



## The Position of Women in the Social and Political History of Ghana *Gana'nın Sosyal ve Siyasi Tarihinde Kadınların Rolü*

Usman ABASS\*

Assist. Prof. Dr. Füsun ÇOBAN DÖŞKAYA\*\*

### Özet

1961 yılında kurulan Amerikan Barış Gönüllülerinin resmi amacı ABD'yi diğer devletlere tanıtmak ve az gelişmiş ülkeler için işgücü sağlamaktır. Ancak bu kurum Soğuk Savaş sırasında Sovyetler Birliği'ne karşı silahsız bir kuvvet olarak kullanıldı. Gana, Amerikan Barış Gönüllülerinin ilk gönderildiği ülkedir. Bunda kuşkusuz, Gana'nın Sahra altı Afrika'sında 1957'de sömürge egemenliğinden bağımsızlığını kazanmış ilk ülke olmasının ve geleceğinin umut verici gözükmesinin etkisi vardır. Gana Afrika'nın önemli ülkelerinden biridir ancak cadılığa inanıldığı ve "cadı kamplarının" olduğu bir yerde kadın olmak zordur. Bu çalışma, Gana'nın sosyal, ekonomik ve siyasi tarihlerinde kadınların konumunu sömürgecilikten bugüne kültürel ve politik değişiklikler dönemi ile incelemektedir. Ganalı kadınlar bağımsızlık öncesi ve sonrası dönemde siyasete önemli katkıda bulunmuş ve 1950'lerden bağımsızlığa dek ulusun milliyetçi duygularını oluşturma konusunda aktif olarak yer almışlardır. Dördüncü Cumhuriyet, ülkenin sosyo-ekonomik kalkınmasına kadınların katılımında bir artışa tanık olsa da, kadınların sayı ve varlıkları düşük kalmaktadır. Çalışma, bu nedenle, kültür ve siyasi güçlerin toplumsal cinsiyet dinamiklerinin, Gana toplumunda kadınların kimliklerini, isteklerini, çıkarlarını ve kendi kaderlerini tayin ediş biçimlerini araştırmaktadır. Çalışmada, ayrıca, Ganalı kadınların ulusal meselelerde marjinalleştirici rolü ile daha sonra 1993'te eşitlik ve katılım vaadiyle demokratik yönetime geçişin kadınların istek ve kimliklerinin seslerini şekillendirişi arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Gana, Kadın, Siyaset, Cadı Kampları, Toplumsal Cinsiyet

### Abstract

The official aim of the US Peace Corps established in 1961 was to introduce the United States to other countries and to provide a workforce for underdeveloped

\* Dokuz Eylül University, M.A. student, Social Sciences Institute, usman\_abass@yahoo.com

\*\* Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Letters, American Studies Department,  
fcdoskaya@hotmail.com

*countries. However, they were used as an unarmed force during the Cold War period against the Soviet Union. Ghana is the first country to which United States Peace Corps, volunteers were sent. Undoubtedly, it has got something to do with the fact that Ghana is the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence from colonial domination in 1957, and that its future looked promising. Ghana is one of the important countries of Africa, but it is difficult to be a woman in a place where the belief in witchcraft is widespread, and there are "witch camps." This study examines the position of women in the social, economic and political histories of Ghana, through a period of cultural and political changes, from colonialism to date. Ghanaian women made a significant contribution to the politics of pre- and post-independent Ghana, and they were actively involved in building the nation's nationalistic sentiments from the 1950's through to independence. Although the Fourth Republic is witnessing an increase in women's participation in the socio-economic development of the country, their numbers and substance remain low. The study, thus, examines how the gender dynamics of culture and political forces have shaped women's identities, ambitions, interests, and self-determination within the Ghanaian society. Also, the study seeks the affinity between the marginalizing role of women in national affairs, and later how the transition to democratic governance in 1993, with a promise of equality and inclusiveness, has shaped the voices of women's ambitions and identities.*

**Keywords:** *Ghana, Women, Politics, Witch Camps, Gender*

Many studies have been made on the political development of Africa. However, much is yet to be done with regards to the indispensable position and the role of women and the continuing efforts they are showing for an identified voice in national issues. This study compares the socio-political position of women before and during colonialism, during the decades of several political transformations through civilian regimes and military interventions, to how traditional cultural practices are playing against women's rise to top-level leadership in Ghana. Such socio-political prejudices against Ghanaian women have created an asymmetrical relationship, where the weaker continues to be subordinated and denied the freedom and individualism to transform power-based ideologies to challenge the dominant force. It is in this context that the study looks at the current dynamics of culture, politics, and gender issues against women within the national political discourse of Ghana.

### **1. The Precolonial Period**

The area demarcating Ghana was habitable since the early Stone Ages, i.e., about 50,000 years ago. Bands of wandering migrants with superior technology were able to impose themselves on earlier inhabitants, exerting their supe-

riority on them. The Akan and Ga-Dangme were the first distinct people to emerge in the region around the tenth century (Gocking 2005: 11). The diffusion of iron technology, from these wanderers, around the fourth century C.E, enhanced farming in the rainforest and contributed to the development of specialization, urbanization, state formation, and territorial expansion (Gocking 18).

Gold mining was one of such new specializations to have developed in the rainforest around the fourteenth century C.E. and had a profound impact on state formation and trade in the region. Trade in gold stimulated long-distance trade by establishing trading links between different vegetation zones of West Africa. Notably, trade in gold, salt, and kola nuts flourished and extended to areas of the Niger bend, Mali, Songhai, areas of Hausa-land, the forest area of Ghana, to the Barbary Coast of North Africa. One significance of the trade was that it led to the rise of local currencies. *Cowry shells*, for instance, became the medium by which these trades were carried out. According to Roger S. Gocking for example, the discovery of these *cowry shells* from the Indian Ocean in the settlement mounds at *Kisoto* in the Volta Basin, dating as far back to the fourteenth century, indicate the magnitude of the trade (Gocking 2005).

The attempts at controlling the north-south trade routes, which had begun in earnest as early as the thirteenth century, closely connected the individual tribes and ethnic groups and eventually set in motion the formation of sedentary settlements and state formation. It was along this line of configuration that Meyerowitz posited that the sister states of Dagomba, Mamprussi, and Mossi were founded around the fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century in the basin of the White and Black Voltas. Also, Bono and Banda states were also established to the south of the Black Volta towards the end of the thirteenth century, likewise, the Adansi oral tradition, out of which the Akan peoples are perceived to have originated (Boahen 1966: 215). On the other hand, Jack Goody asserted that it was rather the influence of the Mande-speaking invaders from the north and the northwest over the indigenous peoples that led to the formation of states, such as Mamprugu, Dagbon, Nanumba and Gonja (quoted from Gocking 2005: 19-20) in northern Ghana. The Mande speakers were believed to be of Bambara origin and may have originated from the then disintegrating empire of Mali.

The Gonja state became an important trade hub in the region from the sixteenth to about the eighteenth centuries. Its principal market town of Salaga became an important trade terminus for caravans and traders coming from the rainforest and the northern Sudan. Items of trade in Salaga included gold, salt, clothing, and slaves. The Salaga slave market reached its peak during the Atlan-

tic Trade era and became a famous slave market for acquiring slaves for shipment to the new world. According to Adu Boahen, “the eighteenth century was the golden age of Salaga and eastern Gonja, Dagomba, and north-eastern Asante, mainly because of their trade with the Hausa states and Bornu.”(Boahen 1966: 220)

Similarly, some closely related states with similar social, political and military organizations emerged around Kumasi, from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. These countries, included Tafo, Amakom, Ohwim, Asan-temanso, Kwaaman, etc., and became part of the Asante Empire (Boahen 217). The Akan state of Asante had become a dominant political force in the south of the region by the seventeenth century, forming the Asanti Confederacy. By the eighteenth century, most of the independent states in the north had come under the authority of the Asante Confederacy. Except for the Fante, which in itself is part of the Akan speaking group, more powerful kingdoms did not develop in the coastal area of Ghana even though there was considerable migration into this region (Gocking 2005: 24).

Thus, Boahen emphasized that the Akan, the Ga, the Ewe and the Gur speaking peoples of northern Ghana all evolved in Ghana more than a thousand years ago, and did not sleep until the Europeans arrived. They had developed communication networks, experimented and adapted defined social and political institutions, mined and exploited the natural resources, established commerce with one another and formed states (Boahen 1966: 215-216). The indigence of the region had lived in some isolated and self-contained societies and were bonded by a sense of community and kinship. David Kimble for instance, affirmed that all of the various states to have emerged had their own outlined political system, with political power or authority in most cases wielded by the Chiefs, in whose bosom are laid political power (Kimble 1963: 125). The character of the indigenous political pattern formed was as described by Daryll Forde, classified into three main types. First, there were the small-scale, politically autonomous local communities. Second, were the “dispersed tribal societies,’ without any central organs of government, but linked to one another through ‘traditions of kinship and related religious dogmas and social exchanges supporting the moral values of kinship.” And the third was the politically centralized state, subjected to the authority of a ruler (Kimble 126).

## **2. The Colonial Era: British Rule (1874-1957)**

Ghana, until 1957 was called the Gold Coast. The name “Gold Coast”, was first used by the Dutch in the seventeenth century (Bourret 1960: 1). The name

signified the abundance of gold in the territory, which attracted the Europeans. Like in most West African countries, Ghana's climate had an enormous impact on the political and social organization of the people. The presence of mosquitoes and tsetse fly inhibited the movement of goods and services. Beasts of burdens such as donkeys and horses could not be used for transport or could cavalry to exert political influence; instead, transport had to be by human portage until the arrival of the modern system of transportation (Boahen 2000: 5).

The encounter with the European countries from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, particularly with the British, changed the political and social development of the individual states found on the Gold Coast. In pursuit of "riches" beyond the European continent, these countries set sail across the Atlantic Ocean, resulting in the development of the Atlantic trade. The Portuguese were the first to set foot on the shores of the Gold Coast in 1471, followed by the French, the English, the Dutch and the Danes. The Swedes and Brandenburgers followed and built fortifications (Gocking 2005: 26). These Europeans initially, came to trade the territories spices, gold, ivory and slaves with European textiles, mirrors, iron bars, brassware, copper and iron products (Gocking 2005). Confrontations ensued between these European countries as they attempted to establish a trading monopoly on the coast. First, in 1637 the Dutch successfully dislodged the Portuguese from the Elmina Castle and subsequently expelled them from the Gold Coast in 1642. Also, in 1850 and 1872, the Danes and the Dutch respectively, handed over their holdings on the Gold Coast to the British voluntarily, because they deemed managing their castles and holdings quite expensive on the coast. Thus, by the eve of the French Revolution, Britain had remained as the only European nation on the coast.

The local states had fought and resisted the European presence on the Gold Coast. However, the latter's superiority in firearms proved vital in annexing the local states. Gold Coast was declared a British Crown Colony in 1874 after the British successfully suppressed all potential sources of conflict with the native states. For the next 83 years (1874-1957), Gold Coast came directly under British imperialism. Colonialism under Britain made extensive alterations to the pattern of social life in African societies, which affected the role of women within the African societal context. The gender dynamics of cultural changes imposed by the colonial administration undermined the traditional sources of power women generated, leading to marginalization and subordination of women politically.

The institutionalization of the colonial government at the onset restricted and deprived both males and females of some basic rights in Ghana. For ex-

ample, both genders could not vote, stand for formal political positions, deprived of education, and in most cases, they were offered insufficient employment (Fallon 2003: 527). However, labor required to run and maintain the established institutions forced the colonizers to extend education to the indigenes. The British opted to train the male population over their female counterpart. Thus, the colonizers contributed to class differences by rewarding those who attended colonial schools and offered men power and political advantages. Audrey Smock in the 1970's identified that the effects of colonial intervention over time limited access of women to higher education with the result that the vast majority of top professional and administrative posts were held by men (quoted from Oppong 1975: 71).

When World War II broke out, it had a profound impact on the material welfare and political development of the Gold Coast (Dan-Bright 1998: 110). The Gold Coast had supported the British during the Second World War with both personnel and finances and fought side by side with the British troops. For instance, it is estimated that the Gold Coast had contributed £340,715 as voluntary gifts, £205,000 in war-saving certificates, and £815,000 in interest-free loans; on top of this, the Gold Coast gave over 65,000 men to the various services during the war (Bourret 1960: 143-146; Boahen 2000: 153).

### **3. The Growth of Nationalism and Independent Ghana**

World War II created inflationary tendencies and led to economic crises such as shortage of imported goods, the appearance of black markets, and the high cost of living (Bourret 1960: 154). Also, a significant proportion of the men, who had served in the British army during the war, also had had the opportunity to learn technical and clerical skills, which proved valuable to the Gold Coast cause. The failure of the British Government to fulfill its promises of granting these ex-servicemen jobs upon their return, the colonial government's reluctance to release the cocoa monies held in Britain for the development of the Gold Coast. In 1947-1948, the government's decision to cut down cocoa trees affected by the swollen shoot disease angered many farmers, traders and the unemployed. What compounded the case was also the continued exploitation of the mineral deposits by expatriate mining firms and the steady elimination of the ordinary Ghanaian from the economic field by European, Syrian and Lebanese companies (Boahen 2000: 156). These developments led to agitations against the British government to quicken the pace of granting the colony its independence.

The agitations culminated and resulted in the 1948 riots, where Syrian and European shops and properties were vandalized. Disturbances in Accra lasted for three days, and saw 29 persons killed, 237 injured, and property damaged amounted over £2,000,000 (Bourret 1960: 168-169). The government responded, by arresting six of the UGCC leaders, which included Nkrumah, J.B. Danquah, William Ofori Atta, Akufo Addo, Ako Adjei, and E. Obetsebi Lamptey. The government blamed them for the riots, described them as communist-inspired agitators, and detained them for about eight weeks. They were popularized by this event and became famously known as the “Big Six” (Boahen 2000: 163; Bourret 1960: 169).

From 1947 until independence in 1957, political parties of disparate ideologies, but with the same core purpose of attaining freedom sprang. It began in 1947 with the UGCC, the CPP in 1949, the Muslim Association Party (MAP), the Anlo Youth Organisation (AYO), the Togoland Congress (TC) and the Northern’s People Party. Following the 1948 riots, the British Government constituted the Watson Commission, under the chairmanship of Mr. A.K. Watson, to investigate the reasons for the riots and make recommendations. The Commission affirmed that the causes of the riots were not only political, but economic and social, and made recommendations toward an accelerated autonomy of the Gold Coast. However, the proposal received opposition from the particular conservative element of the British administration (Bourret 169-170).

Thus, the rejection of the Watson Commission’s findings and recommendations led to setting up of the Coussey Committee in 1949, under the chairmanship of Sir Henley Coussey, an African judge, to deliberate on solving the discrepancies. The Coussey Committee recommended the adoption of British type of representative government to the Gold Coast, but with the unicameral legislature in the colony. It suggested a less radical approach and its wisdom was praised and accepted by the British government (Dan-Bright 1998: 114). However, Kwame Nkrumah rejected the recommendations of the Committee, and described the resultant 1950 Constitution as “bogus and fraudulent”, and demanded that “the people of the Gold Coast be granted immediate self-government, based on the Statute of Westminster” (Boahen 2000: 170). Based on the stand taken by the Nkrumah, the British colonial government persecuted the CPP activists, and in 1950 gagged two CPP presses, imprisoned its editors, and arrested, tried and sentenced Nkrumah to prison terms (Boahen 171). While in prison elections were held in 1951 and Nkrumah won. The victory compelled the British administration to release him to form a government. The path to independence has now been set. The CPP went on to win the 1954 and

1956 elections. Nkrumah eventually won independence for Ghana on 6 March 1957.

The Gold Coast became Ghana on 6 March 1957. Ghana is a name taken from the great Sudanic Empire of Ghana, which existed from the fifth to the thirteenth century, northwest of modern Ghana in the Sudanic zone of West Africa (Gocking 2005: 1). This feast was not attained on a silver platter, but by the sacrifices of men and women who stopped at nothing to see their country liberated from the shackles of imperialism.

Ghana is located in West Africa. It has a land size of approximately 238,535 km<sup>2</sup>. Linguistically, the people of Ghana are composed of two principal sub-families; the Gur and the Kwa groups of languages, north, and south of the River Volta respectively. The Kwa group is further divided into the Akan, the Ga-Adangbe, and the Ewe sub-groups. The Gur is also divided into three; Gurma, Grusi, and Mole-Dagbani (Boahen 2000: 1-2). Besides the languages of the Kwa and Gur units, there are some smaller language groups, which appear to be quite distinct from those of the major groupings (Bourret 1960: 10).

Accra has been the nation's capital since 1877 when the capital was moved from Cape Coast by the British imperialists. Ghana has ten administrative regions. The country's overall population per the 2010 Population and Housing index stood at 24,658,823.<sup>1</sup> Several languages and dialects are spoken in Ghana by the over 80 ethnic groups found there. However, the English language is the official language of the land with eleven<sup>2</sup> local languages having the backing of the government and used at various educational levels. Furthermore, Ghana's human development index shows a likely outcome and even a better projection for the future. UNDP's Human Development Index, which measures a country's life expectancy, the level of education, and standard of living, places Ghana's international average above that of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP 2015: 2-4). Conversely, the Gender Development Index shows that women lag behind their male counterparts in access to education and earning a decent standard of living (UNDP 5). Ghana practices a unitary presidential constitutional democratic form of governance.

The political history of modern Ghana, like that of many other countries both in Africa, Europe, and Asia was a period of constant political and economic instabilities. Democratically elected regimes, which sought to side-lined identified bureaucratic groups, such as those of the military and the police

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<sup>1</sup> Bk.Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population & Housing Census, Sakoa Press (2012): 1.

<sup>2</sup> These eleven government-sponsored languages are *Akuapem Twi, Asanti Twi, Dagaare, Dagbanli, Dangme, Ewe, Ga, Gonja, Kasem, Mfantse, and Nzema*.



from openly engaging in national politics risked been usurped from power by these bodies. Thus, these groups, i.e., the army and the police, assumed the mantle of power to intermittently disrupt politics in the country based on their political and economic judgment of the state of the nation at a given period. The constant interference in national politics, by especially the military coupled with their adopted strategies, exerted fear, panic, and intimidation to other citizens of the land, especially women and the youth.

The end of the First Republic ushered in an extended period of coup d'état regimes interspersed with short periods of attempts at the multiparty constitutional rule. From independence in 1957 to the threshold of the Fourth Republic in 1993, the military wing has had a longer ruling period than civilian regimes. The government changed hands five times during this period. The two civilian regimes were the Progress Party, from 1969 to 1972, and the People's National Party, from 1979 to 1981. The rest were three military take-over governments, namely, the National Redemption Council/Supreme Military Council I & II; Armed Forces Revolutionary Council from June to September 1979; and the Provisional National Defence Council also from 1981 to 1993. In some instances, the military intervened to bring down a military government. For example, in 1979, the military brought down a military regime (Hettne 1980: 187). Thus, the general description of Ghana's political scene from 1960-1993 was, to use Naomi Chazan's description of African political scene within this period, replete with examples of failed democratic experiments and with persistent demands for democratic rule (Chazan 1989: 327). However, the democratic path taken by the people of Ghana since 1993 has successfully been sustained into an exciting political environment, beaconing political hopes in the sub-region worthy of emulation. Three political ideologies characterize politics in Ghana; these are socialism, liberalism, and populism.

#### **4. Women in Traditional Ghana Society**

African nations are deeply characterized by gender, class, ethnicity, religion and various other dimensions of identities (Mama 2005: 99). However, historical records in Africa have shown the existence of little or no significant gender inequality in traditional African society, rather the complementary role of women to men (Machakanja 2015: 201). Traditionally, women have served as queen mothers, queens, and in some areas were political chiefs holding offices in towns and villages, and they have served in high positions in the economic life of their societies and engaged in farming or trade. For the most part, Gha-

naian women are singularly autonomous, self-reliant and achievement-oriented.

Christine Oppong, Christine Okali and Beverly Houghton for instance, have described the southern Ghanaian scene concerning women's roles in the economic activity, the independence of women, the high degree of equality between the sexes, and the sharing of financial responsibility. Women were expected to work to raise their levels of living, to be prolific child-bearers, and at the same time responsible for housework (Oppong vd. 1975: 71-72). Again, these women also participated in women's community associations, which allowed for links among women across geographical locations, and they often drew on these links, as well as their political positions, to challenge indigenous and colonial authorities (Fallon 2008: 81).

Within the Akan groups, for instance, the political office was occupied by both men and women. Agnes Aidoo postulated that in the Akan politics, women held an important post; the office of the *ohemaa*, literally female ruler. The female leader derived her position from the matrilineal social organization and had the power to confer political status on the male chief. The *ohemaa* occupies the senior of two stools, which serve jointly as the source of political authority in the state. She was required to hear all legal cases involving the sacred oath of the state and entitled to her separate court, where she was assisted by male and female counselors and functionaries (Aidoo 1977: 1-2). Emmanuel Akyeampong and Pashington Obeng suggested that the very existence of the queen mother at the highest level of state organization signifies the perceived complementarity of power as both male and female (Akyeampong ve Obeng 1995: 490).

Some women, who ruled in succession successfully as chiefs in the Asante polity of Dwaben, include Ama Sewa, Afrakuma Panyin, and Ama Saponmma (Akyeampong ve Obeng 490). The most successful of these queen mothers is Yaa Asantewaa, queen mother of Edweso under the Asante Confederacy. And among the Dagbons of the north, women shared the privilege of nobility and aristocracy by been chiefs of Gundogo, Kpalaga, Kukulogo, and Sasegele (Vieta 1999: 265).

## **5. Women of Ghana During Colonialism under Great Britain**

From the onset of colonization, girls were exempted from attending school because the colonial authorities were only interested in training men for governance and administration. By the time women were allowed to get enrolled in the education system, the educational gender gap was quite considerate. A

different set of subjects were offered for study by either sex and had a profound impact on the development of national political consciousness. Beatrix Allah-Mensah posited that under colonialism women were taught subjects related to managing the home and denied them the right to gain access to the required training needed for full-fledged political activism (Allah-Mensah 2005: 12-13). However, some women received Western education and occupied high status, became opinion leaders, and started to form associations to address their concerns, but the majority of women, on the other hand, remained illiterates largely and were concentrated in self-employed ventures, such as petty trading and farming.

Women activists, such as Evelyn Mansa Amarteifio and Mabel Ellen Dove-Danquah, traveled to England for high education to pick up active political position. Thus, by traveling, women became aware of the range of anti-colonial movements in Britain, where many were organized and in some cases led by British women activists (LaRay 1987: 442).

The establishment of the British administration juxtaposed it on the indigenuous society and introduced financial requirements, political prohibitions, judicial decisions, religious attitudes, and patterns of behavior and values. Western habits, European dress styles, modes of thought and organization were some of the British traits adopted by the locals (Kimble 1963: 132-134). Women were not left out of adapting to these cultural changes. Women founded organizations, such as the Ladies Mutual Club in Sekondi, and Young Ladies' Christian Association (Kimble 134-149). One of the organized Women's groups to have emerged under colonialism was the Native Ladies of Cape Coast (N.L.C.C.). It was a women's voluntary association formed to address the plight of women.

The group was mainly made up of elite women, such as Mary Barnes, Eliz Waldron, and Kate Swanzy, who were not passive and sought to reform both indigenous and colonial patriarchies. The association was pro-democratic in its activities. The N.L.C.C. for instance, elected women officials, which included presidents, secretaries, and treasurers, and advertised their meetings in newspapers, and held formal meetings. In the nineteenth century, the group, relied on the "Ladies Column" in *The Western Echo* newspaper to articulate and spread their interest. The newspaper gendered the public for the betterment of females and signified women's struggles aimed at liberating women from the tentacles of patriarchy (Akurang-Parry 2004: 466-474).

Women featured prominently in the fight for independence. The British government's decision to impose conditional sales (by which women were

forced by the European and Syrian firms to buy some goods they did not want before given those that they needed) on the petty traders and the *Makola* market women in particular. In 1948 when the riot broke out, these women became irritated and actively joined the riots to loot and boycott imported European wares. Again, following the arrest of Nkrumah and the other members of the “Big Six” in 1948, a woman and a seamstress by profession, Hannah Cudjoe, led a group of women, including Akua Asabea Ayisi, A. Ankrah, and Ama Nkrumah, to organize rallies across the country. They demanded their release and collected funds for the defense of the arrested UGCC leaders, even though there was a ban on public meetings. The women’s protest against the detention of the male political activists was the first of its kind in the Gold Coast. The women marked themselves as nationalist and held an open political demonstration (Vieta 1999: 127-131).

In 1949, Kwame Nkrumah and the Committee of Youth Organisations (CYO) of the UGCC, of which Hannah Cudjoe was a stalwart, broke away from the UGCC to form CPP on June 12. As part of the editorial of Nkrumah’s newspaper, the *Accra Evening News* were Mabel Ellen Dove, Akua Asabea Ayisi, and other women, who wrote articles in support of the independence struggle and criticized the British administration. Also, when Nkrumah was imprisoned following his denunciation of the Coussey report and his constant radicalized political ideologies in 1950, these brave women traversed the length and breadth of the country and enrolled men and women into the CPP’s Women Section and the Youth League. They mounted political platforms and advocated for support for Nkrumah, and where necessary, especially with Hannah Cudjoe, she cooked for the group (Vieta 132).

The political activism of these women enabled Nkrumah to win the 1951 elections while still in prison. For their efforts, Sophia Doku, Mrs. Leticia Quaye, Mrs. Hannah Cudjoe and Madam Ama Nkrumah in May 1951 were appointed as propaganda secretaries of the CPP. Nkrumah went on to win the subsequent elections in 1954 and 1956 and won independence in 1957.

## **6. Situation of Women in Modern Ghana**

The emergence of the market economy that initially provided raw materials to Britain, and which required more hands to manage the cocoa farms and the mining sector introduced hired labor. Men dominated the new middle class that developed, and it brought wealth, individual choice, and independence, and advanced status in the society to be concentrated in the hands of men. Thus, Takyiwaa Manuh opined that in the post-independence economy

of Ghana, women have been in constant conflicts with successive regimes over their significant economic undertakings in their pursuit to gain wealth, economic independence and autonomy (Manuh 1993: 177).

The reason for such conflicts was in the fact that women emerged as the greatest losers of both the political and economic transformations that took place. Mansah Prah, for instance, noted that about 23 percent of the literate population were women in 1989; thus, the majority of those who remained lacked education, training, and skills and the majority of women remained in agriculture and selling. The lack of women's access to education accounted for about 85% of them as traders across the country engaging in activities like petty trading, food processing, and marketing food crops (Prah 1996: 412-413).

Women were kept out of top-level positions in the formal employment sector and were expected to be housekeepers, do secretarial jobs and to serve as attendants. For example, the government of Ghana Gazette of 1971 attests to such job discrimination. In January 1971, the National Archives of Ghana, advertised for a job opening for the position of a receptionist and was emphatic that they needed a female to fill that position. The advertisement read as follows:

*Qualification- A female Ghanaian between the ages of 30-40 years; should be in possession of at least the Middle School Leaving Certificate or its equivalent, a keen sense of responsibility; should have an interest in people from all walks of life, be able to speak good and fluent English. Proficiency in at least one Ghanaian Language other than the candidates own will be an advantage. Duties- To receive visitors who call at the offices of the National Archives in Accra and to give them the necessary guidance and directions, and to carry out any other duties which may be assigned to her from time to time (PRAAD 1971: 5).*

Similarly, in 1971 the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation published a vacancy that needed to be filled for commercial, managerial slot:

*Qualifications- Applicant must either a) be a graduate with a degree in Economics or Business Administration... b) ... c) have experienced in the advertising business. He must have very good knowledge of the market in Ghana and must be able to advise potential advertisers on campaign planning on radio and television. He (sic) must be a good salesman, capable of selling radio and television time and ideas to potential advertisers. He (sic)*

*must be a manager and administrator in the business sense (PRAAD 1971). (our emphasis added and italicized).*

Again, in the Electoral and Local Government Reform report submitted by the NLC toward moving the country to a democratic rule in 1969, there was a deliberate attempt at the exclusion of women from the administration of the land. In the appointment of the Chairmanship of Regional Councils, for instance, the Commission, emphatically stated “We, therefore, recommend that the chairman of a regional council and *his* deputy should be elected from among the members of the council and should hold office for one year.” (ADM 1969: 10).

Ergo, the socioeconomic and political system bequeathed to Ghana at independence came with a male face. Kathleen M. Fallon opined that women’s primary concerns such as health, education, discrimination, low wages, land tenure, and conditions of the informal sector, never became priorities for the government (Fallon 2003: 528).

Women’s political and voluntary groups and associations, such as the Ghana Women’s League, the National Federation of Gold Coast Women, the Federation of Ghanaian Women (FEGAWO), the All Women’s Association of Ghana (AWAG), and the 31<sup>st</sup> December Women’s Movement sprang up in post-independent Ghana. They focused on attaining equal rights and opportunities for women in economic, social and political structures, and to struggle against the structures, laws, norms, and practices, which oppress women. However, women and their groups became victims of attacks, especially under the military regimes that came to power. Takyiwaa Manuh affirmed that these accusations and attacks on women were manifested clearly during the 1970s under the period of the Supreme Military Council I & II, during the brief period of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, and reached its peak under the PNDC regime, which intervened in 1981 (Manuh 1993: 177).

Mansah Prah concerted that, under the military governments, women managed to survive by relying on ties of patronage, social networks and their femininity in their trading activities to establish the dominance of the distribution of the economy, which was soon viewed as a threat to male dominance. Under Generals Acheampong and Akuffo (NRC/SMC I & II respectively), it was evidenced that women used their sexual wiles to obtain trading licenses and other favors from the military officers, and were accused and chastised in the media for using their ‘bottom power’ to do business (Prah 2004: 32).

Under Rawlings’ AFRC, the nation’s socioeconomic retrogress was attributed the high prices of goods and the high cost of living to the “greed” and

“evils” of women traders (Dan-Bright 1998: 213). Women were heckled by soldiers and vigilante groups, to the extent that the AFRC decided to raze Makola market and attempted to revise the entire domestic market structure (Chazan 1983: 282). Traders, who violated the government’s directives had their goods seized and disciplined. Such traders, mostly women, had their heads shaved, subjected to public humiliation, and sometimes stripped, paraded and flogged in public (Dan-Bright 1998: 213).

In 1981, “the Second Coming” of Rawlings under the PNDC sent fear and panic among the people, especially, the market woman, who had once suffered under Rawlings’ AFRC regime.<sup>3</sup> When the market women attempted to demonstrate their support for the revolution, they were met with a bitter, hostile behavior. The *Makola* market women drove to Burma camp when they arrived at the barrier to the Recce headquarters at the Gondar Barracks; the soldiers ordered them to return within three minutes or face the consequences.<sup>4</sup> They were chased out because authorities considered them as enemies of the people and the state. They were accused of being the primary cause of profiteering and cheating in the society. Their opened show of support to the PNP where they made donations of various sums of money to the proscribed People’s National Party (PNP) suggested they were against the revolution, and they were accused of selling milk, rice and other commodities above the control price, ranging from 200 to 500 percent.<sup>5</sup>

No one took the views of traders themselves into account as they were persistently depicted as hoarders, profiteers, and enemies of the revolution. The economic measures of the various regimes unfairly victimized women. Mrs. Kate Parkes, general secretary of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), shared the same sentiment. She noted that the canker and evil of “kalabule” were introduced by a few influential economic giants for their financial interest and gains, and therefore, the women selling in the hot sun in the markets were not the real culprits or agents of “kalabule.”<sup>6</sup>

Democratization process is meant to promote equity and more balanced gender participation in the political life by assessing the position of women and men in democratic processes. However, women have persistently been ex-

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<sup>3</sup> Bk. *The Ghanaian Times*, Friday, January 1, 1982. No. 7,473. (Accra).

<sup>4</sup> Bk. “Makola Mums’ Demo Flops-Troops Chase ‘em out of camp,” *The Ghanaian Times*, Thursday, January 7, 1982. No. 7, 478.

<sup>5</sup> Bk. “Makola Mums’ Demo Flops-Troops Chase ‘em out of camp,” *The Ghanaian Times*, Thursday, January 7, 1982. No. 7, 478.

<sup>6</sup> Bk. Tom Dorkenoo, “A Way of Dealing with ‘kala’,” *The Ghanaian Times*, Tuesday, January 5, 1982, p. 3.

cluded from the processes in Ghana. Ergo, there are a lot of socio-cultural challenges that obstruct the engagement of women in the active democratization process in Ghana. Among these cultural impediments, including a high level of illiteracy, sexual exploitation of women in politics, poverty, domestic responsibilities, and the age-old stereotype attitudes and behaviors of a different gender role in the societies.

One of such cultural impediments is the absence of clothing for women in certain cultural celebrations and events. This occurs mostly in the celebration of puberty rites among the Krobo and Ashanti ethnic groups, where young girls are paraded half-naked and decorated with beads with their breasts exposed. These ceremonies marked the entry of young women into adulthood.

Again, one of the cultural impediments that obstruct women's political activism in Ghana is poverty and the domestic burden imposed on them. For instance, in Ghana, available statistical information suggests that one in four women (27%) married before the age of 18.<sup>7</sup> This together with age-old discriminatory traditional practices against women, such as witchcraft, female genital mutilation (FGM), and widowhood rites inhibits freedom and liberty of women. The widowhood rites in the three northern regions of Ghana, most especially, violate the human rights of women and put them under psychological and emotional torture. According to the Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM), women accused of killing their husbands are tortured. They are stripped naked, their hairs shaved and humiliated at the market square, forced to stay with the corpse for some days, and compelled to drink concoctions prepared with leaves, hairs and fingernails of their late husbands<sup>8</sup> to prove their innocence.

Also, closely-tied to the widowhood rite is witchcraft, where women most especially, are accused of evil acts and banished from the society into separate witch camps in the outskirts of the regions. There are seven famous witch camps in Ghana, and almost all of them are located in the Northern Regions; Kpatinga, Kuku, Nabuli, Gushegu, Gambaga, Gnani, and Bonyasi witch camps. These camps have been in existence for over a century. The camps are run by *tindanas*, leaders capable of cleansing an accused woman so that not only is the community protected from any witchcraft, but the woman herself is safe

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<sup>7</sup> Bk. "Push for Affirmative Action Bill heightens as world marks int'l Women's Day", <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2017/March-8th/push-for-affirmative-action-bill-heightens-as-world-marks-intl-womens-day.php>

<sup>8</sup> Bk. <https://www.modernghana.com/news/298544/widowhood-rites-still-rife-in-northern-regions.html>



from vigilantes.<sup>9</sup> There are about 800 women and 500 children in every camp.<sup>10</sup> All of these traditional and cultural practices prevent women from freely socializing in a “mix-environment” with men.

A bold attempt was made by a businesswoman, Madam Akua Donkor, to contest the 2012 presidential elections as an independent candidate. Her participation in that election proved positive for future elections. The important outcome of the 2016 elections to the Ghanaian women was for the first time, the involvement of independent and autonomous women political parties. Akua Donkor, after her first endeavor in 2012, went on to found the Ghana Freedom Party (GFP). Likewise, Mrs. Rawlings founded and led the National Democratic Party (NDP).

For twenty-five years now, since Ghana’s Fourth Republic came into existence, women in political and civil service positions are challenged by open demand for “sex” before the appointment, exploited, and alleged to have offered “sex” for obtaining higher political office, thereby overlooking their academic and political competence. For instance, the appointment of Madam Charlotte Kesson-Smith Osei, the first ever female Electoral Commission Chairperson of Ghana, in 2015, by the then President John Dramani Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), was met with a barrage of insults and sexual allegations from the opposition, National Patriotic Party (NPP) Member of Parliament for Assin North, Kennedy Agyapong in June 2016. Addressing NPP party supporters at Asokwa in Kumasi, in the lead up to the 2016 elections, he charged that the EC Chair was ‘incompetent’ and would not have been appointed if she had not had “sex” with somebody in higher authority. He claimed officials in government told Charlotte Osei to “bring your buttocks in exchange for the EC Chair position.”

However, she supervised what is now known as the freest and transparent elections in Ghana’s political history. Meanwhile, the elections of December 7, 2016, were won by the then opposition NPP. Until a time when these negative socio-cultural and political constraints against women are addressed, women will continue to play ‘secondary’ political roles even in democracies, and remain confined largely in the informal economic sectors.

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<sup>9</sup>Bk.Kati Whitaker, Ghana witch camps: Widows’ lives in exile, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19437130>, 1 September, 2012.

<sup>10</sup>Bk.Simon Holmes, “Thousands of women accused of being WITCHES are rounded up and forced to live out the rest of their lives in squalid prison camps in Ghana”, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3781821/Thousands-women-accused-WITCHES-rounded-forced-live-rest-lives-squalid-prison-camps-Ghana.html>, 9 September, 2016.

## Conclusion

The exclusion of women and girls from key political and economic decisions results in awry outcomes that do not offer any significant redress to female issues. Men alone cannot address the multiple political, economic, and social challenges that beset our societies today. Addressing these challenges requires the collective efforts of both women and men working together in a “mix-manner.” Democratic equality can only be achieved by way of rational political competition, devoid of vilification of minorities, and a sense of gender participation.

The study would like to make recommendations based on the “subordinate” premise of women in Ghanaian society, which could lead to an increased involvement of women in the democratic political space at the policy-making level. It is the wish of the study that such recommendations would become useful, not only for women aspiring political life, but also governments, policy initiators, civil society, NGOs, women’s movements, and any party interested in women issues.

Political analysts and a lot of literature are in agreement that political quotas for women are the surest way of offering women equity in politics. To this end, governments and political parties have resorted to voluntary party quotas to engage women in politics. This approach, to a larger extent, has been to win the votes of women as voters and not necessarily to empower them politically. It suffices, therefore, to recommend that constitutional quota entrenchment requiring at least 35% parliamentary seats, ministerial, districts, and municipal positions should be allocated for women. Furthermore, in the least form of it, the Tanzanian quota model could be emulated in Ghana, whereby parliamentary seats are reserved for women for some years to expose them to political deliberations, after which they run and contest elections on their own.

Also, political parties should walk the talk and not merely politicize women’s issues in their manifestoes, but entrench women’s participation and representation beyond women’s wings to include conventions of nominating at least 40% of women in all party positions.

Again, female education should be pushed to a greater height, especially from Senior High School level, to include political studies, since it is the transitional point to receiving University studies. Most of the time a higher percentage of female students at the Senior High School level are concentrated in studies related to managing the home in the field of catering, basketry, bead making, Calabash arts, and sewing. Thus, leaving few women furthering their studies in governance and politically related fields at the tertiary level. It is,

therefore, recommended that in all of these vocational and 'home economic' options of the Senior High School level, history, politics, and governance studies should be made compulsory to expose, especially the female student, to the requirements and tenets of politics. Also, a greater presence of women in academia in the fields of history and politics could serve as a motivation for other females to pursue similar paths and eventually land in top political positions.

Furthermore, women should identify themselves as women with different sets of concerns by unearthing their political self-consciousness and advocate for their implementation. According to the Ghana Living Standards Survey, women suffer the most from poverty in the country. This means that access to financial resources and capital inhibit women's political progress and participation. Therefore, potential female politicians should get their networking on the spot to get funding for running political campaigns to promote the cause of women.

Again, democracy cannot develop fully before addressing women issues; the two must go in tandem. The Government, through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, development partners, traditional authorities and institutions, women groups, and civil society, in general, should do more to ensure equal rights for both male and female by fighting discriminatory traditional customs. These customs continue to marginalize women as inferior to men, and the increasing menace of marrying off promising and young females to older men causing them to drop-out from schools and ruining their future.

Lastly, the democratic space should include the informal economic arena dominated by women. Women make up over half of the informal economic sector in Ghana, where they earn their living for themselves and their families. Economic interventions in the form of taxation and distribution of merchandise items are greatly influenced by political decisions. Thus, government and its stakeholders should consult these market women and traders before formulating economic policies that have the potential to deprive some women of their source of livelihood.

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