates a candidate (on the basis of her knowledge) from among those who are qualified to the elders of the royal family and the kingmakers (elders and sub-chiefs). If that candidate is not acceptable, she can nominate two others, always on the basis of her knowledge and wisdom. When political matters run smoothly, the queen mother advises the chief regularly and sits on his left in his court and advises him as he makes decisions there. But when the political affairs of any stool erupt into conflict, the relationship between the queen mother and the chief will reflect these controversies.⁷

Equally important is the queen mother's responsibility for the welfare of women and domestic affairs in her domain. Covering a broad range of social relations, the heaviest responsibility she bears is for the resolution of conflict. All queen mothers are available for hearing cases involving women, domestic affairs, or issues of everyday life and commerce.

The Asantehemmaa holds a formal court each Tuesday to which many women and some men bring their conflicts, whether they are matters of insult or curse between two women, or a conflict that has occurred between a woman and a man. The Asantehemmaa has six to eight linguists (*akyeame*) (all male but one), who direct the court, and twelve to fifteen male elders who listen and interrogate the litigants, finally coming to consensus in regard to the outcome of the case in the absence of the Queen Mother, who hears and rules on some cases but not all.⁸ Paramount queen mothers also hear cases involving various kinds of domestic problems, not only those between a man and a woman, but those involving extended family members in a household or tenants in a house. These queen mothers, as well as those in the smaller towns (who are known as *ɔbaa panin*), do not have a formal court, but they do have one or more linguists (*akyeame*) through whom litigants speak to the queen mother and who report her questions and directives back to the litigants.⁹ They may also have numerous other elders, relatives, or servants who attend the hearing of cases. No matter how small a queen mother's domain may be (neighborhood in a small city or a small village) or how important she may be, she has the authority to hear cases in her domain and pronounce the outcome, providing guidance and direction for the resolution of conflict in the everyday lives of ordinary people. Attending to these many disputes and determining the outcome, which often involves a fine and some form of ritual behavior, constitutes a major portion of a queen mother's duties.¹⁰

A queen mother has many ritual duties, but one of the most important concerns the recognition of a young woman's maturity. Custom dictates that all young women must be brought to the queen mother to be registered when they first begin to menstruate. She examines each young girl to make certain she is not pregnant and then records her name in her registry. This practice has taken the place of female initiation rites formerly practiced by the Akan which involved the celebration of a girl's womanhood by her friends as well as family (Sarpong 1977).¹¹

Like a chief, a queen mother is expected to celebrate *Akwasedae* and *Awukudae* in her own village or town. These are the major religious rituals in the traditional religion; they honor the ancestors by

⁷ Although there is considerable variation from one stool to another in practice, these principles are generally followed throughout Ashanti and Akyim, as confirmed by interviews and observations at Manhyia, Juaben, Juaso, Offinso, Nsuta, Boankra, and other sites in Ashanti.

⁸ *Akyeame* are important members of a queen mother's or chief's entourage who relay all information to the queen mother or chief from a speaker and then relay their response back to the speaker because it is not permitted for anyone to speak directly to a chief or queen mother.

⁹ See Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief*, for a study of the *Okyeame* and his or her speaking role.

¹⁰ I am especially grateful to the Asantehemmaa, Nana Afua Kobi Serwaa Ampem II for permitting me to observe her Court, and to Nana Osei, an *okyeame* at the Court, and to the *Dwanatoahemmaa* (the pleading chief) of the Court, for their assistance, and to the Juabenhene for permitting me to observe his court and discussing its procedures and cases with me.

¹¹ Formerly it was a disgrace if a young woman became *pregnant* before she had undergone the initiation rites and been publicly recognized as a woman by visiting the *queen* mother. Though initiation rites are no longer performed, some young women still pay a ritual visit to the *queen* mother.

making sacrifices to the stools of previous chiefs and queen mothers, a vitally important ritual in a religion that places great emphasis on the ancestors. In addition to these observances that occur every six weeks, queen mothers, like chiefs, participate in the funerals of other royals or family members or prestigious members of their community, large events of public display, especially for those of high rank. Although these are the major public rituals, individual queen mothers are also responsible for more private forms of ritual life as well.

This brief overview of a queen mother's authority and responsibilities illustrates that the queen mother and the chief function in parallel roles based on the principle of complementarity, not on a basis of equal power and authority. Also important, the political system has far more actors in it than these two prominent leaders who also act as signs of authority, female and male. A powerful position in every clan carries the title of *abusuapanin*, an elder who serves as the head of the clan and the royal family and provides the link between the royal family and the chief and Queen Mother. In addition there are sub-chiefs in every town who are the chiefs of the clans other than that of the royal family, and these sub-chiefs work together with the chief in stool matters. However, if a chief fails to perform his duties satisfactorily, the sub-chiefs are authorized to destool him. A most important role is that of *akyeame*. Paramount chiefs will have a number of *akyeame* as well as the sub-chiefs, and numerous other people who constitute their entourage.¹²

Because the political system is inextricably linked to the kinship system, queen mothers also serve as the embodiment of Asante identity, the mother of the clan and the link between the individual and the larger kin group (Stoeltje 1995). A very complex form of leadership replicated in every town and village, chieftaincy is without question a political system. In it authority has clear parameters but power is always under negotiation. Queen mothers and chiefs were engaged in these negotiations of power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (in pre-colonial Asante) as the record, both oral and written, shows, and though the various functions have shifted in terms of dominance, chieftaincy has remained a powerful force in the social and political life of the twenty-first century.

Contradictions, Continuities, and New Configurations

The weighty history of the Akan peoples and the Asante in particular demonstrates the complexity of power relations in this system. As T.C. McCaskie argues so persuasively, the Asante state and the social order from which it grew diverged as the state elaborated and expanded its goals; in order to maintain an equilibrium of compromise between the two, a series of articulations was forged that functioned as ideological accommodation between the state's purposes and the discrete principles, imperatives, norms and values that constituted the social order, evolved over centuries of settlement in the region (McCaskie 1995: 74-77). Close examination of the dynamics of power illustrates that queen mothers in precolonial Asante exercised considerably more power than they did during colonialism and since (Aidoo 1981; McCaskie 1995; Wilks 1975). Ignored by the British, in spite of Rattray's observation that they could be important to the stability of society and by the newly independent state of Ghana, *ahemmaa* have survived the encounter with the West, still clear about their position in society. Unlike the chiefs of small towns, who often reside in cities and in some instances show minimal interest in their communities, appearing only on occasions of public display and sometimes not at all, queen mothers take their responsibilities seriously. They are more likely than chiefs to reside in their town, though many also spend time in the cities, living with family who are linked to the hometown. Moving about frequently permits them to pursue financial affairs and to participate in circuits of information, carrying news to those who live in the city and obtaining

¹² While chieftaincy is the subject of numerous serious scholarly works as well as short descriptive ones, information on the sub-chiefs and elders is less developed than on chiefs. I am especially grateful to Nana Agyeman Serboɔ of Juaso and Kumasi for his assistance with these matters.

information about chieftaincy affairs in general and politics at all levels. Increasingly, queen mothers must take the initiative to move about and pursue these activities in order to sustain themselves as well as the social order in their communities. This set of circumstances creates a heavy burden for almost any queen mother. Caused by the sharp differences between chiefs and queen mothers, the consequences of differential experiences under colonialism and modernity, and the growing pressures of economic survival in postcolonial society, the burdens queen mothers bear today threaten to subvert their authority and undermine their performance. Ironically, while the present could arguably be defined as the most precarious moment of history for queen mothers, they are also at this time becoming visible to influences outside the culture as an important cultural and political resource. This situation reminds us that irony characteristically occurs where contradictions become apparent. And indeed anthropologists have recently directed our attention to irony as it operates in diverse cultural contexts. Noting its prominence in situations of political uncertainty, especially the contingencies in the experience of people constructed as marginal, they have observed it appearing in circumstances involving contradictory cultural models of authority relations (Fernandez and Huber 2001: 21-26).

Independent of the above line of discourse, McCaskie (1995) identifies and analyzes the uses of irony and paradox in the pre-colonial Asante state in which contradictory cultural models of authority were being articulated. The paradox he identifies in Asante culture is the collapsing of the centralized Asante state together with a segmentary lineage system (McCaskie 1995: 77), perceived by the early anthropologists in Asante to be perplexing, since they believed it could not happen. Recognizing the phenomenon as more than an anthropological conundrum, McCaskie explores ambiguities, anomalies, contradictions, and ironies in legal cases, in verbal expressions, in the changing status of specific families (lineages) and argues that these verbal practices "were sanctioned expressions of profound but basically unresolved contradictions in the relationship between the values embedded in the state and the social order" (McCaskie 1995: 80). This process by which contradictions exist in different systems of authority was expressed through well established speech forms in pre-colonial Asante, and these models of speech behavior afforded the Asante "a potent battery of mechanisms that were dedicated revealingly, to indirection in communication" (McCaskie 1995: 81). Rather than disappearing with colonialism, these forms of speaking have been elaborated and can be widely observed throughout Ghana as well as in the courts of chiefs and queen mothers today (Yankah 1995; Obeng 1997; 1999). It might be argued, in fact, that paradox, contradiction and irony have contributed to the vitality of the culture and made possible its unbroken continuity into the 21st century in that they have long been used to facilitate processes of adaptation and accommodation to contradiction and contingency, as well as to voice social and cultural criticism which could not safely be expressed directly. As Fernandez and Huber have stated, "...irony is often used ideologically to express and to contain complexity, wrestle with dissonance and disorder, and critique innovation and deviance" (Fernandez and Huber 2001: 30).

Yet continuity in one form does not imply the continuity of others, especially those related to female authority. In this regard female political leaders have not fared well in Africa. That the role of queen mothers has survived at all is quite remarkable compared to the fate of female leaders and women generally under colonization.¹³ Let us briefly explore, then, the continuity of the role of *Ahemmaa* in Asante who were relegated to obscurity during British occupation.

Among the strongest factors in continuity over time, affecting all of the Akan people and marking them as distinct, is their matrilineal kinship system. All women are important in this matrilineal society, but queen mothers are especially so because they serve as a sign for women generally, and they provide the links of the chain that define who are members of any royal family. Their role was built on the social order that not only preceded colonialism but preceded the Asante state, specifically

¹³For a comprehensive comparative study of women under colonization by feminists anthropologists see the volume *Women and Colonization*, eds. Etienne and Leacock; more recent volumes that consider the effects of colonization on women/gender in African societies is *Gendered Colonialisms in African History*, eds. Hunt, Liu and Quataert and *Women in African Colonial Histories*, eds. Allman, Genger and Musisi. A thorough discussion of the effects of colonization on women and on constructs of gender in African societies is Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*.

that core element of the social order defined as the kinship system from which they derive their authority. Scholars have long pondered questions concerning the differences between matrilineal and patrilineal societies and debated their significance. Although few conclusions have been reached, a few fundamental observations can be made, as Reh and Ludwar-Ene (1995) have pointed out. Specifically, they note that women in patrilineal and patrilocal societies have to invest a great deal of their creativity in adapting themselves individually to the respective situations they are placed in through marriage, but “women in matrilineal and matrilineal societies can bring their energy potential into play beyond the familiar sphere and can contribute to the general organisation of society” (Reh and Ludwar-Ene 1995:10). In other words, women in matrilineal societies enjoy a degree of stability in their life because they do not have to give up their status and/or identity and begin anew in a strange environment when they marry. Through a variety of means women in a matrilineal society are able to participate in social and public life; of especial importance to women in Akan cultures is the presence of a queen mother in a position parallel to the chief who has as one of her most important responsibilities the welfare of women. This function ensures each woman a venue where she can take her conflicts and a female authority who will hear her story.¹⁴

A second condition affecting the survival of the institution of queen mothers in contemporary Ghana is the principle of replication. Also derived from the social order that preceded the Asante state, the political system is replicated in every clan, in every town, and at the level of the paramount chiefs and queen mothers. This replication provides specific, material institutions and individual leaders (*uhemmaa* and *ahene*) who symbolize identity as well as authority in every location. These circumstances are the result of that historical paradox, the linked institutions of a centralized state and a social order based on a lineage system. McCaskie also outlines a contradiction in the Asante state between the norms and values embodied in the social order that accorded status and recognition to lineages and respectability, and the emphasis placed on the accumulation of wealth, which overshadowed lineage status but did not erase it by the 19th century. This contradiction foreshadows the rupture with the future for the queen mothers, and the continuity with the future for so many chiefs.

In the 20th century, institutions and circumstances converged in a new configuration that elevated the male leaders of the Asante political system and linked them to their counterparts in the modern nation state, changing the functions of the sign for both *ahene* and *uhemmaa*. In this configuration two different models of authority are in place: chieftaincy and the state. Although the two systems differ dramatically, the individuals who become linked together are primarily males who have acquired status through the accumulation of wealth/education rather than by virtue of their lineage (or, in addition to their lineage). As sources of power are linked increasingly to wealth and education, resources largely unavailable to queen mothers whose status and power are determined by their lineage, the dual gender feature of the indigenous system is gradually diminished. This configuration shifts negotiations of power to predominantly male institutional settings, and cultural norms, values, and practices assume different meanings. This shifts the meaning of the signs, Chief and Queen Mother, as the dominant function of the signs changes. For the Chief the dominant function becomes his ability to operate in the modern world, particularly to obtain funds, while the Queen Mother's association with native cultural values defines her function as outmoded.

Evidence of this configuration and shift appears in many contexts, but one of the most influential is scholarly publications. Read by many of the educated elite, these publications represent a context wherein issues can be defined, developed, or ignored, especially because publications produce a fixed text which can be widely read and discussed and may subsequently shape policy. The general scholarship on chieftaincy in Africa, particularly European publications, has ignored the role of female leaders with few exceptions, but no example is more blatant than a 1999 collection of essays by European scholars which claims to assess chieftaincy in all of Africa in a “new socio-political landscape” (defined as the relationship between chiefs and the modern nation state) (van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and van Dijk 1999). The only mention of African female leaders occurs in an article on Jamaican Maroon societies who established a form of chieftaincy modeled on the Akan, including a

¹⁴ For studies of these courts and a focus on women who use them see Stoeltje (1998); Obeng and Stoeltje.

female leader. Any study of Akan chieftaincy is absent from the collection altogether. This brand of scholarship demonstrates the ease with which the male-only configuration operates to exclude female leaders from recognition and ultimately from the negotiation of power.¹⁵ It is all the more notable since one of the editors, van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, is co-editor of a volume that includes two articles on Asante which direct attention to custom, law, and queen mothers, as well as one that compares Akan and Jamaican Maroon queen mothers.¹⁶

Performance, Power Relations, and the Global Stage

Such bias as the work mentioned above exhibits has its origins in the patriarchal ideologies inherent in colonialism. Widely diffused by the educational and bureaucratic systems of colonialism,¹⁷ bias against women generally and certainly female leaders of indigenous political systems was characteristic. As Oyewumi argues, "The goal of the missionaries was to transform African societies, not preserve them" (1997: 128). In Ghana today one encounters a wide range of attitudes concerning chieftaincy generally. Regarding queen mothers, most Ghanaians, certainly the Asante, are careful to demonstrate respect for queen mothers; nevertheless, it is still possible to detect a degree of ambivalence on the part of many, both females and males. Whether they express ambivalence, amusement, disdain, neglect or outright hostility (an emotion a chief involved in a chieftaincy dispute might feel), some men and some women are clearly not persuaded of the value of queen mothers. These biases are intensified by the forces of nationalism and globalization.¹⁸ As Gwendolyn Mikell has reported from her case studies of Accra women, they understand that their "...problems derive not just from patriarchal positions taken by men, but partially from a nationalist stance taken by state leaders faced with hegemonic global demands" (Mikell 1997: 334).

Together these influences shape power relations within chieftaincy and pose a threat to the authority of queen mothers, affecting their performance. This threat has many manifestations, any one of which can be submerged, disguised, denied, or even developed into violence, which happens only rarely. To address this threat in the broadest of terms, I want to single out several major manifestations that directly affect a queen mother's authority and her performance of her role. The first and most obvious, of course, is the modern state, a site where major negotiations of power take place that generally exclude queen mothers from any consideration but do not always exclude chiefs. Built on principles of democracy in which official leaders are elected, the Ghanaian state is particularly significant because Ghana was the first African country to achieve its independence (in 1957), and its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, became an influential spokesman for independence throughout the continent. Today's elected political leaders who serve in the government represent all of the ethnic groups in Ghana and the several regions of the country. Consequently, Ghanaians exhibit a strong sense of national identity, both at home and in the diaspora.

In contrast, Asante nationalism derives from a precolonial state, transformed into an ethnic identity. It continues to function with its hierarchical political system based on lineages, complete with a legal apparatus and courts, traditional religion, and a dual gender system of leadership.¹⁹ Moreover, the King and Queen Mother of the Asante occupy their palaces on the same site as their ancestors who

¹⁵ For a select few publications that discuss female roles in African political systems see Aidoo 1981; Barber 1991; Kaplan 1997; Lebeuf 1960; Rattray 1923; Reh and Ludwar-Ene 1995; Oyewumi 1997; Sofola 1998; Stoeltje 1995; 1997; 1998; 2000.

¹⁶ See the articles by McCaskie, Stoeltje, and Zips in van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and Zips, eds. (1998).

¹⁷ See Oyewumi (1997) for an in depth discussion of how this Western bias developed.

¹⁸ See Anthias and Yuval-Davis' comprehensive work (1989) on the way that nationalism defines women.

¹⁹ Jean Allman's thorough historical study (1993) of the Asante role in the transition from colonialism to independence, specifically the Asante National Liberation Movement, integrates the concept of ethnicity with the paradigm of the nation/nationalism, yielding a brilliant study of Asante as historic nation that allows us to interpret persistent Asante national sentiment as a "manifestation of the internal dynamics of Asante society and not simply a by-product of external stimuli" (Allman 1993: 14).

established the Asante state. Recently the Asante have created an Asante Congress, and it has its own constitution. It has held two public Congresses, one of which celebrated the vision and heroism of Yaa Asantewaa, the Queen Mother who inspired the Asante to go into battle against the British. As a consequence of these political, historical and cultural configurations, queen mothers and chiefs alike live in a world of two nationalisms, Asante nationalism and Ghanaian nationalism. They move within and between the nation state, the local domains of custom, and global sites where residents of their home towns have settled and formed organizations, in a dynamic process that invokes multiple identities. Arjun Appadurai has commented on this global phenomenon as the central paradox of ethnic politics. He explains:

That is, sentiments whose greatest force is in their ability to ignite intimacy into a political sentiment and turn locality into a staging ground for identity, have become spread over vast and irregular spaces as groups move, yet stay linked to one another through sophisticated media capabilities (Appadurai 1990:15).

Other scholars, too, have noted the capacity for cultivating multiple identities and the potential contained in the process. Paula Ebron (1999: 911) has pointed out that,

At the center of cultural politics lies a question of power. Self-consciously alternative identities perhaps challenge but may also reinforce dominance; both invigorate discussions of the new antagonisms that are breaking the hyphen between nation and state.

And, indeed, the dynamics of multiple identities and multiple sites of "home" not only invigorate discussions concerning the nation and the state, but create possibilities and potentialities for negotiating power, especially for the symbols of Asante identity, chiefs and queen mothers. These dynamics are present at the local site, they extend throughout the hierarchy, they may affect the nation, and they reach out further to the global sites, carrying politics with them. However, in these various processes chiefs have gained numerous advantages over queen mothers, and the reasons for this are not a secret. One of the most powerful reasons, one that provides solidarity for chiefs and the opportunity to strengthen their bonds, is the institutional apparatus for meeting together. Chiefs meet regularly and often at two chiefly houses: the National House of Chiefs and the Regional Houses of Chiefs—sites which have bureaucrats who keep records and schedule meetings, sites at which hearings of councils are held to resolve disputes within chieftaincy, and many other matters are explored, formally and informally. Both the National House of Chiefs and the Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs are located just across the street from Manhyia, the site of the Asantehemmaa's and the Asantehene's palaces in Kumasi. Queen mothers do not have a parallel meeting place even though they are included in the definition of a "chief" found in the Constitution of Ghana (1992: 168). These Houses for meeting were created after Ghana gained its independence and are defined and outlined in the Ghanaian Constitution in the chapter on "Chieftaincy" (1992: 164-168). They are now permanent and powerful sites for the building of chiefly status, the resolution of certain kinds of disputes occurring within chieftaincy, and the negotiating of issues so dear to chiefs. It is also of interest to note that while these Houses are consistent with the hierarchical system of chieftaincy generally, they are also autonomous institutions.²⁰ This ambiguity has created the necessity for the negotiation of power on occasion. The government also includes a Ministry of Chieftaincy, and the Minister of that office maintains contact with the leadership of chiefs, and the government rules on certain chieftaincy matters.

Complex institutions, these Houses provide chiefs with information and contacts that facilitate their links to government leaders if they wish to utilize them. Chiefs may also be closely linked to government leaders because some individuals who occupy stools will be related to or share business ties with or will maintain other links to individuals in the government. Chiefs, then, have access to and links with the state, whereas queen mothers seldom possess those privileges, and chiefs have an institutional site for meeting together, independently of queen mothers. These institutional factors

²⁰ For a discussion of the creation of the Houses of Chiefs and the relationship between the Chiefs and Nkrumah, see Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*.

have served to bring the chiefs closer to the modern state and simultaneously have created a separation between queen mothers and chiefs

A second major threat to the authority of queen mothers in the contemporary world is their lack of education. In a society where many have no access to education and are therefore not literate at all, education marks a strict divide, and advanced education creates an elite who exercise most of the power, a situation common to most developing countries.²¹ Discussing this problem in depth, Oyewumi explains:

Perhaps the most damaging lasting effect of the association of men with education, gainful employment, and leadership may be its psychological effect on both men and women. This is reflected both structurally and ideologically in the school systems. The notion that females are not as mentally capable as males is commonplace among some of the Western-educated...It is part of the colonial legacy (Oyewumi 1997: 135)

Ghana has long been recognized internationally for the high value it places on education; nevertheless, many women have not received an education, at all. Moreover, male leaders in Asante considered it unnecessary for a queen mother to have an education until recently, apparently because they believed she only needed an education concerning matters of custom. Consequently, many queen mothers are not literate or have very limited education, and this represents a serious obstacle for them in dealing with their chiefs, especially, as it makes it possible for chiefs to exclude them easily from stool affairs. A shift is occurring, however, as many male leaders in the chieftaincy system recognize the importance of education and have begun to seek women who are both educated and qualified by lineage to occupy the stool.

A third manifestation of power relations in chieftaincy is closely related to both of the above, and that is the threat posed by financial difficulties as the Ghanaian economy becomes increasingly compatible with the global. The powerful and unsettling effects of structural adjustment have made life difficult for much of the population (Clark 1988; Clark and Manuh 1991). For *ahemmaa* and others who are dependent on a pre-modern economic system that placed all of the stool resources in the hands of the chief, the current system is disastrous. According to custom, a queen mother should receive economic support from the stool monies which derive from stool lands and investments. But the chief has control over the stool resources, and all too often, a chief is "greedy" and refuses to divide the monies with the queen mother so that she can support her household and her entourage. Moreover, some stools do not have rich resources.²² Yet a queen mother's expenses must be met. The emphasis on performing identity in Asante requires queen mothers (like chiefs) to be present for many public events. They are required to participate in events at Manhyia at either the Asantehene's or the Asantehemmaa's palace, and at ones involving the paramount chief who is their "overlord". Sitting alongside of or dancing in honor of another queen mother, expressing her sympathy at a funeral, or her respect to a Chief, she is mindful that she is appearing as a representative of her own people. Such events require one's presence for at least a day, but sometimes several days, and one must travel with an entourage, the size depending on one's status. Moreover, a queen mother must be dressed in expensive cloth at all times. None of these responsibilities nor accoutrements can be compromised if she is to exercise the authority of her position.²³

If a queen mother is unfortunate enough to be linked to a chief who is unwilling to share the dividends, she is left in an untenable position. In some instances, her family has accumulated wealth,

²¹ See Celestin Monga (1996; 1999) for discussion of this issue.

²² Resources vary widely depending on whether the stool lands include mines or farms, and whether the stool has invested in factories, plantations, or businesses. For example, Offinso is a stool rich in cocoa farms, and in Juaben the Juabenhene has developed palm plantations and a palm oil factory and a program for improving farming for which he received an award from the United Nations.

²³ All of the queen mothers I worked with contributed to this information, and all of them are finding it difficult to locate sufficient finances, whatever their position in the larger system and their particular location. However, I am especially indebted to the Offinsohemmaa and the Juasolihemmaa for their patience in explaining the responsibilities of a queen mother and the full implications of them.

and she can then rely on them for the financial support she needs, but this is seldom the case, and is unreliable at best. All too often the queen mother must then turn to other individuals who have ties to the stool and the financial capability to assist her. Rarely can a queen mother turn to a husband for assistance because they are seldom married due to the demands of the role itself. A wife is expected to serve her husband in marriage, but a queen mother does not serve; other people serve her. Moreover, a queen mother's time is devoted to the performance of her role, resolving disputes as well as attending public events and working with the chief, leaving no time for attending to the desires of a husband. One queen mother explains the challenge of these dual roles.

If you are married and you are a queen mother, and you don't take proper care, your husband will leave you. You have to go about things very, very carefully... Some queen mothers concentrate more on being a queen mother than on their husbands; then if he does not understand you, he will go in for another woman.

Yet, a woman may also leave her husband sometimes because he cannot provide her with resources, and if her chief also does not provide resources for her, she has to seek them elsewhere. The same queen mother explains:

If her husband can't take care of her, she finds someone who can. But men are very, very jealous so he may feel that you are indulging and will leave you. So you have to get someone who understands you and will help you as Queen Mother. That is why most Queen Mothers don't have husbands. It is a big problem.

This convergence of authority, economics, sexuality, marriage, and power represent an instance of what Achille Mbembe has described when he states that "sex and gender norms have historically been central to the structure of power relations and to the organization of cultural categories in Africa." (Mbembe 2001: 7). The fact that a queen mother is not required to be married, is expected to have children, and is permitted to have male friends, places her in a position of privilege in comparison to other women who are expected to marry and restrict their interest to their husbands, who are permitted to have numerous wives and/or girlfriends. Yet, because of the various threats described above, a queen mother may be trapped in a difficult situation. She may be married, and the husband's demands may compromise her ability to carry out her responsibilities, or he may have no resources to contribute to her cause. In another situation perhaps a queen mother is not married, but she may not have sufficient resources from the stool monies, in which case she must seek funds elsewhere. Any of a number of circumstances involving these elements has the potential to compromise her authority, and, at best, they require her to focus on troublesome matters that compete with her duties and responsibilities.

Derived from the disparities that have developed between queen mothers and chiefs, the effect of these socioeconomic and political manifestations of transformations in Ghanaian society has been to elevate the role of the chief and to diminish that of the queen mothers, altering the balance of power inherent in their parallel roles of authority. Throughout these major shifts in the political landscape, however, queen mothers have continued to shoulder their responsibilities and, quite often, those of the chief as well.²⁴ Consequently, queen mothers have gradually become visible outside of local affairs. Both within Ghana and internationally, queen mothers have begun to attract attention from political organizations and NGOs. Due in large part to the UN Decade for Women, African women appeared on the global stage as serious subjects in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Professor Florence Dolphyne formerly of the University of Ghana and some time Chairman of the Ghana National Council on Women and Development published an informative short book, *The Emancipation of Women: an African Perspective* in 1991, the result of her participation in the international conferences on women, her travels throughout sub-Saharan Africa to meet with female leaders and women's organizations, and her Chairmanship of the National Council on Women and Development. She discusses a number of issues relevant to social conditions affecting women and the role of government, NGOs and other

²⁴ In the past several decades, chieftaincy disputes or urban dwelling chiefs have left the chief's stool in many locations vacant or ill attended, and in almost all such instances the queen mother assumes the major role of leadership, in conjunction with the elders of her family.

organizations in achieving improved conditions for women. In her Preface she explains the significance of these efforts.

Ever since International Women's Year in 1975 highlighted the issue of the equality of men and women, women's issues, which previously were the concerns of voluntary women's societies, have attained national and international significance. During that year and throughout the ten years of the United Nations Decade for Women that followed, there were numerous research studies into the condition of women in different societies...it became more and more obvious that, in order to achieve the objectives of the Decade, namely, Equality, Development and Peace, women, from developing as well as the industrialized countries, have to work together to fight the injustices that society has subjected them to for centuries (Dolphyne 1991: ix).

More recently, in 2000, Professor Dolphyne edited a volume that focuses on women achievers in the Ashanti Region of Ghana that recognizes queen mothers. Entitled *Ten Women Achievers from the Ashanti Region of Ghana*, it includes the life stories of the ten women. One of the ten is a royal queen mother, Nana Boatema-Afrakoma II, Queen Mother of Juansa, and the other is Nana Abenaa Serwaa, the queen of the yam sellers and the overall queen of all the sector queens in the Kumasi metropolitan market system, a familiar figure in all of Kumasi.

Possibly the most controversial acknowledgement of queen mothers, however, arose in Ghana in the early nineties. A queen mothers' association was established under the direction of Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings, the wife of former President Jerry Rawlings, in 1990. Mrs. Rawlings had previously established a government sponsored organization for all Ghanaian women known as the 31st December Women's Movement (named for the revolution in which J.J. Rawlings took over the government on December 31, 1981). Acting as its president, Mrs. Rawlings directed attention to the importance of queen mothers as local leaders, and developed a plan for involving them in the agenda of the 31st December Women's Movement. The plan began with the creation of queen mothers' associations throughout the political districts and regions of Ghana. Invited by the Queen Mother of Juaso to accompany her to the first meeting of this association in the Juaso District of Ashanti-Akyim (in June of 1990), I was privileged to be present for the introduction and explanation of the plan to organize the *ahemmaa*. The District Secretary, the representative of the PNDC government (the Provisional National Defense Council), presided over the meeting so that he could provide the instructions and the rationale. He explained that the 31st December movement was not well organized to achieve its goals without queen mothers so they wanted to organize the queen mothers to carry out their projects in the villages and to urge the queen mothers to be patrons of the 31st December organization. Members of the 31st December movement were present in equal numbers to the *ahemmaa* for the meeting. The District Secretary instructed the queen mothers to the effect that the purpose of the meeting was to get them to organize the women in their village to work for the youth and the improvement of the village.

A similar point of view was expressed in an interview I conducted with an organizer of the 31st December movement in Kumasi. She explained that queen mothers are important because the government had declared that development is community based, and queen mothers should help with development in their areas and that it is incumbent on the 31st December movement to educate them to know their rights and to get them to team up with their chiefs to develop their communities to benefit the people. Moreover, she continued, saying that the December 31st movement planned to organize the queen mothers and develop regional and national associations so that they would have organizations like the chiefs, and that the 31st December movement would assist queen mothers with the resolution of their conflicts with chiefs. At another meeting of queen mothers in Ejisu in the Juaben district (in June of 1990) the queen mothers were told that they had been brought together to discuss the problems facing them as women and the issues pertaining to their villages. Moreover, they were told that the 31st December movement in each town was under the care of the queen mothers and that they were seen as an integral part of the 31st December Women's Movement.

This move on the part of the 31st December Women's Movement was perceived by many Asante people as an attempt by the government to control the queen mothers for political purposes. This view was articulated vehemently in a front page article in *The Pioneer*, the independent Kumasi newspaper

on June 24, 1991.

There is nothing wrong with Asante Queen Mothers forming an association to co-operate with the 31st December Women's Movement, but there is everything wrong about the Asante Queen Mother Association UNDER THE UMBRELLA of the 31st December Women's Movement!... Are our *ahemaa* now the subordinates of a political organization...Is the whole deal a trap by the PNDC to angle the Mothers par-excellence of Asante into its political fold and thereby control them?...This is a serious incursion and a dangerous one at that, by the PNDC government into a primary indigenous political institution in the country—Chieftaincy.

A second effort on the part of Mrs. Rawlings as President of the 31st December Women's Movement in 1991 was a proposal to the effect that the National House of Chiefs should give queen mothers representation in the House. Although the issue was widely discussed throughout the country and heatedly debated in the Consultative Assembly, the amendments that would admit them failed to pass in February of 1992. Although some considered the proposal a women's issue, others interpreted it as a move by the government to gain access to the National House of Chiefs through the queen mothers and the 31st December Movement.

In the late nineties Ghana saw dramatic changes and these particular controversies have become a matter of history. A national election brought in a new party to the government with different policies and personnel. A lso significant was the enstoolment of the Asantehene, Osei Tutu II, in Kumasi. Accompanying these changes is an increase in communication (more newspapers and radio stations), and more NGOs have moved into Ghana. However, these debates served to place queen mothers in the spotlight, identifying their authority and recognizing their potential for social and political influence. The focus drew attention to their position as local leaders who can influence the course of events in their towns and villages. NGOs and other organizations have targeted queen mothers as potential leaders in their projects. For example, the *Daily Graphic*, one of the major newspapers in Ghana, reported on January 31, 2002, that Manya Krobo queen mothers (near Accra) were uniting against AIDS, and February 20 it reported that queen mothers attended a workshop on the subject. The newspaper also publishes an article directing attention to problems concerning chieftaincy, entitled "The Plight of the Chieftaincy Institution in Ghana" (January 8, 2002), and in an article that appeared on Dec. 18, 2001 chiefs are urged to redeem their image. These examples suggest the differences developing within chieftaincy between queen mothers and chiefs as the new configuration takes shape.

In spite of their exclusion from the House of Chiefs and the refusal of many chiefs to share their resources, queen mothers seem to have been identified as effective local leaders. They have come to the attention of international agencies and NGOs and are being targeted by these global forces as leaders. For example, the Queen Mother of Juaso who invited me to accompany her to the queen mothers' association meeting with the 31st December Women's Movement in 1990 is now the president of a Catholic Queen Mothers' Association, a new organization, and she has recently become a Catholic for the first time. She proudly explained this news to me when she came to visit me in 2000, her first visit to the U.S.

These ironies that have emerged amid the uncertainties faced by queen mothers have resonance with the comments of Keith Brown (1999), who alerts us to the indeterminacy and contingency of the experience of people constructed as marginal by the expansive states. He argues that an "ironic ethnography" is attuned not only to the political context in which shifts in allegiance make sense, but also to the people's recognition of the ambiguities of their past.

The subject of a still more complex transnational story involving global exchanges is the Offinsohemmaa, the paramount Queen Mother of Offinso, mentioned at the beginning of this article, who was one of the subjects of the GEO feature story. She is an educated queen mother who has shared with me her philosophy and goals. She also told me the story of the support she has garnered from Germany for her projects. The initial contact was made by the brother of a well known son of Offinso, Bishop Peter Sarpong, a Bishop in the Catholic Church,²⁵ who invited a German doctor to

²⁵ In addition to his religious position, Bishop Peter Sarpong is an anthropologist who publishes on Asante

Offinso. When he came to visit, he was made a chief. He then invited the Offinsohemmaa to Germany where she gave talks to women's organizations interested in women and development. The German women contributed DM 5000 to her at that time. These women then traveled to Ghana so that they could see Offinso for themselves and observe the Offinsohemmaa as she carried out her duties. However, transnationalism signifies much more than travel itself, and indeed, there is more to this story that links it to the colonial past as well as the global present. They then expressed their intention to make further financial contributions to the women of the Offinso paramountcy. Not a casual contribution, however, their money will be made available as loans through the office of the Offinsohemmaa. The procedure she established requires that she meet with the queen mothers of her paramountcy to discuss the loans. She explained to me that she has to know that they will use the money profitably before she arranges the loan; then she makes small loans to the 40 queen mothers of the villages in her paramountcy. According to her, most of them will be involved in trading because farming is too risky. Since she knows them individually, she will hold each of them accountable for repaying the loans.

Obtaining funds for loans is not the Offinsohemmaa's only attempt to advance her "small" queen mothers (the Twi term for a lower rank queen mother is *ɔbaa panin*). She also holds monthly meetings for them in which they are educated in some subject. When I last visited her in the fall of 1999, she had recently invited a health nurse to come and speak to the queen mothers on AIDS and contagious diseases such as tetanus and cholera. The Offinsohemmaa observes that earlier efforts from outside agencies to address problems of drug abuse, teen-age pregnancies, family planning and other problems failed because the agencies did not involve queen mothers; now they are realizing that if they want to reach the population they should work with queen mothers. She says, "The queen mothers are in the town; they know the people here... It's me who can know the people. I am the practical one. We will do it." She is convincing because her record already demonstrates that she can achieve her goals.

The above example suggests that the native Asante political system and the cosmopolitan, postcolonial women's organization as represented by the German women, are quite compatible. This paradoxical pairing enables educated German women to support the entrepreneurship of uneducated Ghanaian women through the conduit of their female leader, the queen mother of Offinso, an educated woman who holds a position of authority defined by the precolonial political system. Further, we see in this example of the Offinsohemmaa, as well as in the experience of the Juasohemmaa, a shift occurring in the sign of Queen Mother as she receives recognition from international sources.

Conclusions

In contemporary Ghana both economic and political conditions privilege males, but women are not without voice and visibility. The central government serves as the dominant system of authority for the modern nation state of Ghana, but chieftaincy is a highly valued institution among all ethnic groups and especially for the Asante. While these observations are commonplace, they do not reflect a static situation. Relations of authority are continuously contested in one domain or another, and the negotiation of power is at the top of the agenda for anyone who holds a position of authority. Queen mothers are no exception in spite of the explanations offered by chiefs, scholars, and some queen mothers themselves that imply there are no challenges and certainly no conflicts. (It should be noted that queen mothers are more likely to explain their difficulties than are chiefs, possibly since the source of most of their problems is the chiefs).

As outlined above, the authority of Asante queen mothers has been threatened by the transformations in social and economic conditions of the twentieth century, and most especially by the gender disparities that have diminished the power of the queen mothers. As one knowledgeable

culture. Though he is a Catholic Bishop, he has **no difficulty** understanding the importance of a queen mother who represents the indigenous political system and traditional religion. He indicated clearly to me that she commands the respect of her people, and that he **admires and respects** her as well.

individual explained to me, in principle the queen mothers have more power than the chiefs, but in practice it is different. "Don't be surprised if [you find that] our society is chauvinistic." This difference between principle and practice is the source of major tensions between queen mothers and chiefs, with queen mothers advocating for principle and chiefs acting out practices that defy the principles.

If power is a scarce commodity for queen mothers, and their authority is threatened, we may well ask how it is that they are still on their stools. Bishop Sarpong addressed this issue in an interview with me in Kumasi when he acknowledged that the authority of queen mothers has been considerably reduced, but in spite of that, he stated proudly that the *Offinsohemmaa* commands respect. According to his analysis, a queen mother's authority today depends largely on her own comportment. If she is not respectful, no one respects her. Nevertheless, it is still the law that you must come if she calls you, but you don't have to follow her suggestions. Her real power depends on her individual enactment of the role. Using classical anthropological terms, *ascribed* and *acquired*, he illustrated his analysis with the two kinds of power. In pre-colonial Asante power was ascribed, and authority came from birth. Now, however, power and authority must be acquired by the individual as they perform their role.

To contextualize this shift from ascribed to acquired, a shift in the sign, Queen Mother, we must recognize that the society can select the individual to become queen mother but can no longer ensure her power and authority; it is the individual herself who must seek and acquire power, and to a great degree, her authority now depends on her power. We must also remind ourselves that queen mothers have long been marginalized and their positions denied or revised by changing systems of authority. Throughout, however, they have staunchly remained on their stools, administering to their constituencies. They have continued to embody the role of mother of the clan and to enact Asante identity while chiefs have all too often tarnished their image with chieftaincy disputes and abuses of power.

It would appear, then, in spite of contemporary threats to their authority, that queen mothers are proving to be resilient yet again. Representing the native, but comfortable with multiple systems of authority, they are establishing links to the cosmopolitan. They have not given up their efforts to destool irresponsible chiefs or to persuade their chiefs to provide resources for them, but they are simultaneously pursuing the path to external resources. Recognizing that ascribed power and authority has been weakened, they are acting as individuals and becoming traders so that they can feed their children; and they are pursuing development projects for their communities at every opportunity. At the same time they are becoming more aware of each other and the advantages of meeting together to share experience, regardless of who provides the umbrella. Making these transitions is challenging, especially so because having to search for resources in itself represents a challenge to their authority. Yet, the forces of globalization are recognizing the potential of queen mothers and through them are changing the dominant function. Rather than advisors to chiefs who are often uninterested and unavailable, their dominant function is shifting to the welfare of women. Their relationship to the chief is diminishing in importance, while their activities with external sources that can benefit the women for whom they are responsible is increasing in importance. What was previously a negative cultural value that associated the sign, Queen Mother, with the past, has now become a positive value, creating hope for the future.

Assuming their full responsibility as mother of the clan, *ahemmaa* are fully conscious that they signify Asante identity and continuity. African identity, according to Mbembe, is a process of composition and stylization through which disparate signs and fragments of reality are rearranged around central signifiers that function as images and illusions (Mbembe 2001: 11). But, identity is nothing if it is not performed. The performance of identity has long provided the space for the negotiation of power and the renewal of authority, the expression of gender relations and the construction of images (Stoeltje 1997). This is the space in which composition and stylization take place. Queen mothers, undaunted by uncertainty and indeterminacy, are propelled by the principle of continuity into the performance of identity, where they are fully engaged in the process of composition and the enactment of paradox as they approach the global stage, signifiers of female authority and the embodiment of a shifting sign.

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POETRY AND GENDER: THE CHANGING STATUS OF DAGAARE WOMEN

Edward Nanbigne

Abstract

This paper examines the evolving roles of Dagaare women in Dagaare oral poetry, and with that transformation, their changing status in the society. The issues of women as they are reflected in the oral poems they sing are also examined. Resources from fifty women, including discussions with people knowledgeable in Dagaare oral arts were gathered and analysed to understand how the situation of the Dagaare woman is changing. Particular women performers were also picked and their poems recorded for analysis, and they were also interviewed on their views on their changing roles and position in the society.

The status of women is examined vis-à-vis their prestige, economic and political power in the society and is seen to be inexorably changing as their economic base improves and they gain more and more recognition in their society.

Institutional factors that promote change such as migration, activities of NGOs and the Churches are also examined. One of the recommendations made is that much more needs to be done to give women an even higher status in the society.

Résumé

La communication étudie l'évolution du rôle des femmes Dagaare dans la poésie orale dagaare en identifiant les changements qu'elle a entraîné au niveau de leurs statuts dans la société. Les problèmes des femmes tels qu'ils sont représentés dans les poèmes oraux sont aussi étudiés. Les informations recueillies auprès de cinquante personnes interrogées y compris des entretiens avec des personnes bien informées sur les arts oraux des Dagaaris sont rassemblées et analysées afin de comprendre l'évolution de la situation des femmes dagaare. Certaines femmes artistes ont été choisies et leurs poésies enregistrées pour les analyses. Elles ont été également interrogées pour savoir leurs opinions sur l'évolution de leurs rôles et leur position dans la société.

Le statut des femmes a été examiné eu égard à leur prestige, leur pouvoir économique et politique dans la société. Le statut des femmes change d'une manière inexorable lorsque s'améliore leur situation économique et par conséquent, elles jouissent d'une reconnaissance plus importante dans la société.

Les facteurs institutionnels qui favorisent les changement viz: la migration, les activités des ONG et les Eglises, sont aussi pris en compte dans le travail. L'une des recommandations faites parmi d'autres, est qu'il reste encore beaucoup à faire pour accorder aux femmes un statut plus noble dans la société.

Introduction

Change is taking place all the time in all human societies, sometimes manifesting as a sudden and catastrophic event, and may involve a complete change in the ideology of the society. Often however, it is a gradual and hardly perceptible process (Beattie 1964: 241) The role of Dagaare women in oral poetry and with it their statuses in Dagaare society have been changing in just such a barely perceptible way.

The main forms of poetry traditionally created among the Dagaaba are dirges (*lagni*), praise songs (*dannu*), play songs (*anlee* and *kɔɔri*) and esoteric religious chants like those of the Bagre

festival and the *summa* mask. The playing of xylophones (*gyile*) and drums (*tumpaani* and *gangari*) may also be included. It is praise songs and play songs that women have traditionally performed. In most other Ghanaian societies including the Dagomba and the Ewe, singing of dirges is the preserve of women (Awoonor 1976: 96). Among the Dagaaba however, it was unknown for a woman to chant a dirge at a funeral ground. She might however wail or dance to the chanting of the male dirge singers. Women were also mostly excluded from traditional religious ceremonies and the chants associated with them, because they were considered impure or not reliable enough to be able to keep the esoteric secrets of cults such as the *summa* mask. It was a taboo for a woman to perform on the xylophone or on the drums. The legend about the making of xylophones has it that the blood of the fairy who taught men to make the xylophone is still a part of the instrument and so because women menstruate, they did not play it (Wiggins 1988: 3). There was no actual prohibition forbidding them from playing, but the traditional belief that a woman who performs on the xylophone or the drums would be rendered barren was a powerful deterrent. Because of the social stigma and ostracism that accompanies childlessness, no woman would risk becoming barren. *Tumpaani*, the "talking drums," are considered by Dagaaba to be infused with spirituality which would be profaned by the touch of a woman.

In recent times however, it has been noticed that increasing numbers of women have begun to chant dirges at funeral grounds to the accompaniment of xylophones and calabash drums. Also, starting from the example of the churches, women have become accepted as players of xylophones and drums. It may therefore be assumed that this great change in the role of women in Dagaare oral poetry is not isolated nor is it confined to the sphere of literature, but is a change involving all other areas of social life.

Theorising about women needs a basis in the context of culture at the interface of culture and women's social space (Kolawole 1998). This is particularly so in myths about women which become a determinant of the self-image of women. Over a long period of time, images of women projected through mythical allusions, which uphold the position of women in the society in relation to that of men and play down women's achievements, begin to be accepted by the general society and become part and parcel of women's image in the society. Writers now highlight the danger of consistently depicting women with negative images. There is a great diversity of reactions to the issue of women's portrayal, many situating women within the patriarchal setting, assuming therefore that women's position in the society is inevitable, as a result of the patriarchy, and that (therefore) nothing can be done about it. Others see women as the victims of the traditional system in which they live, which might not be susceptible to change. Yet others do not see any problem with women's empowerment, for they see women as always having been empowered (Kolawole 1998: 15-16).

Oral literature provides the domain in which individuals in different social roles comment upon power relationships in society and create knowledge about it. However, people producing oral literature are not just commenting on society, but are involved in power relations either supporting or subverting those in power. The forms of art they are involved in are imbued with power, which can provoke, move, direct, prevent, overturn, and recast social reality (Furniss and Gunner 1995: 3). Women can thus redefine the terms of their signification in the context of the oral arts, creating new myths and symbols to replace the old terms that are detrimental to their image. The traditional conceptions and expectations of women are undergoing transformation from the introduction of factors of change, which offer opportunities for advancement and/or enhancement of the social status of women (Development and Women Studies Programme 1992). With the NGOs, churches, and other agencies working among the people, augmenting the influence of education, and contact with the cultures of other ethnic groups, the status of women is slowly but relentlessly changing.

Women in Traditional Dagaare Society

The Dagaaba, organised according to clans, which trace descent patrilineally from a putative ancestor, nevertheless recognise the importance of their uterine kin group as well, and maintain a joking relationship with it. However, they would not accept any form of dominance from uterine kinsmen (Tuurey 1982: 19).

In anthropological and sociological studies, status refers to relative power, wealth and honour, esteem or prestige (Oppong and Abu 1987). Most of these elements are identified in the traditional Dagaare male, but only a few can be identified in the traditional female. Power radiates from the elders of the eldest generation and goes down through the males to the youngest generation of males. Power is thus gerontocratic, and remains firmly in the hands of males.

Even identity favours males, as, though a man may not lose his membership in the clan nor leave his clan to become a member of another clan, a woman becomes a member of her husband's clan, albeit a member with low status. Though such a married woman has complementary status with the males of her generation in her patrilineage, once married, even her own patrikin consider her as belonging to her husband's clan rather than to her natal clan.

Ownership of land is vested in the clan heads and the land priests (*Tendaamba*), and is parcelled out to the males of the clan because it is only males who inherit land. Even the males do not have absolute ownership of the land to do with it what they will, as they only hold it in trust for subsequent generations. As an important factor of production, particularly for the agrarian Dagaaba, this practice securely puts wealth in the hands of males to the exclusion of females. Among the Lobr, one of the Dagaare groups, a woman may, through industry, attain a high status and acquire a *bellu* name, which is passed on from the mother and may be passed on matrilineally through daughters. Sons may use the *bellu* name, but they cannot pass it on to their sons. Among other Dagaare groups, even though women may become rich through such income generating activities as *pito* brewing, pottery and basket weaving, there is no recognised social status accorded their effort. The fact that they are well off may not even be noticed, in the light of their husband's influence and control over the wealth. A woman who has it and flaunts it may be called *pognaa* meaning "woman chief," but this is by no means a praise name, rather a derogatory remark meaning the woman is headstrong.

The inferior status of women among the Dagaaba is mentioned by Goody (1962: 60), who in writing about witches mentioned the role inferiority of women, saying that they have a subordinate position in both social and physical terms. Honour and prestige would normally not be attached to the figure of a woman. She is considered a possession of her husband's family, paid for with the cattle and/or other prestations so that she can be of economic and other benefit to her husband. However, Goody writes that when a woman has a grown up son with children of his own, she is said to have become a *yir sob*, a "house owner" (Goody 1962: 79). Goody continues that if a woman has borne three or four children, she is allowed to look in the granary of the house, an act that would otherwise not be acceptable for a wife. This is because she has now satisfactorily performed her reproductive role.

Assimeng (1990: 58), writing generally about women in Ghana, notes that various myths, taboos, customs and traditions had historically assigned women to a ritually and therefore socio-politically inferior status. He suggests that a principal cause of this discriminatory attitude that is regarded as spirit-charged and polluting.

Through all this, the traditional woman is expected to be reticent and take things stoically, because she has been socialised to believe that suffering in silence is a virtue (Mugo 1994: 62).

Institutional Factors Promoting the Change of Status

Change occurs when there are certain factors to trigger the change. Change in the status of Dagaare women can be attributed to general growing enlightenment as a result of travel among other ethnic groups, education, the activities of the churches and the NGOs. Certain roles that the economic situation of the Dagaaba has forced women to assume have also played no small part in changing the status of Dagaare women.

Since the time of the colonial administration, when the Northern territories were considered a "labour reserve" (Songsore and Denkabe 1995: 1), Dagaaba have been travelling to the cocoa farms and the mines in the south of Ghana in search of work. The Dagaaba seem to love to travel, as can be shown by names such as *Yonye* (Travel and see); *Yochilli* (Travel and mature); *Yobanzie* (Travel and know places). Initially, they did not take their wives along with them, but left them in their villages and sent them remittances. These days however, things have changed and both men and women migrate down to the south of Ghana where they come into contact with cultures of ethnic groups in the south. The Akan woman for example, traditionally has a great degree of autonomy in her society and holds the power of decision making in many activities (Boaten I 1993: 92). Since cultures in contact with each other end up influencing each other, Dagaare women who have sojourned in the south of Ghana gain a certain amount of emancipation which their colleagues in Dagao do not have. These somewhat emancipated women finally influence their peers back at home. Though this might not have changed the situation of the Dagaare woman, the enlightenment that it has brought about would eventually help to bring about changes in the status of Dagaare women. It is not only the women who benefited from travelling and contact with other cultures, since the men too, seeing how other men co-exist with their spouses, became more tolerant of their wives' exhibition of emancipation. They should for example endure their wives joining social groups and taking part in the activities of the group.

Education has played a great part in the enlightenment, which is helping Dagaare women to recognise their rights. Though women were generally not sent to school, more and more of the younger generation are going through some schooling. This gives women the chance to know what is going on around them, the changes in the world, and the status that women have in other places, and as a result they are aware that their lot is not inevitable.

The churches, particularly the Catholic Church, have played an important part in the changing status of Dagaare women. Right from the time missionaries moved into the Dagaare area in 1929, the missionaries have preached equality between the sexes. Apart from preaching, the church did its best to ban the practice among its members of those elements of culture which were thought to be inimical to the status and well being of women. Catholic Action, a Catholic association, taught girls to resist the traditional mode of "catching" girls, where the girl to be married was waylaid and abducted to the suitor's house, thus making the marriage a *fait accompli*. Dagaare girls of the Catholic Action were supposed to rally to her aid. In addition, girls were no longer to accept marriage through mediation without having first met face to face with the suitor and given their consent (Bekye 1987: 41-43). Apart from this kind of direct action the churches also played a part in the changing social status of Dagaare women in more subtle ways. The Catholic Church has provided the best of education in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Girls were not ignored as the church built a big girl's secondary school in Jirapa, the St. Anne's Vocational Institute at Nandom, and the St. Claire's Vocational Institute in Tumu, all catering to the education and training of girls in vocational skills, through which they would be self sufficient and therefore not be dependent on a man.

The Non-Governmental Organisations that operate in the Upper West Region have played their part in direct ways to change the status of women. Agents of NGOs such as the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP), *Suntao-Nuntia*, "Help each other, love each other" the 31st December Women's Movement and some government agencies such as the National

Commission on Women and Development (NCWD) and the Non Formal Education Division (NFED), directly educate women on their rights as persons of equal status with men, and on their potential. They organise women into social groups and co-operatives and at meetings of these groups discussions are held to enlighten the members on what they could do to make their lives better and to increase their standing in the society. The *Suntaa-Nuntaa* organisation is engaged in this through encouraging and helping women in tree nursing and planting as an income-generating venture. In this way women are repairing the damage to the environment that the society has caused, and while making some income, they are also earning the recognition of the society. Co-operatives of women are helped with small loans by agencies such as the National Boards for Small-Scale Industries (NBSSI), Africa 2000 and IFAD, and with inventory credit by Technoserve, to enable them to engage in many income-generating ventures. Dagaare women have fully embraced this, as shown by the ninety-nine women's groups that are operating in the Wa and Nadowli districts (Songsore and Denkabe 1995: 130-132).

The work of these agencies with women does not in any way mean that men are completely cut off. According to Mr. Stan Dery¹ program manager of CEDEP, men are encouraged to attend some of the focus group discussions so that during the discussions the two groups would begin to understand each other more.

Women in the Literary Milieu of the Dagaaba

Furniss and Gunner (1995: 3) write that performers of oral literature go beyond being mere commentators and are involved in relations of power in terms of supporting or subverting those in power. They continue, that the forms of oral literature are themselves invested with power, in the words and texts which have the ability to provoke, move, direct, prevent, overrun and recast social reality. A performer has the ability not only to represent power relations, but also to transform these relations. According to Lucy Duran's 1995 article, "*Jelimusow*: The superwomen of Malian music", women are constantly redefining the terms of their signification in general social discourse, not leaving the other sex to determine the terms by which women are signified. Furniss and Gunner (1995: 5) further see oral literature as constituting a field in which political process and the representation of daily social life are central. Song and poetry are an integral part of the way African people are commenting on the happenings in their societies. Sutherland-Addy (2000: 14) underlines women's redefinition of themselves when she says that women interact intensively with the rest of society in complementary and conflicting ways, finding an outlet in self expression to deal with the tangle of emotions emanating from their social experience.

It is in the church that a lot of girls have had the courage to play the xylophone and the drums as members of the choir. In this non-traditional space, there were none of the fears that they would have in the traditional space. On the other hand, they were encouraged by the preaching of equity between men and women "in the sight of God." On Good Fridays in the Catholic Church among the Dagaaba, a funeral is held for the death of Jesus Christ in the full traditional way. During these services, women began to sing dirges. Nobody took this as a serious effort on the part of women to break into the field of dirge singing, but it served as an encouragement to women to consider singing dirges in earnest.

The very tradition that did not give women the chance to perform dirges actually alternatively provided the opportunity for women to practice singing dirges. Among the Dagaaba, there exists a joking relationship between grandchildren and grandparents. During the funerals of grandparents, especially when they have lived to a ripe old age, females who are grandchildren of the deceased, irrespective of their ages, dress up in smocks like men and come out to sing dirges in praise of their grandparent. This is usually after the first bitter edge of the death has

¹ Interview at CEDEP offices in Wa on the 19th of January, 2000.

been taken off with very serious mourning and dirge singing. This transvestite behaviour reduces the seriousness of the dirge singing as the females are seen to be posing as men. It is taken that men are singing the dirge. It is understood by everybody around that the dirge singers are grandchildren (classificatory or otherwise) of the deceased and that they are joking with their grandparent. Often, an accomplished male dirge singer might sing a duet with the female singer, making corrections for her and in this way unwittingly actually training her to become a good dirge signer, though nobody would have believed that she would actually sing dirges in earnest. It is in just this fashion that a lot of young men learn to sing dirges.

Apart from this opportunity to sing dirges that is created by the joking relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, the fact of women being the main performers of *dannu*,² praise songs, gives them the skills to sing *kolagni*,³ the actual dirge sung at the funeral grounds. Praises form the basis of the dirge, and other issues are then brought in. Women are already adept in singing praises, so it is just a matter of bringing in topical issues to make the dirge. The type of dirge that women usually sing, *komuɔɔ*,⁴ comprises just praises without many other topics of note being brought in.

The *Suntaa-Nuntaa* organisation, a Non-Governmental Organisation working with women's groups in agro-forestry and empowerment of women, uses drama and other oral arts to organise the women they work with. During the performances of women in these meetings they use the Dagaare drums that are used for dances such as *bawa*, but they do not depend on or ask men to play for them. They go ahead and do the playing themselves, saying that after all the men are not a part of the group so they do not have any business coming to play for them. This shows that the women are determined to maintain the integrity of their groups and do not want any influence from their menfolk. They hitherto did not usually exhibit such independence of mind

The Status of Women in the Oral Poetry of the Dagaaba

Dirges

There are different dirges performed among the Dagaaba, *kolagni* and *komuɔɔ*. The former used to be performed exclusively by males.

Komuɔɔ unlike *kolagni* are performed by only females. The women may sit around the corpse and chant these in an undertone accompanied by weeping. There are no topical issues brought into the singing of this type of dirge. There may just be mention of tribulations that the deceased or family went through in life, but the main focus is on virtues. These virtues are usually mentioned in the praise names that are given to the deceased.

Kolagni, on the other hand, are a very serious type of dirge with serious subject matter. These are performed at the funeral grounds when the funeral is still fresh and they are referred to as *kotuluu* (hot funeral). In the performance of a *kolagni*, as with all other types of Dagaare dirge, there is no composition that the performer already knows and performs. The Dagaare dirge is an impromptu composition sung by one, two or three dirge singers.

² *Dannu* are praises songs mainly sung by women. These however form the main part of the *kolagni*, a dirge which usually starts with an introductory wailing (*langmuɔɔ*) to set the rhythm, followed by the delineation of the lineage of the deceased, the praises forming the main part, and then some more wailing to tune down.

³ *Kolagni* are dirges sung at the funeral grounds while the body is lying in state or seated on the catafalque. These dirges are traditionally sung by only men and are considered a more serious form of dirge.

⁴ *Komuɔɔ* are dirges sung by the women gathered in the house to mourn, or those sitting around the corpse. This form of dirge is made up only of praises and is not different from *dannu* which is the preserve of women.

Women have now convincingly entered the field of singing *kolagni*. This does not mean that they did not have the skills before. My main informant on women's dirges, Pelbasuoye Seripe⁵ of Sankana, says that she did not have to learn by understudying any dirge singer, nor did she undergo any initiation to be able to sing. She believes her ability is God given, and it gives her self-confidence and high self-esteem.

*Ka wirin lan kɔɔ che n wien man yi*⁶

With a hundred whistles together, my whistle comes out clear.

She goes on to establish her superiority over others, (male singers from Takpo in the Nadowli district).

N muɔ nan ban kuori kan ban seu ban bi,

Piirikulaama,⁷ n muɔ nan ban kuori kan ba seu ban bi.

Since I sing dirges, am I not better than them,

Piirikulaama, since I sing dirges, am I not better than them.

At the funeral where this dirge was recorded the men from Takpo had been reluctant to give way to Pelbasuoye until a male dirge singer from her own village of Sankana took over, and then handed over to her. She could therefore not resist the jibe at them. This is just an example to show that Dagaare women are ready to fight for recognition. This particular woman is known as a *pɔg ganda*, a hard-headed woman, who would not be pushed over by any man.

Women who have started singing dirges at funerals have financial consideration in mind too, for they earn some money, apart from the gift of money thrown down by mourners and relatives of the deceased in appreciation for the praises and good things said about the family and the dead. Indeed the novelty of women singing attracts more throwing of money.

Ka gyilin ba kono che unin u lazari nin pie.

If the xylophone is dull, it is still the 30 (cowries).

Some of the traditional roles of women feature in the dirges of women:

Sombonayiri Dachiema, ɔn kuɔn waanin yiri

Jiribayima, ɔn kuɔn waanin yiri...

Zebanuma ɔn kuɔn mwaanin samba

Sankana lankonoma, ɔn kɔmaaru wieli.

Dachiema of Sombo royal house, fetch water to the house

Jiribayima, fetch water to the house...

Zebanuma, greet the visitors with water

Lankonoma of Sankana, get cool water and cool the mourners.

One of the specific duties of women is fetching of water. A man would never be required to go the stream to fetch water, nor to even fetch water for visitors to drink.

⁵ Interview at Sankana near Wa on the 15th of January, 2000.

⁶ This and the excerpts of the dirge that follow are from the performance of Pelbasuoye Seripe at a funeral of a young woman at Sankana on the 15 of January, 2000. The full texts of all excerpts used in this paper can found in the unpublished M. Phil thesis "The Role of Women in Dagaare Oral Poetry: An Indicator of the Changing Status of Women in the Society" presented to the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana by Edward Nantambu in the year 2001.

⁷ This is a praise name given to the deceased. It means literally one who fetches water from a rocky pool. The village Sankana is a rocky place with very few water sources.

To be fair to the singer of the dirge that is used here, she also criticises what she thinks is bad about women. She laments that some women do not measure up to the task of being wives and that it would have been better for the husbands of such women to have remained single.

*Pɔgba yee ka kaŋa man zoli bun che yoli ka pɔga
Ba yeli ka pɔga ka kaŋa kun ven che zin.*

Woman yee! Someone will take something and call her a wife
when they talk of wives and someone would not rather remain single.

The dirge singer thinks things have changed. There was a time when women used their beauty to get what they wanted from men. In the past, a woman could not go to a drinking bar and buy drinks for herself. A man would have had to take her and buy drinks for both of them. There is such a change in this that religious leaders and social workers have noticed what they term a negative change in the status of women - Dagaare women taking to the drinking of locally brewed liquor (akpeteshie). Now, women do not fear to show that they have the wealth to get what they want. According to the dirge, they even buy what only males used to buy and own.

*N muɔ ba yeli ka pɔga mwaa vielun danin a daan
Pɔga la buo da gbulo wo nii.*

Didn't I say women should take beauty and buy pito
Who is a woman, buying items like cattle.

Praise songs

Praise songs in Dagaare *dannu*, are so called because they involve naming the ancestors, and praising them. By association, the living descendants of the ancestors are praised. Women use these praise songs for the functional purpose of providing rhythm for work, such as grinding of millet, pounding things in a mortar or churning ground shea-nuts into butter, but because they are predominantly praise names their functionality does not feature in the text. Apart from the rhythm for work, songs also take away the tedium of the work. Women however are able to work into the songs, issues that are dear to their hearts or are of social importance to them or the society. They can pour out their woes through these songs, thus purging their emotions, and at the same time giving out pointed messages to listeners.

In the praise songs, not all the names used are actual names of ancestors. Some are names coined to show some attributes, and a Dagaare listener would understand what the message is, not from what is said, but from the name that has been used.

The excerpts of *Dannu* presented here are from the composition and performance of Sonaanma of Loho,⁸ renowned for her singing. Because of her singing, she still uses the big built up grinding stone in her house. She however claims that it is poverty that makes her do that tedious work instead of going to grind whatever she needs at the grinding mill. The singer sees herself as someone who was to have come to the world as a man. She has a humorous way of seeing her situation. She perhaps thinks that the situation of males in her society is better, and that her being a female was a mistake. She sees herself as a *gɔba*, a master xylophonist, and one whose gift was given by God. It is the talented male xylophonists who are called *gɔba*.

*A gɔɔri ŋa, nie zaa nan pegi ma
Naamwin la di kumo.*

⁸ The excerpts of *dannu* used here were composed and sung by Sonaanma Charia of Loho and recorded on the 4th of January, 1999. Loho is a village about five kilometers to the north of Wa.

This my xylophone talent, nobody initiated me into it
It is God who gave it to me.

She continues:

*A yeli mam man kono yuori yela ni
Che ban wa ye ko pugina kuon
Ka maan di bin
N le kuomin buu buu waana ka ba diu
Hai, man min di pa sani wo
A waanin Loho, a wayo dire nin nimha.*

That is why I have been crying for a penis
But they said we should have a swim
And I put it down
I jumped in the water buu, buu, when I returned it was gone
so I also took a useless vagina
And I came to Loho to be in destitution.

She is lamenting her struggle in life.

*Le man du man yi yee a mo mori kpali
Pa, yeli na kpe ma, a wo konkoha an in baanhi.*

That is how I used to go out and struggle, for nothing.
Oh! This thing pains me, like bangles on a leper.

Her main lament is about her childlessness, in spite of her having given birth to as many as ten children who have all died leaving her childless and the butt of the society. The situation of the childless woman, in spite of the changing times, has not really improved among the Dagaaba.

She attributes the deaths of her children to witchcraft.

*Maan ba dogi nyohinii zaa,
kuun na zun la
Kaa naan m min nyila fiin
M ela Loho. Ana n la taa la kuun bi?
M min na, a danaan man zin, a nin bihi pie, maan
Ana n i wala, mba me bi?
N kula tuon yeli ka sobbihi yen ta ko ba
Ba di koora, ba yiri la ban koora.*

I haven't given birth in vain
It is because of death
If not, I also got a few
I built Loho. Do I have death?
Even I, could be with ten children, I
What should I do, didn't I build?
I can't say witches should not eat them
They should eat, it is their house they are breaking.

The poem is not entirely about herself, however She sings about social issues.

In recent times, there has been a great lament among Dagaaba about young men not wanting to become responsible by marrying. There is always the comparison with by-gone years when

youths married by e ighteen years o f a ge. These d ays however, b y t wenty-five, t hey a re s till either in school or t rying to be gainfully employed so t hat t hey can establish t hemselves and marry. T he society however, t hinks t hey a re not serious about marrying. T he singer devotes herself to t he issue of bachelorhood. She sees t he bachelor as a recalcitrant and irresponsible person.

*Dakuɔri kpaglagaa nyɔnfolon dɔgriba nuɔna,
Dakuɔri kpaglagaa pɔga bii bie.*

Uncaring bachelor, kin of freedom lovers,
Uncaring bachelor, no wife, no child.

Breaking from the song, she makes a comment about a young man standing by:

*Kaɲa turi gba chɔ ni. Ba zɔra biribiri u yeli chibe wo. U naan leun pel Pel. Bo un digra?
Bien muɔ kono bi?*

That is one of them hiding in the corner there. If they are running helter-skelter, he does not care. He would just run off like a shot. What is he taking? Is it a child that would be crying?

Play songs

Play songs, *anlee* and *kɔɔri*, have always been the preserve of women, and the medium through which they could have a bit of fun at other people's expense.⁹ Because of *anlee* songs, people were wary of misbehaving, lest the women make a song about their misdemeanours. There were limits, however, as to how far they could go in their songs, particularly if these were to be sung in the public domain and not secretly at home. The question is, do they now sing about things that they used not to sing about? Grace Azaanang, one of the women from whom I gathered *anlee* songs had this to say:

When I was young, anytime we sang certain songs, my uncle Matthew would appear with a cane and we would all have to do "440" to save ourselves.¹⁰

These days, women sing any song with impunity. Certainly, many songs are still about social issues, the common one being orphans and widows, and the fact that these are vulnerable people in the society.

*A bikpiibe yeli, u man pen la h'm h'm
A pɔgkuɔri yeli yee, u man pen la h'm h'm.
A bikpiibe yeli, u man penin la puɔ
U ba taa saa nin ma, u paa kpe yel ku ninbong.*

The orphan's problem, he moans h'm h'm
The widow's problem, she moans h'm h'm
The orphan's problem, he moans to himself
He has no father and mother, whom should he tell.

⁹ *Anlee* and *kɔɔri* are play songs but of different tempos. *Kɔɔri* is much more faster than *anlee*.

¹⁰ "440" is slang for to run fast and far, derived from the race of 440 yards. This is from an interview with Grace Azaanang on the 1st of February, 2000, at Charia

Some songs comment on the situation of women in the society. The fact that a woman leaves the safety and love of her natal home to go and live with a husband in a house where she may be regarded as second class rankles with women now, and they sing their protest in no uncertain terms.

Naamwin! Bon la dɔgɛɛ hun i, dɔgɛɛ dɔgɛɛ dɔgɛɛ
A baki hu deɔ sau woo
A yi ti kuli niɛ bie
Ka niɛ bie leu tuura bu sau yela.

God! What is suffering that you created, suffering!
 To leave the food of your house
 And get married to somebody's son
 And somebody's son insults you because of food.

It is clear from some of the songs that Dagaare women are no longer ready to blindly follow their husbands even when they see that it would not do them any good. Their independence of thought is established, if not in reality, at least in song.

Kun kpenli dɔɔ yela ti nyen tiisan h'm h'm h'm
Kun kpenli dɔɔ yela ti nyen kɔɔtin h'm h'm h'm
Ka zie wa nyaana kaa dɔɔ bala bamii h'm h'm.

I won't sleep at a bus station because of a man
 I won't sleep in a courtroom because of a man
 And tomorrow the man would not regard me.

In recent time, some *Anlee* songs have become very boldly insulting to men, unlike the previous subtle hints of the songs. This may show that now women do not have such a high regard for the assumed superiority of men. The songs seem to suggest that the women would rather do without the males of the society if they had their way.

Ka dɔɔ naan da dɔgma, n naan yeli la dɔɔ yeli
A dɔɔ muɔ waala bunholuu muɔ
A dɔɔ muɔ waala bunholuu muɔ
Nin laani laani laani.

If a man did not beget me, I would have talked about men
 What actually is a man
 What actually is a man
 A useless useless useless person.

Conclusion

This paper seeks to establish evidence for a change in the role of Dagaare women as manifested in the context and performance of oral literature of the society. The change in the part played by Dagaare women in the performance of oral literature should be an indication of a change in their status in the society.

Oral literature is a sphere that shows the improved social status of women as it leads to their being objects of admiration, imitation, deference, suggestion and attraction. Though a woman may be low in political and economical status, her social status may be high because of her involvement and/or achievement in the oral arts, which may make her an object of admiration in the society, and increase her own self-esteem.

The increased responsibility that women have in the maintenance of their families has given them more say in decision-making. They are more involved in the responsibility of family maintenance because there are more opportunities open to them to generate income, the use of which they control. Further augmenting ability of women to generate income is the fact that now they are able to own land in their own right; land which is deeded to them and which they can pass on to their children. This together with the avenues for small loans for income generating ventures gives women a new confidence in life so that they can now look to issues connected with attaining high prestige in their society. Society now recognises the indispensability of women and holds them in higher esteem as a result.

The change in the status of Dagaare women is however on a minimal scale, and more can be done to accelerate the changes that are taking place. With the intervention of the agents of change such as the churches, the NGOs and government agencies concerned with the improvement of women's position and condition in the societies, the regard that people have for women is rising. Women can now speak boldly in public and their suggestions would not be disregarded simply because they are women. However, only a few women are yet able to be so bold. It is hoped that more and more women would become involved to make definite changes. For something to really become accepted, it needs to be a more general occurrence so that it does not seem as if it is a few nonconformists challenging the status quo. It would be a real change when an outspoken woman is not called a *pɔg gāndaa*, a headstrong woman.

The aim of the agents of change should be the creation of contented families that are able to meet their everyday needs. A happy family of that sort is less likely to live in an atmosphere of oppression. A couple would then be more amenable to ideas of gender equity.

An issue of concern however, is the negative change in the status of women where alcoholic drinks are concerned. Definitely, women are more independent now. What used not to occur when men had to buy drinks for women is becoming common. Drunkenness used to be associated with men, but now some women, from those in their teens to the elderly, are drunk as often as men. This trait is particularly common among those who have the time to go around attending funerals. The drinking of hard liquor like gin and *akpeteshie* by women is of great concern in the society. Though it shows a change in the status of women, they could be better off without that type of change.

Literature in any society serves both as an indicator of change and an arena where the change can occur. The change in status of Dagaare women, as reflected in the oral poetry, is not restricted to the private domain, but extends to the public domain too. Women now not only perform roles that were not traditionally assigned to them in the public domain, they have gone on to add dimensions that were little used or not used at all. Women are not hesitating to pour out their woes in their performances. The issues that disturb them in the society feature prominently in their poetry. The problems that come with childlessness and widowhood are major concerns, as well as the treatment they suffer from their husbands. Whatever happens in the society affects women too. They therefore sing about other issues such as irresponsibility and wickedness not just on the part of men, but also on the part of women. This is a step in the right direction, as women would be doing their own cause a disservice if they turned a blind eye to issues that women need to be admonished about, and rather adopted a confrontational posture with men.

The men of the Dagaare society have not prevented women from performing *kolagni*, which proves that, but for the fear concerning women's performance of the dirge, they would not have been left out of the performance for so long. The society has also undergone such a change that people are rather thrilled about women performing the dirge. The very fact that the attitude of Dagaaba to this change is mild shows that literature can be a safe space in which women can change and show change. It shows that literature is a dimension in which women can be what they are not in reality. There is clearly scope for further explanation of change for women through literature.

One area however where women have not made much of a breakthrough is in the playing of xylophones and drums. Though women are now known to play these instruments, they do so only in the non-traditional domains of churches or at meetings of women's groups. Only a few women have been known to play funeral xylophones at funeral grounds. These, however, were very elderly women who would no longer have any fear of being unable to bear children if they play the xylophone. A change would really be seen to have occurred when young women are able to perform on these instruments in public the way women now perform dirges. We may not have long to wait.

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LOOKING UP TO THE VICTIMS: LAND SCARCITY AND WOMEN'S ROLE IN FOOD PROVISIONING IN THE GHANA-TOGO BORDER AREA

Ben K. Fred-Mensah

Abstract

This article has shown that even though women in a cash crop growing area on the Ghana side of the Ghana-Togo border played virtually no role in the transfer of land to migrant farmers, it was they who, either as wives or heads of household, faced the responsibility of dealing with household food insecurity that had resulted from the transfer of the land. Thus, the paper suggests that, in collaboration with its development partners, the Government of Ghana should assist these women to develop alternative income-earning enterprises that de-emphasize land as the only means of earning livelihood in the area.

Résumé

Les femmes qui se trouvent du côté ghanéen de la frontière Ghana-Togo, où poussent les cultures de rente, ne sont pratiquement pas impliquées dans le transfert de terre aux agriculteurs immigrés. Pourtant, se sont elles qui en tant qu'épouses ou chefs de ménage, prennent en charge la lourde responsabilité d'insécurité alimentaire du foyer provoquée par le transfert de la terre. Par conséquent, la communication propose que le gouvernement ghanéen, en collaboration avec ses partenaires dans le développement, aide ces femmes à développer d'autres entreprises génératrices de revenu afin de ne plus dépendre de la terre comme le seul moyen de gagner leur vie dans la région.

Introduction

Feminist writers on Africa have noted a paradox in gender relations in the region. The paradox is that although women, compared to their male counterparts, constitute the larger proportion of active labor force in agriculture, particularly in food production, and form extensive networks in the informal sector where they are noted for their entrepreneurial abilities and creative skills, they represent the weaker force in the marketplace and the political arena. The sources of this state of affairs can be traced to the pre-existing cultural and contemporary political and legal arrangements in the region. In other words, barriers to the progress and wellbeing of women in Africa can be traced to male political domination, the nature of the sexual division of labor¹, the burden of women's domestic labor and childcare, limitations on access to property and women's lack of choice over childbearing.² It is often believed that the modernization processes in Africa since the colonial period have done more harm than good to the welfare of women and in the region.³

¹ In this regard, the structural adjustment programs, which were underway in most African countries from the mid-1980s, have generally been considered as having disproportionate adverse effects on women through their insistence on removal of subsidies on social services and agricultural inputs, cost-sharing measures and overemphasis on export agriculture (Cornia et al. 1987; Kabeer and Humphrey 1991; Gladwin 1993).

² For more information on these barriers, Fred-Mensah (1993) and Moser (1993).

³ For example, the colonial education and legal systems, with their preference for dealing with only men in the public spheres, have gone a long way to curtail the economic clout and political power of women in Africa.

Thus, as we move further into the twenty-first century, it is necessary to assemble and examine the existing case studies and statistical information on gender issues in Africa. In doing so, we may be in the position to reevaluate the conceptual tools and operational activities that have hitherto been designed to improve the welfare of women in the region (Adepoju and Oppong 1994).⁴ In this chapter, I intend throw more light on the apparently contradictory status of women in most of Ghana's agrarian communities. Based predominantly on empirical materials from among the Buem of the Ghana-Togo border area (GTBA), I will show that even though women in this area have played little role in the transfer of their ancestral land to migrant farmers and, today, constitute a negligible proportion of cash crop farm owners in the area,⁵ either as wives or heads of single-parent households⁶ they face the inescapable responsibility of dealing with the increasing household food insecurity that has resulted from land scarcity in the area.⁷

The study focuses on cocoa cultivation, even though it is not concerned with the production of the crops *per se*. Cocoa as a perennial export crop, is discussed in terms of its role as agent of change in the indigenous land rights system in the GTBA. Introduced into the area at the turn of the twentieth century, the production of cocoa has engendered massive migration into the area, transformed the duration of the use of the land from transient regimes of annual cropping to perennial use; enhanced the value of the land; changed the income concept of peasant farming; thrown the traditional concept of property in land into disarray and, in some communities, eliminated the land frontier.⁸ This shift from subsistence agriculture to cash cropping has altered the pre-existing production relations, where production relations are defined as the relationships among people as land grantors and land users, as farm owners and farm workers and as creditors and debtors.

One normative argument central to this study is that the denial of the women in the GTBA of their customary rights of access to their kin-based land by their male counterpart is a violation of their entitlement. As Sen (1981, 1982) noted, entitlement connotes rights, which define the "relationship between people and the commodities which they need to acquire in order to lead certain kind of

⁴ It must be recalled that there have often been shifts in vision on the strategies for dealing with issues regarding women and girls, particularly the contemporary shift from the concept of women in development (WID) to gender and development (GAD). The WID approach came under attack by researchers in non-governmental organizations who advocate a shift of focus from "sex" to "gender" as the conceptual tool for gender-sensitive planning and analysis. The resentment generally derived from the notion that the approach perceives women in isolation and focuses on women in terms of their sex, that is their biological differences with men rather than in terms of gender. Focus on gender takes account of the social relationships that exist between women and men, a relationship in which women have been subordinated. Gender-aware approaches are concerned with the manner in which male-female relationships are constructed: men and women play different roles in society, their gender differences being shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants (see Fred-Mensah 1993, for a summary of these views).

⁵ Discussions on women cash crop farm owners date back to Hill's seminal work in the 1950s among the migrant cocoa farmers in Akim Abuakwa farming district in the Eastern Region of Ghana, (Hill 1958; also Vellenga 1986).

⁶ The term *single-parent households* in this context refers to households headed by women. As Migot-Adholla and John (1994) noted, the main factors influencing the incidence of female-headed household in much of Africa include widowhood, marital failure and premarital motherhood. A more extensive discussion of the concept can be found in Guyer and Peters (1984).

⁷ The term land scarcity in the current study is considered a subjective one. It does not necessarily connote absolute land shortage. It may refer to either the inability to get land for food crop cultivation or the inability to expand existing export crop production. It may also refer to the quality of the available land. In this case, an uncultivated land can be available yet land can be considered scarce if the quality of the land is so poor that it cannot be used for food cultivation or the yield from it is low (Francis, 1984).

⁸ Conceived of as property regime, land rights systems define relationships among persons with reference to the land. Property rights are not relations between people and things. Rather, they are behavioral relations among people that arise from the existence and use of things of value. It thus follows that changes in a system land rights are ipso facto changes in interpersonal relations, hence evidence of social change (Bentsi-Enchill 1964; Fred-Mensah 1987; Bromley and Cernea 1989).

lives.’⁹ However, as a relational issue, people’s entitlement must be viewed with reference to the sociocultural context within which it is to be exercised. In other words, in applying the entitlement analysis to people in relation to an object of value, which in this case is land, attention must be paid to the fact that the sociocultural milieu within which the people operate can be a source of their vulnerability, irrespective of the statutory or customary laws that govern the land. This thinking was captured in Gore’s (1993) review of Sen’s works on entitlement when he noted that a person’s command over the resources by which food is acquired can depend upon something more than legal rights. This view was corroborated by Gladwin (1993) when she, too, observed that there is gender vulnerability engendered by social stratification and imbalance in gender relations both at the community and household levels in most of Africa’s agrarian communities.

The Local Economy

The GTBA marks the eastern limit of the Ghana side of the Koforidua-Akwapim-Akwamu-Togo mountain range, which has an average height of about 450 meters above sea level (Dickson and Benneh 1990). This area lies in the semi-deciduous rainforest that marks the central portion of the Ghana-Togo border. The GTBA is a cluster of communities that constitutes the eastern half of the larger Buem Traditional Area in the Jasikan District in the Volta Region of Ghana.¹⁰ The main settlements of the GTBA are New Ayoma, Dzolu, Old Ayoma, Baglo, Odumase, Kute and Lekante. In Ghana’s contemporary decentralization scheme, the GTBA is a semi-autonomous administrative unit known as the Buem-Kator Area Council, constituting one of the seven area councils of the Jasikan District.¹¹ The indigenous people in the GTBA are called Buem and their language, Lelemi. This language forms part of a linguistic community which Ring (1987) called the Ghana-Togo Mountain Group (GTM).¹²

Agriculture, including forestry, hunting and fishery is the most important occupation in the GTBA. It employs about 84 percent of the labor force. Darkoh (1964a, 1964b) noted that Buem people have been cultivators as far back as human memory can reach.¹³ Until the introduction of cocoa and, later, coffee, agricultural activities in the GTBA were predominantly subsistence farming. Farms were relatively small and were designed to meet the needs of the changing demographic composition of the domestic groups. They were also planned to meet the food requirements of such rites of passage as birth, marriages and funerals. Food crops grown in the area are generally annual and the main ones are maize, yam, rice, cocoyam, plantain and banana. Vegetables are also grown. They include pepper, okra, tomatoes and garden egg. The crops are totally rain-fed, and the entire agricultural system is based on a simple technology, of which the hoe, the cutlass, the axe, the scythes, the knife and the basket are the most important farm implements. Poultry and livestock are kept alongside the arable agriculture. The main animals are goats and sheep. Fishing is of no economic importance in the GTBA as the area is inland and there are no large rivers or lakes.

⁹ For a summary and discussion of Sen’s works on entitlement, see Gore (1993).

¹⁰ The Buem Traditional Area is one of the most important indigenous political systems in the northern part of the Volta Region (see Fred-Mensah 1999b; Dorm-Adzobu 1974).

¹¹ The other area councils of the Jasikan District are the Jasikan Area Council, the Tapa Area Council, the Konsu-Ovi Area Council, the Buem-Ntete Area Council, the Bowri-Kwamekrom Area Council, and the Nkonya Area Council.

¹² The other members of the Ghana-Togo Mountain group identified by Ring are Boweri, Akapafu/Lolobi, Likpe, Logba, Avatime, Tafi and Nyagbo. Of these groups, Boweri, Akapafu/Lolobi and Likpe are Buem’s closest neighbours.

¹³ This is also attested by the indigenous Buem Calendar. The calendar shows the main agricultural activities, crops normally cultivated, implements normally used and how agricultural practices relate to the various seasons of the year. The month of July (*Ububu*), for example, translates literally to mean "it is always wet". It is the month in which rice is planted. The major agricultural tool is the hoe (*kaklorkor*). Corn is harvested in August (*Oryafe*), a month whose name is translated literally to mean "sunshine from God" (Fred-Mensah 1999b).

In both of his works, Darkoh noted that hunting was a major economic activity in Buem, and it lasted until the late 1960s when uncultivated forests and the uninhabited bush began to disappear. The chief game consisted of bush pigs, leopards, antelopes, lions and monkeys. He noted that except for the pelt of the black monkeys, products of the animals were not traded. Instead, hunters normally preserved the skins and some other parts of certain animals for display as trophies on ceremonial occasions. There are also a few lumbering activities, which involve the felling and sawing of trees. The major tree species used in this trade include Sapele, Mahogany, Odum and Wawa. Since the mid-1980s, lumbering has declined as an economic activity in the GTBA. This is due mainly to two factors: firstly, most of the trees have disappeared as a result of overexploitation and agricultural cultivation and secondly, the stringent nature of the current national environment laws and policies has discouraged the felling and destruction of trees. Heavy taxes, court fines and, in some extreme cases, imprisonment are some of the penalties that can be imposed on any one caught felling trees in the area without a permit from the Jasikan District Administration.

There are commercial activities as well. These include private transport business, food processing and petty trading. Individuals run bush taxis. The vehicles involved in the transport business are mostly Nissan and Toyota mini buses and wooden Bedford trucks. These vehicles carry goods and passengers within the GTBA and between it and such more southern towns and cities such as Hohoe, Keta, Accra and Tema. There are also small shops, which sell such items as household wares, pharmaceutical products and stationery. The GTBA is also noted for itinerant traders who move their wares from one market to another. There are designated market days, of which those in Kute and New Ayoma are the best developed. Tuesdays are Kute market days and Thursdays are New Ayoma market days. The markets are predominantly outdoor and open-air, and attract traders from far away places as Accra, Ho, Hohoe and Jasikan and Togolese towns such as Bena and Ahlor. The items traded normally include farm produce, handicrafts, farm implements, textile products, stationery, earthen wares, aluminum and glass products, ornaments, cosmetics, and fish. The bulk of the trading activities are controlled by women. Male farmers who live within a radius of about four kilometers of a market town, too, do visit the market where they meet their counterparts to discuss business and share alcoholic beverages, of which palm wine¹⁴ and a locally distilled liquor *akpeteshie*¹⁵ are the most important.

Cocoa, In-Migration and Land Transfer

Land, called *kalo* in the Buem language, is obviously the most important productive resource in the GTBA. That is, the land tenure system traditionally conforms to the family land¹⁶ concept of Ghana. The land is owned by lineages, and lineage heads are responsible for allocating it to households and individuals who need it for cultivation or establishing residence. Thus, attachment to of a lineage, based primarily on consanguinity, affinity or adoption, was the main means by which households gained access to land. Unlike the Akan (Bentsi-Enchill 1964) but like the Ewe (Kludze 1973), the power of Buem chiefs, including the paramount chief, over land is not proprietary. It is only political. That is, a chief of Buem has no right to control and or transfer land by virtue of his position. He can do this only when the land belongs to his lineage and he is entitled to its allocation. It is the responsibility of the chief to settle land disputes and impose fines where necessary. This oversight duty of chiefs expanded with the advent of cash cropping and the subsequent influx of migrants. Not only must chiefs cope with the increasing land-related conflicts, they must also append their signature and/or thumbprint to all documents—known locally as *land receipts*—pertaining to plots of land transferred in his chieftdom if the document is to be considered valid and tenable in courts of law (Fred-Mensah 1999b).

¹⁴ This is a frothy whitish alcoholic beverage extracted from oil palm trees.

¹⁵ This a gin-like liquor distilled from such fermented beverages as palm wine, sugar solution and fruit juice.

¹⁶ The term *family*, as understood in Ghana's statutes refers to a group of people who descend from "a common ancestor and they constitute a corporate entity," capable of holding ultimate titles to property, including land. It must, therefore, be distinguished from its ordinary usage in English, which simply defines it as a basic social unit, consisting of a husband and wife and their children (see Kludze 1973: 31-32).

The various means by which precolonial communities in Ghana established initial possession and control over land have been discussed in the literature (Bentsi-Enchill 1964; Ollenu 1962). These included conquest, first occupation and voluntary transfer from one ethnic group to another. The people of Buem as a whole established claims of ownership to their present territory by the means of uninterrupted occupation. Their ability for expansion beyond the present possession was curtailed by the arrival of other ethnic groups, among which are the Akpafu to the eastern and northeastern areas, the Likpe in the southeastern corner and the Akposso Kubi to the northwestern corner. There is evidence to show that Buem had to fight a series of wars and court battles with their neighbors to prevent them from encroaching upon their land. For example, the people of Kute have been to war several times with their Akposso neighbors in Togo and the Buem in New Ayoma have fought many wars with the Akpafu over plots of land that lie on their common border. They have also embarked on a series of legal battles with Likpe Kukurantumi, their most immediate southern neighbor.¹⁷

The nature of migration into the GTBA was similar to that noted in the older cocoa growing areas in southern Ghana (Hill 1963; Hunter 1972), southwestern Nigeria (Berry 1975) and southeastern Ivory Coast (Hecht, 1985). The exact dates of migration into the GTBA are difficult to establish because information on migration to the area is very sketchy. However, based on Kotey's (1972) study in the Kute area and Dorm-Adzobu's (1974) surveys of Buem as a whole and pieces of information garnered from remembered histories of the farmers and dates on land receipts, four periods of the migratory processes have been identified. These were 1900 to World War I period, the inter-War period, the post-World War II period, and since the mid-1960s. In ethnic terms, the majority of the migrants to the GTBA were Ewe from Ghana and Togo. Most of the Ghanaian Ewe migrants were Northern Ewe whose homes of origin are to the south of the GTBA. These migrants were from Agortime, Akorme, Anfoega, Anfoeta, Anlo, Avatime, Gbefi, Gbi, Dakpa, Dzodze, Peki, Tongu, Ve and Vakpo. Non-Ewe Ghanaian migrants were from Anum and Boso in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The Togolese Ewe migrants originated from southern Togolese towns such as Agoe, Atakpame, Dayi, Gafe, Keve, Kpelle and Tsevie. There were also non-Ewe Togolese migrants, most of whom were the Kabre, the Kotokoli and the Kaboli. There were also a few Fon and Yoruba who migrated from southern Benin and southwestern Nigeria, respectively (Fred-Mensah 1999b).

Land acquisition by migrants for cocoa cultivation posed very little problem. The apparent land hunger of the migrants was equally matched by the willingness of the Buem landowners to transfer the land. The major means by which the early migrants acquired land were by purchase and share contracts known *dibi*¹⁸. Of 259 migrants farms studied over 50 percent were originally acquired through purchases and by the *dibi* contract (Fred-Mensah 1999b). However, since the end of the 1960s when the land frontier in the area had virtually disappeared, the sale and pledging¹⁹ of self-acquired farms as well as inheritance of farms have become the most important means of land and farm transfer to the migrants. Farms were sold either directly to the migrants or they were originally pledged but

¹⁷ For more information on these cases, see *Ghana Law Report* (1962), "Nana Akoto III of New Ayoma v. Nana Kwasi Agyeman I of Likpe Kukurantumi" (1), Accra, 29th June..

¹⁸ The word *di bi* is derived from an Akan (a Ghanaian language) expression *-di bi na meso medi bi*, literally meaning, "eat some so that I also eat some". The *di bi* contract in the GTBA has a peculiar feature that makes it attractive to the migrants. In this share contract system, it is not only the harvests that are shared equally between the land grantor and the cultivator. The land on which the crop has been cultivated is also shared into two equal parts, and one half is given to the cultivator. This portion of the land becomes the cultivator's property in perpetuity (see also Robertson 1982).

¹⁹ Pledging in Ghana dates back to the precolonial era when people pledged (that is temporarily exchanged) self-acquired properties such as beads, ornaments, and working implements for either money, goods, or services. The practice became more pervasive with the advent of cash cropping and introduction of modern forms of money which have made it possible for farmers to pledge their perennial cash crops. Contrary to the official negative attitudes towards farm pledging in Ghana, writers such as Hill (1986) believe that it has many "positive features" (1986, p. 91). In what she terms "The Need to be Indebted", Hill explains that "Because rural and tropical communities in which cash circulates are innately inegalitarian, so it is inevitable that the impoverished need to borrow and that the richer people should put their surplus funds at work" (p. 83).

ended up in sale. More than a quarter of all the parcels that were acquired after the 1970s were acquired by this means. It must be noted that while the bulk of land transactions has been between the Buem lineage heads and the migrants, individual Buem household heads have also transferred their self-acquired farms either through direct sale or pledging to the migrants. In his study on the "competition between cocoa and coffee" in the Kute area, Kotey (1972) noted what he considered "steady increases in rates" at which the indigenous people were transferring their land to migrant farmers.

The contribution of cocoa to the social, economic and political transformations in Ghana in general and in the GTBA in particular has been phenomenal. As La-Anyane (1963) noted, if ever there was a golden age of agriculture in Ghana, that golden age was ushered in by cocoa. Cocoa production did not only convert peasant agriculture into a highly lucrative rural economy, it also became the chief source of income in southern rural Ghana and the major foreign exchange earner.²⁰ In doing so, cocoa production enabled Ghana to lay the socio-economic foundation for an emerging modern society.

The most prosperous period of cocoa production in Ghana began immediately after World II and lasted until the mid-1960s, when it attained its peak. Though the country as a whole recorded the highest peak of cocoa production of a total output of 571,721 tons in 1964/65 cocoa season, the Volta Region, including the New Ayoma Cocoa District²¹, had reached its peak earlier. The district reached its peak of 31,780 tons in the 1956/57 cocoa season. Thus, until the later part of the 1960s, both the Buem and migrants made enormous gains from investments in cocoa. The lineage and household heads were able to amass vast tracts of their family land, which they generously sold to migrants. They also made part of their wealth from relatively large farms which they developed through the *dibi* contract and use of familial labor.²² However, most of these farms have either been sold or pledged to migrants. One important question, however, is: What are the probable adverse effects of increased production of cocoa on food security on the households in the GTBA, considering its significance in the transformations of the local communities and the competition it inevitably would engender between it and food crop production in the area?

Land Scarcity and Food Insecurity

Since the 1960s, and in the past two decades in particular, research on the relationship between agricultural commercialization and food security in the producing communities in developing countries has become one important approach to assessing food security needs in these countries. There have been tremendous efforts in this direction to assess the extent, if any, to which agricultural commercialization has had negative effects on local food supplies and nutritional statuses of communities that produce these cash crops. Critics of agricultural commercialization generally assert that if the resources that are diverted into the production of agricultural exports are used to promote local food production the problems of malnutrition in most developing countries would be reduced, if not eliminated. It is further argued that to improve nutrition, scarce resources such as land and labour, should be shifted out of export crop production into the production of food for the local economy. Advocates of commercialization of agriculture, on their part, contend that

²⁰ It must be recalled that just before the outbreak of World War I, Ghana (then the Gold Coast) had become the leading producer of cocoa and at the time of its political independence in the late 1950s, it was producing about 40 percent of the world's total supply of the crop (Hill 1963; Beckman 1978).

²¹ Before the advent of the reform of the Ghana Cocoa Marketing Board (GCMB), the New Ayoma Cocoa District office was responsible for organizing the purchase and storage of cocoa and coffee in the GTBA on behalf of the GCMB.

²² Being predominantly patrilineal, the use of familial labor, including the labor of wives by Buem household heads for developing their cocoa farms is not surprising. Vallenga (1986) showed that there was a higher probability of the use of familial labor, including the labor of wives, among patrilineal groups than among matrilineal groups in Ghana.

by exploiting comparative advantage and generating faster growth for the overall economy, export cropping can raise incomes and improve nutrition.²³

Obviously, cocoa production competes with the production of other crops, including food crops. However, the opportunity cost involved in the production of cocoa in relation to the cultivation of food crops depends on different factors, among which are the nature of the farming system used for cultivating the cocoa, the developmental stage of the cocoa trees and the cocoa variety that is under cultivation. For example, in the farming system whereby food crops can be, and usually are, interspersed with the young cocoa plants, the opportunity cost of producing cocoa to food production is close to zero, implying less negative impact of cocoa production on food production. But as the cocoa trees, particularly the Amelonado variety (also called "Tetteh Quarshie"²⁴ by the local farmers), which can be as tall as over 20 feet, continue to grow the opportunity cost for growing cocoa begins to increase. This is because, except in the case of a particular yam variety and tall stemmed-food plants such as banana and plantain, which can be interspersed with the cocoa plants, it is virtually impossible to continue to grow food crops on the same plot with cocoa. One other thing to take into account in the analysis of opportunity cost in cocoa cultivation vis-à-vis food production is that it requires extensive use of the land in order to achieve a profitable investment. The crop must be planted at intervals of about 12 feet apart to enable it to grow and develop well. Because of this extensive use of the land in the cultivation of cocoa, most farmers have acquired wide areas of land in order to expand their profit-making opportunities. Most of the farmers whom I spoke to had more than one parcel of land under cocoa cultivation.

It follows, therefore, that the increasing disappearance of the land frontier in most parts of the GTBA from the later part of the 1960s was bound to have a serious negative impact for food production in the area. Throughout all my four visits to the area, beginning in the fall of 1992, I witnessed steady declines in quality of life of the people, particularly the majority of the indigenous group. Personal incomes of the farmers declined, thus affecting even the non-agricultural enterprises. This is because demands for goods and services accordingly declined. Households with limited access to land found it difficult to purchase food and meet other obligations such as paying for their health costs and their children's educational bills.²⁵

It should be recalled that by the 1970s, output of cocoa in the country as a whole had begun to decline steadily and by 1981, the country had recorded its lowest output of about 150,000 tons. Even though cocoa output began to increase again in the mid-1980s in the country as a whole, the increase in the Volta Region, including the GTBA, has fallen far below the national average. For example, between 1984/85 and 1989/90 cocoa seasons, the period for which district-level data on outputs became available, the New Ayoma cocoa district recorded an increase of only 38.4 percent, whereas the country as a whole recorded an increase of 76.3 percent over the 1981 level.²⁶ By the mid-1990s, the situation had become so frustrating to the farmers in the Region that an appeal was made to the

²³ Since the mid-1980s the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington, DC in particular has been undertaking such studies in Africa. The countries include The Gambia, Kenya and Rwanda. For summaries of the arguments and the findings, see, Pinstrup-Andersen 1983; von Braun and Kennedy, 1994

²⁴ Tetteh Quarshie was the Ghanaian who was said to have smuggled the seeds of the Amelonado variety into Ghana from the island of Fernando Po in 1879.

²⁵ The current situation in this area was predicted by Dorm-Adzobu when in the mid-1970s he observed about the Buem Traditional Area as a whole that virgin lands in the area were becoming exhausted, thus posing a threat to food supply. He went on to caution that the gradual decline in cocoa yields in the absence of other viable income-generating enterprises could lead to a downward trend in the social and economic lives of the people.

²⁶ Attacks by parasitic fungi called *phytophthora palmivora* and *phytophthora megakarya* (referred to as "black pod" by the farmers) are the main cause for the relatively low performance of cocoa in the Volta Region. The fungi attack the cocoa pod and infect the beans in it.

government by the Volta Region branch of the Ghana Cocoa, Coffee and Shea Nut Farmers' Association (CCSFA), requesting it to "declare the Volta Region a cocoa disaster area."²⁷

The declines in cocoa output in the GTBA coincided with the continuing deterioration in the real value of the Ghanaian currency, the Cedi, which was due to the successive currency devaluations embarked upon by the government under its austere economic programs. It must be recalled that after the mid-1980s, the government was implementing country-wide austere socio-economic measures under its neo-liberal programs, technically dubbed structural adjustment programs (SAPs). In line with its emphasis on cost-recovery and cost-sharing, as in any part of the country, costs of all socio-economic services, including education and health increased, thus aggravating the hardships unleashed by the steady decline in incomes from cocoa. The Buem were hit harder because they, contrasted with the migrants, had less access to land due to their massive transfer of the land to the migrants. The migrants thus appeared to be in a better position to deal with the emergent hardships than the Buem.²⁸

The food situation in the GTBA, however, began to improve from the mid-1970s when residents could supplement their own production with food imported from the neighboring Togolese villages of Bena, Kpete, Welikorpe and Tormegbe. This too did not last long. Due to a steady expansion in coffee and, to a lesser extent, cocoa production in this area, after the 1970s, the food supplies from the area to the GTBA markets, too, began to dwindle. Consequently, food prices began to increase again in the GTBA. Though the people of the GTBA as a whole have been devising strategies to cope with the deteriorating economic conditions in the area by resorting to nonfarm income-earning activities, the greater proportion of these non-agricultural activities are owned and operated by migrants and their offspring. Today, migrants have largely taken over from the Buem the operation of businesses such as transport, lumbering, petty trading, food processing and corn milling. For example, in Kute, apart from two palm wine sellers, no other significant business in the area was owned or being operated by a Buem. Also, apart from Dzolu, where two families from the indigenous group owned and were operating transport businesses, none of the transport businesses I encountered in the area was owned or being operated by Buems. In New Ayoma, none of the 6 passenger trucks and buses that I came across were owned or being operated by a Buem. They were all owned and operated by one migrant Kotokoli family from northern Togo.

Aggravating the already deplorable conditions of the Buem was the problem of indebtedness. The presence of migrants and their better financial position made it attractive for the generally impoverished Buem to contract loans from the migrants. As a consequence, they have become indebted to the migrants. This indebtedness was, in turn, aggravating the distressing economic conditions of the Buem debtors, thus accelerating the sale and pledging of their farms to the migrants in order to meet their debt obligations. With their relatively good financial situation, the migrants have continued to purchase these farms and as a result make extra profits to cushion themselves against the hardships brought about by the deteriorating Ghanaian economy. Because the migrants in general are able to eke out some food and/or income from the land under their use, their socioeconomic conditions appear to be better than those of the Buem, validating a basic postulate that in agrarian communities, where there are limited nonfarm employment opportunities and a general lack of formal social security systems, it is better to have access to a piece of land, no matter how small, than have none at all (von Braun 1989). The key question, therefore, is: How have the Buem been coping with the increasing food insecurity?

The search for the answer to this question directs attention to the role of women, either as wives or as heads of single-parent households in ensuring household food security and welfare in the

²⁷ *Daily Graphic*, December 20, 1994, p. 3 and July 27, 1995, p. 7.

²⁸ Some of the migrants also embarked upon what I will call onward migration, a practice whereby the migrants continue to migrate to areas where land frontiers still exist, even as they retain their holdings in the GTBA. Since the mid-1970s, some of them have migrated to areas such as Salifu, Bontibor and Ahmansu, all to the north of Buem in the Jasikan District. Others, mostly sons of the early migrants, have moved to new frontiers in the other Ghanaian cocoa growing regions such as the Western and Brong Ahafo Regions.

GTBA. Our investigation has shown that more women than men are active in the struggle to ensure household food security in the area.²⁹ This is primarily because it is women, who shoulder the greater burden of spending time at home. It is the women who are closer to the children and their dependent relatives. It is common scene in Buem towns to find men sitting under a tree enjoying their pastimes even when those activities are at the cost of more gainful ones.

These women strive to ensure their household food supply in two principal ways; firstly, by tilling the marginal lands and, secondly, by purchasing food from the local markets. Women cultivate the plots that have been considered unsuitable for cocoa and coffee cultivation and thus abandoned. It has often been noted that self-provisioning through household production is the major means by which the rural poor households attempt to ensure their food security (Whitehead 1988). As Toulmin (1991) reminded us, richer rural households normally have a more diverse portfolio of assets and sources of income, which enables them to buy food and/or deal with any negative impacts that may emanate from changes in agricultural resource allocation or adverse ecological conditions such as drought, soil infertility, and incidence of pests. It is a usual scene in the GTBA to see women on their way to or from farm (sometimes accompanied by their children), with a wooden tray or a load-carrying pan balanced on their head. The crops cultivated include rice, plantain, banana, maize, yam, cassava and vegetables such as okra, pepper, garden eggs and tomatoes. Because these plots are generally poor in quality, usually wet or rocky, or due to overuse, and given the rudimentary character of the production techniques, the yields are normally very poor. The women thus try supplement their farm returns by engaging in non-agricultural activities like trade in cooked food, alcoholic beverages, and household wares. Returns from these enterprises are generally low, too, due to the low level of capital investment and the generally low income of the residents.³⁰

A more comprehensive understanding of the burden which Buem women face can be gained when other services that they perform in addition or as a supplement to food supply are taken into account. Unlike their male counterparts, it is the women who ensure the supply of firewood, the main source of household energy in the area. The search for firewood in the GTBA is a laborious and toilsome task. Because the woods in the surrounding bushes have been depleted due to overexploitation, the women and their children have to walk long distances usually along narrow and winding paths, some of which entail the crossing of streams and/or climbing of hills. Even in a situation in which the man accompanies his wife to the farm after the day's work,³¹ while the man may have only a rifle on his shoulder and cutlass in his hand, it is the woman who carries the firewood on top of any other item she may have in the container (usually a carrying pan) and, in the case of a nursing mother, with a baby tied in a cloth on her back. Furthermore, the man has the option to stop over at a friend's or relative's farm or house for a chat and drinks, whereas the woman has to continue to the house in order to embark on her multiple tasks—notably cooking and bathing the children. In addition to all these, it is the woman who does the family laundry and makes sure there is water in the house, adequate for all to use. In the absence of energy- and time-saving devices such as washing machines, pipe-borne water and modern cooking stoves, these tasks are by any measure arduous and wearisome.

It may be of interest to know that even though most of the women I talked to expressed grief regarding their predicament and wished their men could offer more help, they never failed to adorn our conversations with smiles and expressions of hope for a better future. The hope that these women

²⁹ Household food security is defined as the ability of households to secure enough food at all times in order to ensure adequate dietary intake for all members (von Braun et al. 1993).

³⁰ Based on a study on rural growth linkages in Malaysia and Nigeria, Hazell and Roell (1983) noted the effect agricultural growth had on the growth of the non-agricultural sector. They noted, among other things, that the effect arose from "increases in household expenditures on consumer goods and services as a result of increased farm incomes."

³¹ Women in rural Ghana do not at all times have control over their own labor. A woman's husband can deny her the right to use her labor on her farm or enterprise by being made to work on the man's farm, though with no guarantee that she will be a full beneficiary of the fruit of that labor (Vallenga 1986).

expressed was usually tied to their children's future, based on the assumption that their children would grow up and be better off than them and, if possible, take care of them.

This notion of children being considered a source of future security for their parents is not peculiar to the Buem, though in their case, most of these dreams are not realized. As contrasted with the youths of the migrant families, Buem youths have made little socioeconomic progress both at home and in the urban areas. One major problem among the young Buem men is alcoholism. Both casual observers and researchers have linked loafing and alcoholism among Buem men to the apparently unfettered manner in which they have sold their land and pledged their self-acquired farms. The sale and pledging of farms was more pronounced in the Kute, Old Ayoma and New Ayoma communities and these are the communities in which alcoholism is most rampant.

The excessive land transfers in the GTBA have been a matter of interest to all and sundry, particularly researchers and local administrators. As early as the 1930s, the British Colonial Office responsible for the United Nations Trusteeship Colony of the TransVolta Togoland, of which the GTBA was part, expressed concern about what they considered to be an indiscriminate disposal of land by the Buem to "stranger" farmers. Also, in an attempt explain the excessive land transfer in the Kute area in particular, Kotey (1972) noted that,

... The impression given is that the Buems ... are not commercially oriented; they prefer their meager subsistence to hard farm work that could improve their future life; they prefer an Epicurean type of life (p. 14).

... Land was sold indiscriminately, to the extent that now there is no land left to cultivate food or start a new cocoa or coffee farm ... The irony is that many second and third generation Buems have become landless and unemployed (p. 15)...

He went on to observe that

... It will be naive, however, to explain the habit of land sales purely by economic motives. [These discordant elements cannot be explained solely by reference to cocoa/coffee cultivation]. There must be more behind it, which a sociologist will be more competent to study (p. 22).³²

Issues of Policy

Though GTBA is a small area, lying in an obscure area in rural Ghana, the findings from it provide an insight into the persisting barriers that continue to militate against the advancement of women in Ghana's agrarian communities. Discrimination against women's access to land in the GTBA results from the persistence of traditional barriers to access and weak implementation of national development policies. Like in some other areas in Africa, women's access to land is generally restricted and even in instances in which they have acquired rights of access, such rights are tenuous and ephemeral and, as a result, their security is limited compared to their male counterparts (Migot-Adholla and John 1994).³³ In the GTBA, the men were able to use their position to acquire land and deny their female counterparts access in the rush for land simply because it is men who, as heads of the lineages, are the administrators of the kin-based land. This situation is a matter of concern, not only because women generally produce the bulk of food in most of these communities, but also because effective access to productive property is a matter of social justice and a means for the women to improve their well being (World Bank 1992).

At the level of policy, the key question is: if, as shown above, membership of a kin group was traditionally fundamental to one's eligibility for access to land in the GTBA, irrespective of gender, why then have women been disadvantaged in the transfer and allocation of the land with the advent of cash cropping in the area? The policy usefulness of this question lies in the assumption that the

³² For a detailed explanation to land transfer in Buem-Kator, see Fred-Mensah (1999b).

³³ See Stamp (1990), too, for summaries of some of the earlier works on this issue.

mere incorporation of gender components in development programs will not necessarily translate into improving the welfare of women and girls. In other words, in applying the notion of entitlement to the contemporary gender-sensitive development programs in Ghana and, indeed, Africa: in what way can it be assured that gender-sensitive components in contemporary development programs can be translated into opportunities which will improve the living conditions of women and girls in Ghana?³⁴

The major welfare priority in the GTBA is must be the search for means by which the food situation in the area be ameliorated. From both analytical and empirical points of view, land redistribution in the area does not offer the most viable option in dealing with the household food situation among the Buem. Not only has the land been extensively transferred to migrants (reaching over 90 percent in the Kute area in particular), the investments made in the land are relatively fixed and permanent and there is no evidence to show that the farmers are ready to convert their cocoa farms into food crop farms, even if the cocoa farms are exhausted as a result of age. Unlike the transient annual subsistence crops such as cocoyam, cassava and corn, cocoa is a perennial crop. The Amelonado cocoa, which is the commonest variety in the area, takes four to five, or even six years to begin to bear fruit. And once established, it may occupy the land for about 60 years before it begins to die out. Even when the older trees die out, there is no guarantee that the land will be used for food production.³⁵ This is because in the areas where the older trees had died, farmers were either replanting cocoa or converting the land into the cultivation of other perennial crops, notably oil palm and kola nut trees. Furthermore, even if the exhausted cocoa farms are converted into food crop farms, the bulk of them will remain with the migrant groups, particularly in the Kute and Old Ayoma areas. This thus leaves little room for the Buem women to increase their food supply through their own production.

Thus, one potentially viable option for improving the food security situation for the poor households in the area is by enabling them to improve their income-earning capabilities. This calls for the need to develop policies that would change occupational structure in the area and, in doing so, enable the people to transcend the notion that social and economic security can be assured only by having access to land (Siddle and Swindell 1990). The Ghana Government, in conjunction with interested non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can provide land-deficit poor households with skill training in trades under the auspices of the country's Non-Formal Education Division of the Ministry of Education and the National Council on Women. This may include dressmaking, knitting and pottery. The international donor community can assist by making available small loans through their microenterprise development programs and social development funds. It must be noted that there already exists in the country a program in which handicraft industries are receiving both financial and moral support from the Ghana Export Promotion Council (GEPC), the Ghana Tourist Board (GTB) and a section of the international donor community, particularly the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Through joint programs by these organizations, Ghanaian handicraft makers are being assisted to supply orders from large foreign retail firms, notably JC Penney, Pier 1 Imports, and American Merchandizing Company, all in the United States.³⁶ With increased income, poor households, too, can ensure food

³⁴ In a review of 15 World Bank's development projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, it was found out that there were wide discrepancies between project objectives and project outcomes. Many of the components that were designed to improve the welfare of women were not mentioned anywhere in the project supervision and completion reports (Fred-Mensah 1993).

³⁵ Retaining the depleted cocoa trees instead of replanting them or planting other crops evokes the image of the "irrational peasant." Explanation for this behavior can be found in economic decision-making that is guided by risk aversion. As an article in Ghana's *Daily Graphic* of 17 May, 1995 noted, it is not always easy to persuade farmers to cut down their cocoa trees because no compensation can be adequate to make up for any possible returns. As the trees die gradually and can continue to bear some fruit, farmers do not understand why they should sacrifice a small yield by cutting down existing trees for the future of those they are not sure of.

³⁶ *Ghanaian Times* (Accra) March 10, 1995.

security by purchasing food from the local market or by importing it from other food-producing areas (Fred-Mensah 1993b; 1999a, 1999b).

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GENDER IDEOLOGY AND MANOEUVRING SPACE FOR FEMALE FISHERIES ENTREPRENEURS

Ragnhild Overå

Abstract

Local gender ideologies vary considerably in fishing communities along the coast of Ghana. This article compares the extent to which women convert capital from the female market sphere into ownership of fishing equipment in the male fishing sphere in three ethnically diverse communities – Moree (Fante), Kpone (Ga-Adangbe) and Dzelukope (Anlo-Ewe). Kinship ideologies, post-marital residence patterns, and gender division of labour and roles in the local fishing economies shape women's place-specific manoeuvring spaces. It is argued that a loyal and trustworthy male cooperation partner is a prerequisite for the success of female entrepreneurs in a male arena like the fisheries.

Résumé

Les idéologies liées au genre parmi les ruraux varient considérablement dans les communautés de pêcheurs le long de la côte du Ghana. Cette communication étudie auprès de trois communautés ethniques différentes- Moree (Fante), Kpone (Ga-Adangbe) et de Dzelukope (Anlo-Ewe) le degré de conversion du capital que les femmes tirent des ventes au marché en bien d'équipements de pêche dans un domaine dominé par les hommes. Les idéologies de parenté, lieux de résidence après le mariage, la division du travail et la répartition des rôles en fonction du genre dans les économies locales de pêche, déterminent le statut et l'espace de manoeuvre réservé aux femme dans la société. L'argument soutenu est qu'un partenaire fidèle, crédible et coopératif, est une condition préalable pour le succès des femmes entrepreneurs dans un domaine des hommes tel que la pêche.

Introduction

Though situated within the same nation state, local gender ideologies vary considerably in communities along the coast of Ghana. Livelihood strategies and life-styles among the Fante in Moree, the Ga-Adangme in Kpone and the Anlo-Ewe in Dzelukope are similar and typical of fishing communities (see Map 1). Socially and culturally, however, there are notable differences in terms of language, kinship systems, marriage practices and the socio-economic organisation of production systems in these three places. Ideas about how women ought to behave thus also vary. Based on extensive fieldwork in Moree, Kpone, and Dzelukope in 1991, 1994 and 1995 (see Overå 1992 and 1998), I will compare inter-community differences in the extent to which women turn capital accumulated in the female dominated fish market into ownership positions in the male dominated fisheries. (The underlying idea is that local gender ideologies shape women's economic opportunities, and that the extent of male co-operation determines the "size" of female entrepreneurs' manoeuvring space within the male fishery sphere.)

In Ghana, fish processing and fish trade in the artisanal fishing sector are entirely in the hands of women. Many of them earn substantial amounts of money by smoking fish that they transport to the large inland market places (see Map 2) Successful fish traders invest in houses for their children and relatives, whereby they enhance their social position as well as their economic

position: Through recruitment of family labour the potential for expansion in fish processing and trade increases. Some of these "matrons" have become canoe owners themselves, securing their fish supply by hiring men to fish for them. By investing in canoes, outboard motors and new types of nets, and by hiring and managing male crews, these women transcend gender norms in the fisheries.

This type of female entrepreneurship "took off" when the outboard motor was introduced in the artisanal fisheries in Ghana from the 1960s onwards. When it became clear how much fish a motorised canoe could produce, outboard motors became an investment object for a large number of fish traders. As a result, the canoe fishery became more capital intensive, and the fish traders' importance as creditors became even more pronounced. For the most successful trader-creditors, the step towards canoe ownership was thus an obvious one. By integrating fish production and marketing, they could ensure their fish supply and increase their profit potential. Not only did female investors' entry into the fisheries benefit these women's personal careers: a process of technological innovation took place on a large scale, and led to an increase in production in the sector as a whole. Hence, the degree of motorisation of the Ghanaian canoe fleet increased from zero in the late 1950s to 20-25 % in 1970 and to 57 % in 1990, and consequently the annual fish landings increased from 20,000 tonnes in 1960 to 300,000 tonnes in 1990 (Lawson and Kwei 1974; Vercrujssse 1984; Hernæs 1991).

The degree to which women "crossed over" from being large-scale fish traders who extended credit to fishermen (receiving fish as repayment of the loan), to actually buying equipment and running fishing companies themselves, varied from place to place. Whereas Fante women became famous for their powerful role as investors and owners (Christensen 1977; Vercrujssse 1983), Anlo-Ewe women only rarely became owners of canoes and beach seines, and among the Ga-Adangme, it was mostly women in urban areas like Accra and Tema who became canoe owners. So, why do not women in Moree seem to meet the same barriers against canoe ownership as women in Kpone and Dzelukope? Factors such as localisation in relation to urban markets and fishing grounds, infrastructure, type of fishing technology, and so on, certainly account for some of the regional variation in female entrepreneurship in the fisheries, but in my view differences in gender ideology are the key explanatory factor. In order to gain a better understanding of local differences in gender ideology, each of the three places is analysed as what Doreen Massey (1994:5) calls a "mix" of power relations stretching out in space: between the members of a household, in the market place, on the beach, to seasonal fishery migration destinations, and in local and national institutions. The combination of one's social statuses such as gender, age, ethnicity and occupation defines a person's social position. Depending on his or her position in a constantly shifting "power geometry" (Massey 1994), each person thus has different access to resources.

I will show how women's access to resources in different fishing communities varies, and how the dominant or mainstream gender ideology in each place to varying degrees open up for women's investment of capital and positions of power and influence within the fisheries. The aim of this exercise is to develop a gendered and contextual entrepreneur approach that illuminates the relationship between women's economic opportunities and the socio-cultural context in which they live their lives. An entrepreneur model based upon the quite outstanding case of Ghanaian "fish mummies" could be a useful tool in improving our understanding of why and how women and men's entrepreneurial potentials vary according to the gender ideologies of particular contexts, historical eras, cultures, situations and places.

Male and Female

In Ghanaian fishing communities, it is taken for granted that men fish and women trade: fishing and fish marketing are separate male and female spheres. Husbands and wives also keep their incomes from these activities separately. Production and distribution of fish can thus be regarded as a gendered exchange system: men provide fish for women's cooking pots, in which they transform fish into food – or money – with which children are provided for. Without the female pot and the market it would be meaningless for a man to fish. Symbolically, this complementarity can be seen in the light of men's role as provider of semen for women's wombs: she nurtures his seed and ensures the continuity of the generations. Logically, male cannot exist without female and female cannot exist without male. Gender complementarity (not necessarily implying equality) ensures continuity and welfare for the lineage and for society as a whole, and is a value system on which many West African societies are founded. Drewal analysed female and male among the Yoruba in Nigeria as “the container” and “the contained” (Drewal 1992:180): men are “contained” in women during sexual intercourse and women “contain” their children during pregnancy. Moran (1990) talks about complementary dual-sex political status systems in Liberia, and Kalu (1996) recognises this way of thinking in many African myths, which she calls a gender duality discourse.

Analysing the gendered division of labour – men providing fish for women's pot – in Ghanaian coastal communities as a duality discourse makes sense: the fishery at sea is a male domain, the market ashore is female. According to this gender duality people in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope define separate, parallel (and ideally complementary) male and female hierarchies. For example, this way of thinking is manifested in the Akan authority system with a male leader, the *ohene*, and a female leader, the *ohemma*, at all levels of governance from the lineage to the state. The power balance between the female and the male hierarchies is, however, often asymmetric: while male leaders usually exercise their authority in society as a whole, the authority of female leaders seldom extends beyond women's domains.

The gender duality discourse will here be used as a backdrop against which the construction of gender ideologies in the three local contexts will be analysed. The dual gender model is also useful in analysis of changes in the social construction of gender. What happens, for instance, in the local discourse on masculinity and femininity when actors at the summit of the female hierarchy (whose main arena is the fish market) achieve powerful positions in the male fishery arena? I will return to such issues, but before we take a closer look at life in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope, let me connect the concepts of gender and entrepreneurship to social practice and agency: woman, man or entrepreneur is not something one simply “is” or has “become”, it is also something one “does”.

Gender as Performance

All societies have norms that are highly valued, and which it “pays” to follow. Clifford Geertz (1973) called such values models for good behaviour. Connecting models for good behaviour to gender, Linda McDowell (1997) says that gender ideologies are mainstream assumptions about gender-appropriate behaviour in a given context. Gender is thus a performance. Ideas about good and bad ways of being a woman or a man – the way in which one's role ought to be acted – vary from place to place, between cultures and social strata. If we connect the performative aspect of gender to Massey's power geometry, it is clear that one can (and must) be a woman or a man in different ways depending on where one is positioned in relation to others in a context. Our way of being a woman or a man may also change if we change our location in the local power geometry, or if we move into a different context. Concepts such as positionality and gender as performance are thus useful in understanding the different articulations of gender relations in different places, and thus how manoeuvring spaces are constructed for differently positioned individuals.

The social construction of masculinity in fishing and of femininity in the market is central in the perception of what good behaviour for men and women in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope ought to be. As in fishing communities in Ghana in general, a man would almost be looked upon as

feminine if he engaged himself in fish trade. As Nukunya (1969: 155) commented on the attitude of Anlo-Ewe men towards fish trade: “No man, not even a bachelor, would do any of these things.” A male fish trader would simply not be a “proper man”. He would not fulfil his role as provider of fish for women’s pots and markets – society’s source of life, welfare, and future wealth. Interestingly, Irene Odotei describes a male fish buyer who, in co-operation with a female fish buyer, sells fish in Accra: “He is unique and mixes well with the women. He behaves like them” (Odotei 1991: 213). As long as this man behaves according to the rules of the female market domain and is a good business partner, his behaviour among the female traders appears to be acceptable in the urban context. Nevertheless, men in Moree, Kpone, Dzelukope, or in other fishing communities, do not regard fish processing and trade as admirable male behaviour.

How, then, are women who enter the male domain of fishing regarded? Many of the female traders who invest in canoes, motors and nets, do not solely do this indirectly through credit, physically distanced from the rough tone among fishermen on the beach: they are both owners and managers of their male crews. They manage the economy and organisation of the fishing company, negotiate the sharing of the catch and the payment of the crew. Some female canoe owners complain about the mannish behaviour they feel is required of them when they enter leadership roles in the fisheries. Men often perceive women who enter such roles as (literally) out of place, and female canoe owners must therefore find ways of behaving that the fishermen can accept within the male power arena. Odotei (1991) describes how women achieve this by combining an often tough and aggressive role of leadership – which includes shouting and rough talk to the extent that their voices change towards a more masculine tone – with more feminine strategies like giving the men good food for the fishing trip or nice clothes for the annual festival, through flattering and cajoling, and by showing a “motherly” concern towards crew members and their families.

To sum up ideas about gender-correct behaviour structure, the manner in which women and men perform economic activities and their choice of occupation, women or men transcending traditional gender barriers must often find new ways of performing their gender.

Entrepreneurship

Fredrik Barth was one of the first to view entrepreneurship as an aspect of a role, rather than primarily as a quality of particularly clever persons or “economic men”. Entrepreneurship is thus associated with agency, strategies and modes of behaviour – with the performance of one’s role(s). Barth defines entrepreneurship as the ability to convert value from one sphere of exchange to another. Spheres of exchange are “discrete spheres of the economy, with unity within and barriers between, in which goods and services can circulate freely” (Barth 1963: 10). The idea is that certain types of value can circulate freely within each sphere, but not between them.

The entrepreneur finds channels of conversion through the barriers between the spheres, with the goal of accumulating profit. Importantly, the profit is not necessarily of an economic nature: social respect and prestige are also important measures of success and creation of value. This is what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) calls symbolic capital. An important point is that symbolic capital can be stored. One’s “capital stock” can also be combined with other types of capital, and symbolic capital can be transformed into economic capital and vice versa. By finding new ways of converting capital from one sphere to another (as from market to fish production), or by finding new ways of combining different forms of capital (as by combining feminine and masculine strategies in leader strategies), the entrepreneur can enter new niches – or utilise old niches in new ways – in such a manner that the accumulated different capital types mutually stimulate one another. Hence, the entrepreneur changes her economic and social position, or her location in the local (and sometimes also the regional or national) power geometry.

Ghanaian women’s conversion of capital accumulated in the fish market into ownership of canoes is true entrepreneurship in this perspective. As we shall see, relations to men by marriage or kinship are important channels of conversion for fish traders who aim at entering the fishery. One may even characterise women’s strategies as “female” entrepreneurship. This does not mean that men who invent new fishing techniques or find new ways of accumulating capital in the fisheries

(within the male sphere), or that women who find new markets for fish (within the female sphere), are not innovators within their domains. However, a woman who expands and climbs in the female market hierarchy risks far less, both socially and economically, than if she invests in a male domain. As Green and Cohen (1995) point out, when women take up leadership positions in a male dominated area, this may in itself be seen as an entrepreneurial activity, even if the activity itself is not new or innovative in other ways. The financial or physical risk is not necessarily the greatest challenge for a woman compared with other types of risk – personal and psychological – which they often see as much more difficult. Correspondingly, a male entrepreneur who invests his capital, time and effort in fishing, risks less economically – and certainly socially – than if he were to become a fish trader in the female domain.

In the following section I will examine how entrepreneurial women in the Ghanaian canoe fisheries find channels of conversion through gender barriers, and how this led to technological innovation and increased fish production. Thereafter, the different degree to which local gender ideologies in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope open up for female entrepreneurship in a male sphere is compared and analysed.

Fishing and Trading

Roughly 8,500 canoes employ 91,000 fishermen in Ghana, in addition to 1.5 million people who either make a living in processing and distribution of fish, or are dependants of fishermen and fish traders (Koranteng et al. 1993). In addition there are an estimated number of 2,000 Ghanaian canoes in other West African countries (Haakonsen and Diaw 1991). Ghanaian migrants' fishing is of great importance for the fish supply in their host countries, and their remittances and investments are vital for the welfare of their home communities in Ghana (Overå 2001). The largest canoes are 60-70 feet in length and have a crew of 20-30 men.

While the average level of motorisation of canoes in Ghana in 1995 was 58.7% (Quaatay et. al. 1997), 88 % of canoes in Moree, 55 % in Kpone, and 18 % of canoes in Dzelukope had outboards motors (Overå 1998). The low degree of motorisation in Dzelukope compared with Moree and Kpone largely reflects differences in fishing techniques. In Moree and Kpone, fishing with purse seine (*watsa*) and drift net (*ali*), as well as deep sea line fishing in Kpone, that require outboard motors on large canoes that can go far and move quickly, whereas fishing with a large beach seine (*yevudor*), which is set in a circle from the beach and dragged ashore by man-power, is the main method in Dzelukope. It is, however, notable that whereas women own 25 % of the canoes in Moree, only a few unmotorised canoes in Kpone, and none in Dzelukope, are owned by women. This could indicate that the financial capacity and involvement in the fisheries by female fish traders is significant for the level of motorisation in these communities.

The adaptation of new technology from the 1960s onwards led to innovation and an increased production of the most important source of protein in Ghana: smoked, dried and salted fish. As mentioned, large-scale fish traders were the most important source of finance behind these new investments. They had a commercial interest in extending credit for new equipment. This enabled the fishermen to supply the traders with larger quantities of fish for their processing and distribution enterprises. Where banks either failed to give credit to fishermen for new equipment at all, or failed to retrieve payments of debts, the institutionalised exchange relationship between fishermen and traders was adapted to a more capital intensive mode of production in which large sums of credit and debts were in circulation. The fishermen repaid their debt to the trader in the form of fish, and therefore the trader was flexible and could – and had to – wait until her debtors caught fish.

To a greater extent than in the case of banks, the credit relationship between fishermen and traders was both of an economic and a social nature. The trader reduced the risk of losing money through her intimate knowledge about her debtors' personal character, social relations, his lineage and extended family, marriage, and other social and economic assets. Likewise, symbolic capital like parental authority, lineage loyalty, sexual attraction, religious influence, friendship and trust,

could be activated in the relationship between creditors and debtors in a way never possible for a bank.

With the motorisation of the canoe fisheries, the economic ties between the fishermen and the trader-creditor, and the dependence of the former upon the latter, became much more pronounced. This was a shift of power: the fish traders who previously had been dependent upon receiving fish on credit, experienced that the fishermen came to depend on them for credit to participate in the motorised fishery. Some scholars viewed this power shift in a Marxist perspective. Emile Vercurijsse (1984), for example, analysed the process as an evolving class division resulting from the exploitation by capitalist merchants, as he called the fish traders, of the fisherman labourers. What an analysis based entirely on a Western perspective missed out, however, is that the “exploiters” to a large extent are the mothers, aunts, wives, sisters or neighbours of the “exploited”. In Ghanaian fishing communities where economic and social relations are closely intertwined and institutionalised through kinship and marriage, the power relationship between creditor and debtor, as we shall see, is better understood in a locally anchored and gendered perspective.

In the following I will therefore examine the embeddedness of marriage and kinship in the fishing economies of Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope. It will appear that regional variation in the social organisation of the economy greatly impacts upon the degree to which women are able to become owners of the means of production, managers and employers of men in the fisheries.

Table 1:
Regional variation in some of the variables that constitute three gendered contexts

<i>Place</i>	<i>Ethnic group</i>	<i>Kinship ideology</i>	<i>Residence pattern</i>	<i>Fishing technology</i>	<i>Motorisation</i>	<i>Female ownership</i>
<i>Moree</i>	Fante	Matrilineal	Duo-local	Purse seine, drift nets etc.	88%	25% of canoes, motors and nets
<i>Kpone</i>	Ga-Adangme	Patrilineal	Duo-local	Purse seine, drift nets, line	55%	Some un-motorised canoes, some net
<i>Dzelukope</i>	Anlo-Ewe	Patrilineal	Viri/patri-local	Beach seine	18%	None

The table displays differences in kinship ideology, post-marital residence patterns, fishing technology, degree of motorisation and female ownership of fishing gear. This overview is a rough presentation of the variables that will be compared, and is merely meant as a “map” to guide the reader in the comparative analysis of three complex contexts.

Kinship Ideology

In the matrilineal kinship system in Moree, lineage membership and inheritance of lineage property descend through the maternal line, whereas Kpone and Dzelukope have patrilineal kinship systems with lineage membership and inheritance descending through the paternal line. Kinship systems involve culture-specific ideas about the procreation and attachment or possession of children. Terms such as structure or system are easily associated with stasis rather than with dynamic change through social practice. The term kinship ideology may thus be more appropriate. But even if kinship ideologies often are flexible and are negotiated in daily life, customs and ideas about inheritance through the generations nevertheless has consequences for one’s rights and duties in relation to one’s lineage, in relation to one’s spouse, and men’s and women’s property rights.

Kinship ideologies thus influence one's primary access to resources for one's life projects, and therefore also in which direction one invests one's labour, loyalty and interests. Kinship ideologies thus set some premises for women and men's models for good behaviour through the life cycle, and for interaction between women and men. Karla Poewe writes that "kinship is an ideology which defines the room each of the sexes has to manage their affairs." This "room" is what I here have called female entrepreneurs' manoeuvring space. (Poewe 1981:11)

Simply put, one may say that in matrilineal kinship systems relations between siblings born by the same mother are given primary importance, whereas in patrilineal systems relations between siblings originating from the same father are considered the most basic and important (Poewe 1981: 5-6). When a child is born, it is evident for everyone who the mother is. In a matrilineal system no other proof than the self-evident fact that the child emerged from the womb of the mother is necessary to determine its kinship: kinship bonds are transferred from mother to child through her blood. In patrilineal systems, the transfer of kinship from father to child through substances like semen, blood, or spirit, are not equally easy to prove. As Poewe points out, this is one of the reasons why men (and often lineage elders of both sexes) according to a patrilineal logic often regard the control of sisters and wives (especially their sexuality) as necessary in order to secure fatherhood and recruitment of new members to the lineage.

These differences in attitudes to gender roles between matrilineal and patrilineal systems have two important consequences that are relevant for the "size" of women's room for manoeuvre, that are relevant for women's opportunities in Ghanaian fisheries: 1) in the matrilineal system it is less important for husbands and relatives to control women's sexual (and economic) activities than in a patrilineal system, and 2) whereas men in a patrilineal system tend to focus their interests on their father's lineage and the continuity of the patrilineage from father to son, the interests of men in a matrilineal system are focused on their mother's lineage and the continuity of the matrilineage through the children of his sisters: those who come from the same womb as himself.

In explaining the different degree of female entrepreneurship in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope it may thus be useful to compare how different types of kinship systems facilitate or constrain women's entry into the fisheries. According to the difference between the patri- and matrilineal inheritance practices outlined above, the primary interests of men in Kpone and Dzelukope are vested in their fathers' and/or fathers brothers' fishing company. In Moree, on the other hand, a man's interests are vested in both his mother's brother's canoe (which he may inherit together with his cousins) and/or his mother's canoe (which he will inherit together with his sisters). It is not attractive for a son in Moree to work in his mother's "female" fish processing and trade business; that is her daughters' task. But if his mother invests in fishing equipment, it is in her son's interest to invest muscle power, skills and loyalty in her enterprise. Not only does that secure him employment, but also an income and housing. By working for the mother he also enhances his social position and the long-term welfare of the matrilineage to which he belongs. For a woman who invests in fisheries, it is crucial to have male partners who support her efforts and who have "male" skills in fishing. It is thus no coincidence that almost all female canoe owners in Moree have employed one of their adult sons as captain.

House and Marriage

The manner in which people locate themselves in relation to one another can be viewed as a spatial expression of kinship and gender ideologies. An examination of residence patterns in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope, reveals differences between the patrilineal and matrilineal systems, but also in the spatial organisation of the two patrilineal systems.

Dzelukope

Compounds in Dzelukope are traditionally composed of several houses where women and men, who are related through the male line, live in their own small units surrounding a courtyard. A typical compound would contain a man who has inherited his father's house together with his brothers, his unmarried sisters, father's sisters who are widowed, and his own and his brother's sons and unmarried daughters. Most beach seine owners are heads of such compounds. The ideal residence after marriage is virilocal. This means that a man is expected to set up his own household

and that the wife moves in with him. Often the husband is allocated a room or builds his own house in his father's compound. The wife is thus surrounded by the husband's relatives in her new home. If the husband has more than one wife, he may live with one of them and build houses for the other wives. A man gains a lot of prestige if he is able to marry many wives and build houses for them. Needless to say, this is affordable for the beach seine owners only, who may have ten wives (though this is becoming rare). Ordinary crew members usually have one, at most two, wives.

Whether women live in the compounds of their fathers or husbands, they are expected to subordinate themselves to their father, brothers, their husband and his relatives. Nowadays women sometimes build their own houses. They usually live there with their sisters and/or daughters. Only a couple of generations ago, Anlo-Ewe men were very provoked by women's investments of their earnings in houses, since this is clearly a female strategy to achieve a greater degree of independence (Greene 1997:37). Today men accept that women build their own houses. Female beach seine ownership, however, is still difficult.

Kpone

In Kpone, the spatial organisation of groups linked by marriage and kinship is different. People live in lineage houses founded by a male ancestor. However, the lineage house is divided into a male and a female section. Over time, and as new generations of the lineage require more space, the male and female sections are built as separate houses, often located in different parts of town far from the original lineage house (Azu 1974). Therefore, most women in Kpone live in women's houses – *yeiamli* – while men live in men's houses – *hiiamli*. Men and women continue living in their men's and women's houses after they get married. In the "male" house a group of brothers live with their sons and sons' sons. A man is thus surrounded by his father, his father's brothers, his own brothers, and by his sons and nephews. Often these men own one or more canoes and are fishing together. The "female" houses are often built for a group of sisters, or by a woman and her daughters. Since the daughters do not belong to the same lineage as their mother (they belong to the lineage of their father), but still continue living together with the mother when they get married, "female" houses come to contain women who belong to different lineages and who have children belonging to different patrilineages than themselves. Sons live with their mother until they reach puberty. Then they move to their father's house and are trained to become skilled fishermen.

Though women live separately from men, they stay in close contact with their male relatives. A wife also brings food to her husband and stays overnight with him in the men's house. Women in Kpone are expected to accept the decisions of their husbands and elders. However, the duo-local residential arrangement gives women ample opportunity to engage themselves in independent income generating activities. They have co-operation partners in the women's house, and though each woman administers her own income, they work closely together in fish smoking and trade. The aim for most women in Kpone who manage to make some savings, is to build a house for themselves and their daughters whereby they are highly respected and secure their old age. This is a long-term strategy: whenever there is enough money, they buy a bag of cement, and gradually – often in the course of a period of ten or more years – a house is built and extended. Even if sons and daughters in principle are entitled to inherit from both their mothers and fathers, daughters in practice usually inherit their mother's personal property while sons inherit from their fathers. A practical reason for this is simply that men do not need their mother's fish smoking equipment, and neither can they take over and live in her house. The same applies for a daughter with regard to inheritance of her father's canoe. The siblings would normally inherit the canoe as a group, with the brothers fishing and the sisters maintaining rights to parts of the catch.

Moree

In Moree, both women and men live in houses, or *fie*, whose residents are members of a subsection of a matrilineage (*ebusua*). This means that male and female lineage members originating from the same ancestress live in one house (for example a man with his sisters and the children of his sisters). Women often build their own houses where they live with their children. Upon marriage, husband and wife continue residing in their own *fie*. They thus have their own rooms in separate houses and also keep separate purses. It is the responsibility of the wife to cook for the

husband. She brings the cooked meal to the husband's *fié*, and sleeps there. In the morning she goes back to her own house. If the husband has more than one wife, they alternate in this arrangement monthly. Children live with their mother. They belong to her lineage and do not inherit any of their father's property. Still, the father contributes to the up-keep of the children. He fulfils this duty by providing his wife with fish and – if he can afford it – with “chop-money”. Though the children do not belong to his lineage, it is essential for a man to prove his virility and masculinity by having children. The idea is that blood is transferred from mother to child, whereas spirit is transferred to the child from the father. Fathers therefore play an important role in the development of their children's personality.

Wives and husbands co-operate and extend credit to each other. However, in long-term projects like investments in houses and canoes, or in one's choice of trusted partners in fishing or fish trade, both women and men tend to focus more on members of their matrilineage than on their spouses. To invest too much in one's marriage may be directly unwise. Widows, who have invested in houses, canoes or trucks together with their husbands, experience that the matrilineage of the husband claims everything “back” upon his death. A much wiser strategy is therefore to invest in property outside the field of marriage, and women thus prefer to invest in houses for their children and matrikin. Thereby a woman gains prestige and enhances the wealth of her lineage, and – importantly – she secures a pool of labour for fish processing and trade. Unlike in Kpone and Dzelukope, the building of a house does not only consolidate a woman's position among her female kin: she also provides for male kin, especially sons, and this creates bonds of dependence and loyalty. As we shall see, the combination of a house, family labour, market capital and male partners (with personal interests in their wife, sister's or mother's enterprise) is crucial for the viability of women's fishery enterprises.

When Market Women Become Bosses of Fishermen

The Ghanaian fish market is a female hierarchy with its own organisations, leaders and unwritten laws (see Robertson 1984; Clark 1994). At the top of the hierarchy are the large-scale traders with a lifetime of experience. Further down the ladder are those who sell smaller quantities, usually only during the main fishing season. At the bottom of the hierarchy are women without the economic and social resources required to trade independently, and who therefore make a living as carriers and hired fish smokers for the more wealthy women (Overå 1993).

Girls learn at early age to become good fish traders and are socialised into the female market sphere. Young girls carry fish in large head pans from the beach to the house. They wash, gut, smoke and pack the fish. When girls reach their teens, they join female relatives on trading trips. As they get older they are given more responsibility and may travel to Kumasi and other markets with other women's fish in addition to their own. During the most hectic season of the herring (*sardinella aurita*) fisheries from July to September, large-scale traders have their own representatives in the receiving end of the market chain (see Map 2).

The trade system is based on traders' ability to establish relations of trust and a network of co-operation partners. One's success therefore largely depends on one's experience and reputation as a trustworthy person. A trader constantly risks great losses. To reduce risk, promote safety and efficiency, and to make profit, she must be part of a “career network” (Overå 1998). This is her only security. In addition to building up trust through the trial and error method in working with other women over time, kinship is one of the most important conditions for entering into relations of economic partnership. It is not given, however, that relations of trust, reputation, authority and prestige acquired in the female market hierarchy are forms of symbolic capital that can be activated – or are even relevant – in the male fisheries.

Women interviewed in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope (Overå 1998) express that their ambitions mainly remain within the female market sphere. However, whereas many of the wealthiest women in Moree have extended their strategies beyond the female market sphere to the male fishing sphere – they have so to speak “enlarge” their room for manoeuvre and incorporated the role of canoe owner into their gender-appropriate role of trader – women in Kpone and Dzelukope have not

succeeded in this endeavour to the same extent. In the following we shall look at the barriers that women in these three communities meet when they try to enter the fisheries, and what openings – channels of conversion of material and symbolic capital – those who succeeded have found.

Kpone

The spatial and symbolic gender division has many practical outcomes that strengthen the barriers between male and female spheres. Such barriers may be articulated through condemnation of behaviour which is not gender-appropriate, or which is appropriate, but takes place in the wrong arena.

I interviewed women in Kpone who had previously invested in motorised canoes, as well as husbands who had given their wives loans for such projects. Husbands regarded these investments as highly unprofitable, their wives had not succeeded as canoe owners. Men who had worked as crew members for female canoe owners complained that female employers “don’t understand our problems”, that they “don’t know enough about fishing”, and that they “don’t understand how hard fishing is” and therefore “don’t pay us well enough”. The women complained that they could not trust their male workers, as for example when their crew sold their catch in other towns. The female canoe owners in Kpone thus ended up selling their motors and canoes, while their crews started working for male canoe owners again. However, some women in Kpone are still owners of nets that they rent out to fishermen. This is a strategy to increase their supply of fish, but without having to enter “male” leadership positions in the fishery.

Clearly, many fishermen in Kpone find it difficult to be in subordinate positions as workers in relation to women, even when they are their mother or aunts. In particular they find it difficult when the woman is related or married to a man with authority and wealth, that are highly respected among the fisherman. Neither is it in the interest of sons to invest their labour or capital in their mothers’ fishing enterprises, since the surplus tends to be directed towards the building of women’s houses. This means that men are not a resource for women who enter fishing to the same extent as female relatives are a resource for them in fish marketing. Adult sons in Kpone in general show great concern for and are close to their mothers, but their long-term interests – economically, socially and symbolically – are vested in the men’s house and in the fishing enterprises of their male relatives. It is by directing their efforts towards these men and “male” institutions that young men secure their future.

There are, however, women from Kpone who have succeeded as canoe owners, but not in their home town. I met one of them, Korkor, in the fishing harbour of Tema, five kilometres west of Kpone. Women from all over the country come to the harbour city of Tema to buy fish from cold storage plants, or from canoes landing fish in the fishing harbour. In this urban context, the female traders’ and canoe owners’ gender and kinship identity associated with their local origin recedes more into the background. They are first and foremost professional fish traders and canoe owners, and these roles tend to be more important and visible than their roles of mother or wife. In this setting, Korkor from Kpone had established herself as canoe owner.

Together with her brothers, Korkor inherited her father’s canoe. The brothers decided to run the fishing operations from Tema, and Korkor was the wholesaler of fish from their canoe. After four years Korkor had accumulated enough capital through fish trade to buy her own canoe. But instead of recruiting her crew from Kpone (as her brothers had done), she employed a captain from Ada (a fishing town further east), and he hired a crew for her. The captain turned out to be very reliable, and it is through him that Korkor now manages her fishing company. By avoiding gender constraints associated with her various female roles in Kpone, Korkor has managed to enter a position in Tema, in which her crew members primarily perceive her as a capital owner and employer, and not as an aunt, daughter, sister or mother. Nevertheless, Korkor’s goal is to gradually invest her surplus from fishing in a house for herself and her daughters in Kpone.

Dzelukope

Women in Dzelukope face two barriers that seem almost insurmountable: the patrilineal kinship ideology and the organisation of beach seine companies. Usually, owners of the huge beach seines

in Dzelukope are men who simultaneously are head of a branch of a patrilineal clan, and head of a compound. A beach seine owner is thus in possession of a large stock of symbolic capital, to use Bourdieu's terms, in the form of masculine authority, which is strengthened and legitimised through the patrilineal kinship ideology. Such masculine authority is essential in the management of a beach seine company, and in the role of employer and leader of crews of fifty to hundred men. The interconnections between patrilineal descent and beach seine ownership are very strong. Polly Hill notes that "nets are often regarded as a perpetual non-vanishing form of property, analogous to inherited land" (1986: 11). To divide a set of nets (comprising a beach seine) between a group of heirs is regarded as undesirable. The beach seine should be passed on from father to son, and it is considered a great shame if the son is unable to take over: "A net should never die" (Hill 1986: 26). This ideology makes it almost as unthinkable for a woman to be an owner of a beach seine company as for her to be head of a patrilineal clan. Women thus do not have access to those forms of symbolic capital that are required within the male sphere of fishing. As in Kpone, sons in Dzelukope have more at stake in their father's and their patrilineage's fishing enterprises than in their mothers', and thus direct their efforts towards their fathers and father's brothers. With declining catches, even the wealthiest beach seine owners are struggling to maintain fishing as a profitable venture. The scope for female ownership in the fishery therefore seems more limited than ever.

There are, however, also among the Anlo-Ewe examples of women who have become owners in the fishery. The first beach seine was actually imported to the Volta Region around 1860 by Afedima, a rich female slave trader (Greene 1996: 165). There are also contemporary examples of women who are beach seine owners far away from Dzelukope, as in Abidjan (Odotei 1991) and Sierra Leone (field data 1995). In Tema, there are Ewe women who have invested in canoes for *ali* and *watsa* fishing. Women from Dzelukope thus have in common with women from Kpone that they have more success in entering the fisheries when they do it away from the social control of their home town. It also appears that women can compensate for the lack of masculine symbolic capital if they have enough economic capital. As mentioned, women in Dzelukope find alternative strategies by building their own houses and co-operating closely with daughters and female relatives, and there seems to be a tendency in the direction of more women's houses and a duo-local residence pattern. Since the fishery is regarded as a closed arena for women in Dzelukope, women rather seek new strategies in the female sphere by establishing more independent households. Moreover, men's increasing problems of fulfilling the economic expectations towards their traditional male role of providers and heads of households tends to strengthen such matrifocal tendencies.

Moree

In Moree, many women invest in houses where they gather sisters, sons and daughters around themselves, and where they become important persons in the matrilineage as providers. The richest of these women have invested in canoes and outboard motors. Through such ownership in the fisheries, many women have carved out a position for themselves in the local community, not only in terms of wealth, but also in terms of social power and prestige.

The career path of a female canoe owner usually starts after she has reached a position in the market hierarchy through hard work and long experience, and through which she has built an extensive network of female business partners. The divorce rate is high in the matrilineal setting and many women in Moree, who have "made it" as traders, divorce and remarry a canoe owner. Alternatively, a successful trader may – through her extension of credit – enable her husband to become a canoe owner. These are strategies to increase her supply of fish in order to expand in fish trade: a wife of a canoe owner is entitled to buy the catch of his canoe. She must sell a portion of the catch (usually 50%) to the wives of the crew members, but she makes a profit on the price difference between the wholesale price and the price that the other women pay. The remaining 50% of the catch goes into her own processing and trading business.

A position as canoe owner's wife thus gives a trader an opportunity to expand and to gradually earn enough to build a house. She becomes a "matron" with many "clients" – both men and women

– who depend on her housing, employment and care. The house also functions as a family firm and a workshop, and is a necessary investment if she wants to expand her scale of operations. At this stage the woman may have adult children, access to credit in her extensive network, and savings large enough to buy a canoe and an outboard motor. Many are assisted by their husbands with loans and technical know-how. Though husbands and wives keep separate purses and do not live together, husbands do have an interest in enabling their wives to become canoe owners, when the wife expands her economic activities and earns more money (and pays back the loan he gave her), she can be a resource for his own fishing company. The wife continues to be his wholesaler also when she gets her own canoe, and she is thus an important source of credit. Husband and wife keep up the separation of their economy and residence, and run separate – though closely intertwined – fishing companies.

Whereas husbands are important sources of credit, sons are more important in the management of women's canoe companies, and almost all of the female canoe owners in Moree have sons as captains on their canoes. In the relationship between mother and son, age and parenthood are as important social statuses as gender. Perhaps this is the reason why women rarely recruit their brothers as captains: it is not appropriate for a woman to be in an authority position in relation to a brother who is of the same age or older than herself. Gender is thus never an isolated factor. Gender always interacts with other social statuses that jointly constitute social persons, whereby individuals are positioned in relation to each other in the local power geometry.

Through relations with men (sons and husbands) women in Moree get access to resources, contacts, knowledge and authority in the male sphere of fishing. The institutions of marriage and the matrilineal kinship ideology thus provide women with male intermediaries, or “brokers”, to use Barth's term. These male relations become important channels of conversion for the transformation of material capital (market capital and ownership of houses) and symbolic capital (prestige in the matrilineage, trust, female charm and fertility) acquired in the female sphere into types of capital that are relevant in the male sphere and which indeed are required in fishing (authority in relation to male workers, fishing skills and technological knowledge). Because men have a personal interest in facilitating such conversion of capital across gender barriers, women in the matrilineal system find openings into the male fisheries through channels that are largely closed in the patrilineal systems.

Women's Manoeuvring Spaces

We have seen how ownership of the means of production in local systems of fishing are influenced by cultural and social factors. Different local “mixes” of factors like kinship ideologies and residence patterns shape the manoeuvring space of women with regards to ownership in the male fishery sphere. Whereas the most affluent women in Moree manage to cross the gender barriers that exist between the market and the fisheries within their local context, women in Kpone and Dzelukope find these gender barriers hard to overcome locally. In general, the ambition of becoming a fishery entrepreneur is almost unimaginable, or even undesirable, for the majority of women in all the three fishing communities. The main strategy for women in both Kpone and Moree, and increasingly also in Dzelukope, is thus to invest their earnings in houses and provide well for their dependants, which ultimately enhances their capacity to operate on a larger scale as fish traders. The labour, loyalty and support of daughters and female relatives are essential inputs to achieve a position in the female market hierarchy. However, some entrepreneurial women see that instead of letting the capital that they have accumulated through fish trade circulate within the market and women's sphere, they can increase their profit potential by integrating production and distribution of fish into one enterprise. It appears that the gender barriers met by women who attempt to employ this strategy in communities with a strong patrilineal kinship ideology – and even more so when women share residence with their husbands and his relatives – are so high that their only way of succeeding is to relocate themselves to another context.

When there is little scope for accumulation of economic and symbolic capital outside traditional women's domains, as in Kpone and Dzelukope, women may look for opportunities elsewhere. Migration becomes a way of changing one's position in a power geometry that stretches out in time and space. While women in Moree find conversion channels from market to fishery through male co-operation partners, women in Kpone and Dzelukope find channels of conversion by moving both themselves and their capital – and often a male intermediary like a son as well – away from duties and social control at home. Through migration they may activate their stock of material capital in combination with resources in a new place (like cheap and qualified labour, good fishing grounds, or fish markets with less competition) without the risk of losing their reputations as respectable women. However, even when women move to urban areas or abroad to make money on fishing, they tend to channel their savings back into their home community. They invest in houses and their (female) relatives' welfare in ways that are in accordance with their home town's gender ideology: To be a rich woman is not considered immoral or inappropriate, especially as long as she redistributes her wealth. This moral economy is also valid in relation to male entrepreneurs (see Hart 1975). If, however, a woman becomes rich by strategies that require "masculine" behaviour, and therefore threaten men's honour, occupational identity and masculinity, the attitude towards the female entrepreneur in the local community tends to be negative, and her stock of symbolic capital decreases. When women risk negative sanctions and disapproval of "masculine" behaviour in the fisheries, and when their fishery-related roles are regarded as conflicting with their roles of mother, wife, relative or colleague in the local community, most women hardly consider the economic gains in the fishery worth the social costs at home.

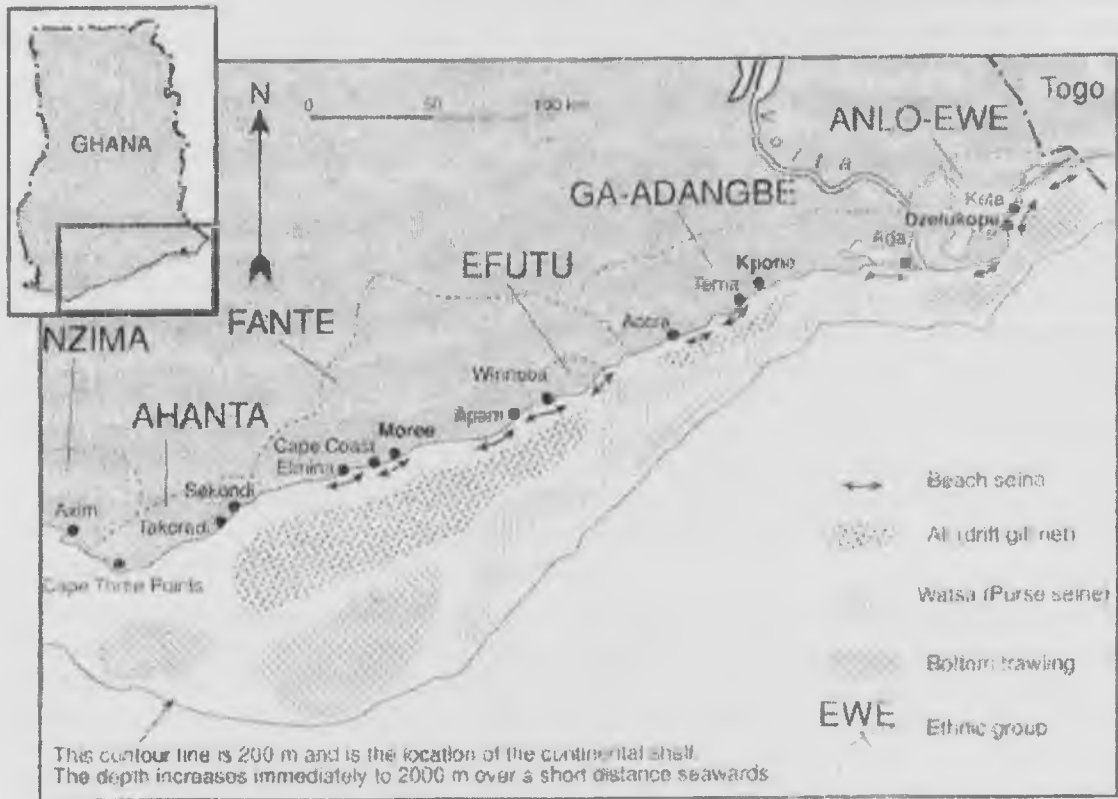
In contrast to Kpone and Dzelukope, the combination of the matrilineal kinship system and the duo-local residence pattern in Moree opens, rather than closes, women's manoeuvring space. An important reason is that men according to matrilineal ideology may gain when female relatives invest in fishing equipment. Men's loyalty, labour and other commitments may therefore just as well go in the direction of a female as of a male relative's fishery enterprise. They tend to view women's roles as owners, employers and managers in the fisheries first and foremost as an extension of the female trader role. By defining (the often very real) power of female canoe owners as irrelevant in the male hierarchy, and as long as men feel that their economic, social and political interests are well taken care of, men can tolerate that women use the male sphere of fishing to achieve their goal of accumulating prestige in the female sphere of market and motherhood. In this way men avoid the emotional and ideological paradox they inevitably face in relation to female leaders in a male domain. As long as female canoe owners maintain the female market hierarchy and the matrilineage as their main prestige arena, men feel less uncomfortable with female canoe owners in their midst. Hence men can write women off as a threat to their own masculinity, despite that the fact women who have one foot in the top of the female market hierarchy and another among the elite of owners in the fishery are powerful.

The place-specific manner in which gender relations are embedded in local fishing economies, is crucial for the opportunities and constraints of female entrepreneurs. In a process of modernisation in the fisheries, where new actors obtained power and the power was concentrated in fewer hands, the complementary dual-sex gender model has been a device to avoid conflict and chaos: a system of thought that maintains a sense of continuity and order when both production systems and gender roles change. However, the boundaries between male and female domains can be permeable. The degree to which women are able to employ entrepreneurial strategies beyond the female domain, largely depends on men's perception of these strategies. When their authority and positions of power are threatened, men use the duality discourse to confine women to their domains, as we have seen in Kpone and Dzelukope. When men's position is enhanced through women's enterprises, as in Moree, they conveniently mediate between the male and female domains at the same time as the dual-sex gender order is maintained.

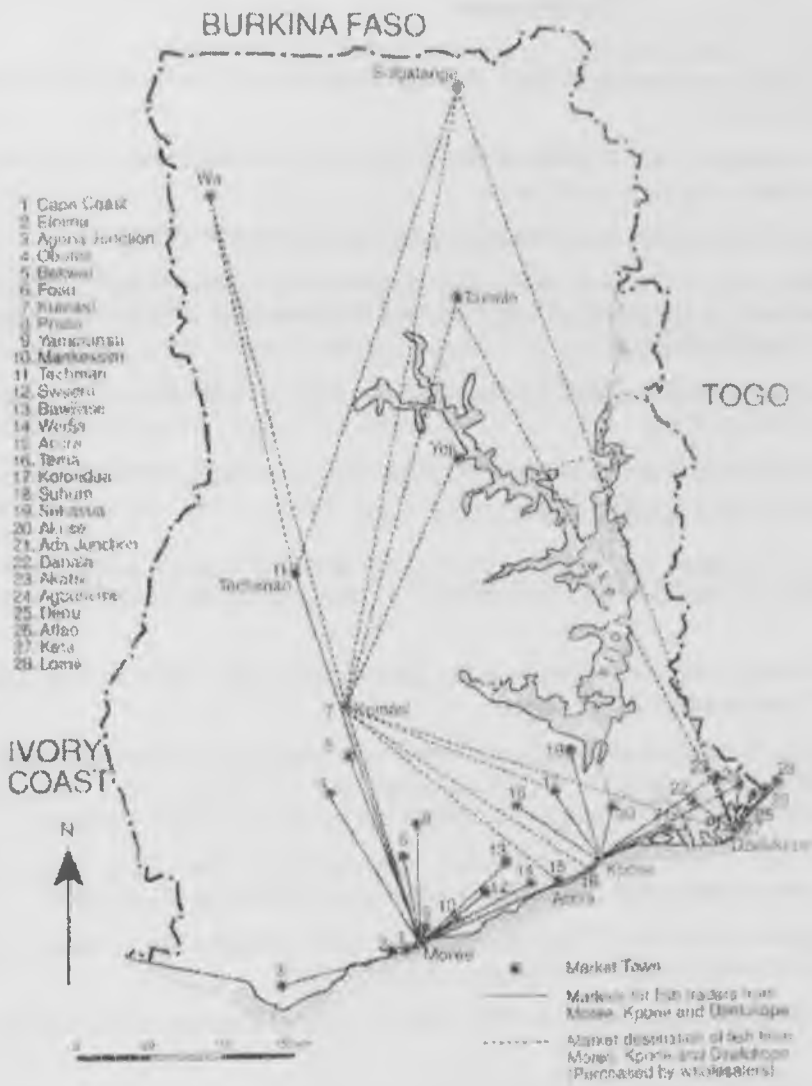
The degree of motorisation of canoes in Ghana did not increase in the 1990s, and has even showed a slight decline (Koranteng 2000). This reflects the harsh conditions resulting from liberalisation of the national economy and the increased costs of imported inputs like petrol and outboard motors. It cannot be ruled out that the activities of the industrial fishing sector also have

had a negative impact on the catches of canoes. During revisits to Moree in 1999 and 2001 it became clear that many of the female canoe owners, who had been active since the 1970s, were not able to replace a spoiled outboard motor or canoe and could thus not send their crews fishing. There were no new female canoe owners, and the most prominent of all canoe owners – both male and female – who owned six canoes in 1995, was now only operating two. This illustrates that in present day Ghana, women face constraints that may overshadow a local gender ideology that facilitates female entrepreneurship.

Map 1
Case locations, ethnic groups and fishing techniques along the coast of Ghana.



Map 2
Marketing regions of fish from Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope.



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WOMEN'S HOUSEHOLD ENVIRONMENTAL CARING ROLES IN THE GREATER ACCRA METROPOLITAN AREA: A QUALITATIVE APPRAISAL

Jacob Songsore and Gordon McGranahan

Abstract

Women play key roles in the care and management of the home and in environment affecting health risks and family well being. Results from a qualitative survey in Accra indicate that environment problems in and around the homes are a particularly serious health burden for women and children, escalated by poverty. These issues warrant more attention in environmental debates and programs. Improvements need to come with better economic conditions and improved services, but also through changes in gender relations to the advantage of women. Such changes will improve power relations.

Résumé

Les femmes jouent un rôle clé dans l'entretien, et la gestion des foyers et de l'environnement et influent sur les risques sanitaires et le bien-être familial. Le résultat d'un sondage qualitatif mené à Accra montre que les problèmes liés à l'environnement autour des maisons posent des problèmes sanitaires extrêmement sérieux aux femmes et aux enfants. Ces problèmes sont aggravés par la pauvreté. Cette situation demande que l'on se prenne sérieusement aux débats et programmes portant sur l'environnement. Le progrès doit être accompagné de meilleures conditions économiques et une amélioration des services par le biais des changements dans les relations en matière de genre au profit des femmes. Un tel changement pourrait améliorer le pouvoir de la femme.

Introduction

In societies the world over, women are both producers and carers; they care for children, for old people, the sick, the handicapped, and others who cannot look after themselves. They serve the household with food, cleanliness, clothing, and in many cases water and fuel. (Vickers 1993).

Since women, as opposed to men, play a pre-eminent role in the care and management of the home and its environs, the household environment can be said to be engendered. Moreover, the home and neighborhood environments are especially critical to the health and well being of children, the elderly and, among active adults, women. Adult men tend to spend more time away from home, and thus face fewer of its environmental hazards. For many women, especially those categorized as housewives or homemakers, the place where they live is also the place where they work (Muller and Plantenga 1990).

It is, therefore, of special relevance to women, children and the elderly that in many cities in low income developing countries the most significant environmental health hazards tend to be encountered within people's houses and neighborhoods.

The immediate environmental threats for the residents of these cities are not long-term global warming, cumulative exposure to carcinogens, or even decade-long desertification but rather the life and death immediacy of malaria, respiratory illness, and diarrhea. Their threats are derived in part from household environments characterized by indoor air pollution, a bug-filled outdoors, near-the-door faeces, and far-from-the door water. There are also the dangers connected with the use of insect sprays, uncontrolled sewage, and ambient air pollution (Kates 1994: see also Benneh et al., 1993; Songsore and McGranahan 1993; McGranahan and Songsore 1994).

In Ghana, the few readily available statistics on housekeeping activities indicate that at every age, females contribute more than males, but that the difference is especially large among adults (Ghana Statistical Service, 1995). This confirms the general perception that women bear an inordinate share of the labour burden of household environmental management (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 1993; Opong 1994).

Like rural women, urban women are also wholly responsible for domestic work although they are able to rely, to a greater extent, on paid assistants or unpaid family helpers. Removed from the support of immediate kin, urban women are experiencing increased conflicts between their domestic chores, employment and other responsibilities. In most households, women are left to make their own arrangements and there is a strict division of labour between 'house matters' and more important questions befitting of male intervention or mediation. This is a reflection of patriarchal ideology and practice and appears to occur irrespective of the educational level of men or rural or urban location of the household. Where households can afford it, they employ housemaids, who are usually girls, which in turn contributes to the problem of child labour discussed earlier. Other families use the services of daughters to perform domestic functions, perpetuating the myth of the femininity of household tasks (ROG/UNICEF 1990).

Far from being egalitarian and harmonious units, households have a hierarchy mediated by gender, age and kinship. Both the state and all social groups in Ghana recognize the man as the head of household. The patriarchal construct of the household underpins power relations between the sexes and who has control over what assets and who takes what decisions forms the basis of both co-operation and conflict within the household (Friedmann 1992). Women as home managers and housewives are in a subordinate relationship to husbands within the subsistence production of the household. There is an economic element to this subordination: to the extent that men can retain preferential access to liquid financial resources, they both reinforce their own power within the household, and can often cushion themselves against the worst deprivations of poverty. As a result, "Poor men in the developing world have even poorer wives and children" (Vickers, 1993). But the reasons why women are the most exposed to household environmental hazards go beyond their relative poverty.

Other cities might well yield very different results. However, several features of the situation in Accra undoubtedly represent broad tendencies. We have argued elsewhere that the environmental problems of the poor tend to be more local and more directly threatening to health than the environmental problems of the wealthy (McGranahan and Songsore 1994). It would seem from this more gender-sensitive analysis, that the environmental problems of poverty are also more prone to be a burden for women and to affect the health of children. Recognizing the inadequacy and pitfalls of both gender-blind approaches to environmental problems and those which merely provide a narrative of women's roles, the paper approaches this analysis from a micro political-economy perspective.

The focus of the present paper is to examine and make more "visible" the role of women as the principal managers of the household environment and the range of burdens women in different social classes face as a result of this environmental care. More specifically, it presents an account of the internal structure of the household and its relations with the wider society. This is followed by the

presentation of a conceptual model of engendered environmental niches as a tool for analysing household environmental care and a qualitative account of women's environmental redressing of these gender inequalities.

Data Sources and Methodology

This paper draws on a section of a much broader study of women and household environmental care in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area, of which the main findings and detailed methodologies have been presented in the initial report (Songsore and McGranahan, 1996). These involved both the use of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The initial quantitative study was based on i) a sample survey of 1000 representative households and ii) physical tests of water quality and exposure to air pollution for a subset of 200 households (Benneh et al. 1993; Songsore and McGranahan 1993).

The empirical data from the main quantitative survey enable statistical analysis to be carried out on some of the inter-relations of gender, environment and epidemiology at the household and neighbourhood levels (Songsore and McGranahan, 1996; 1998). The data fails, however, to even begin to capture the intra-household struggles and the politics of environmental management through which many of these problems emerge. Such micro-politics are especially critical to the poor majority living in compound housing units, where environmental health risks are severe, and the management tasks are complex. Owing to the architecture of this compound housing, but also for other reasons, the environmental management problems of the poor are less segmented into individual household tasks, and almost inevitably involve more conflict and /or co-operation among households.

This gap was subsequently addressed by the use of qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. This follow-up research was conducted in the low-income neighbourhoods of Nima, Ashaiman, Mamprobi, Jamestown and Old Ashaley-Botwe. These five areas covered different socio-ecological zones where low-income households live in the metropolis. The research within each neighbourhood included:

- i) in-depth interviews with five women of representative households living in household compounds in each area; and
- ii) focus group discussions with selected women's and men's groups or associations in the same area.

The current paper is largely a narrative of the results of the qualitative survey which appeared in section one of an earlier, larger publication (see Songsore and McGranahan 1996).

The Internal Structure of the Household and its Relations with the Wider Society

Gender relations within the household

The secondary or subordinate status of women in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area appears to be universally considered the norm, despite considerable cultural diversity and some recent erosion of men's relative power (see the next section). Both women's groups and men's groups acknowledge the man as the head of the household, whether in the nuclear household consisting of man, wife and children or in the multi-generational extended family. As stated in one of the women's focus group discussions, "since it was the man who married the woman, and takes care of all members of the household, he is the head." Women generally seemed to feel that this man ought to provide guidance, protection, support and care to all members of the household.

This view was reiterated by the men, who put it only slightly differently, "it is the man who has married the woman, so it is his responsibility to provide for the house, and hence he is the head." Men also emphasized the decision-making aspects of male leadership. As one male respondent crudely put

it, "the man gives orders; and the orders he gives must be obeyed by the woman first and foremost, then the children will follow suit. Then everything will go on well in the home". In Ghanaian society generally, and among men in particular, the assertive female is abhorred and labeled a "he-woman". "There are many instances where a wealthy woman owns the 'marital' house and supports the family-husband included – yet the authority figure in the house remains the man" (Aidoo 1985:25).

It is therefore not surprising that a number of writers have drawn attention to the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of most households, with the household and family as the arena of women's subordination and the architecture of discriminatory gender roles. "The feminist appraisal opened for public view the privacy of family life and exposed not only affection and protection but also inequality and misogyny" (O'Connell 1994)

This unequal power between men and women is manifest in spheres such as access to and control of resources, decision-making powers in the allocation of resources, control of decisions on reproduction, what economic activities wives can undertake, and the allocation of tasks at the household level. The notion of the male "breadwinner" is common, but most men keep the size of their earnings secret, and the woman is often expected to manage with whatever "chop money" she is given, making up for deficits from her own resources. Auntie Vic represented this common problem well. She said her husband, a fisherman, rarely discloses his income, especially during the fishing season in August. She claims that he spends a lot on girls, drinks and friends. These days, she has learnt a few tricks to enable her to keep a bit of what she gets from selling his fish. She says that for most of the year she uses money from baking bread and frying doughnuts to take care of the family. Her husband is therefore not the sole provider for the home; she actually contributes almost all her earnings to feed, clothe and educate the children.

Men do not necessarily see this type of arrangement as reflecting the deprivation of women. As one male respondent in the indigenous Ga settlement of Jamestown puts it. "In this community, the women generally earn higher incomes than the men. This is largely due to their trading activities. So if the men should pool financial resources with the women, the latter will not respect them." Another took the view that many women have developed the tendency of exploiting their male partners, and want to use the man's money without controls. "The woman hides her money in such places that it would take a thief to locate it. The only time you, the man, will know that your wife has money is when she puts on a new cloth. She can even tell you that she bought it on credit and so get you to pay for it. So if you make the mistake of keeping a joint account with your wife, you are just about a few steps from your grave".

By contrast, women respondents (both individually and in group discussions) held that men, especially when men and women pool resources together in joint economic ventures, tend to monopolise income to the exclusion of women. Because of men's tendency to take control of such earnings, women vegetable (pepper) growers in the peri-urban settlement of Old Ashaley-Botwe have decided to establish their own independent farms so that they can control the income that is generated directly. There is, however, considerable intra-urban variation between and within residential areas depending on the cultural setting, level of education of household members and the economic status of the household and of the particular woman.

In the old, typically low income, indigenous Ga neighbourhoods of central Accra, such as Jamestown and Mamprobi, and in the Ga villages found in the rural fringe, women tend to exhibit considerable autonomy in decision-making and control of resources. This is partially due to the duolocal pattern of residence of husband and wife; the cultural norm is for each to reside in a compound house of their pre-marital family. There is also a long tradition of independent commercial activity amongst the women. Many women appreciated the freedom associated with living apart from their husbands. One woman who was divorced by her first husband because of her (assumed) infidelity said, "If you live together with your husband you feel ill at ease; it is better when you go and see him occasionally" (Robertson

1993: 66). However, most upwardly mobile Ga men and women, once they have moved out of these communities, live neolocally, i.e. co-residentially, in the newly developed mixed neighbourhoods.

By contrast, in low income, migrant communities such as Nima and Ashaiman, the control of decision-making by men tended to be more complete. Most migrant women did not have an equally strong footing in commerce, and lived co-residentially with husbands who in most cases earned higher incomes. Polygynous marriages also tend to be both unstable and very undemocratic in their internal organization.

Economic Crisis, Women's Empowerment and Changing Gender Relations

The power of men within the household has come under threat from two processes: economic crisis and the growing unemployment of men on the one hand; and the reverberations of the global movement for the empowerment of women on the other.

Although the economic conditions of households in general have deteriorated in recent decades, and continue to deteriorate, women as a group have experienced some measure of progress in education, income earning abilities and their overall status in society. In general, it was the men who most clearly articulated this looming threat to their hegemony over women. As the men's group in Mamprobi put it. "One can say that in the past men's control over their wives was somehow absolute. But this control is diminishing. One can attribute this to the general trends of economic hardships which have made some men exist only in name." This view was reiterated by other men's groups in the low-income neighbourhoods surveyed.

The industrial workers of Ashaiman carried the same message: "We are in a community where we count much on industrial work and other wage employment. In recent times many men have been laid off in an attempt to restructure the economy. So the women have taken over the headship of many households because they provide the money". In support of this view the poor fishermen and working class elements in the blighted inner city residential district of Jamestown argued that "Often when the man is unemployed the woman takes control. She is the one who has the money and so if you dare display your authority the cash flow will stop so she becomes the head."

Although in group discussions and in-depth interviews women also stressed their growing role in generating household income, most women saw it more in terms of an increase in the pressure on their labour time than an increase in their power over men. This "reproductive squeeze" has led many women to disrespect their male partners, and disapprove of their discretionary consumption.

According to Auntie Stella of Mamprobi: 'In the olden days the men worked and took good care of their families. These days a lot of them have no proper work to do – just bits of fishing work, company, construction labour and other menial jobs – so they do not have enough money for the home. The bits of extra money they make go into drinking and girl friends.' As another woman put it: "Nowadays the men can no longer cope with the burden of looking after us well, so most of us are on our own with our children". As has been shown elsewhere, women's income provides them with psychological and practical leverage in their gender relations. Women, however, may use their often low earnings not so much to increase their power in gender relations but to diminish conflict by asking their husbands for money less often (Kanji 1995: 51-52; Kanji and Jazdowska 1995). Quite a large proportion of women, though recognising positive changes in the status of women, felt that they were not part of this process.

To the extent that the economic crisis and the increasing role of women in informal economic activities have enhanced women's influence in the household, this is being activated by the growing power of women's movements and associations, which are creating a consciousness of the need for greater gender equality. Some men see this growing women's movement as a real threat to their social power at the household level. The following statements by two men interviewed articulate these fears well:

With educated women who have been enlightened by the campaign on the empowerment of women, they think that men have been having the upper hand for far too long and that this is the time to rub shoulders with the men. To me this whole question of empowerment of women is likely to lead us to a situation where women will become men and men become women.

"These days there are many educational programmes on radio and television telling women what their rights are and what they too can do. So there is some change in their attitude in the home. I can say that these educational programmes are doing more harm than good."

Both statements implicitly blame strategic gender conflict on feminism rather than on the men who seek to keep the upper hand. The first statement makes a point upon which radical feminists and conservative anti-feminists actually agree: that existing male and female roles are fundamentally patriarchal. The second statement suggests that challenging these roles does more harm than good. The question is, whose interests are being harmed?

Women saw their increasing power principally as the result of changing economic realities at the household level, even though these might have been enhanced by the growing women in development (WID) activities. In general, as Sister Gloria indicated: "Because women do not depend solely on their husbands for money for food, clothing and health care, they are a bit more vocal and can also take part in decision-making in the family. In fact, in a lot of homes, the men are heads only in name." Such women have often overruled decisions taken by the men without their prior consultation. Other studies have shown that women with independent incomes have a long, slow struggle to increase their power in relation to men, whereas a loss in income often implies a rapid decline in influence because of the loss of "bargaining power" with men over a range of issues affecting themselves and their households (Kanji 1995: 53).

The Growing Incidence of Female Headed Households

Consequent upon these developments and the growing pressures for survival at the household level, one institution which has come under threat is the family itself. Some of the reasons for increasing marital instability and divorce regularly mentioned include the following:

- Economic hardships leading to divorce or male abandonment of his parental responsibility, often also resulting in child labour and abuse,
- The inability of some men to cope with the increasing economic power of wives and the wives' consequent "disrespect" for male authority,
- Growing infidelity and breakdown of the moral fabric of society, itself partly a consequence of poverty, unemployment, and crowding within the home,
- The growing incidence of co-habitation or consensual marriage instead of customary marriage or marriage under the ordinance because of increasing marriage costs, and
- The growing normalcy of poor female headed households.

Fayorsey in her study of 216 Ga women in central Accra found that 26 per cent of all marriages were between couples already living under consensual unions. She presents a graphic picture of the extent of marital instability in this sub-area of the city. Of the total sample of women interviewed only 3 percent were never married and 58 per cent were married only once. The remaining 39 per cent had been married at least twice (Fayorsey 1992/1993; Fayorsey 1994).

About 73 per cent of the thousand representative households surveyed were male headed, the remaining 27 per cent being headed by women. There is a marked cluster in the indigenous Ga enclaves, where women exhibit a much greater autonomy, and often live separately from their husbands (Aidoo 1985: 22). Between 32 and 45 per cent of all households in the indigenous

communities surveyed were female headed. All other residential sectors had percentage scores well below the average for the city (Songsore and McGranahan 1996: 16; 1998) A decade ago studies showed that households formally headed by women were on the increase in Ghana and constituted about 29 per cent of all households (Lloyd and Brandon 1991: 7).

Having analysed to some extent the power relations within the household, in the next section we discuss the gender division of labour in the management of the home environment.

Layers of Engendered Environmental Niches

Although the internal relations and systems of mutual support are rather complex and unique to individual households in the neighbourhoods and sub-cultures in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area, there is obvious asymmetry in the roles and responsibilities men and women play within the home. Extending beyond the household, networks of solidarity and other social and economic exchanges also exist between household members, on the one hand, and other extended family members, neighbours and community residents, as well as various community and state institutions. It is important to recognize "that the household is not a closed, autonomous unit or separate sphere" (Varley 1994: 120). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the importance of the household, and other local-spatial constructs, when discussing both environmental management and disease transmission (Cairncross et al. 1995).

One important aspect of women's subordination is the gender division of labour which gives women overall responsibility for household environmental care, the principal subject of the present analysis. In order to unravel the gender relations in this and neighbouring spheres, it is important to identify the environmental niches at the household and community levels, and how the responsibilities for their management are ordered.

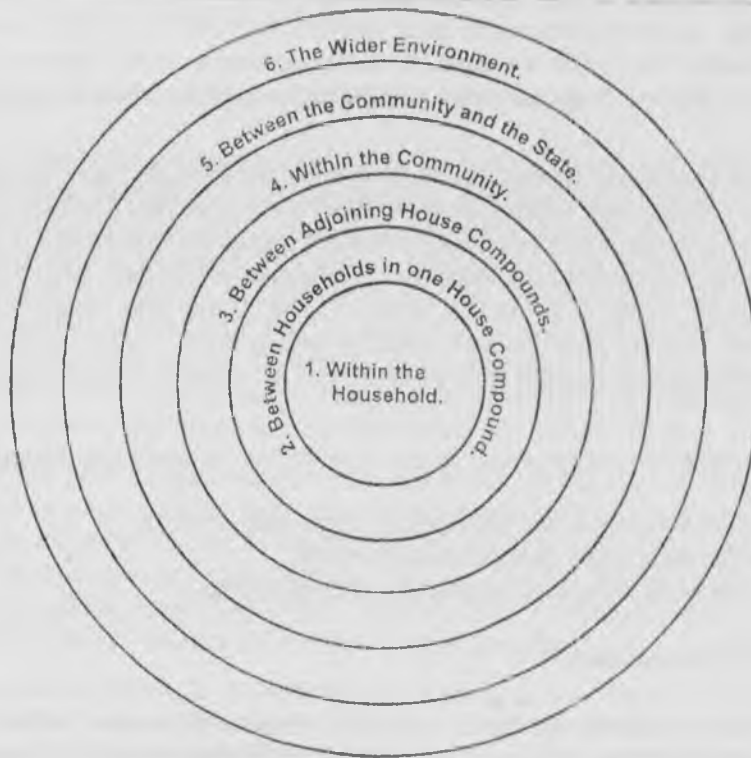
The environmental niches and their management can be conceptualized in terms of a series of overlays of hierarchically arranged layers of engendered environments (Figure 1). Each niche can be defined in terms of the principal social interactions through which environmental management must emerge. The boundaries are, of course, very porous, with the state at times intervening in matters normally resolved within the households, community leaders taking roles traditionally assigned to the state, and so on. Also, it must be kept in mind that one of the most common challenges for environmental management is that the physical and social worlds almost inevitably remain a very imperfect match.

The most basic sphere is within the homes of individual households where some of the most bitter conflicts and struggles of women over their subordination and work burdens are encountered. Much of the discussion of the previous sections focused on this niche.

At the next level, especially within house compounds where the internal architecture is designed for the use of several households (either as extended family members or as a collection of unrelated households in tenement housing units), are the communal areas shared by members of the various households. This niche can include the courtyard, shared kitchen, toilet, bathroom, gate leading out of the house compound and the immediate surroundings of the house-compound, including especially its frontage.

On the peripheries of this niche are the shared and intervening commons between neighbouring house-compounds in closely built-up areas, which need to be managed as a different sphere. This includes areas where formal responsibilities are often very poorly defined, but effective management typically will require arrangements between adjoining compounds.

Figure 1:
Layers of engendered environmental niches: household, community and state in Ghana



The fourth tier consists of community sites, such as public toilets and waste collection points, where an overlay of the wider community environment and community regulations impinge on specific household members with specific responsibilities for managing specific niches.

The next overlay, which at least formally superordinates all the other tiers mentioned, is where the environmental management decisions emerge through the executive and regulatory framework of state environmental management institutions on city-wide and national levels.

Finally, there is a wider environment which refers to external influences and processes which are largely beyond the control of the state or any of the other relevant actors.

It is the particular combination of elements from all these layers which give communities and neighbourhoods their character. The evidence presented below suggests a waning influence of women as one moves from the inner to the outer layers of decision-making and environmental management within the city. But how are environmental caring roles carried out in reality within these niches and by whom?

Women's environmental caring roles

Most people asked were apt to stress that women as principal homemakers do practically every household task, very much like the proverbial "hewers of wood and drawers of water," to satisfy men's needs and the needs of the household. In most low income communities, female children are normally by their mother's sides, assisting them in their household work from about age seven onwards. Their

assignments, depending on their age, tend to include washing utensils, participation in meal preparation, sweeping and washing of clothes. They also go on short trips to the market to buy needed items while others do petty selling to help generate some income for the family's sustenance. Child labour, especially for girls, was very common in most low income areas, as children did petty trade before and after school hours. The mother's burden can easily become a young daughter's, a sacrifice rarely demanded of boys. School drop out rates tended to be high in these communities, again especially for the girls.

Even male children are sometimes pressed into petty selling. Additionally, they do such chores as fetching water, dumping garbage and running errands. Boys were considered a second-best choice among the interviewed households, and rarely did such work except in households with no female children. In most cases, boys, like adult males, were out of the house and thought to be "playing", older male children were especially likely to be out and about. As the saying goes, "like father like son". Indeed in every community visited, male children could be seen playing football whilst their female siblings were indoors taking care of younger siblings or doing one chore or the other for the principal female homemaker.

For ease of analysis, women's environmental caring roles within the home are discussed under the following:

1. managing the household environment and cooking in the limited sense;
2. childcare, care for the elderly and general healthcare; and
3. managing communal areas in house compounds and neighbourhood.

Managing the Household Environment

The principal environmental management tasks normally performed by women include cleaning the home, toilets and bathrooms; washing clothes; fetching water and buying or fetching domestic fuel for cooking; going to purchase food items and other household needs from the market; cooking food, serving meals and cleaning the dishes. In all these activities they may be exposed to serious environmental health risks. Not all environmental caring roles are necessarily undertaken by the principal female homemakers. As revealed by in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, a complex division of labour often exists between wife and husband, wife and especially female children, wife and house maid or foster-child, wife and mother-in-law or sister-in-law etc. These vary according to the household composition, stage in the demographic cycle, wealth, type of employment of adults and whether the principal female homemaker is also the principal "breadwinner". This variation notwithstanding, women generally take their role as carers for the home environment and as wives and mothers most seriously.

The social norm is for women to do the unpaid physical work and the men to pay the bills – rent, electricity bills, water bills, and toilet charges – and provide money for the upkeep of the family, which in local parlance is called the "chop money". Men may undertake, in addition, such occasional tasks as setting traps for mice, killing dangerous reptiles such as snakes that may stray into the home, protecting the household from neighbourhood violence and undertaking minor repairs to the building or the room. While it is becoming the general practice for women to help pay the bills on behalf of impecunious male heads of household, very few men help in performing the routine household chores on behalf of overworked women.

There are ideological and cultural barriers keeping men apart from these activities. The rather derogatory term "kotobonku" is the label given to men who undertake household chores. In the past, refusal by the wife to wash a man's clothes was sufficient reason for a divorce. Most married men, and perhaps especially those from low income households who could not afford the services of maids or cooks, considered it derogatory to scrub bathrooms or wash cooking utensils. Even unemployed men may consider it beyond their dignity to help their wives with household chores. Some men do not even

have the elementary courtesy of picking up the bucket from the bathroom after they have washed with water carried to the bathroom by women. This prevailing attitude would appear to be strongest among the poorer uneducated men, although it is in such households that the environmental management burdens for the women are particularly acute.

Caring for Children, the Elderly and the Ill of the Household

For those women who are principally homemakers with infants and children, caring for the home also includes feeding, bathing and clothing the child. It is the mother who has to keep close watch over the children, monitoring their health state, worrying when children fall sick and taking them both to health care providers and to school. The mother, together with the grandmother and female siblings, is the child's entertainer, playmate, educator and socialiser. All these activities entail a heavy demand on the woman's labour time and often stand in conflict with other domestic tasks and income generating activities. As in most cultures, "the idealization of the institution of motherhood as all-powerful, strong and caring brings with it the implication that mothers alone have full responsibility for child-bearing and all the related household caring and domestic work" (O'Connell 1994: 37)

The household head is traditionally responsible for taking care of the household in general. Therefore he/she is responsible for sick people in the home. Male heads of household may exercise this leadership by deciding on the type of health care institution to visit or the form of treatment such sick people should have, as they are normally those who pay the bills. Women in their turn physically nurse sick children and adults (especially elderly people) whilst increasingly they also contribute towards paying the health bills of members in most low income households.

As one woman remarked, "It is the woman who takes care of the sick man, and the man too takes care of his sick wife. There are some men who do not bother about their sick wives. Women cannot do the same. They are always full of pity for their husbands." There was a pregnant woman whose husband gave her 15,000 cedis (USD2.5) a month for the upkeep of the home. He added no extra money for medical treatment, drugs, or other pregnancy related expenses. Life for her was a daily struggle.

On account of their role as carers within the home, women are not only exposed to communicable diseases when other household members become ill, but often feel the weight of their responsibilities very heavily, adding to an already stressful life.

Managing Communal Areas in House Compounds and Neighbourhoods

In low income neighbourhoods where the majority of the city's population is found, the most popular dwelling type is the single-storey traditional compound house. This is normally occupied by several nuclear households, either as a collection of extended family members or as a group of individual tenants who do not have any kin and who often come from different backgrounds. Over the years, a nexus of informal arrangements has developed for managing communal areas and facilities within the house compound and in the neighbourhood. It is this internal architecture of house compounds more than kinship networks that determines to a large extent institutional arrangements for managing shared facilities and spaces. These include the courtyard in the compound house and the immediate surroundings, the in-house shared toilet, kitchen, and bathroom. It also includes mechanisms for sharing out electricity bills and water bills among all members who share the same meter.

A gender division of labour is evident, as women play a critical role in maintaining good hygiene and sanitation within these communal areas. Women are responsible for cleaning shared kitchens, bathrooms, courtyards, toilets and the immediate environs of the house. Arrangements for joint

management are often negotiated between the principal female homemakers from each household within the house compound. Among many tenant households a fairly rigid roster is prepared, indicating days or times during which each female principal homemaker is on call for keeping the commons clean. Similar arrangements are found where nuclear households belonging to one extended family live in a family house compound, although these are sometimes more informal and voluntary in nature.

Each house compound has its rules of hygiene practice laid down by the landlord or his caretaker, who is often an old trusted tenant, for rental units. In the case of family house compounds these are often laid down by the head of family, who in most cases is not a woman, although the implementation is carried out by women. Bachelors who do not have female dependants are exempted from these feminine duties. Rules can be very rigid where resident landlords or landladies share the house compound with tenants. In one such case the following rules were laid down and they were to be observed by all tenants. Persistent violation could cause the eviction of the tenant:

- women are responsible for managing the communal areas,
- noisy quarrels between tenants are not allowed,
- the courtyard has to be kept clean,
- no loud music is permitted,
- no domestic animals are to be kept,
- too many visitors are not allowed for any household, and
- by 11 pm the main gate leading from the house compound to the outside is locked. Any person expecting to be late in arriving home has to make arrangements with the sons of the landlord to open the gate after that hour.

In the very crowded house compounds in Jamestown, where the open courtyards have been reduced to mere passageways through infilling with the construction of wooden shacks to serve as additional accommodation for family members, the codified rules of hygiene behaviour for every house compound also included the following:

- no spitting is allowed on the ground
- no defecation on the ground by children is allowed except in chamber pots, and
- no urination on the walls is permitted.

Although these norms exist in neighbourhoods where non-communal houses and less crowded communal house compounds prevail, they are less rigorously enforced, since every household has at least a small private area in front of the room in the courtyard where household activities such as cooking take place. Very often, the level of enforcement depends on the knowledge of good hygiene behaviour and the degree of co-operation among householders. As a general rule men only come into the picture intermittently. When there is the need, men may weed around the compound or desilt gutters. They help resolve conflicts between households due to misunderstandings between children or women.

Elaborate arrangements also exist in individual house compounds for settling electricity bills among individual householders using a shared meter. The bulk electricity bill is shared out using what in most areas is called the "point system". A point is defined as an output flow that a household uses e.g. points are awarded for bulbs, refrigerators, fans, electric irons, heaters, television sets etc. A weighted system is employed whereby electric appliances such as irons, heaters and stoves are given 2 to 3 points each as the case may be. On a few occasions the rate is the same for all households, or based on household size. Owners of the meters, often resident landlords, are in the habit of shifting much of the cost of electricity consumption to other householders

Similar arrangements exist for sharing water bills from an in-house standpipe. In most cases the owner charges co-residents monthly fees or else they pay by the bucket.

Although there is no specific legislation targeting women, very often it is the woman responsible for the day's house compound chores who is held accountable when sanitary inspectors come around. Where fines are levied for dirty surroundings, these may be paid by the specific household on duty or all the resident households contribute to pay the fine. This depends on the negotiated arrangements in the particular house compound. Many environmental externalities exist (e.g. noise pollution, smoke pollution, effluent pollution, smell nuisance and flies) and are the cause of inter-household tension despite the informal arrangements.

Where pan latrines exist in house compounds, women are only responsible for their cleaning, leaving the responsibility of daily or weekly removal of the human excreta to a hired conservancy labourer, invariably male. If he defaults, it is the men in the house compound who have to dispose of the waste at a sanitary site (or household members resort to a public latrine until the contents are emptied by the hired conservancy labourer).

The more difficult areas to manage are the environmental niches between house compounds and the commons within the neighbourhood. This is because of the widespread practice of illegal waste dumping and open defecation or the disposal of black polythene bags filled with human excreta. This often happens under cover of darkness. For example, in some parts of Nima people have to wake up at 3 am to visit the community KVIP in order to avoid over an hour long wait in the toilet queue in the morning. It is such long queues and pressures to answer nature's call, together with the odour nuisance of these facilities, that often compel these desperate actions in deprived communities.

At the community or neighbourhood level, institutions of the metropolitan authority or the CBO assume management of the community-wide facilities where they exist. Men are usually engaged and paid from the charges levied on households. Women and children do carry garbage to the waste dumping sites or containers and like everyone else use the public toilets. Women's influence drops sharply at this point as formal institutions manned by men begin to assert themselves. Women in general were less aware of neighbourhood by-laws than those set at the household and house compound levels. Some recalled by-laws concerning unauthorized waste dumping, open defecation and the need for good sanitation around the house. They were less conscious of the responsibilities and duties that the metropolitan authorities and utility agencies had in their communities for the delivery and maintenance of services. Perhaps as a result of the poor representation of women at these higher policy making levels, they are unable to shape policy in response to both their practical and strategic gender needs with regard to environmental management at the household level.

Azala-A Girl Porter or Kaya Yoo

This brief account of Azala provides the last section of this appraisal. In discussing women's environmental problems, it is important not to lose sight of the socio-economic dimensions of the common problems which both women and men face. The following account of a young female porter, or *kaya yoo*, is a woman's story, gathered in the course of this study. But it is also a story of economic hardship transcending the gender divide. There is an enormous gap between the environmental health and management problems Azala faces, and those which impinge on wealthier women whose homes are secure and well serviced. A somewhat similar story could be constructed, however, for many young boys working in the informal sector.

It was a hot and steamy Saturday afternoon. Flies were buzzing around the group of girls sitting on their large carrying pans in front of the Electricity Sub-Station office near Makola Market in the heart of Accra's Central Business District. Some of the girls were conversing while others were asleep. Two were picking lice from the hair of a smaller girl. The conversation stopped when the girls noticed some strangers approaching. Understandably, the girls looked suspicious and skeptical. These were children ranging from about ten to seventeen years who for one reason or the other were not in school. Some were found here through their own truancy, others were forced to be there through circumstances beyond their comprehension and control.

One of these girls was Azala. She is twelve, and left school several years ago, when she was in class 2. Coming from a poor home, she says she was enticed to Accra by the lovely items her relatives brought to their hometown (Tamale) from the metropolis. According to Azala, she had to plead hard and cry herself to sleep before she was allowed by her illiterate parents to come to Accra with her aunt, who is a *kaya yoo* living in a shack in the squatter settlement behind the Timber Market in Accra.

Azala is now a *kaya yoo* herself, and wakes up around 6 am. She sweeps the yard with the help of other girls in the house. She takes her bath and eats some koko (i.e. porridge) bought nearby. By 8 or 9am she arrives at Makola Market. Work commences with a characteristic struggle with other girls for clients' wares. For lunch, she buys kenkey and fish from street food vendors. Often, she comes back home around 6-6.30pm. She then bathes, buys her supper from vendors, eats and goes to sleep. On Sundays, which are off-duty days, she washes her clothes, braids her hair and sometimes visits friends and watches television.

Azala complains that city guards and some clients harass the *kaya yoo* at the market. The former chase them around for not registering with the Accra Metropolitan Authority (AMA). The latter pour insults on them and sometimes underpay them.

For her accommodation, she shares a one-room wooden shack with eight other *kaya yoo*s. They each contribute 300 cedis a week as rent for the room. The house is covered with polythene as roofing material and leaks a lot when it rains. "When it rains, we have to roll our mats and stand upright, covering ourselves with big polythene bags", she said. She pays 50 cedis for the use of a public bathhouse including a bucket of water provided by the water vendor, who also runs the bathhouse which is capable of taking 10 women at a time in the female compartment. The bathhouse consists of a walled open space with a cemented floor. She also pays 30 cedis per use for a public toilet facility. "These public facilities are dirty and inconvenient", she complained. She confessed she sometimes wakes up very early to defecate on the garbage dump. If caught she would have to pay a fine of 5,000 cedis.

She and the other *kaya yoo*s regularly buy cooked food from vendors. They have no pots, pans, coal pots and other facilities for cooking, which at least spares them the smoke hazards. "Besides, it is cheaper and time saving to buy cooked food rather than to cook it yourself", Azala claimed.

She sometimes suffers from malaria, headache and skin rashes. Her aunt gives her medicine bought from chemist shops or itinerant drugs peddlers. She recollects attending Korle-Bu Hospital only once. This was when she became literally paralysed with malaria. "Hospital fees are too high. So we buy our own medicines," she said.

Azala, nevertheless, looked quite healthy and strong at the time of the interview. Her clothes, however, had a dirty appearance and her hair was a bit untidy. The place she was found taking a breather was also very dirty.

The foregoing sections given some insights into the politics and structural context of women's household environmental caring roles. The results do demonstrate that the principal adult women of the households, on account of their managerial role, bear an inordinate share of the environmental health burden within the domestic sphere. A household's wealth (or indirectly its class position) plays an important mediating role in determining the constellation of environmental hazards faced by the principal woman homemaker of a household. However, several of the more serious environmental hazards, ranging from exposure to smoke from cooking fires, to pesticides from home spraying, and to cross infection from the children, are clearly linked to the gender division of labour (Songsore and McGranahan 1996; 1999). A companion study in Jakarta has also shown that a significant share of women's respiratory illnesses is contracted from their children, as was the case for Accra (Surjadi 1993: 82). Among children, a gender division of labour asserts itself fairly early.

However, the results suggest that for children under six, the environmental correlates of poverty pose obvious health risks, but their severity bears no clear relation to the sex of the child, according to the monitored diarrhoeal and acute respiratory problem results from the quantitative part of the larger study (Songsore and McGranahan 1994; 1996; 1998). While age helps determine which health problems are most severe for both men and women (Stephens et al. 1994), the age trajectory of environmental hazards is gender dependent.

Conclusion

Environmental problems in and around the home are a particularly serious health burden for the women and children of the Greater Accra Metropolitan area. Poverty greatly exacerbates this burden among children. On the other hand, the tasks that many women face in managing the home environment are far more onerous in conditions of poverty, even as the need to devote time to income earning activities is greater. Household environmental management not only involves more difficult and hazardous work in poor neighbourhoods, but is more likely to require co-operation among households. Moreover, when men are unable to meet their traditional economic obligations, they resent it when women become the principal income earners, but are not inclined to take on traditionally female obligations.

Household and neighbourhood level environmental problems do not receive the attention they deserve in environmental debates, and this probably reflects, at least in part, a form of gender discrimination: once the water has left the tap, the fuels have been purchased, and more generally the environmental problems have entered the home, they are considered less important "women's problems." From the perspective of the women, and particularly the low-income women, improvements in environmental services almost certainly deserve more support. On the other hand, simply increasing the level of government intervention is unlikely to be the most effective means of assisting these women.

This study suggest that the future of environmental management in the homes and neighborhoods of the Greater Accra metropolitan area will be determined in part by external development: 1) changes in formal government policies on environmental services and regulation; 2) economic changes which affect the circumstances of the poor majority; 3) changes in relations between the genders. All of these processes have global as well as local dimensions, and are closely interrelated. Many of the recent shifts in government policy affecting local environmental management reflect adherence to a structural

adjustment programme (SAP) promoted internationally in support of global capitalism (Songsore and McGranahan, forthcoming). The economic prospects for the poor majority also depend critically upon the global political economy.

The principal focus of this study has been on the role of women in environmental management in and around the home. Despite the local focus, the importance of large scale and even global processes is even evident here. The economic setbacks which have affected large parts of Africa in recent decades have had repercussions on household relations in the Greater Accra metropolitan area, as have the structural adjustment policies Ghana has had to adopt. Indirectly, international economic processes and economic ideologies have played an important role in shaping the development of gender relations locally. More directly, the international women's movement has changed the meaning of women's daily struggles to improve their position.

While many men are feeling threatened by women's empowerment, the actual gains women have made have been minimal. There still exists a critical disjuncture between those who manage the household environment and those who take strategic decisions in terms of allocation of resources to support environmental improvement, are principally male household heads and male policy makers within the state bureaucracy and *not* women. Those who bear the burden of environmental management within the home are almost exclusively women. Compounding the difficulties which may arise due to the dominance of men and male perspectives within government, is the related problem that formal state regulations are ill suited to many of the local environmental management problems women face.

Like many problems women have in relation to men, the environmental problems of the home are complicated by the "intimacy" of the social relations involved. If a factory pollutes the air, and damages the health and well being of local residents, governments around the world recognise this as a public nuisance, and accept the need for regulating the factory owners. If workers are adversely affected, most governments also accept the need to regulate their employers. But within the household, the legitimacy of government intervention is more problematic, and it is easy to end up blaming the principal victims.

Is a male household head responsible for the smoke which his spouse is exposed to while cooking, if he is the one who purchases the stove? Or, is a female homemaker responsible for the poor sanitary conditions which put all household members, and even neighbours, at risk? Historically, the later view has been more evident than the former. During Accra's colonial period, for example, there were times when the work of the lower courts was dominated by cases of women accused of sanitary offences (Robertson 1993). Hopefully, such an approach would no longer be considered acceptable. However, alternative strategies, through which the government could actively support women to improve their environmental position in relation to men, are not evident. Moreover, it is all too easy to imagine, for example, an anti-smoke campaign, warning women not to expose themselves to smoke from cooking fires and smokers not to smoke cigarettes, as if the two problems are comparable: as if women were actively choosing to cook with smoky fuels in the same manner people choose to smoke cigarettes.

The women in the Greater Accra metropolitan area did not seem to think the government had a major role to play in dealing with, for example, indoor air pollution. Only 15% of the almost 1,000 women respondents felt that the government needed to take the lead in improving indoor air, as compared to 78% for water, 61% for solid waste, 56% for outdoor air, 44% for insects, and 42% for sanitation. The areas where government action was popular were precisely those areas where the government can act without becoming involved in household affairs. Yet at the same time, more than half of these same women felt that improvements in indoor air quality did need to be initiated at the household level (Songsore and McGranahan 1996: 30-31).

Serious attempts to improve conditions for these women, and indirectly for the majority of Accra's citizens, will have to work with them. It is not simply a question of providing advice on how to improve home environments, and the opportunity to purchase household level environmental services at cost. Improvements should come with better economic conditions, and improved services, but also through changes in gender relations to the advantage of women. In some cases this may involve increasing their status or easing the burden of women's roles, while in others it may involve challenging existing roles. But in all cases it will involve significant changes in relations of power.

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SOCIAL DYNAMICS AND INFANT FEEDING PRACTICES IN NORTHERN GHANA.

Mariama Awumbila

Abstract

Infant feeding practices have been identified as one of the major determinants of children's nutritional status and account to a large extent for the high rates of malnutrition among children in Ghana. The relationship between breastfeeding and especially exclusive breastfeeding and child health and birth spacing in developing countries is well documented. However for the age group 0-6 months, although breastfeeding is widely practiced in Ghana, studies indicate that only 8% of children under 4 months are exclusively breastfed and 45% are given some form of supplementary feeding by age three months. Despite efforts of Health Workers to increase the percentage of exclusively breastfed babies, not much success has been achieved, because feeding practices are often difficult to change as they are directly related to varied economic, socio-cultural and religious factors in the community and to various dynamics prevailing at the household level.

Employing mainly qualitative research methods, this paper examines infant feeding practices of women with children 0-6 months in two areas in the Bawku East District of Ghana and analyses the role of socio-cultural factors, household and gender dynamics as determinants of infant feeding practices and child nutrition. It argues that the existence of beliefs and value systems especially with regard to the cultural administration of water is central to conflicts with exclusive breastfeeding recommendations of WHO and UNICEF.

The paper recommends that policies that seek to improve infant and child health status in developing countries, must recognise and understand the broad complex of dynamics operating at the household and community level affecting feeding behaviour. It also requires that women's knowledge and perceptions on infant feeding are recognised and valued to ensure sustained changes.

Résumé

Les pratiques alimentaires de l'enfant ont été considérées comme l'un des principaux déterminants de leur statut nutritionnel. Elles expliquent dans une grande mesure, le taux important de malnutrition parmi les enfants ghanéens. La relation entre l'allaitement maternel, surtout l'allaitement maternel exclusif, la santé de l'enfant et l'espacement des naissances dans les pays en voie de développement est bien documentée. Cependant, bien que l'allaitement maternel pour le groupe d'âges 0-6 soit largement pratiqué au Ghana, des études montrent que seulement 8% des bébés de moins de 4 mois sont exclusivement nourris du lait maternel, 45% des bébés de trois mois reçoivent un supplément de nourriture autre que le lait maternel. Malgré les efforts faits par le personnel de la santé pour augmenter le pourcentage des bébés nourris exclusivement du lait maternel, la réussite n'a pas été satisfaisante, parce que les pratiques alimentaires restent souvent difficiles à changer. Ceci s'explique par le fait que les pratiques alimentaires sont directement liées à de divers facteurs économiques, socio-culturels et religieux dans la communauté. Elles sont aussi liées à plusieurs dynamiques au sein de la famille.

La communication, en s'appuyant principalement sur les méthodes de recherche qualitatives, fait l'examen des pratiques alimentaires infantiles chez les femmes dont les bébés sont âgés de 0-6 mois

dans deux milieux du district de Bawku Est du Ghana. Elle analyse également le rôle que jouent les facteurs socio-culturels, les dynamiques de genre et le foyer dans le choix des pratiques d'allaitement et de nutrition de l'enfant. La communication avance l'argument que l'existence des systèmes de croyance et de valeur surtout la gestion culturelle de l'eau, constitue le point central des conflits qui rendaient les femmes réfractaires aux recommandations de l'OMS (Organisation Mondiale de la Santé) et de l'Unicef pour l'allaitement exclusif des enfants.

La communication propose que les politiques qui ont pour but d'améliorer l'état de santé du bébé et de l'enfant dans les pays en voie de développement, doivent prendre en compte et comprendre l'énorme complexité des facteurs qui influent sur le comportement alimentaire au niveau du foyer et de la communauté. La communication exige aussi que la connaissance et la perception des femmes en matière de nutrition des enfants soient reconnues et appréciées afin de garantir des changements durables.

Introduction

Malnutrition is a major cause of infant and child mortality in Ghana. In 1998 for example, it was estimated that among children aged 0-36 months, 26% were stunted, 31% were underweight and 12% were wasted (Ghana Statistical Service, 1999). The problem is even more acute in the Northern Savanna Zone, where ecological conditions and higher levels of poverty have resulted in high malnutrition and consequently high morbidity and mortality rates.

Infant feeding practices have been identified as one of the important determinants of children's nutritional status and account to a large extent for the high rates of malnutrition among children in Ghana. The impact of infant feeding practices on the health of children and the importance of encouraging breastfeeding has gained increasing recognition in recent years. Breastfeeding plays an important role in developing countries because of its relationship with child health and birth spacing. Several studies have shown that breastfeeding has beneficial effects on the nutritional status, morbidity and mortality of young children. Breastfeeding is also associated with longer periods of postpartum amenorrhoea, which in turn leads to longer birth intervals and lower fertility levels. (Huffman and Combest 1990). Thus UNICEF has made the promotion of breastfeeding as one of the major components of its strategy to improve child survival. Current breastfeeding recommendations include the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, thereafter breastfeeding with complementary nutritive foods well into the second year of life (WHO 1989; 1993). The Ghana Ministry of Health is promoting these WHO/UNICEF recommendations.

Exclusive breastfeeding is defined as the use of breastmilk as the only source of food, to the total exclusion of other supplementary foods such as formulas, water, juices or teas (Labbok and Krasovec 1990; WHO 1989). Several studies have shown that exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months is beneficial to both infant and mother and enhances child health and survival (Dewey et al 1993; WHO 1989; 1993). In resource poor settings, exclusive breastfeeding is especially crucial as it among other benefits, maximizes intake of breast milk and avoids exposure to potential sources of contamination thus preventing many infections. Early supplementation, especially in areas where sanitation is poor and household water supply is unsafe, can result in infection and lower immunity levels. Infants who are exclusively breastfed have lower risk of exposure to and less severity of diarrhoeal diseases compared to infants who received food supplementation. Infant mortality rates are five times higher for exclusively bottle fed infants, three times higher for mixed fed than for those exclusively breastfed (Huffinan and Combest 1990; Davies-Adetugbo 1997). Clearly then, breastfeeding is associated with a lower risk of morbidity and mortality among infants and exclusive breastfeeding is associated with the lowest risks.

Child survival strategies therefore recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. However evidence particularly from the developing world indicates that exclusive breastfeeding is rare and early supplementation with water, teas or juices or other fluids is the norm (Davies-Adetugbo 1997; Ghana Statistical Service 1999a; Semega-Janneh et al, 2001).

In Ghana breast-feeding is nearly universal. 97% of all children born in the past five years were breast fed for some time (Ghana Statistical Service, 1999a). Even after age 6 months when food supplementation becomes necessary, breastfeeding may continue until after the child's second birthday. However for the age group 0-6 months, although breastfeeding initiation is widely practised in Ghana, with an average duration of 20.4 months, only 17% of children under the age of six months are exclusively breastfed, with 38% fed on breastmilk and water or water based liquids. Food supplementation starts very early. By age 2-3 months, 45% of children are breast feeding and having some form of food supplementation. (Ghana Statistical Service, 1999). Exclusive breastfeeding rates are even lower in the northern part of Ghana, where child malnutrition and resultant morbidity and mortality rates are highest.

Despite efforts of health care providers to promote exclusive breastfeeding, not much success has been achieved, as feeding practices are often directly related to varied economic, socio-cultural and religious factors in the community and to various dynamics prevailing at the household level. Crucial among these as determinants of the nutritional and health status of infants and young children are the socio-cultural factors particularly the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, norms and customs of a community. However, studies on infant and child nutrition often focus on health related aspects, often neglecting the range of factors affecting the care giving environment and the complex range of factors operating at the household and community level which ultimately affect feeding behavior.

Employing mainly qualitative research methods, this paper examines infant feeding practices of women with children 0-6 month in the Bawku East District of Ghana, in the context of WHO/UNICEF recommendations, and analyses the role of socio-cultural factors and household dynamics as determinants of infant feeding decisions and child nutrition. It also discusses the implications of breastfeeding behavior for program design and policy in Ghana.

Data Collection

The study was undertaken between the period November, 1998 and May, 1999 in the Bawku East District of Ghana. The study employed mainly a qualitative and participatory research approach using trials of improved practices (TIPs) as core method.

Two study sites were selected from the District, Bawku town, an urban area and the District Capital, and Garu-Tangzug, a rural settlement located 30 kilometers from Bawku town. The selection of the two areas as a study site therefore served as a basis for examining the infant feeding practices among mothers of varied ethnic groups, socio-economic backgrounds and residence (rural/urban) patterns.

A sample of 30 mothers with children aged 0-6 months were randomly selected from households with the target population of children 0-6 months, from the two study sites. These 30 mothers formed the core study subjects. 24 Key informant and in-depth interviews were also undertaken with community, opinion and religious leaders, traditional healers, traditional birth attendants (TBAs), mothers, grandmothers/mothers-in-law, in the two study sites, as well as Health Care providers and Policy Makers at the regional and district levels. Focus group discussions, 24-hour dietary recall, Food Frequency Assessments and observations were also undertaken. Discussions centered on the cultural perceptions of breastfeeding and infant feeding in general, the first events including first feeds after birth, exclusive breastfeeding, expression of breastmilk and wet nursing, methods for enhancement of lactation, breastfeeding taboos and problems, other foods and weaning. These provided an understanding of the knowledge, attitudes, practices and community perceptions and images pertaining to child feeding.

Trials of improved practices (TIPS) (Dicken et al 1997) were the main method used. Using a three-visit protocol, exclusive breastfeeding recommendations were tested in homes by discussing possible improved practices, negotiating specific practice changes and obtaining an understanding of the constraints and motivations for each practice change.

The Setting

The Bawku East District is located in the North-Eastern corner of Ghana. It is bounded by the Republics of Burkina Faso and Togo to the north and east. The international boundaries have serious implications on health service delivery in the district. The vegetation is mostly semi-arid and sparse shrubs and trees. Population density is high with an average of 87 persons per sq. km, which is the nation's highest outside of the capital region of Greater Accra. Densities in the cultivated areas of Bawku East District reach 270 persons per sq. km. As a result, good quality farmland is limited, consequently posing a severe strain on household resources and incomes.

The primary economy of the District is subsistence farming, with wholesale and retail trading activities taking place mainly in the towns. Crops grown are cereals, legumes and vegetables in the rainy season, and vegetables especially onions and tomatoes in the dry season under small irrigation schemes. Livestock are also reared. Men are mainly responsible for cattle rearing while women rear smaller animals such as goats and poultry.

Irregular rainfall and declining soil fertility have resulted in low crop yields and inadequate levels of food production, thus making the district a food deficit region. Compared to the rest of the country, the area experiences shortages of food with greater intensity because of the single rainfall season and the frequency of drought. The situation is further compounded by the fact that basic cash crops in the region are also food crops and many rural households sell off food crops to satisfy non-food needs, often leading to a long pre-harvest "hungry season" from about February to July. These factors coupled with limited opportunities for off-farm sources of rural employment have resulted in high levels of food insecurity and poverty in general. Welfare indices in the region are among the lowest in the country. Only 33% of the total number of children of school going age (5-14 years) were enrolled in primary and Junior secondary school in 1996 (five-year Medium Term Development Plan, Bawku East, 1996), and access to health care facilities is poor.

The poverty level is one of the highest in the country with 71% living below the poverty line compared to a national average of 40% (Ghana Statistical Service 1999b). In defining the parameters of the poorest in the society, women are particularly vulnerable because they do not control the agricultural resources and do not have the same opportunities as men to migrate because of their reproductive roles. The child malnutrition rate in the District based on weight-for-age assessment is one of the highest and is on the increase (Presbyterian Church of Ghana 1998).

The District is heavily influenced by migration of mostly young men, but sometimes of whole families to the southern part of the country. The pattern of migration has changed from the initial colonial period when forced labour conscription from northern Ghana to southern Ghana mines and cocoa plantations was official policy, to the present where environmental pressures and the relative shortages of land have forced seasonal as well as permanent patterns of migration from the area.

Household Organisation and Gender Relations

A majority of people in the district live in compounds made up of clusters of circular mud huts thatched with grass. More wealthy households use cement blocks and roof with aluminum sheets. The size of each compound depends on the number of wives and adult sons in the household. Polygynous marriages are the norm. Each wife occupies separate quarters within the extended family compound.

However the compound may include a number of "households" or production / consumption units. Each compound is headed by a "Head" or "Landlord". This can mean that any one compound may house large numbers of adults and children, all dependent on the same portion of farmland.

The traditional household structure in the district is based on male headed units of extended families, with a clear division of economic responsibilities of ensuring the welfare of all household members based mainly on age and sex. Men are regarded as household heads and breadwinners and charged with the responsibility for the welfare of all household members. Women mainly supplement household income, as well as providing their own personal needs. Women were also primarily responsible for all reproductive activities including all child care, cooking, collecting water and fuelwood. Child bearing and caring roles are mainly the direct responsibility of mothers, under the supervision of mothers-in-law where they are present in the household. Fathers play a limited role of provision of financial support. Household decision making is mainly taken by men sometimes in consultation with women. Decisions on health care attendance are however mostly taken by mothers and mothers-in-law.

However, with increasing social change, several changes have occurred in the structure of the household as well as in gender divisions of labour in reproductive tasks and the responsibilities associated with these, with women taking on a large part of household responsibilities for the daily needs of households. Despite these changes, women's traditional responsibility for reproduction and productive tasks have remained, while new gender roles have been added, thus increasing women's workloads (Awumbila and Momsen 1995).

The household in the Bawku East District is structured with status being principally determined by sex and age, thus creating hierarchies headed by senior males. The woman's image and status in the society is viewed within her maternal role. Her prestige, security and the harmony of her family relationships are dependent on the number of children she bears and rears. The woman's status in the family is subordinate to men's. The subordinate position of women is reinforced by social norms and religious beliefs, and an inheritance system which precludes wives from inheriting their husband's property, including land, such that women are under the control and authority of males throughout their lives. Thus the society is in essence a male dominated one with women having unequal access to several resources compared to men.

The society is based on a patrilineal and patrilocal system of gender relations. Thus land and property are passed on from father to sons. Distribution of a Landlord's assets on his death has implications for all members of the extended family. All male members of the extended family have a title to his assets. All sons are entitled to a portion of land and some livestock. Each son's share of land and assets is in proportion to his age and seniority with the youngest receiving the smallest portion. A woman's food and livelihood security may depend on a very complex set of familial relations. These would include whether she has sons or not, whether they are older sons, whether if she has a son his share of the land is enough to support his wives and children and herself etc.

Women's access to resources in the District, as found in other parts of Ghana, is substantially less than that of men. Women's access to, ownership and control of productive resources are to a large extent determined by kinship systems headed by men in families, and customary laws, norms and practices that give men control over land and other resources owed by the family. Women's limited access to productive resources has been suggested as key to understanding their subordinate position in society and to explaining gender inequality in Ghana (Robertson and Berger 1986).

For example, land relations, which are critical to women's rights in the District due to the central role of agriculture in meeting livelihood needs, often reflect gender, class and kinship relations and are implicated in their reproduction. The major ways in which women acquire rights in land is mainly through their lineage, through marriage and through contractual arrangements. Women's access to land is however affected by tenurial arrangements and inheritance systems as well as land use patterns.

The land tenure system in northern Ghana is characterised by communal ownership, with individual descent groups headed by men owing portions. Thus theoretically, each member of a kinship group, male or female has rights to land by virtue of membership of the group. However in practice, the situation is different. The authority to decide on land allocation to individuals is delegated to male descent group heads or households heads, with women's access depending on the goodwill of male members of the kin groups. A woman's rights to land are therefore through men, husband, brothers, fathers or sons. Secondly, most of the land allocated for farming is inherited under a patrilineal system of inheritance with the majority of women deriving their use-rights from husbands. Wives do not inherit from their husband's property, and remain in a disadvantageous position. As a result of these gender inequalities, women's farms tend to be smaller than men's farms (Awumbila and Momsen 1995).

Domestic level changes in land use have however occurred over the last few decades, which have affected women. In polygynous households, women are now frequently given the use of portions of their husband's land for growing cash crops. In some communities where there is less pressure on land, women are occasionally granted use of uncultivated land, but this is uncommon and would only apply to women who are heads of households.

These household and gender dynamics have implications for decision making in the household and particularly for infant feeding choices and options that women make.

Current Infant Feeding Practices

Initiation of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is almost universal in the Bawku East District with average duration of 24 months and a maximum of 48 months. It is considered good for both baby and mother, nutritionally ideal for baby, convenient and cheap. However practices regarding initiation, frequency and duration and introduction of supplementary feeding vary.

Breastfeeding starts a few hours after delivery to three days after birth depending on the type of influence from mother-in-law and the mother's exposure to health/nutrition information. The average starts between 4-12 hours after delivery. A few women initiate breastfeeding after two days and attribute this delay to the need to wait to have "blood" breastmilk converted to "good" milk. In such cases, some women depend on a wet nurse until the milk appears acceptable – a declining practice. Others give water or herbs until the second or third day before giving breastmilk to the babies, in situations where there is no other breastfeeding mother within that vicinity. This was to purge the baby and clean the stomach.

Most mothers use both breasts to feed their baby at a feed. The general perception was that, both breasts have the same quantity and quality of breast milk. A quarter of women, predominantly in the urban area, perceived each breast as performing a different function and therefore the need to feed from both breasts at each feed. The left breast was perceived to provide food, while the right provides water. Hence the "food providing breast" must always be given to the child for longer periods than the "water providing breast". These women were mainly from ethnic groups whose origins are in Burkina Faso, Togo and Niger. Hence this perception was more common among the migrant population of Bawku.

There appeared to be some differences in the timing of initiation of breastfeeding by residence. Babies born to urban mothers were more likely to be breastfed within three hours of birth (80%) than babies born to mothers in rural areas (13%). Of the five babies breastfed after 12 hours, four were from the rural area. The Demographic and Health Survey in 1998 (Ghana Statistical Service 1999a) similarly found that urban babies and babies of mothers with at least secondary education were more

likely to breastfeed within an hour of birth. This difference by residence is probably due to the influence of health education and intervention measures to promote exclusive breastfeeding in the urban area of Bawku.

Gender and Breastfeeding

Although the findings did not indicate any current gender differentials in the timing of breastfeeding initiation, or in the introduction of non-breast milk food, in-depth interviews with grandmothers, traditional healers and birth attendants revealed that these differences existed in the past. Traditionally baby boys were breastfed after three days while girls were breastfed after four days. This practice appears to be linked to the culture in the area where even numbers are associated with females and odd numbers with males. Thus funerals of males are performed over a period of three days and four days for females, females are buried with four cowries and three for males.

Colostrum and Prelacteal Feeds

The role of colostrum in fighting infections and promoting growth and development of the newborn is widely acknowledged. Colostrum feeding has been found to decrease infant morbidity especially in developing countries by reducing the risk of diseases and infections such as diarrhea, gastroenteritis, respiratory and other infections (Huffman and Combest 1990; Holman and Grimes 2001). This role is often mediated by differences across cultures in the acceptability of colostrum and the prevalence of prelacteal feeding. The feeding of various substances prior to the first breastfeed has been reported in many communities around the world. A common reason for giving pre-lacteal feeds is often the rejection of colostrum as unclean or unwholesome and in some cultures the belief that it is harmful.

In the Bawku area, although colostrum is traditionally perceived as dirty and unwholesome, discarding of colostrum is currently not widely practiced. About three-quarters of babies were given colostrum, which supports earlier findings in the area (Abugri and van der Heide 1997). A quarter of mothers however thought that colostrum should be expressed and discarded and that breastfeeding should not be initiated until "white or clean milk" begins to flow. The practice of discarding colostrum was higher in the rural area (40%) than in the urban area (14%), probably indicating the influence of health education and public health interventions and urbanisation on child feeding practices. The main reasons given for discarding colostrum were:

- It is "dirty" and can cause baby to contract disease
- It contains blood or pus and is therefore not good for babies.
- it causes abdominal pains, diarrhoea and other digestive problems
- It is bad blood, which has stayed in the breast for nine months of pregnancy.

A universal name for colostrum did not exist in any of the local languages. Instead colostrum was referred to in Kusaal language as "first milk, yellow milk, dirty milk or dense milk" interchangeably. During in-depth interviews, the similarity between colostrum and pus or blood was often noted. Breast milk only became pure or clean after it had changed from yellowish to the whiter color of mature milk. While waiting for "clean" milk to flow, women would use a wet nurse to provide breastmilk to their babies or give water with herbs. The practice of wet nursing was however noted to be on the decline in the area due to health/nutrition information and education. Many mothers now see this practice as promoting infection. The practice now was to give babies water with herbs while waiting for "clean" milk to flow.

Exclusive breastfeeding

Only a third of children 0-6 months were exclusively breastfed. More mothers in Bawku town (40%) were practising exclusive breastfeeding compared to the rural area of Garu-Tanzug (26%). The introduction of prelacteal feeds especially water prevented the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Warm water is typically given to baby within the first hour to 3 days after birth. Shea butter, glucose and herbs are put into water solutions. The main reason for giving water early is for religious and customary purposes, that is, to fulfil the custom of welcoming visitors including “newborns” with water as a sign of welcome.

Some mothers add shea butter (to fill the stomach) or herbs (such as *Sampuliong* among the Kusasi ethnic group, to stop navel pains) to the water. Other substances given are gripe water (to stop navel/stomach pains) and special water washed from a slate on which Islamic verses had been inscribed, for protection against diseases. Some reasons assigned for giving water at this tender age include to:

- Fill stomach and induce sleep
- Promote abdominal comfort, and stop navel pains
- Stop heartburn and hiccoughs
- Quench thirst after struggling during labour period
- Lubricate/moisten throat of the baby
- Welcome the baby into the world. Every living thing must be given water.

When mothers were asked if they thought exclusive breastfeeding for six months was possible, they thought it would be difficult. The major reason given was the infants need for water. There was the general perception that water is essential for an infant's normal growth, to quench thirst and to promote digestion. Breastfeeding without supplementary water is “not possible, the baby will become thirsty” and will not develop normally. However the major reason attributed for introducing water during focus group discussions was to fulfil the custom of welcoming visitors including “newborns” with water as a sign of welcome. As one grandmother summarised, “It is bad to deny a new born child water. When that is done the child will return to God and will report that s/he has been denied water. Because s/he was not wanted. Water is life.”

Expression of Breastmilk

To facilitate exclusive breastfeeding, the use of expressed breastmilk is recommended by health officials when the mother is away from home. In the study area, the use of expressed breastmilk was culturally unacceptable. None of the lactating mothers, traditional birth attendants, grandmothers nor health workers ever expressed breastmilk nor recommended it for practice. It was perceived as a “bad” practice because it could easily be contaminated, poisoned, bewitched or turn sour and cause illness. Health workers thought it could become contaminated if not refrigerated, and therefore it was unsafe for the rural environment. They would prefer that water be given to baby in the mother's absence.

Supplementary Feeding and the Weaning Process

Figure 1 summarises the feeding patterns and the sequence of weaning in the Bawku East District. Food supplementation starts by age two months with porridge (*koko*) made from fermented millet or corn dough with little or no sugar. The consistency of the porridge is initially light and often diluted with water, but made thicker as the child grows older. By age four months, 40% of children in the sample were breastfeeding and having some form of supplementation. Semi-solid foods such as thicker porridge and soups are introduced from 4 months. By six months solid foods such as mashed yam, *tuo zafi* (TZ) and

soup are introduced. Other supplements are orange juice and weanimix. No gender differentials were observed in weaning patterns.

The introduction of non-breastmilk was not common in the area due to its expense and inaccessibility. Women in the urban area were more likely to introduce milk formula than rural women. Among reasons given was the perception that they lacked enough breastmilk and to make babies grow fast and healthy. The general perception was that breastmilk is better than infant formula, makes babies healthier, and protects the child against diseases such as diarrhoea. It was also perceived to make the child more intelligent and wise. Breastmilk was also seen as free and always available.

Figure 1
Feeding Patterns of Infants in the Bawku East District

Food or Drink	Days				Rest of Month	2	3	4	5	6
	1	2	3	4						
Prelacteal Feed	x	x	x							
Water	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x
Glucose solution	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x
Fruit (orange) juice							X	x	x	x
Breastmilk	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x
Diluted Porridge (koko)						x	X	x	x	
Weanimix							X	x	x	x
Thicker Porridge								x	x	x
Tuo and Soup									x	x
Adult food									x	x

Source: Fieldwork, 1999

Several factors influence a woman's decision to introduce supplementary feeding, among which are the belief that if solids are not introduced early enough the child will not learn how to eat, the need to protect the mother from losing too much weight; as well as mother's need to work away from home, mostly in the markets or on farms. As discussed earlier, the major occupations of women in the district are retail trading in the urban areas and subsistence as well as cash crop farming in the rural areas. Trading of foodstuffs and consumables such as sugar, milk and soap means that women often have to travel long distances outside Bawku and into neighbouring Burkina Faso and Togo to purchase items for sale. They also spend long hours in the markets retailing these items. For the majority of women in the rural areas, their labour is critical on the household farm on which millet and sorghum are grown for household use, as well as on their own private fields on which are grown crops such as groundnuts and beans for sale. As a result children are often left in the care of older siblings at home. This has implications for infant feeding practices in the area.

The weaning process is usually completed in between 24 to 48 months. However breastfeeding can be terminated prematurely if the lactating mother becomes pregnant. Pregnant women are not expected to breastfeed according to Kusasi culture. If a pregnant women breastfeeds, it is believed that both the

breastfeeding child and the fetus could be harmed. Cessation of breastfeeding with pregnancy has been found in several other cultures (Dettwyler 1986).

Household Dynamics and Feeding Practices

Family and household members including husbands, mothers and mothers in law, all have been observed to have an influence on infant feeding. The household among the Kusasi and other ethnic groups who inhabit the rural parts of the District is a complex social institution in which various forms of hierarchy come together to give clear lines of super-ordination and subordination, with the status markers being age, gender and marital status (Whitehead 1981). The hierarchy in the household is reflected by the spatial arrangements of huts, which reflects the division of social space within the compound. A high status in the household is reflected by the proximity of location of one's hut to that of the household head.

Women pass through various stages in their life course from being a young unmarried adult, through early and late reproductive stages to the post childbearing stage, and these have their appropriate terminology in the Kusaal language. During each stage in the life course, females have clear-cut biological, economic and cultural roles. These stages are determined mainly by age, marital status and relationship to Head of the household, which in turn determine the status of a woman in the household and sometimes the type of tasks performed and the amount of time allocated to particular tasks, and her role in household decision making.

The Kusasi society is patrilineal, with patriarchal social structures in which women marry into a man's patrilineage and are expected to produce sons to ensure the future of the kinship group. The position of the young wife as the newest member of the lineage, required to earn approval from its older members, improves as she grows older, bears children and gains the right to assistance from younger wives, leaving her free to engage in activities outside the household. Responsibility for housework and childcare is progressively shifted to teenage daughters and then to the daughter-in-law and the senior wife's role rapidly becomes supervisory. Thus as women grow older and leave child bearing behind, they often gain considerable respect, power and economic control and take part in household decision making. Thus women's informal power tends to increase with age. The role of the mother in law in household decision making especially in terms of childcare and infant feeding is therefore crucial. Thus it is important to consider at the household level, ways in which women are not an undifferentiated category. Household relationships usually embody relationships of power, domination and subordination even among one gender, often based on age and gender (Wolf 1990). Strategies to improve on infant feeding need to recognise these dynamics at the household level and how they shape infant feeding decisions.

A key finding was that mothers-in-law were often the primary decision-makers regarding infant feeding practices. Elderly women and older co-wives in the household were also influential in feeding decisions. In nearly all households where the mother-in law was present, she played a dominant role in deciding breastfeeding initiation and the timing of the introduction of food complements and supplementary foods. This pattern occurred because of their higher status within the household and the extended family system. Although women generally have a lower status in the household compared to men, as they progress along the life course, moving from the status of a wife to a mother-in law and a grandmother, they gain power and authority in the household over women in the earlier stages of the life course. As a result, wives often hesitate to contradict the opinion of their mothers-in-law regarding feeding decisions and will often implement these decisions even when they contradict recommendations made by health professionals.

This indicates the need to target all-important actors in the community in breastfeeding intervention strategies. The dynamics at the household level and the role of mothers-in-law as influential persons

and as custodians of the customs and beliefs also needs to be recognized. Strategies which target only mothers, on the assumption that they are solely responsible for family nutrition, may fail to change infant feeding practices.

Beliefs, Values and Perceptions on Breastfeeding

Infant feeding practices, including whether and how to breastfeed, are supported in all cultures by a web of meanings and values. In Ghana, traditional beliefs and attitudes on appropriate infant feeding practices have important implications for the nutritional status of the child directly. In various parts of Ghana, various beliefs exist which tend to impact on child survival and health through for instance withholding breast milk from children for the first few days and infection through contaminated foods and fluids.

Knowledge about the socio-cultural factors affecting women's beliefs and attitudes, motivations and behaviour with regard to breastfeeding are often the least understood among factors affecting breastfeeding. The study observed the existence of cultural and social beliefs which encourage breastfeeding for a long duration, but also the early introduction of prelacteal feeds and food supplementation before six months, which inhibits the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. For example, the cultural / traditional value systems attached to the administration of water to new born babies as a sign of welcome was deeply rooted. Specifically, the custom that every visitor including the newborn must be welcomed into the family with water, otherwise the "visitor," in this case the newborn will "return" to where it came from, appeared to be very difficult to change. This belief was reinforced by the general perception that infants need additional fluids especially water to maintain their water balance. However studies show that exclusively breastfed infants do maintain adequate hydration even in warm climates (Sachdev et al 1991). A summary of beliefs and attitudes about breastfeeding are summarised in Table 1.

Implications for Policy

Thus an analysis of local knowledge and attitudes towards breastfeeding indicates that women have knowledge and perceptions on infant feeding which optimize the benefits of breastfeeding to mother and child, as recommended by WHO 1989; 1993).

These include:

- Breastfeeding is almost universal and of long duration (2-4 years)
- Breastfeeding is done on demand rather than to a schedule
- Breastmilk is perceived to be better than infant formula for healthy development of infants and for mother-child bonding
- Colostrum even though traditionally perceived as "dirty" is given by many mothers (three quarters) to stimulate milk production

There were however also other practices, which do not optimize infant feeding, which include

- Delayed initiation of breastfeeding (more than 12 hours)
- Discarding of colostrum by some mothers
- Prelacteal feeding with water and herbs, ritual fluids is the norm
- Exclusive breastfeeding is not widely practiced
- Early introduction of supplementary foods

Thus a “culture of infant feeding” exists in which breastfeeding is central, but exclusive breastfeeding is not widely practiced or accepted. Even though breastmilk is seen as the best food for infants, there is also a strong feeling that infants need water to survive and that breastmilk alone cannot provide all the nutritional needs of infants for six months. The study finds several practices which are in conflict with the practice of exclusive breastfeeding, but it finds that the most important conflict between local knowledge and beliefs and current breastfeeding recommendations is on the issue of giving water to babies. Perceptions on the infant’s need for water both for nutritional (humans need water to survive) and especially for customary purposes (for life) implies that this practice may be difficult to change. This is particularly important in this context where only 16% of the population in the district has access to pipe borne water (Ghana Statistical Service 1999a). Unclean water is one of the major sources of contamination and infection in infants in developing countries, leading to higher rates of infant morbidity and mortality. It is therefore necessary that health care providers and policy makers recognize and understand these cultural factors in intervention programs to improve infant nutrition and child health.

Infant feeding and breastfeeding in particular is often best understood as a bio-cultural phenomena, that is influenced and determined by both biological and cultural factors, so that rather than look for one universal human strategy, the best method may be contingent on local and household environment, cultural customs and beliefs and the particular situation of mother and child. Within these, women negotiate practices within a complex web that includes their cultural beliefs, assessment of their own local environment and their child’s nutritional status, as well as their own personal circumstances.

Conclusion

The implications of these findings are that efforts to modify infant feeding practices must take into account the many influences on feeding practices, and will need to recognize and understand the broad complex of factors and dynamics operating at the household and community level which affect feeding behavior. They also require that women’s knowledge and perceptions on infant feeding are recognized and valued, and that all stakeholders participate in decision making if sustained changes are to be ensured.

Such considerations are of current importance especially in counselling regarding infant feeding options in HIV/AIDS response and prevention strategies. Strategies to prevent or reduce mother to child transmission (MTCT) of HIV/AIDS needs to take into account the range of perceptions and cultural values and issues on infant feeding in determining the best recommendations to give mothers, not only to minimize the risk of HIV transmission to infants, but also to minimize the high risk of morbidity, mortality and other problems related to infant feeding in resource poor settings. A better understanding of these issues will help inform policy options about infant feeding for all categories of women.

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**Table 1:
Beliefs On Breastfeeding Practices In Bawku East District**

Belief	Reasons/Perceived Cause	Effect on Mother/Child	Remedy/Treatment
Colostrum is not good for child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is water • It is dirty • It is blood or pus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child gets diarrhoea • Child does not grow well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discard first yellowish milk • give water • use "wet nurse"
Milk is bad or spoilt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk is watery • Milk has no taste • Ants inside breasts • Engorged breasts • Punishment from gods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child gets diarrhoea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use herbs e.g. sampuliong" • conduct milk "test" • pacify gods
Lactating mother should not eat certain foods, e.g. slimy soups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes breastmilk bad/slimy • does not enhance milk production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of breastmilk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eat legumes e.g. groundnuts and vegetables
Do not breastfeed while lying down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk can pass through ears of baby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ear Infection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always sit up to breastfeed
Baby must be given water after delivery before breastmilk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every visitor or stranger must be given water as a welcome sign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If water is not given, child may "return" i.e. die. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be given water soon after birth.
Each breast has a different function. Left breast is food and right is water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left breast is bigger than right one 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left breast produces more milk than right one 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always feed more on left breast

Source: Field work, December, 1998

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

PLEASE follow these guidelines closely when preparing your paper for submission. The editors reserve the right to reject illegible or otherwise inadequately prepared papers.

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