

**PRACTICE AND CONVERSION OF ASANTE MARKET WOMEN TO THE  
AHMADIYYA MUSLIM MISSION IN THE LATE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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## ABSTRACT

### PRACTICE AND CONVERSION OF ASANTE MARKET WOMEN TO THE AHMADIYYA MUSLIM MISSION IN THE LATE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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Asante Islamic history does not end in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Asante women in particular, have been converting to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. This period also correlates to a time when women were victimized in Ghana as prostitutes, witches and non patriotic. The ill treatment of women also intersected with the failing socio-economy. Food production was at its lowest and unemployment at its highest. Many people formed associations and consequently came to depend less on the state and more on social and religious networks.

Converting to Islam was not without its problems. Asantes lived among Muslims for centuries, even before the rise of the kingdom. While the monarchy welcomed the written and linguistic knowledge of Muslims, they curtailed the spread of Islam. This worked to maintain Islam as distinct from Asante cultural traditions. Consequently, Islam was remained the religion of the foreigner or non-Asante. This configuration has not changed.

Asante women who converted to Islam during this period were ostracized by their families. Some were denied inheritance, property, titles and stools. Many left the family home and never returned.

British colonial rule gravely affected the relationship between Muslims and the Asante. British use of Muslim troops to topple Asante transformed the Muslims from allies to Asante enemies. Furthermore, British rule also gave rise to an influx of unskilled young Muslim men to the new colony. Because these Muslims were not literate and were employed as menial laborers, the Asante came to regard Muslims as social inferiors.

I argue the reason why the matrilineal family has turned against such converts is because they would be outside of their authority. The inability to control women members is a problem for this system. Because identity is passed via the maternal line, this system is threatened each time women leave. Another reason is that the oldest members of the matrilineal families are losing power over the youth.

The women interviewed for this dissertation all claimed they faced discrimination as Muslims from their family members and society in general. They also assert that they are willingly changing what it means to be Asante. One example of this change takes place during funerals. Muslim Asante refuse to wear the traditional black cloth. They opt to wear their traditional clothing which irks the family members. Wearing the Asante traditional black cloth at funerals is just one way of affirming ties to the matrilineal. Indeed, Muslim Asantes are proof positive that the matrilineal system is changing.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the daughters of Mesimene Galette and Saintlus Laguerre, who went on to become the greatest mothers the world has ever known. Yaya, Ate and Sylmene, I stand on your shoulders and your prayers continue to protect me.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my four favorite men. To my wonderful husband Nii who is willing to do anything, anytime, and anywhere to make me happy. To my brilliant cousin Kerby Laguerre-Simon, whose support I can count on anytime, anywhere. This dissertation is also dedicated to my beautiful sons Chiemeka and Mawuvi who have turned my life into one of the greatest ever lived.

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## Introduction

### **Conversion and Practice of Asante Market Women in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in the late 20th century**

The Akans constitute the largest ethnic and linguistic group in Ghana.<sup>1</sup> They are located in the southern part of the country and dominate positions of political and economic power. The Asante are the majority within the Akan group. The language of the Asante, Asante Twi, is the most widely spoken language within the Akan group and Ghana.<sup>2</sup> It is extensively spoken on television and radio. As the majority ethnic group in Ghana, any new development among this group is of national significance and worthy of study.

The Asante are a matrilineal people. This means they inherit property and identity via the maternal line. The Asante are some of the few people in Ghana with this practice. A matrilineal society is not necessarily a pro woman system, as presumed. It is another way designed to control women's reproduction and production. It also means they control the labor and production of that woman and her children as well. This means children born into the matrilineal system belong to the woman's family. Thus belonging is defined in relation to a woman; this is also used to exclude outsiders.

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<sup>1</sup> T.C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>2</sup> The Akans include the Fanti, Asante, Akyim ethnic groups and other smaller subgroups. Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 1.

It is precisely because the child of a Muslim father and Asante mother would be considered Muslim (i.e. non-Asante) that the matrilineal family protests against such unions and conversion. Another problem with choosing a Muslim husband and converting to Islam, from the family's perspective, rests on a century old bias that Muslims (i.e. Northerners) are inferior to the Asante.

In recent years, especially in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Asante people, especially women, began converting to Islam. However, they did not convert to the older traditional Northern/Hausa-dominated "orthodox" Islam, which was present among the Asante for centuries. This was because the Hausa lived were not assimilated into Asante culture and remained foreigners. Hausa language, way of life, and religion was analyzed as non-Asante. They were nonetheless respected as intelligent people and worked as diplomats and held other professional positions. However, this cordial relationship changed with the British defeat of the Asante in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is because the British troops which toppled Asante were made up of Hausa Muslim soldiers. In addition, British rule boosted migration; and these new migrants were mainly young Hausa men who were part of the colony's unskilled labor force. Because this group of unskilled Hausa youths made up the majority of the total Hausa population among the Asante; they came to regard the Hausa as social and economic inferiors.

It is partly because of these reasons that the Asante shunned Hausa dominated Islam. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission was invited to the Gold Coast in 1921 by two Indian missionaries. The Ahmadis had already built a presence in Nigeria and other neighboring West African countries by the time they came into the Gold Coast. The

Asante thought all Muslims were Hausa and were welcoming to Ahmadi Islam as a good alternative because it came from “whites” in India.<sup>3</sup> The Ahmadis, unlike the Hausa, stressed modern education with focus on math and science. They also developed modern facilities such as hospitals and clinics. Furthermore, they denounced the Hausa health practices as “fetish” and “backwards.”

Conversion in Ghana was at its highest during the 1980s-1990s periods. This period also coincided with the harshest socioeconomic and political era in Ghanaian history. The country experienced drought, high unemployment, low food production, political instability and rising levels of urban-rural migration. Rural urban migration led to the breakdown of traditional family as more of the husbands, fathers and uncles migrated out of the villages and country for work sometimes never to return. Consequently, gender roles were reversed. Women became the primary providers for their families. They also became the primary workers on the farms, left vacant by their husbands, brothers and uncles. Furthermore, women became the producers and sellers of produce during a socioeconomic trying period in Ghanaian history. The Asante women who converted to Islam during this period were producers and sellers in Ghana at a time when few were able to afford food. Indeed, it was not an easy period to be a market woman in Ghana.

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<sup>3</sup> Obruni is the Akan word for white people and by extension foreigners. Because Islam was associated with Hausa culture, few Akans realized that Mohammad was not “born in Tamale.” This is why Indians are referred to as “whites” here. In extension, Islam was considered a Hausa religion and thus African.

When Hajjia Pokua<sup>4</sup>, who was a Catholic at the time living in Kumasi, decided to convert to Islam after listening to a missionary preach in Twi, she felt she came to “know” the religion better. She was impressed with the information presented by the Asante preachers and their ability to answer questions calmly and thoroughly. However, her family did not approve of her interest in Islam. Although Northern/Hausa Muslims had lived among the Asante for centuries, they were not successful in converting the Asante to Islam for many reasons. One major reason was that these Muslims maintained themselves as foreigners within Asante and often conversed in Hausa and Arabic and was not successful in transferring information about Islam in Akan. Most Asante Ahmadis do not speak these languages and deny Arabic and Hausa as the only languages capable of transmitting knowledge about Islam.

Hajjia Pokua’s interests were sparked and she began attending women’s meetings to learn more about Islam. She converted a few months after her first meeting. While her family “worried her” about what the social implications of her conversion would be, she found a new home with the Ahmadis. They showed her how to dress, how to eat, and how to behave as a Muslim woman. All of this was antithesis of her life as an Asante. She welcomed the change, especially when she was not really part of the Catholic Church and had problems with her family.

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<sup>4</sup> Hajjia Pokua is an Asante market woman who converted to Islam in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her case is particularly interesting as she is a member of the royal family. The family’s response in such cases tends to be harsher than poorer families without property and titles. Pokua claims her family’s treatment would have been less if she was not royal. Being a member of the royal family, as many of the women confessed, complicated matters and made the response even more pronounced.

She later married an Asante Ahmadi man and started a new life with him. They had children and raised them as Muslims and apart from the non-Muslim family practices. According to her, she did not “lack” because her family denied her access to the inheritance and was forced to leave the house. Furthermore, her husband provided for the family and she also worked as a market woman. As insiders and outsiders of Asante ethnic group, Ahmadis such as Hajia Pokua, lived their lives apart from the non-Muslim population. They attend family funerals, but not the grand celebrations. They don’t wear the traditional black cloth and nor do they pour libation. These changes to their cultural practices have kept them from inheriting stools or royal authority. Hajia Pokua’s narrative indicates the tensions faced by Asante women when they convert to Islam. Her story also highlights the response and the subsequent new life they develop outside of the matrilineal family.

I met Pokua in Kumasi during the annual Ahmadi Women’s Association meeting. She, among many other women, had answered my request to interview Asante women who converted to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission during the 1960s to the early 1990s. I was interested as to why such women converted, how that has affected their matrilineage and how being Muslim has influenced Asante culture. People were pleased with my interest to research and write about the Asante as Muslims and Ahmadis. They recognized that few had done this research and wanted me to work towards demystifying the idea that all Asantes were Christians.<sup>5</sup> I had been in the country for over 2 years at the

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<sup>5</sup> This is a problem facing other “new” Muslim identities. See Egodi Uchendu’s “Being Igbo and Muslim: The Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria and Conversions to Islam, 1930s to Recent Times.” *Journal of African History* 51, 2010.

time. The Ameer, or Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, had adopted me as a daughter and people at Headquarters and in Kumasi had heard of my research. Not only was it interesting that a Haitian was researching Ahmadi Islam, but I was particularly welcomed in Kumasi because the Head of the Mission there was from Trinidad. As a fellow West Indian, he and his family's welcome further attested to my credibility in the community and enhanced people's willingness to discuss these sensitive issues of that period with me. These included the persecution of market women, the topic of kalabule and anti-women government policies.

It was the last Friday of November in 2007 and Pokua was well dressed in the standard white cloth commonly worn by Ghanaian women on Sundays. Her attire was further adorned by gold bracelets and the veil. The veil was the only distinction between her and every other Ghanaian woman. Pokua is happy she converted. However, she remembers a time when her family strongly disapproved of her choice and continued "disturbing" her. Her inheritance and that of her children were revoked. These were signs to her that she was no longer welcomed in her family. She married an Ahmadi and continued her life as a Muslim. They had children and since he was able to provide for her and the children, she did "not lack." In addition, she continued to work as a market woman, selling fish. They did not run into the zongos<sup>6</sup> as her family had teased but

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<sup>6</sup> Zongos are "Muslim" or "foreign" quarters developed in the non-Muslim southern portion of Ghana during the colonial period. There are Zongos in Kumasi, Accra, and throughout the central region. They have now developed into full fledged slums where Muslims, of various economic standings, live. Apart from being a slum, Zongos have a concentrated Muslim community. As a result all Muslims, except the Ahmadis, seeking to be part of that community gravitate towards working and living in the Zongos.

rather, they carved a life for themselves among the general population. Ahmadis, unlike other Muslims in Ghana, do not migrate into the zongos.

Her new life was part Asante and part Muslim. As an Asante Ahmadi, she cut out Asante cultural practices not permissible in Islam such as pouring libation, wearing black funeral cloth, and holding festive funerals. By so doing, she physically removed herself from important activities that not only reinforced the ethnic bond, but that of belonging to the family as well. As a result, it was years before she saw her family and they seldom tried to keep in touch with her. Converting to Islam had turned her into a second class member of her family and ethnic group. From the family's perspective, her conversion implied her willingness to break the family and ethnic bond.<sup>7</sup>

These tensions have also highlighted another problem within the matrilineal, the fact that it is losing longevity and influence. The ability of the matrilineal system to remain relevant in a changing world has been an issue since the colonial period. As more people move away from the villages, centers of the matrilineage, and into the cities where they can form new relations, the presence of the elders as guides and custodians of this tradition is less felt. By so doing, the elders in the village have lost some power over the young. One example of this lost of power is Asante women converting and marrying Muslim men, often against their families wishes. I will return to this topic later.

### ***Chapter Breakdown***

The first chapter presents the historiography of the Asante, Islam, women, the matrilineal system and conversion to better situate this research within the dominating

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<sup>7</sup> The fact that Igbos convert to Islam is perceived as “betrayal” by other non-Muslim Igbos in the society. See Uchendu’s “Being Igbo and Muslim.”

discourses. While much has been written on the Asante, works that explore current trends on conversion by women to Islam are limited. Furthermore, because scholars have also bought into this notion of the Asante as a Christian ethnic group, they have overlooked not just the religious changes taking place, but ethnic ones as well.<sup>8</sup> I present these literatures to show how they intersect and influence agency and choice.

I also present the discourse on media and masculinity to prove how they worked to portray women as the enemy of the state during that period. Understanding how the media, which is mostly male dominated, worked to promote cultural norms, is important to this dissertation. In addition, it would be difficult to paint the picture of the period without analyzing masculinity and its fluid nature.

Chapter two analyzes why “orthodox” or non-Ahmadiyya Islam failed to win over the Asante. This is particularly peculiar since Muslims lived as favored guests in the Akan states and later within the Asante kingdom for over 700 years. What is striking is that although these Muslims were welcomed they were prohibited from proselytizing and converting the Asante to Islam. It was feared that Islam threatened the matrilineal system. By protecting the matrilineal, Islam and Asante identity were maintained as distinct and separate. This chapter also highlights how and why the relationship between the Asante and the Muslims changed. British colonial policy affected this relationship, but it was not the only strain. Asante economic policy had curtailed Muslim movement and activities in

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<sup>8</sup> Igbo Muslims are experiencing similar problems. See Uchendu’s “Being Igbo and Muslim,”

the kingdom decades before British takeover. However, British activities on the Coast,<sup>9</sup> conflicts and wars with and against the Asante certainly ruined the relationship. By the time the British organized an army made up of Hausa soldiers to topple the kingdom, the Muslims went from being friends of the Asante to British allies.<sup>10</sup>

I look at the colonial period in chapter three. The British take over created an atmosphere that permitted and promoted religious change among the Asante for the first time. British rule also negatively influenced the status of women in the society. Women fell from power assigned to “queens” to being considered “prostitutes” in some cases and a nuisance within this changing landscape.<sup>11</sup> Women were being trained to become mothers, anything opposite that colonial vision was destroyed.<sup>12</sup> It was within this vacuum that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission gained access to Asante. Although the Ahmadis were welcomed to the Gold Coast from India, they had a difficult time getting established in the colony. This chapter also introduces the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission.

In addition, to understand the problems Ahmadis had in establishing their version of Islam among the Asante, I explored the matrilineal system. Chapter four presents a historiographical review of works on the matrilineal system to situate these changes within a broader context that looks at pressures facing the system. This chapter also looks

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<sup>9</sup> See J.K.Fynn’s *Asante and its Neighbors, 1700-1807*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political System*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 90.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Jean Hay, “Queens, Prostitutes, and Peasants: Historical Perspectives on African Women, 1971-1986” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 23, (1988): 432.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Allman, *“I will not Eat Stone,” A Women’s History of Colonial Asante*, (Heinemann: Portsmouth, N.H, 2000), 195.

at the discourse on conversion and how it threatens the longevity of the matrilineal system.

Chapter five focuses on the history of the Mission and how it worked to construct itself as modern, educated and progressive within the colonial order. While the Mission was optimistic about their modern approach towards raising the status of Muslims in the region, they had difficulty convincing the colonial administration of their superiority over the older Muslim communities. It was also difficult for them to win over the Asante.

One of the major changes impacting the matrilineal system was urban migration. In chapter six, I focus on Ghana's socio-economy from 1960s-1990s to see how the poor economy, low food production, and rural-urban migration impacted religious change.<sup>13</sup> Another problem posed by urbanization and the move away from the villages is the loss of power by the elders. As elders are "made" and not "born," many are losing the opportunity to become elders by performing control over the youth. As they lose out on this, others are abusing their superficial power by denying the woman converts their inheritance and access to the matrilineal.

In chapter seven I deal with the "woman problem" within a broader historical context of shaming and blaming of women from the colonial period to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> I look at the changing nature of women's identities in Ghana and the

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<sup>13</sup> Gracia Clark, *African Market Women: Seven Life Stories from Ghana*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 33.

<sup>14</sup> Colonial responses to women's freedoms are well noted in other cases. See Sean Hawkins' "The Woman in Question:" Marriage and Identity in the Colonial Courts of Northern Ghana, 1907-1954 in *Women in African Colonial History*, ed. Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

victimization it brought forth.<sup>15</sup> I situate the conversion of Asante women to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission within the context of women asserting new identities for themselves.<sup>16</sup>

Chapter eight examines the history from an oral and historical perspective. I interviewed men and women with direct and indirect information to the Asante women converts. This chapter highlights some of the tensions that converting to Islam created in the matrilineal system and the actual changes that occurred. These changes are also occurring at the expense of the elders.<sup>17</sup> In addition, I want to highlight the new identity that being Muslim and Asante is forming.

I present the conclusion in chapter nine. My research contributes by showcasing this major part of Asante and Islamic history, a history that has been overlooked and understudied. By focusing on stories such as Pokua's, I also present the changing nature of the matrilineal society and how Asante converts are creating new identities for themselves. In conclusion, I hope to include the Asante within contemporary geopolitical dialogue on Islam with the aim of a greater understanding of the Muslim world.

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<sup>15</sup> Women's colonial history is often different from what the men experienced. Historical proof of this in other parts of Africa is Elizabeth Schmidt's *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* (Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Women's struggles for freedom within their particular societies are not only in Asante. See Ifi Amadiume's *Reiventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* for analysis of such changes among Igbo women.

<sup>17</sup> Gracia Clark, *Onions are My Husband*, 256.

### *On Methodology*

I interviewed more than fifty Asante Ahmadi men<sup>18</sup> and women farmers or market women. They were either alive at the time, or were related to a woman farmer or market woman who was. I also sought out Asante Ahmadi women farmers or market women who converted to the Mission during the period under study. However, not all of the interviews were successful, and thus not all of the voices are presented. Because these women were all asked the same questions, after a while, they began to echo each other. I then chose the informant who said it best.<sup>19</sup> Some of the women were very old and at times unable to process their thoughts. I specifically sought to interview men and women over 60, since they would have been alive at the time. In addition, I also was not against interviewing children of such men and women, either. The Kumasi women were a bit nervous speaking about these issues and probably thought I was working on revamping the image of women as *kalabule* or fraudulent.<sup>20</sup> The Ahmadis interviewed in Accra were less apprehensive about speaking on this topic.

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<sup>18</sup> Men were interviewed in cases when they were the son, husband or brother of an Asante woman convert, and not because they knew more about this time period. Nwando Achebe has written on how gender affected knowledge of history during her field experience. This was not my experience. See “Daughter, Wife, and Guest-A Researcher at the Crossroads,” *Journal of Women’s History*. Autumn, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> This was based on whether or not I interviewed the person as opposed to an assistant because only then could I be sure of the context of the answer. In addition, as an “editor” of this process, I recognized my control over the data used in the dissertation. This is because I plan on using the other interviews for articles. Power and control in the field is discussed and analyzed in Heidi Gegenbach’s “Truth-Telling and the Politics of Women’s Life History Research in Africa: A Reply to Kirk Hoppe” in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*. 1994. See also Nwando Achebe’s “Daughter, Wife and Guest.”

<sup>20</sup> An apprehensive interviewee affirmed that women were not *kalabule*, and would not be interested in partaking in research that sought to revamp that image. I had to do a lot of

Interviews were conducted using Twi and English. I am semi fluent in Twi. Having lived in the country for over 2 years at the time, and had been visiting since 1998, the Twi language came naturally to me, although I had no formal training. My comprehension was enhanced riding the *tro-tros*,<sup>21</sup> which not only helped my language skills, but helped me understand the social interactions of local people on the day to day. I also, unlike other regular researchers, had married in Kumasi and borne children in Accra. My knowledge of the society, beyond the written texts, was enhanced by these real life moments experienced and lived by me.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, I had become less a visible “guest” to many when using Twi. However, that was not without its problems. My accent was obvious and it often distracted people, who were then eager to know where I was from and why I had an accent speaking Twi. Explaining that I was from Haiti and educated in the US often took an hour or two away from the interviews. Were there any Muslims or Ahmadis in Haiti?

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explaining to win back her confidence. One way I did that was by letting her know the following: That I was not Ghanaian, I am a friend of the Ameer and from the same region as the head of the Kumasi Mission. Thus as a “complete” outsider, I had nothing to gain by revamping that old stereotype.

<sup>21</sup> Tro-tros are public buses which are more affordable than taxis, but also more dangerous. Some of these buses are minivans made for six, transformed to take 12 people (possibly more with children sitting on adult laps). Such buses are extremely dangerous and are notorious for causing the accidents on Ghanaian roads, especially when used to travel long distance, outside of Accra.

<sup>22</sup> I was aware of my difference. This allowed me to pay attention to unarticulated customs, taboos, and assumptions. I also paid attention to my accent and other linguistic issues that could serve as stumbling blocks along the way. Recognizing the difficulties associated with doing oral interviews as an outsider allowed me to pay attention to the society in a different way. See Margaret Strobel’s “Doing Research as an Outsider,” in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 1977.

What is the religion over there? Why would a Haitian be interested in conducting research on Islam?

By that time, I would get more insights as to how the Diaspora is not as real or constant in the minds of Ghanaians. This is so because most of the Diasporans they see, are not really considered “other,” in the sense of coming from the experience of the Atlantic Slave Trade, but perceived to be that of “class.” Calling Diasporans “obruni” or the “white man” is an indication that their otherness is related to the notion that travelers “must have money,” and most of the visible travelers are white. But a Diasporan can also look foreign.

I was an obvious “obruni” when I first came to Ghana in 1998, even though I would attempt to use Twi everywhere that I could. When I returned in 2000, 2001 and 2005, people would approach me using Twi and would be disturbed to find out that I was not Akan. What had changed? First my disposition changed. I was less aware of my surroundings as foreign. I was more comfortable with being in a foreign country. And thirdly, I was less aware of being foreign.

Connections also helped people to see me as less foreign (non Ghanaian and non Muslim), even in cases, where I pointed out that I was, I would be dismissed as “one of us.” My first contact at the Mission was with the president of the women’s association. She then introduced me to the Ameer, who was surprisingly available and approachable. I was not expecting any form of relationship with the Ameer, whom I had assumed would consider himself too important to meet with me. However, he became my first assistant. He linked me to more people, provided background information, and willingly

interviewed twice. And by working to “[connect]edness to the rest of society,” I gained more insights and confidence.<sup>23</sup>

Although I had worked to gain people’s trust and confidence, it goes with the territory that people become apprehensive when questioned. The topic of *kalabule* is scary to invoke for many. It was a “bad” period for many in Ghana. It’s linked to not only women, but the drought, lack of food, employment and the dictatorship. Would some people think that I was working for the National Democratic Convention in gauging how people still remember that period? In such a case, they had reasons to fear since the NDC was working on making a combat at the time. I squashed this fear by providing them more information to my background. I explained that I was a daughter of a market woman and that most of the women in my family were market women. And while nothing specifically akin to what experienced by them took place in Haiti, that I knew the problem to be men’s inability to face their incompetence. That always worked. Nothing shows women more respect than agreeing with them that problem was actually men’s insecurity and weakness.

I used an assistant in Kumasi to help interview as many people possible during the national meeting of Ahmadi women. An assistant was more needed in Kumasi because unlike the interviewees in Accra, I could not depend on English to take me the “extra mile,” when my Twi proved unable. In addition, I learned that nothing turns off non-English speaking Asante people off more than conducting an interview with them in a foreign language. Even the Ahmadi missionaries in the early twentieth century had

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<sup>23</sup> Nwando Achebe, “Daughter, Wife, and Guest-A Researcher at the Crossroads,” *Journal of Women’s History*. Autumn, 2002, 14.

realized how important language was to converting the Asante.<sup>24</sup> I had at least learned that from them. Furthermore, it was important to get an assistant in Kumasi because no other opportunity would be available to talk to every female Asante Ahmadi member until the following year. The two assistants, who were Ahmadi Akans, knew first hand some of the answers posed by my questions.

Although the fliers posted around Headquarters specified that an interest in interviewing Asante women converts, or those related to her, non Asantes (and men not related to Asante women) also responded to the call. They clarified that their families responded in similar fashion and that the period under review also affected them in the same way. I interviewed them anyways, as to not appear rude or favoring the Asante. This took up more time and recording space than anticipated. Language was another problem presented with the fliers. Written in English, few people were able to read and get the full understanding of the project. I should have verbally presented my information to the groups and not just rest on fliers written in English to convey the message.

Another problem encountered was that this was indeed sensitive information. People had not forgotten how traumatic this period had been and discussing it was not easy for many of them. I could sense these questions being asked about me. Was I one of those people? Had I come to contribute to why women needed to still be punished for this

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<sup>24</sup> Asante emphasis on using Twi is often misconstrued as ethno-centric. It is also important that scholars go into the field prepared linguistically to allow their collaborators make an impact. It is essential that local languages are learned, not only to break barriers, but to get viable information which may not be articulated in English and other non-African languages.

period? Was I going to argue that it was not NDC but rather women? I certainly had not prepared to be considered “one of those.” But eventually, the less political questions asked, the more that focused on their lives as Muslims, Asante and market women, the more comfortable they were discussing the past. I did notice many people anxiously watching the audiotape.<sup>25</sup>

This was particularly so because the nation was preparing for an election period. During this time, the National Democratic Party, (whom everyone had thought would not and could not win because of their history of dictatorship and abuse of power), had started making a “comeback” in the minds of many. For the reasons discussed in this dissertation, many people thought the NDC had no chance in winning an election in Ghana. However, their fears and anger at how the NDC treated their family members and them at the time, was often heard over the radio station, news, and in the streets. My research was proof positive that people had not forgotten or forgiven what took place during that period.

The interviews with these women are presented labeled based on the topics discussed. I asked questions pertinent to the lives of the women and the country at the time and their responses are shown here labeled by subjects discussed. They include information on “kalabule,” “on being Asante” and the “problems with converting.”

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<sup>25</sup>The suspicion which follows field researchers is a common occurrence, only recently discussed as a potential hindrance to getting truthful and real information. Achebe writes about a similar experience in “Daughter, Wife, and Guest-A Researcher at the Crossroads.”

## Chapter 1

### *The Historiography*

Islam in Ghana is at a standstill in the minds of many social scientists. Historians in general have not acknowledged the changing trends of conversion to Islam in Ghana nor the rise of Asantes within the religion. Focus has mainly been on the 19<sup>th</sup> century Islam in the region. By so doing, historians have contributed to our understanding of the Northern/Hausa Muslims to the development of the Asante Kingdom. They have recognized personalities who worked throughout the kingdom and aided in its advancement and aggrandizement. However, few have ventured into the 20<sup>th</sup> century to analyze the changing shapes and dimensions of Islam in Ghana. Thus 20<sup>th</sup> century activities of Muslims and Islam have been giving far less attention. Furthermore, the rise of the Ahmadiyya among the Asante in present day Ghana has not been given proper attention in the discourse.

My work seeks to fill this void. I look at the conversion of Asante women to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. By so doing, I highlight the changing nature of women's roles and identity formation in Ghana and among the Asante in particular. In addition, with focus on the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, I bring to the foreground an Islamic sect and its influence among a group not readily known as Muslim. In addition, my work shows a different dimension to Islamic identity in Ghana since the Ahmadi rejects Hausa

“superiority in Islam.”<sup>26</sup> To better present the various factors influencing conversion among the Asante, this chapter presents historiographies of both the Asante (and the Akan) and that of Islam, conversion and women.

***“Historiography of the Asante, the Akan and the Matrilineal Tradition”***

The Asante are a sub-group of the Akan major ethnic group. They speak the Twi language which is mutually intelligible to all Akans. They trace descent via the maternal line which also distinguishes them from other ethnic groups in Ghana. Every member belongs to an *abusua* or maternal family which

is otherwise a property-owning corporation with corresponding rights and obligations. The members of the lineages and their various segments own common user rights in land and stretches of rivers, political offices known as “stools” *nkonua*, and custodianship of shrines.<sup>27</sup>

The role of the *abusua* is to act as guides protecting sets of values and activities on marriage, funeral rites and familial relationships. But they also control access to family resources. The Asante matrilineal society controls everything. Indeed, it was designed for that very purpose.

The Asante matrilineal society was designed quite fittingly during a period when state elders sought to unite and define Asante identity. This “identity control” was one reason why the matrilineal system was designed. Some of the oral information collected by R.S. Rattray affirms how the militarily excursions of the Asante influenced how the

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<sup>26</sup> Robert S. Kramer, “Islam and Identity in the Kumasi Zongo,” in *Cloth of Many Colored Silks*, ed. John O. Hunwick and Ivor Wilks (Northwestern University Press, 1996): 288.

<sup>27</sup> Kwame Arhin, “The Economic Implications of Transformations in Akan Funeral Rites,” *Africa* 64 (1994); 308.

matrilineal was designed. One proverb states, “the matrilineage is like [some] flowers; it flowers in bunches. The matrilineage is an army, and the child of your mother is your [true] sibling.” This proverb indicates how beautiful the support of the matrilineage can be and how militaristic it can also become, when provoked. The link to the military is most likely as a result of the fact that during war, many women were raped. Consequently, only the woman would know who had impregnated her. Another reason put forth is because women were not trusted to be truthful with this information.<sup>28</sup> That they could be impregnated by one man and claim another as the unborn child’s father was cited as reasons for passing on property and wealth via the maternal line.<sup>29</sup> It is easy to see how war influenced this system. This does not mean that men did not matter in this transaction, although they mattered less before colonial rule. Their contestation to claims to their children is one notable change impacting the matrilineal system.<sup>30</sup>

The matrilineal system is much older than the Asante state or kingdom. While it has been “usurped by the Asante state” it is much older than the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> Redefined by the Asante statement Komfo Anokye, the matrilineal “was the crucial arena of interpenetration between kinship and polity.”<sup>32</sup> That each member had to belong to one in order to form the polity or community made sense when we consider this period as a time of instability and when Asante identity was less defined. However, rural-urban

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<sup>28</sup> Allman, *I Will Not Eat Stone*, 49.

<sup>29</sup> J.G. Platvoet, “Cool Shade, Peace and Power: The Gyeda “Tree of Reception” as an Ideological Instrument of Identity Management Among the Akan Peoples of Southern Ghana,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, (1985): 7.

<sup>30</sup> Allman, “*I Will Not Eat Stone*,” 105.

<sup>31</sup> T.C. McCaskie, “Konnurokusem: Kinship and Family in the History of the Oyoko Kokoo Dynasty of Kumase,” *Journal of African History* (1995): 358.

<sup>32</sup> T.C. McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, 192.

migration, urbanization and the changing socioeconomic roles of women have caused changes to the matrilineal system.

R.S. Rattray remarked in 1929 that “the demiurgic construct from which all subsequent historical developments flowed in simple evolutionary elaboration—was the family.”<sup>33</sup> However, the abusua is not as powerful as they used to be. In fact, it’s their weakening status that family members seek to preserve when they excommunicate some of the women when they convert or marry Muslim men. McCaskie mentioned that “the matriclan, having been supplanted in its primary economic function—over time became vestigial.”<sup>34</sup> As Wilks puts it is,

the clanship continued to determine patterns of marriage by virtue of the rule of exogamy, and in that respect was a socially integrative factor. But claims to land are based on heritable rights which the clanship conferred upon...the Matrilineages.<sup>35</sup>

The abusua has been losing authority since the 1930s, which correlates with the rise of women’s economic activities in the cocoa industry. The fact that the abusua is losing control is most evident in marriage issues. The ways of the past when the young would agree to marriages arranged by the elders are long gone. Gone are also the days when the youth would seek out the elders for their wisdom and guidance.<sup>36</sup> Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang’s “Gender-Role Perceptions in the Akan Folktale,” explores a plethora of

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<sup>33</sup> T.C. McCaskie, “R.S. Rattray and Asante History,” *History in Africa* 10 (1983): 193.

<sup>34</sup> T.C. McCaskie, “State and Society, Marriage and Adultery: Some Considerations Towards a Social History of Pre-Colonial Asante,” *The Journal of African History* 22 (1981): 483.

<sup>35</sup> Ivor Wilks, “The State of the Akan and the Akan States, A Discursion,” *Cahiers des Etudes Africaines*, 22 (1982); 13.

<sup>36</sup> Sjaak van der Gest, “The Elder and his Elbow: Twelve Interpretations of an Akan Proverb,” *Research in African Literatures* 27 (1996): 488.

stories and proverbs used as guides to warn young women from marrying men of their choice. Opoku-Agyemang states, “the story about the woman with a mind of her own and who makes her choice of a husband and lives to regret it is perhaps the most popular.”<sup>37</sup> She goes on to say, “there is no negative comment on the male who makes his own choice,” which underlines how just how much more important it is to control young women in a matrilineal society. This is particularly because children of that woman would belong to the matrilineal as oppose to children of her brother who would belong to their mother’s matrilineal.

Another folktale which is significant to this thesis is telling to how Asante view polygamous marriages, which some of these women were assumed would join. On this Opoku-Agyeamang states, “men and women are shown to be ultimately unhappy in the polygamous marriage, a fertile area for discord in the family, or who harm each other’s children.” Some of the names of the folktales include “How it came about that hunters are poor” among others. These stories represent Asante social and cultural understandings and biases against cultures which promote these and against members who behave in these fashions.

In a related article, “The Elder and his Elbow: Twelve Interpretations of an Akan proverb” Sjaak van der Geest noticed that the elders are not as central to the lives of the young as they used to be. Unlike the past when the young would seek out the elders for advice and “sit at their feet” in search of guidance, these days, no one visits the elders,

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<sup>37</sup> Naana Jane Opoku-Agyeamang, “Gender-Role Perceptions in Akan Folktale,” *Research in African Literatures*, 30 (1999): 12.

except foreigners “conducting research.”<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, the elders are not easily defeated.

They warned,

The child who does not listen to the opanyin and acts as if he is an opanyin himself will run into trouble. But if you respect the opanyin and listen to his advice, you will be OK.<sup>39</sup>

The Akans believe the child squats at the foot of the elder to show his acquiescence of power and authority. The elders need this kind of show to remind everyone of their status and authority. But when that does not work, little threats may go a long way.

One more reason for the changes is that although matrilineal, the Asante are a patriarchal society. Queen mothers and other women with authority select men to rule and manage the affairs of the state. Such authority also acknowledged men as the dominant gender. Their “sexual needs” are recognized, not women. Men are expected to have access to women, not the other way around. Wealthy men were allowed to have as many women as possible to aggrandize production and reproduction for that individual man. Nonetheless, the definition of what a man was supposed to be shifted and changed over time.

In *Making Men in Ghana*, Stephen Miescher states patriarchy was further boosted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century due to the wars of expansion and conquests. War “as male occupation altered relations between men and women, seniors and juniors.”<sup>40</sup> Thus wars further highlighted and cemented the inequalities between those able to fight, and those unable. In addition, the wars also defined men as weapon holding. The military and its values

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<sup>38</sup> S. Van der Gest, “The Elder and his Elbow,” 489.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 471.

<sup>40</sup> Stephan Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 8-9.

were held in high esteem among the Asante. Women were not necessarily absent from this equation, but not as widely praised and acknowledged. Most women served as the spiritual force guiding victories on the battle fields.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a man was defined as either married, elderly, or wealthy. Married men were expected to have children to help them farm and be able to provide for his children. A senior man was expected to comport himself a certain way and provide guidance and advice to the youth. Wealthy men were expected to share their wealth, lest they be considered undignified of the title.

In *Making Men in Ghana*, Miescher quotes, “the Opanyin [elder] is made, discovered, not born.” Miescher understands this in the context that masculinity during the colonial period was not fixed but fluid.<sup>41</sup> However, it is precisely because this title was not fixed that the elders sought to make their mark on controlling the youth. This affirms the fact that the elders have to make themselves matter, and that they have to assert authority over people to maintain that status.<sup>42</sup> One way of making an elder is indicative of controlling the youth, especially young women.

An example of the elders losing control and status “is nowhere better illustrated than during funerals.” Funerals for the Akans are central to reinforcing the ties that bond when alive. Funerals, asserts Kwame Arhin, are “occasions for asserting and validating claims on estates on the basis of relationship sanctioned by customary use.”<sup>43</sup> However, funerals are no longer celebrated as they once were. Muslim and Christian members have

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>43</sup> Arhin, “Funerals,” 312.

forced changes, wresting power from the elders. According to Kwame Arhin, “Islam, for example, prescribes simple burial for rites de cease adherents, whose souls are all believed to be equal in the eyes of Allah...Christianity has weakened many of the belief and practices of traditional religion.”<sup>44</sup> As observed by Van der Gest, funerals are the preeminent occasion for the elders to shine,” and that power is being taken away from them. Marriages and funerals would be times when their wisdom would be sought, especially as custodians of the traditions. But now, both marriages and funerals could take place with limited guidance and participation from the elders.

By 20<sup>th</sup> century, with war making power centered in the hands of the British, Asante men became farmers and traders. As slavery became abolished, husbands came to depend more on their wives and children as farm laborers. Wealthier men could and did hire cheap Northern/Muslim laborers. As men became cocoa farmers, women became more visible as market sellers. This was possible because they would continue farming food items alongside helping their husbands develop the cocoa farm.

Activities of missionaries and the church also contributed to new definitions of manhood. This often encompassed creating monogamous husbands.<sup>45</sup> This was exacerbated by rural-urban migration. As young men went to the cities in search of wealth, the elder men in the villages no longer held authority over them. Consequently, these young men returned to their villages as “big men” but not willing to fall under the authority of the elders who were now supporting financially.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 11.

Nationalist movements also contributed to centering men and sidelining women in politics. The nationalist movement often celebrated the frustrations of the male youth in search of employment and higher education. Although women fought for independence, and were also victims of unemployment and lack of adequate educational institutions, they were not necessarily free after the colonialists left. Women often became victims to the same system they sought to overthrow; a system that defined them as minors and second class citizens.<sup>46</sup> While the definitions of manhood changed over time, men always had the right to exercise control over women. Women became a threat to societal norms when they fought against such inequalities. Asante women converting to Islam at this particular time in history is one more example of how women respond to social inequalities.

***“Historiography of Islam among the Asante”***

The literature on the recent history of Islam among Asante has been partly ignored. The works of Ivor Wilks and David Owusu-Ansah, which mostly deal with Islam within the Asante Kingdom allow me to build on the *longue duree* of Islam in this region. Wilks has done tremendous work on Islam in Ghana focusing on Northerners living among the Asante and “orthodox” Islam. He was commissioned by Ghana’s first president Kwame Nkrumah to undergo an oral history project aimed at documenting and preserving that history of Islam and Muslims in the country. However, that history did not include Ahmadi Muslims. Unlike Wilks, Owusu-Ansah, and Thomas McCaskie, Enid

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 12.

Schildkrout's works focus on more recent developments of "orthodox" Islam and Muslims in Ghana.

The studies of "orthodox" Islam and Muslims have dominated our understanding of Islam in Asante and in Ghana. Scholars such as Ivor Wilks, Thomas McCaskie, David Owusu-Ansah, and Enid Schildkrout among others have all contributed in various ways to our understanding of that past. From the scholars aforementioned, we know how the Wangara became Asante Nkramos and how Asantehenes limited the spread of Islam in the kingdom. They have also proven how Islamic talismanic traditions were incorporated into Asante traditional religious beliefs and how women lived in colonial Asante society. However, as these scholars have chosen to focus on 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, they have also focused on non-Ahmadi Islam.

Looking at the history of Islam in the Asante kingdom and later Ghana, Ivor Wilks' seminal piece *Asante in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* has created a strong foundation in looking at the *longue duree* of Islam among the Asante. Besides discussing the rise of the Asante kingdom and the various ways the kingdom and its people functioned, Wilks also contributed to our understanding of Muslims and Islam among the Asante in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This book is particularly important to my research since it presents the theoretical framework used by Asante's Muslims. This framework answers why the process of Islamization was limited among the Asante, as oppose to other groups in West Africa. Muslims that lived in the Asante kingdom, informs Wilks, followed the Suwarian tradition of Islam. This tradition was established by West African scholar Al-Haji Salim Suwari in the fifteenth century. It permitted Muslims to trade and live in non-Muslim

territories without being obligated to convert or wage jihad to bring about religious change. Suwari believed that Muslims wait on God to bring about the inevitable changes. By highlighting the Suwarian tradition, Wilks answers, from the Muslim perspective, why the Asante did not convert to Islam.

Another reason why Islam was limited among the Asante was because of the state policy. That Islam as a foreign idea was quarantined has been explored in detail by Thomas McCaskie in *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*. He has analyzed how the Muslims lived within this confined space where only Islamic tenets similar to Asante traditional religious practices were welcomed and sanctioned. This particular book is important because it explains, from the Asante perspective, why the spread of Islam was limited until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Nehemia Levtzion's *Islam in West Africa*, provided another example as to why Islam was limited among the Asante. He argues that the majority of Muslims living among the Asante were businessmen seeking trade and other economic opportunities that the wealthy kingdom provided. While they lived among the Asante, their primary goal was to trade, not to spread Islam. He states,

Though merchants did open routes and expose isolated societies to external influences, they were not themselves engaged in the propagation of Islam, which was the work of professional men of religion. In other words, merchants served as carriers of Islam rather than as agents of Islamization.<sup>47</sup>

The majority of Muslims coming to Asante were most likely merchants, and not clerics. However, a full time merchant could also have been a part time cleric. I believe Asante

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<sup>47</sup> Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa*, (Oxford: 1968), 28.

state policies that curtailed freedom of the Muslim had more to do with containing the activities than their willingness to do otherwise.

Although Islam and Asante identity were kept as distinct, the two did merge in certain respects. Muslims, argued David Owusu-Ansah, were useful to all in Asante, not just the kings who employed them. Owusu-Ansah's contribution on the Muslim/Asante talismanic tradition highlights the few occasions where Muslims were allowed to trade without threatening the status quo. He explains that the similarity to the Asante traditional religious beliefs is the only reason why Islamic talismans were sanctioned in the kingdom. In his *Islamic Talismanic Tradition in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Asante*, he analyzes the relationship between Asante and Islamic talismans and how they merged. In addition, Owusu-Ansah's work is of particular use due to another theory he brings forth which interprets the Asante's lack of Islamization. He states that personal and public turmoil and upheavals cause conversion. And that the failure of Muslims to convert the Asante was also due to the fact that they had not known any turmoil or disturbance which would permit religious change. Indeed, Asante wars of expansion, which were fought mostly by foreign-dominated army, did not directly affect the average Asante. Furthermore, since most of the wars were of expansion were won by the Asante and fought "elsewhere," the Asante could be said not to have experienced much turmoil and changes according to Owusu-Ansah. In this case, the Asante, according to Owusu-Ansah, would have sought religious change if factors had arisen giving them the need for a new religion.

Following his line of thinking, the need for religious change tends to come during times of social turmoil, unknown to the Asante until late the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until

the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with toppling of Kumasi and later exiling of Asantehene Prempeh and the downfall of the kingdom did those factors feature. However, the Muslims proved unwilling or unable to convert the Asante. Again his work and that of the scholars mentioned above have mostly concentrated in 19<sup>th</sup> century orthodox Islamic tradition in Asante. Consequently, Ahmadi Islam and Asante Muslims in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been overlooked.

The anthropologist Enid Schildkrout, on the other hand, focuses on 20<sup>th</sup> century dynamics of Islam. Her works have focused primarily on “orthodox” Islam and the tensions which have escalated over the years between Northerners<sup>48</sup> and Southerners vying to dominate Islam in Ghana. Schildkrout explores these issues more in “Islam and Politics in Kumasi.” The tensions explored in this article are similar to that of the Ahmadi versus the Northerner/Hausa. Her work is useful when it comes to analyzing the preexisting tensions within various Muslim groups seeking to overthrow Hausa alleged superiority in Islam and over Muslims in Ghana.

### ***“Historiography of Asante Society”***

Jean Allman’s work on gender in the Gold Coast is also useful to this study. One particular article on “Gender, Chaos and Unmarried women in Colonial Asante” while not on Islam, highlights the historical trends of blaming and shaming. While the women interviewed for my dissertation were blamed and shamed during the 1960s for allegedly

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<sup>48</sup> Between North and South was one way the Asante position the kingdom geographically. As the “center” of the region, Northerners are Muslims who were once subjects of the Asante kingdom, while Southerners are used to explain the population south of the kingdom. Southerners also explain Asante coastal history with the British and future subjects.

causing the nation's economic mess, Allman presents a protracted history of this activity. In her *"I Will Not Eat Stone: A Women's History of Colonial Asante*, she found that women came under abuse from the colonial authorities and traditional society at a period when they were seeking economic independence. As a result, such women were delaying getting married, since one of the main reasons for marriage was for economic security.<sup>49</sup> By so doing, colonial authorities and traditional customs were upset and sought ways to force such women into marriage contracts. One of the ways of forcing women to marry was by arresting them. In response women arranged marriage contracts and pretended to marry so they could be released from jail. Similar to the women subjects of my dissertation, they too were imprisoned, beaten and had their properties confiscated for their economic activities. Instead of pretending to be married to secure safety, the women here chose religion. They secured their safety by presenting an image that they were "innocent" and absent from the worldly.

To understand how the state worked to suppress women's activities during this period, it is also important to understand how women impacted changes during the colonial and post colonial periods in Africa. In the edited volume, *Women and the State in Africa*, the authors argue that although the state is relatively weak (to collect taxes, regulate fees, etc.), "in terms of capacity to impose authority, it is nonetheless powerful enough to unleash its violence against particular groups and classes." I argue that the weaker or insecure the president, based on his inability to solve the nation's problems, the more violent his government becomes towards the economic activities of the groups

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<sup>49</sup> Allman, *I Will Not Eat Stone*, 145.

deemed outside of its grasp. The way the state worked to control the activities of women in Ghana is similar to how European states worked to control the economic activities of Jews and even how independent African states viewed the Lebanese.<sup>50</sup>

As Claire Robertson argues, “gender identity is increasingly being used by the government of Ghana in an ideology which objectifies women traders into a class which can be blamed and persecuted for causing the enormous economic problems.”<sup>51</sup> This is particularly revealing since women were persecuted at a time when the states was unable to control and execute food production en masse. It was also a period when most young men migrated into the city and outside of the country in search of greener pastures. They left the land in the hands of their sisters, mothers, and grandmothers, who became the leading food producers at the time. The fact that women’s activities were reprimanded at this time showcases the government’s unwillingness to accept women’s roles in solving the problems. This reveals how male perception of the economy and patriarchy worked to instill fear in women’s activities by reinforcing old age based discrimination against women.

The struggle against the state has typically been analyzed between classes not gender. Scholars have paid more attention to how class, ethnicity and religions have clashed in Africa and less on how gender intersects. This is one major contribution of my work, exposing the abuses levied against women at this time. Ghanaian women were not alone in their victimization. Other states in Africa have responded in the same way. The

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<sup>50</sup> Robert Fatton, “Gender, Class and State in Africa,” 60.

<sup>51</sup> Claire Robertson, *Sharing the Same Bowl*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 243.

question then is why would such governments respond to market women in this way? Especially since the women were alleviating the food shortage. The answer to that question lies in understanding masculinity and power.

In Molaria Ogundepe-Leslie's *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation*, she found that assumptions about leadership and power meant that "men had the natural right to leadership." And the notion of powerful women was considered as "not natural" or as abuse of power.<sup>52</sup> In an article on black market women traders in Zambia, Karen Trangerg Hansen argues that the weak state unleashed a form of terror on women during periods when they sought to "redraw a restrictive gender boundary" between the powerful and the powerless. This "collusion of [wo]man and the state" was used to keep both genders in their "rightful" places and also to reinforce control. The idea of keeping women in the home as their "rightful" place has more to do with stifling competition among the sexes as a way of perpetuating the false notion of male power and control over women and the economy.<sup>53</sup>

### ***A Historiographical Analysis of Conversion***

In the past, historians theorizing conversion have often focused on the role of the traveling migrant trader or cleric whose religious knowledge and literacy was used to the benefit of their foreign hosts. In the process of this interaction between these two groups (Muslim male vs. non-Muslim chief or village) the trader/cleric (assumably) ends up

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<sup>52</sup> Molaria Ogundepe-Leslie, *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation*, (Africa World Press: New Jersey, 1994), 156.

<sup>53</sup> Karen Trangerb Hansen, "The Black Market and Women Traders in Lusaka, Zambia," in *Women and the State in Africa*, ed. Jane Parpart and Kathleen A. Staudt (Rienner Publishers: London, 1989), 158.

influencing his host to the point that some scholars have accepted the presence of Muslims and Arabic language as proof of conversion of a people or chiefdom to Islam. The theory that if the chief is a Muslim, then so is his people, stems from this perspective. This was partly inherited from the works of the North African scholar Ahmad Baba who in the 17<sup>th</sup> century divided the sub region into land of Islam and nonbelievers.<sup>54</sup>

In this section I analyze the topic of conversion as it relates to traditionally non-Muslim societies transitioning to Islam in the twentieth century. While few of these works deal with Ghana or the Asante in particular, some do deal with societies and peoples who were traditionally non-Muslim but eventually adopted the religion for various reasons and are now part of the Islamic world. This literature helps to explain and highlight some of the changes impacting the Muslim Asante.

Islam has not been domesticated by the Asante. One of the main reasons why is because religious change is not only a “confrontation between two religions,<sup>55</sup>” but that of a society as well. It is well assumed that African religions have tended to be more inclusive in adapting to other religions.<sup>56</sup> This is not always the case, especially when the line between religion and ethnicity is not so well drawn and defined. In the case of the Asante where to belong means not being a Muslim, that group has shown reluctance to religious change.

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<sup>54</sup> David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2004), 67.

<sup>55</sup> Karin van Nieuwkerk, *Women Embrace Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), x.

<sup>56</sup> See John S. Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969).

Another reason why religious change is a problem for Asante women is because the matrilineal society depends on the existence of women members. As women convert, they marry Muslim men and reproduce for the man's line, not their own. According to custom, the matrilineal society loses each time a woman converts or dies. That these women are making choices to "follow their husband"<sup>57</sup> is not new in this context. Many of the women interviewed in this dissertation shared similar stories to the western women discussed in *Women Embrace Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West*.

Precisely because conversion is not an individual but social decision, the right of an Asante woman to change religions has been contested. In *Women Embrace Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West*, the author finds that "the individual's free choice of religion is more an ideal, abstract notion than an observable fact."<sup>58</sup> Although the volume deals with western women and conversion in the West, the same holds true for this group of African women in Africa. Asante women had the "freedom" to choose, however, the implications of that choice cost them their inheritance, access to the matrilineal family and to some degree their ethnicity.

Unlike the effort to domesticate Catholicism and Christianity, Islam has been maintained as the religion of the foreigner.<sup>59</sup> In fact, most Asante continue to see Islam as a foreign religion. It is not surprising that conversion among the Asante to Islam continues to cause commotion giving that many perceive Islam as incompatible with Asante identity. As visitors to the Asante kingdom, Bowdich and Dupuis noticed the

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<sup>57</sup> Nieuwkerk, *Women Embrace Islam*, x.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>59</sup> See Pashington Obeng's, *Asante Catholicism: Religious and Cultural Reproduction among the Akan*, (E.J.Brill: 1996).

generous nature of various Asantehenes towards their Muslim guests. Interestingly, among this cordial and warm reception, the Asantehenes made no attempt at converting their people. It was known that while they acknowledged the importance of Muslims as traders/clerics and bureaucrats, they themselves were not interested (or allowed) to accept the religion for themselves or for their people.

David Owusu-Ansah has argued that the ruling class thought accepting Islam as a state religion would change the social make up of the society to the detriment of their class.<sup>60</sup> The one alleged case of an Asantehene influenced by Muslims ended in his destoolment and suicide in the early nineteenth century. He was charged with intending on establishing the Shari'a as law in the kingdom and subsequently "level all ranks of men and place them at the arbitrary discretion of the sovereign," thus yielding more power for himself and taking away that of the chiefs and other members of the ruling class.<sup>61</sup> The ruling class did not stand to lose as much as the matrilineal system.

It was precisely because conversion to Islam entailed more than religious change that islamization was met with such difficulty among the Asante. Although few of the literature presented here deals with conversion among the Asante, the cases are similar. The literature deals with conversion to Islam by people from ethnic groups traditionally considered non-Islamic. In that literature I explore how conversion to Islam threatened to change how these groups belonged and how they reasserted their identities. The list

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<sup>60</sup> David Owusu-Ansah, "Islamization Reconsidered: An Examination of Asante Responses to Muslim Influence in the Nineteenth Century," in *Ghana in Africa and the world: Essays in Honor of Adu Boahen*, ed. Toyin Falola, (Africa World Press, Inc., 2003), 260-1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

includes the Igbo's in northern Nigeria, the Waso Boorana of northern Kenya, the LooDaga of northern Ghana, the Maasai of Kenya, and merchants in Sikasso, Mali.

Robin Horton's theory on conversion sparked a much needed debate and consequently added to our understanding of the process of conversion. Rather than take conversion processes for granted, Horton sought to explain the logical reasoning behind the change of religions among Africans. He emphasized that the structure of societies promoted conversion to certain religions and the marginalization of others. His structural analysis theory stated that the more advanced a society, the more prone its citizens would be to adopting universal religions such as Islam and Christianity. As they moved into contact with the wider world, so too would their needs for a universal (emphasis on universal/greater God) religion be. The opposite being, the smaller scale societies had no need for universal religions because their emphasis on the smaller gods met the needs of these adherents in their villages.<sup>62</sup>

Humphrey Fisher's rebuttals to this theory are well documented. Unlike Horton, Fisher argued that more emphasis need to be put on the role of the missionaries, whose skills at missionizing created converts. In addition, he thought that a discussion on conversion cannot be complete without analyzing the religion itself, and not just the structure of society.<sup>63</sup>

The Asante are one exception to Horton's theory. Current dialogue on conversion has shifted the focus from the debate sparked by Horton and Fisher. Scholars have

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<sup>62</sup> Robin Horton, "African Conversion" *Africa* (XLI), 1971.

<sup>63</sup> Humphrey Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered: Some Historical Aspects of Religious Conversion in Black Africa," *Africa*, 1973.

analyzed many different reasons why people change religions, often independent of the structure of their society. For example, in some of the cases cited, scholars have found a convert's decision is based on his/her search for identity. In cases dealing with Christianity, conversion theories have also been used to explain how conversion can be used as a prism to study how Africans dealt with and within the colonial enterprise. Christianity brought with it tools useful to the colonial order such as literacy, technology and class.<sup>64</sup> In such cases, conversion is one way of dealing with the new power structure. For the women presented in this dissertation, conversion had to do with self redefinition.

The Asante converts are not only being sidelined by other Asantes, they are also treated as second class citizens by fellow Muslims. As “tuba” or newcomers to Islam, they are perceived as not “truly” Muslim. Thus, the rise of conversion is interpreted as a fluke. This is because religious identity has been delegated to ethnic groups; Muslim northerners and non-Muslim southerners. To be a Muslim means having to accept and be influenced by the dominant Muslim ethnic group. Societies have recently begun to acknowledge the in-betweens. Similarly, Igbo conversion to Islam is causing a similar stir. Similar to the Asante, the Igbos are constructed as traditionally non-Muslims. Similarly here, the north was perceived as Islamic, and the south non-Islamic.

For the Igbos who chose to convert to Islam, they had to deal with an established notion of Islam and Muslims. This notion perceived Islam and Igbo culture as incompatible and distinct. According to Douglas Anthony, “in the past, for Igbos living in

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<sup>64</sup> James F. Searing, “Conversion to Islam: Military Recruitment and Generational Conflict in a Sereer-Safen Village 1920-38, *The Journal of African History* 44 (2003): 14.

these areas, conversion from Christianity to Islam usually started a process of changing one's ethnic affiliation to Hausa," or Hausanization.<sup>65</sup> To be Muslim in this case meant changing one's identity to that of the Hausa, by adopting their language, style of dress, marriage and moving into their communities. The Hausa dominate the discourse on Islam in Nigeria and also in Ghana. But some Igbos, similar to the Asante, refused to acknowledge this alleged superiority and claimed Islam on their own terms. They refused to accept Hausa as the second Islamic language after Arabic and continued to wear their own clothes. An interviewee stated that,

Before when we would go somewhere, and they would see that you are Muslim, they would start talking to you in Hausa language. Because you are Muslim they think you are a Northerner, and when you say you don't understand, they would be perplexed. [I would tell them that] Islam is a religion and Hausa is a language. [Then they would ask] Can you be a Muslim without understanding Hausa? So you can't speak one Hausa? They would be surprised. Even now there are people who think if you are Muslim, you should speak Hausa. [They often ask] Don't you pray using that language? We would answer that we pray using Arabic.<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, the Igbos maintained themselves as distinct Muslims while living within an Islamic community and among other Muslims. Anthony found that "there are now Igbo Muslims who assert membership of both Igbo and Muslim worlds, to whom Hausanization does not appeal. These converts actively challenge the view, so widely embraced in Nigeria, that Igbo and Muslim identities are mutually exclusive."<sup>67</sup> The Muslim Asante are similarly changing their ethnic identities.

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<sup>65</sup> Douglas Anthony, "Islam does not belong to them:" Ethnic and Religious Identities among Male Igbo Converts in Hausaland," *Africa* 70 (2003): 2.

<sup>66</sup> Fatiha. *Interview*. Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission Headquarters. April 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Anthony, "Islam does not belong to them," 2.

The link between religion and ethnic identity is also a problem for the Tiv, who believe that “anyone who does *salla* [Islamic prayer] is a Hausa man. He is no longer accepted as a Tiv.”<sup>68</sup> This dichotomy “negates the grey areas” of which there are small but important minorities. While the Muslim Asante acknowledge that the Hausa have a long history of being Muslims, they are by no means trying to be Hausa. Indeed, few even speak Hausa, and some look down on the “Northerners.” Interestingly, the Muslim Asante are asking for recognition from their fellow Asantes, not from their fellow Muslims. The fact that they are perceived as “Northerner” or having strayed from their ethnicity is the bone of contention, not that they are “tuba” or “bad” Muslims.

Unlike the Igbos, the Asante Muslims have a history of feeling superior to their “northern” Muslim neighbors and would not accept being labeled as “Northerners” or accept them as religiously superior in any way. Contrary to Anthony’s findings, the Muslim Asantes are not appropriating Hausa culture “as an act of will” or trying to affiliate. They are not part of the Hausa circles or economic centers. They do not live in the zongos but are part of the mainstream due to their educational levels. They use Twi language among themselves and a mix of Twi and Arabic when greeting. I speak more Hausa than the 52 people I interviewed for this research, combined. These Muslims are claiming Islam for themselves because as they put it, “Islam does not belong to them [the Hausa].”

James Searing’s article on conversion among the matrilineal Safen ethnic group in Senegal highlights how conversion to Islam can change the matrilineal system. Similar to

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 3.

the Asante, the Safen associate Islam with their neighbors, the Wolof. Searing states that the Safen rejected conversion to Islam because it was one way of maintaining their independence from the Wolof. Thus to be a Muslim was to accept Wolof identity and religious lordship. As he puts it, “conversion to Islam was linked to the disintegration of crucial aspects of the historical “ethnic boundary” between Safen and Wolof in the aftermath of military recruitment during the First World War.”<sup>69</sup> Conversion began to take place at a critical time in history when maternal uncles were said to have abused their power by recruiting their nephews for the War.

Upon their return, as an act of rebellion against their uncles and the matriline, nephews who felt wronged, began to break the matrilineal bond by converting to the patrilineal Islam. By converting, they followed a patrilineal lineage where their fathers had control over them, not their maternal uncles. Converting to Islam was the way they chose to break the relationship between them and the uncles and thus the maternal line.

Conversion to Islam eventually overturned this system of labor and inheritance. By many tokens conversion was also a rebellion against it. Under the colonial system in Bandia, young men suffered from the power of their maternal uncles. The story of military recruitment, as it was told me by the first generation of Muslims, underlined this. Uncles sent their nephews to war, but they lost much of their legitimacy in the process. Uncles also sent their nephews to work on the fields cultivated for the Wolof canton chiefs.<sup>70</sup>

Conversion was used to remove the authority and power had over their nephews. In addition, the maternal line was disturbed and changed. They established a new system of inheritance and belonging. And because they converted to Islam,

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<sup>69</sup> Searing, “Conversion to Islam and Military recruitment,” 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 19.

The young men could not inherit property from their uncles. No one would offer them their nieces or daughters in marriage. They were insulted: 'You are ruined'(yakkunga),'You are Wolof now' (Wolofnga), 'You are a traitor' (workatnga). How did the converts cope with these difficulties, I asked? The reply was that they relied on themselves and helped one another. This led to the formation of Muslim work group and mutual aid society that continued in various forms for many years. Some fathers also helped their sons, aiding them in their defiance of their uncles. This closer relationship between fathers and sons went back to the end of the war, when returning veterans would have nothing to do with the uncles who sent them to the front. They looked to their fathers or sons for support.<sup>71</sup>

In his article entitled, "Merchants, Muslims and Wahabiyas," Richard Warms explores the history of conversion among a particular group of merchants in Mali. Similar to the history of the Asante, Islam was brought into Sikasso, Mali (located in southwestern Mali) by Dyula traders. Following Horton's conversion model, Warms found that the local population converted to allow them access to the wider Muslim circles as they moved out of the village due to slavery, warfare, and colonization. As they came into contact with people with different linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds, Islam became a religion they had in common and thus unified them on religious and economic levels.<sup>72</sup> Traders and merchant activities made Islam an attractive religion for many of the town's inhabitants, who found they had to be Muslim to get access to the merchant circles. In addition, French colonial rule also impacted conversion as the French supported the growth of Islam in contrast to any African Tradition Religion. Furthermore, colonial rule facilitated easy travel which "favored the expansion

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>72</sup> Richard Warms, "Merchants, Muslims, and Wahhabiyya: The Elaboration of Islamic Identity in Sikasso, Mali," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 26 (1992): 4.

of Islam.”<sup>73</sup> For merchants in Sikasso, being a Muslim was their leverage as merchants. They used this identity to create bonds and credit with other Muslim merchants. This was how they created a socioeconomic difference in the region vis-à-vis their non-Muslim neighbors.

Islamic identity did not carry the same leverage amongst the Asante as it did among the Sikasso. In fact, because the Muslim merchants were working in a predominantly non-Muslim center, their impact and influence was limited. The Muslim minority had more to gain by accommodating Asante religious needs than vice versa. Owusu-Ansah posits that fewer conversions existed among the Asante people because they, unlike other groups in West Africa, did not experience rapid social changes that may have influenced change of religions. In addition, he states that during the period when Islam should have claimed some converts, (during political or social turmoil) it was unable or unwilling to do so, proving that maybe the religion itself was not properly implanted in the region. The period of British conquest of Asante and the subsequent demolition of Kumasi is a good example of such occasions, when the Muslim population proved either unwilling or unable to take advantage of that situation.<sup>74</sup>

In his study on Islamic conversion among the Yao of southern Malawi, Alan Thorold states that “the development of Islam among the Yao occurred in conjunction

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>74</sup> David Owusu-Ansah, "Ashanti Responses to Islamization--1750-1874: A Case Study of the Relationship between Trade and Islamization in A Forest State of West Africa." *Institute of Islamic Studies*, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, 1980.

with fundamental changes in the political economy of the region.”<sup>75</sup> Similar to the Asante, the Yao are also a minority Muslim group in Malawi. He goes on to say that “there is a kind of internal logic of Islamic transformation which can be discerned.”<sup>76</sup> Thorold notes the beginning of Islam among the Yao with the end of the slave trade, which “caused a severe erosion of the chiefs’ authority since a great deal of their power and wealth depended on it.”<sup>77</sup> The rise of urbanization and unemployment can be seen as causing “severe erosion” of the matrilineal system and the support it afforded them in the past. Louis Brenner, in the same volume states in reference to Islamic identities in Mali, the “construction of identities can be conceptualized as a system of transformations located within a broader socio-political process.”<sup>78</sup> This also echoes what is taking place among the Asante and eventually the Muslim Asante within a locally non-Muslim area and nationally in a secular state.

To be able to tease out these complications, I have to pay attention to individual stories. Michelle Gilbert’s work “The Sudden Death of a Millionaire” does that. Gilbert defines conversion as an act by the individual and society. The individual has to be accepted as having changed. As she states, “religious conversion is a rite of transition, and the newly acquired status must be socially validated.”<sup>79</sup> The Asante Muslims are not

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<sup>75</sup> Alan Thorold, “Metamorphoses of the Yao Muslims,” in *Muslim Identity and Social Change in Sub Saharan Africa*, ed. Louis Brenner (Indiana University Press: Indiana, 1993), 79.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>78</sup> Louis Brenner, “Muslim Identity and Social Change,” in *Muslim Identity and social change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (Indiana University Press: Indiana, 1993), 59.

<sup>79</sup> Melissa Gilbert, “The Sudden Death of a Millionaire: Conversion and Consensus in a Ghanaian Kingdom,” *Africa* 58 (3), 3.

being accepted as having changed religions. In addition, her idea of “under conversion” is particularly interesting. She states that conversion can take years to occur, and not immediate as assumed. For example, that individual Asante is converting to Islam is the immediate aspect of conversion. However, it can take years for society to accept Asantes as part of the Islamic world. Thus their break with the Asante tradition is not complete.

Most theories or models on conversion discuss this process as solely a change in religion and religious activities. However, for the Asante who are angry at their daughters, sisters and aunts for converting, the bone of contention is precisely because conversion to Islam is more than a change in religion and religious activities. The fact that Islam compels their new converts to stop wearing traditional cloth when mourning, to stop holding elaborate funerals, to stop pouring libation, to stop acknowledging the ancestors, and so much more is the reason why the religion is perceived as a threat. What then becomes of the matrilineal system? And how are they still Asante?

Humphrey Fisher adapted a theory on conversion from Arthur Darby Nock, which states that conversion is “a definite crossing of religious frontiers, in which an old spiritual home was left for a new one and for all.” His definition of adhesion is also useful, “one foot on each side of a fence,” which in turns leads “to an acceptance of new worships as useful supplements and not as substitutes, and [does] not involve the taking of a new way of life in place of the old.”<sup>80</sup> As he states, a “great change is involved” and needed from those seeking this new path. I agree that, “religious change is not a one-off

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<sup>80</sup> Humphrey Fisher, “Many Deep Baptisms: Reflections on Religious, Chiefly Muslim, Conversion in Black Africa,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57 (1994): 68.

affair, but a continuing evolution: not one conversion, but one stage after another in a continuing conversion process: not one baptism, but many baptisms.”<sup>81</sup> I find this theory relevant to this study on Asante women converts to Islam. Since Islam has been present among the Asante for centuries, can the fact that they are still perceived as newcomers to Islam be explained in terms that they are still “under conversion?”

The “Northerners,”<sup>82</sup> one interviewee informed, do not think an Asante can learn Arabic or become knowledgeable in the Qu’ran, “so when they see me, they are shocked that I can speak, read and understand Arabic.”<sup>83</sup> The Asante are often criticized for following certain aspects of their culture, which some see as non-Islamic. One of my interviewees is often asked by whom he calls “Northerners” why he has kept the Asante name of “Owusu,” although he is a Muslim. His reply is that he is still Asante and very proud to be Asante. This notion of pride is also a bone of contention between the two groups. Some of the Asante interviewed think the “Northerner” has accepted Arabic names to the detriment of their traditional names because they have “nothing to be proud about.” The Asante continue to reaffirm, “I am Muslim, but still Asante”.

This is the entente within which the Asante Muslim finds himself. His identity is being poked at from both sides and in the process he is creating a place for him/herself within Ghana’s Islamic paradigm and identity construction.<sup>84</sup> As the process of inheritance is challenged, this population and their descendants are perceived to be

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>82</sup> This term is used here in reference to people who are considered traditionally Muslim, (often from the Northern section of Ghana) and have been Muslims longer than the Asante.

<sup>83</sup> M. Adjei. *Interview*. Rare Book Room, Balme Library, Accra. May 2006.

<sup>84</sup> A. Owusu. *Interview*. Islamic College of Ghana, Accra. May 2006.

enriching another group's numbers. Or as an informant told me, Asante Muslim women are perceived to be "removing [their] intestines and replacing [them] with filth." I find this analogy interesting because it implies that these women are giving away something vital to life, and unable to replace it with something equally important. The analogy implies that they are removing their lifelines and in the process sacrificing themselves.<sup>85</sup>

These theories are all relevant to the exploration of conversion among the Asante. This is because there are multiple factors influencing conversion during the period of study. One major issue is the rise of women's socio-economic power which made many of them independent for the first time in the colonial and post colonial periods. This led to delaying marriage in some cases but others chose husbands who were outsiders to the Asante matrilineal system. In addition, apart from choosing non Asante husbands, some of the women, as market sellers came into contact with Ahmadi missionaries. By so doing, they learned a great deal more about Islam than they had previously known. Thus conversion was also influenced by their genuine interest in the religion. One more important aspect which influenced conversion during this period had to do with the socioeconomic landscape. The economy was at a standstill. Socially, men and women were changing traditional concepts of gender. Ghana was politically so unstable that scholars state that this trend had been normalized. Because so many changes were already taking place among the genders, and women became prominent food producers

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<sup>85</sup> This issue of identity is also causing havoc in present day Ga society in Accra. The candidate for the Ga traditional stool is allegedly claiming his eligibility through his grandmother, thus matrilineal. While he grew up in Accra, the Gas are however a patrilineal group and are denying him the right to claim belonging-ness through the grandmother. While this issue is not religious, interestingly the same problems arise; that of identity in a changing world.

and sellers, the victimization of women took a new turn. I argue that these socioeconomic problems also influenced conversion. Women turned to religion for solace and protection. The mosque and church provided a new connection in society while distant from it as well.

I now turn to explore the changing facets of masculinity among the Asante and other groups in West Africa.

### ***“On Masculinity”***

Why were there such few men who stood up for these women? Why did so many men “sell out” these women? Why women were left alone to face these abuses as a gender when they fought alongside the men for independence and other freedoms as part of the nation? Parts to those answers lies in “cultural understandings of men’s right to control women” and how this control “leads many societies to condone the physical discipline of women and girls.” Even though women were incorrectly blamed, men had the moral authority to discipline as needed. So men who stayed silent, did so believing that men in general had that moral authority to physically discipline women and girls, and still not call it violence or abuse.<sup>86</sup> Akosua Adomako-ampofo-Ampofo expresses concern

with how the social construction of masculine aggression gains social acceptance through the state’s complicity with the use of violence, either overtly or by its silence, during war and peacetime, and the adverse implications for women in those social spaces.<sup>87</sup>

Kay Palan’s “Reexamining Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Identity Scales” states that gender, or how men and women are conditioned to behave are social constructions.

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<sup>86</sup> Adomako-Ampofo, “Women and Gender Studies,” 692.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 693.

That is, society and culture shapes how boys and girls behave. In the process, boys are trained to be “independent, assertive and competitive.” Girls on the other hand are taught how to be “understanding, caring. Femininity thus involves an awareness of others, interdependence.”<sup>88</sup> While these roles do not always coincide with biology, some cultures, similar to the Asante culture, structure their societies around these divisions. Men and women unable to conform, often find themselves outside of society and often victims of the backlash.

In many cases however, these terms are up for contestation. It’s not always a given that men are allowed to be independent, assertive and lords over women. In “Wolof women, economic liberalization, and the crisis of masculinity in rural Senegal,” the author finds that men’s battles with women “believe the instability of their status.”<sup>89</sup> She continues that “men must verbally [and physically] promote their ideal vision of male authority precisely because this opinion is open to negotiation.” This is all the more visible during the periods discussed in this dissertation, when women are owners of their produce and often independent of male authority. It is understandable why women would refuse to marry under such conditions considering that they were not dependent on the men’s labor or finances. As a result stereotypes that “a husband is nothing,” and “men are of no use anymore, they can’t do anything for you,” would frustrate men who were once thought to be more important.

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<sup>88</sup> Kay Palan, “Reexamining Masculinity, Femininity, 366.

<sup>89</sup> Donna Perry, “Wolof Women, Economic Liberalization, and the Crisis of Masculinity in Rural Senegal” *Ethnology* (2005): 209.

The other part of that answer has to do with the fact that women did not easily accept the social constructs of their gender. Some women, often a silent majority, find ways to struggle and change aspects of society that positions them as social inferiors. These women are not as atypical as the literature would suggest. The more accurate portrayal most likely involves women's contestations on a level that men have been forced to ignore for fear of disturbing social norms. Other tensions often results from women's gains in status and attention during periods when men's power waned. The struggles that escalates is often as a result of not women not wanting to "stay in their place," but of women in search of their place.

### ***"The Media"***

The print media in West Africa was started by colonial authorities and dominated by men. In the post colony, government-owned newspapers continued to dominate the field and so did the men as journalists. The print word continued to be in the hands of government and used as the state's mouthpiece. So much so that the independent press had a hard time establishing themselves. One reason for this is that newspapers in Ghana were used to create the "national imaginary." In *The Press and Political Culture in Ghana*, the author states that

the national imaginary of print capitalism not only constructs an ontology of political reality but also a narrative that positions a hypothetical set of actors in relation to one another (be they classes, ethnic groups, regions or personalities) and organizes the historical logic of their engagement and ongoing interaction.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Jennifer Hasty, *The Press and Political Culture in Ghana*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2004), 10.

I would add women into the list of actors. For during this period under review, women were the subject par excellence in the news media. This was so because “both state and private journalist participate in a common political logic grounded in African notions of authority, political legitimacy, sociality, and discursive propriety.”<sup>91</sup> In addition, as part of the societal structure and part of the landscape of agreed norms and customs, private newspapers also sought to capture the audience of the state owned newspapers. And by so doing, printed similar materials and often with the same views. One example of this was the “woman problem” in Ghana.<sup>92</sup>

*The Daily Graphic* (founded in 1950 and *Ghanaian Times* (founded in 1958) were state funded during the period under review.<sup>93</sup> The others were independent and part of the independent press. *The Daily Graphic* (founded in 1950) is the oldest newspaper in Ghana. The independent papers were founded in the post colony. It’s worth noting that most newspaper journalists in Ghana at the time were men. Recently however, young women became the most visible television reporters.<sup>94</sup>

While the *Graphic* has “the largest readership” in Ghana today, *The Mirror* was founded to counter their state sponsored news. “Founded on a policy of vigorous neutrality and constructive criticism,” the *Mirror’s* neutrality soon gained them the reputation of being “neocolonial” and although staffed by African journalists, “the papers

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>94</sup> There are 9 public channels in Ghana, although not all have nationwide coverage. They are GTV, TV3, TV Africa, Metro TV, Net 2, Crystal TV1, Crystal TV2, Viasat 1, and E TV. The last two are South African channels. They all have female anchors or co hosts to the news. Most of the women tend to be young and according to “gossip” single. The radio continues to be dominated by young men.

initially faced boycotts by Ghanaians and Nigerians who suspected neocolonial agenda.”<sup>95</sup> That they would be labeled neocolonial indicates the government papers’ attempts to discredit alternative voices.

*The Ghanaian Chronicle* is an “investigative paper” with “reputation for greater subtly and balance in reporting.”<sup>96</sup> While these papers are perceived as competitors, they continue to report similar news items and often with the same value systems. For example, not one of those papers sought to analyze and criticize the “woman problem.”

I presented this thorough analysis of the literature to analyze the different themes involved in understanding conversion among Asante women to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. Because the topic of conversion implies so much more than religious change, we have to understand the socioeconomic context of that change and why Islam became attractive for the first time to Asantes. By so doing, the importance and weight of that change would be clearer to the reader.

Now I turn to explore the changing complexion of Islam among the Asante.

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<sup>95</sup> Hasty, *The Press and Political Culture in Ghana*, 32.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

## Chapter 2

### *The Changing Complexions of Islam and Muslims in the Asante Empire, 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

The Asante kingdom emerged as the most powerful inland kingdom in the early eighteenth century. This was done by defeating and incorporating its neighbors to the north and south of its borders into the economic and political order. The kingdom expanded to an Empire by including smaller, but strategically positioned states, whose capture was in line of the policy to control and enrich the Empire.<sup>97</sup> By so doing, the Asante Empire or “Greater Asante” emerged geographically larger than present-day Ghana.<sup>98</sup>

The economy was based on gold, but other items such as kola nuts were traded as far north as present day northern Nigeria. One of the major reasons why the Empire’s economy flourished was because Kumasi became the region’s major trading center; and traders came from far and wide with their merchandise to the capital. Asante’s wealth was depended on the extensive gold fields and its ability to control trade routes. Due to its position and wealth, the Asante dominated trade to the north and south of its borders. This was done by sending Asante officials and spies to safeguard and protect the borders and control the subjects. Asante officials and traders were given free access to the markets of the subject states; while subject peoples were limited to markets in Kumasi.

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<sup>97</sup> J.K. Fynn, *Asante and its Neighbors 1700-1807* (London: Longman, 1971), 37.

<sup>98</sup> Ivor Wilks, “On Mentally Mapping Greater Asante: A Study of Time and Motion,” *Journal of African History*, 33 (1992): 175

The Asante Empire was made up of other Akan groups such as the Fanti, Akyem and other groups whose culture and language were similar to the Asante. These people, as Akans, were considered less foreign or “other” even as captured subjects. This is because they shared similar cultures to the Asante. Their funeral rites were the same. They buried their dead after 40 days and held elaborate celebrations for the life the person lived. They also believed a person can only take over power after performing certain rites; such as cooking for the ancestors. They all also believed that the ancestors lived amongst the living and that they can be consulted for advice by diviners. Furthermore, this group of Akans believed that purity of the group can only be guaranteed by tracing members via the maternal line.

This was not the case for Northern territories such as Gonja and Dagomba. As Muslims and unlike the Akan, the Gonja and Dagomba bury their dead after a week. No elaborate celebrations are held, which the Akan see as a disgrace to the dead. Belonginess is not traced from the woman, but by the man. Children belong to the man and his family, not the woman and hers. Because of these various cultural, religious and linguistic difference, the Northerners were easily maintained as “other” and were less able to be incorporated, at least culturally, into “Greater Ashanti” or the Empire.<sup>99</sup>

In terms of state structure, the Asante kingdom and later Empire did not depart from the Akan system of rule based on the matrilineal family and kinship. The matrilineal system means each family unit traces lineage to a single female ancestor. This is also how property, wealth, people and labor are controlled, through the female line. This family

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<sup>99</sup> Abaka, *Kola is God's Gift*, 14.

system eventually encompassed the village, town and state. Thus, belonging and being was only possible through the matrilineal family; the core of Asante identity.

The Asante used the matrilineal system to construct and unify its ruling class. The matrilineal system was also used to exclude “others.” This worked to disqualify the non-Asante from holding political power within the monarchy. The Northerners or Muslims were the most distinct “other” within the Empire. While they were respected for the spiritual power embedded in Islam and their Arabic literacy skills, Muslims were maintained as a separate community and not allowed to convert the Asante. Indeed, to convert an Asante to Islam would have been met with capital punishment. The Asante ruling class were adamant about restraining conversion to Islam. One major example of this was the de-stoolment of Asantehene Osei Kwame in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was rumored that he was secretly a Muslim and would adopt Islamic law in place of the matrilineal system. Whether or not this was true is not the point. The fact that mere rumor was enough to de-stool him proved how fearful the ruling class was of Islam ever becoming the state religion.<sup>100</sup> This is another indication of how serious the Asante responded to dissention and threats to the matrilineal system.

The Asante were able to control and maintain Muslim influence separate from Asante culture until the British takeover. As mentioned before, the Muslims who were invited into the kingdom and Empire were very skilled and literate. They were used as diplomats, historians, and traders on behalf of the Asante. British rule brought in an influx of Muslims, who were mostly young and unskilled. As part of the British armed

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<sup>100</sup> Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 243.

forces, the British enlisted Hausa/Muslim troops to help topple Asante. By so doing, these new Muslims outnumbered the older and educated population, and were associated with Asante's downfall. Furthermore, Muslims became associated with unskilled labor force and inferior jobs. Consequently, Muslims gained the new reputation of being inferior subjects and anti-Asante, as part of the British armed forces used to overthrow the empire. I will return to this in the next chapter on British rule.

The first phase of Muslim migration into the kingdom of Asante predates the rise of the state in the 1700s. By the time the Akan states united, Muslims were already working as traders between the region and North Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The Dyula is an ethnic group which came from Wangara, Mali and were in search of centers of gold production. Upon arriving among the Akans, they settled and became the leading traders in gold; but not all of them were traders. Some were clerics and artisans. Scholars agree the majority were traders, taking into consideration just how few sought out to convert the general population, as occurred in other parts of West Africa. This aspect of Akan history has been explored by historians Ivor Wilks and David Owusu-Ansah. Wilks states that, "the history of the early dispersion of Wangara from the heartlands of Mali is at the same time that of the development of new centers of gold production."<sup>101</sup> It is important to keep this in mind because as the world system is changing to gold use for trade, so too are the Wangara migrating outside of their homeland in search of gold producing centers and being their middlemen to North Africa and beyond. Thus the motives for migration were economic, not religious. Nonetheless,

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<sup>101</sup> Ivor Wilks, "The Juula and the Expansion of Islam into the Forest" in *History of Islam in Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion, (Ohio University Press: Bloomington, 2000), 94.

these two motives need not be exclusive of one another. But economics is one reason why the Muslims did not push to convert the Asante.

Muslims traded and lived among the Akan before the Asante kingdom emerged dominant in 1701. In search of gold producing centers for the global market, the Dyula were the primary group of Muslims living among the Asante at this time. As Muslim traders, the Dyula used their Islamic knowledge and network to help situate themselves among the Asante. Their literacy skills were welcomed and they worked to “open” the Asante to the global/Islamic world. In return, they dominated the gold trade coming out of Asante. Later on they were given Asante “citizenship.” This new identity meant they were the only group of Muslims acknowledged and sanctioned to be doing business in the wealthy empire. They were also maintained with wealth and riches surpassing that of their Muslim brethren in other kingdoms such as Dahomey. The Dyula and Asante relationship was built on mutual respect and appreciation. It was also a sensitive relationship.

Topping their other responsibilities, the primary duty of this Muslim faction was to pray for the Asantehene’s health. Their other duty was to guarantee protection against invaders and spiritual enemies. In the meantime they worked as ambassadors and diplomats. This included writing letters of correspondence to other Muslim states to “open” Asante up to the wider Muslim world. They also worked as military advisers and brokering truces for the Asante with their Muslim neighbors.<sup>102</sup> It is reported that Asantehene Osei Bonsu trusted the opinion of his Muslim advisors so much that he never

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<sup>102</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Consul Dupuis and Wangara: a window on Islam in early nineteenth-century Asante,” *Sudanic Africa* (1995): 59.

engaged in any warlike enterprise without first consulting his team of Muslim clerics. Letters written in Arabic from the period referred to various Asantehenes as “sympathizers, saviors, and friend,” showing the great respect that the Muslims had for their kings. These letters are also indicators of how well received and how well the Asantehenes maintained the Muslims.<sup>103</sup>

These Muslims were also permitted to convert a few people, an activity prohibited to all other Muslims at this time. Written sources on the kings in the 18<sup>th</sup> century confirm that an important relationship developed between Muslims and certain Asantehenes. For example, Asantehenes respected Muslims to the point of having freed Muslim slaves and pardoned them from the death penalty.<sup>104</sup> In addition, Asantehene Osei Kwadwo not only freed Muslims but appointed one as his junior counselor. That person was Abu Bakr Bamba, then appointed leader of Asante Nkramos or Muslim subjects of the Asante Kingdom.<sup>105</sup> Although this term has been misappropriated to mean “all” Asantes who are Muslims, it was originally given to the group of Dyula/Wangara clerics and merchants, well positioned within the Kingdom and working for the Asantehenes.<sup>106</sup> Writings from

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<sup>103</sup> Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 110.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>106</sup> In a book published by the Ahmadiyya Mission, a descendant of the first followers explains how the term “Nkramo” came to be. He states, “I feel duty-bound to write this book in the hope that it may throw light on the position of “Islam” the religion brought by the Prophet of Islam some 1400 years ago, and which has been given the wrong name of “KRAMO” in this country due to ignorance. To the average Ghanaian, “KRAMO” literally means a Muslim whose lot in society is to “kill” by means of Holy Quran but “KRAMO” is the perverted form of “CRAAT” an Arabic word which means reading. Is this the correct rendering of the word “Islam” which means “Peace” and all that it connotes? In this country, due to the unfortunate accident of history, Islam is branded as the religion of the Northerner, the ignorant, the poor, the old and the down-trodden and so

these Muslims describe Asantehene Osei Bonsu “as a friend on whom they could always rely for protection.”<sup>107</sup> He was also referred to as “savior and sympathizer of the Muslims.”<sup>108</sup> Wilks remarked on an alleged rumor of an Asantehene supposedly in communication with jihad leader, Almami Samori in the late nineteenth century, who reportedly visited Kumasi in person.<sup>109</sup> This “rumor” attests to how important Asante had become to the Muslim world. It also is an indicator of how well respected the Asante were that a jihad leader would consider visiting this land of non-Muslims. It was also reported that descendants of the Prophet Muhammad were “received by the Ashantee with hospitality unlimited in its scope.”<sup>110</sup>

Although the Asante refused adopting Islam as state religion, they held the “holy book of the Muslims” in high esteem. They believed it was embedded with magical powers. In the eighteenth century, a Muslim-made amulet war-gown cost thirty slaves, and even more if imported directly from the north.<sup>111</sup> Although these Muslims were in contact more with the royal houses, the average Asante turned to them for amulets to guarantee happy marriages, childbearing, easy childbirth, long life, wealth, and prevent

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Muslims are regarded with scorn and contempt in society. Nkramo is word not a religion. As the Hausas call a person who has studied the Holy Quran “Mallam” a perverted form of Muallim an Arabic word which is title for a person has studied the Holy Quran so do the Wangaras also give the title “Alkramoa” to a person who has studied the Holy Quran. Thus “Nkramo” came to be accepted as the name of Islam in this part of West Africa because it was given that wrong name by Mallam Tiibu a Wangara man.” (*The beginnings of Ahmadiyya in Ghana* Sept 1979, 3).

<sup>107</sup> Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 257.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 258.

illness<sup>112</sup> when needed.<sup>113</sup> Muslim expertise was not solely monopolized by the court. Indeed, Asantes of all classes purchased amulets and sought the advice of malams for various needs. Despite how well received Muslims were, Islam was maintained as distinct from Asante culture. To be an Asante also came to mean not being a Muslim.

Founded by Al-Hajj Salim Suwari in the sixteenth century, Suwarian theology affirmed that it was permissible in Islam for Muslims to trade within non-Muslim territories without threatening their positions in the afterlife. As Wilks notes, he “allow[ed] them access to their material resources of this world without foregoing salvation in the next.”<sup>114</sup> Further, *kufir* or disbelief was “construed as ignorance rather than wickedness.”<sup>115</sup> This meant that jihad was not obligatory and it became the duty of the Muslim to educate. In addition, I would add that this paradigm allowed such Muslim traders freer access to non-Muslim territories without having their Muslim identity threatened by other Muslims in the wider Islamic world. This would also relieve them from the pressure of having to launch a jihad to prove their Muslim-ness.<sup>116</sup> While the

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<sup>112</sup> Marian Dansa, born Abena Dansa, from Meposo was of the royal family. She died in 1986 and was over 100 years old. She converted when she was about 18 years old, “had already given birth before converting.” Adjei’s mother was her 11<sup>th</sup> child. According to her great grand child, the family “had a blood stool, every forty days would call *Akwasidei*, you have to pour libation, cook food for the ancestors. She realized that every time after performing this, she would lose one of her children, unsuspected[ly]. So she decided to convert to Islam, abandon the traditional way of worshiping. That time, she did not know much about Islam, but in an act of frustration, she decided to worship the Supreme God. The Muslims use to preach, the orthodox Muslims, and that influenced her to come to Islam.”

<sup>113</sup> David Owusu-Ansah, “Prayer, Amulets, and Healing” in *History of Islam in Africa*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 482.

<sup>114</sup> Wilks, “The Juula and the Expansion of Islam,” 98.

<sup>115</sup> Wilks, “Consul Dupuis and Wangara,” 60.

<sup>116</sup> Wilks, “The Juula and the Expansion of Islam,” 106.

Suwarian tradition helped Muslims assimilate in Asante, McCaskie informs that some of the Muslims, at least in secrecy, weighed the options of a jihad. In *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, McCaskie explains that:

Some of those peripatetic Muslims resident in Kumase confessed privately to the doctrinal reservations that underlay their commercial and diplomatic motives for being there. They fully understood that while their international contacts and command of literacy were of use to the Asante state, their continued presence and influence depended upon syncretistic adaptation and public adherence to established Asante paradigms of belief, custom and social practice.<sup>117</sup>

This statement implies that Asante state policy, based on the matrilineal system, more than the unwillingness of Muslims to convert, stopped the spread of Islam in the kingdom.

The second phase of Muslims in the kingdom came in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Partly due to Usman dan Fodio's jihad and the incorporation of tributary kingdoms to the North, Hausa migration into the region soon outnumbered the Dyula. Consequently, Hausa culture and numbers came to dominate the Muslim population in Asante. Until today, Hausa is synonymous with Islam in Ghana.

The Hausa, similar to the Dyula before them, utilized their literacy skills and networks for the advancement of the Asante Kingdom. They were successful "representatives" of the Asante kingdom to the northern tributaries because they were "already integrated into the social and political life of the hinterland states."<sup>118</sup>

The Asantehene was keenly interested in encouraging trade with the north, and he welcomed Muslim traders in Kumasi, who could then keep direct communication

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<sup>117</sup> T.C. McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, 135.

<sup>118</sup> Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa: A Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the pre-Colonial period*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 182.

with the court, from where the organized Ashanti state trading was commanded. The resident Muslims in Kumasi could render invaluable service to traders in the north, both in representing them before the Asantehene, and in reporting economic and political conditions.<sup>119</sup>

Wilks argued that the Hausa takeover as the dominant Muslim group at this time was made possible by the fact that the Dyula, after centuries in the region, had assimilated enough to be allowed access to other economic activities, generating vacancies in their previous posts. This was because the Dyula were recognized as the first group of Muslims sanctioned to carry out trade and work at the behest of the Asante. As a result, they came to adopt Asante language and culture. They became known as the Asante Nkramos and were no longer perceived as “strangers” in the kingdom. Unlike other Muslims who were to migrate into the kingdom later on, Asante Nkramos were under the direct authority of the Asantehene. The Hausa and other Muslims came under the authority of their respective chiefs in the zongos.

It was widely believed that Hausa Muslim spiritual activities on behalf of the kingdom enabled the Asante to defeat and conquer Muslims to the north of the capital. The Dyula worked mostly as diplomats while the Hausa worked securing victories. It is this period of conquests and conflicts with Muslim states which inaugurated Asante linkage of Muslims as inferior subjects and outsiders, particularly in reference to the Gonja and Dagomba tributaries. Asante’s policy towards these tributaries was influenced by Asante ethno-centricism, especially in regards to the belief that Asante presence was

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

mandatory because the Northerners were prone to fighting and violence.<sup>120</sup> Asante perception of Muslims in general was further changed by the mid nineteenth century, during which the open door policy granted to Muslims or northern traders was revoked. No longer were Muslims given free access to Kumasi markets. They had to bring their products outside of the city and sale it to an Asante middleman at a very low price who would then resale it at the market. This exclusion did not affect Asante Nkramos, or Muslims acknowledged by the court, but Muslims from the north and other areas. Wilks states that this decision may have been taken by Asantehene Kwaku Dua I in 1844. He notes, among many other possible reasons, that this may have been an effort by the Asantehene to curb the growing economic power of the Muslims in Asante.<sup>121</sup>

Due to the fact that the Dyula had worked to “open” the Asante to the global network of Muslim traders, many more Muslims were passing through and partaking in economic activities within the kingdom. As itinerant traders, they were of no direct use to the kingdom. It was to curb their growing presence that this law was passed. In addition, the Asante kingdom had taken deliberate steps at reducing competition among kola nut traders to benefit their “professional class working for the state.” By banning northern traders and denying them access south of Salaga, the Asante monopoly in key items was protected.<sup>122</sup> This step was all the more prudent when the end of the Atlantic slave trade is taken into account. The argument has been made that Asante intervention at this time

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<sup>120</sup> Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 266.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>122</sup> Edmund Abaka, *‘Kola is God’s Gift’ Agricultural Production, Export Initiatives and the Kola Industry of Asante and the Gold Coast c.1820-1950* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 59.

was “a means of compensating for losses resulting from the abolition of the slave trade.” Abaka argues that demand for kola grew at this time and controlling it meant increased revenue.<sup>123</sup> The end of the Atlantic slave trade meant a decrease in state revenue, which was compensated for in the rise and demand for the kola nut.

The third phase of Muslim migration occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike earlier Muslims, this new wave of migration was ushered in by British military needs. These Muslims were about 2,000 Hausa men from “the Nigeria colonial forces.”<sup>124</sup> They “considerably augmented the Hausa population of southern Gold Coast.”<sup>125</sup> It is not surprising that Hausa culture would become synonymous with Islam in Ghana considering how overwhelming the populations of Hausa Muslims were in the region. This third phase was a big blow to Asante power, since these Muslims were imported to partake in the 1873/74 Anglo-Asante war. This Hausa Constabulary would go on to form the West African Frontier Forces in 1901. They would be used to help conquer and secure British colonies.

This war dealt another crucial blow to Asante-Muslim relations. As mentioned earlier, the Muslim relationship within the kingdom, although favorable, was very delicate. The Muslims were above all, foreigners, to be watched over and contained, lest they get out of control. Competition from the kola nut trade was the first clear attempt to curb the rising economic influence of Muslims within the kingdom. So when one more situation occurred which painted the Muslims in a negative light, such as failing to secure

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>124</sup> Owusu-Ansah, "Ashanti Responses to Islamization," 121.

<sup>125</sup> Patrick J. Ryan, “Ariadne and Naxos: Islam and Politics in a Pluralistic African Society,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, (1996): 78.

victory, the Asante began to question Muslim allegiance to the kingdom. Not only was the Muslim God unable to help the Asante, but subsequent revolts by Muslims in the North may have been read as disloyal and untrustworthy, and by association, implicated the wider Muslim community.<sup>126</sup> Asante were further resentful of British colonial policy which allowed Muslim traders free access to the toppled kingdom. Things took an even worse turn during the colonial era with the adoption of the indirect rule system, where the British sought to rule “indirectly” through the established political order. By doing, they acknowledged the Zongos as states with their own ruling system, when they were previously under Asante domination. Similar to the practice adopted in Nigeria and Sudan, indirect rule in the Gold Coast was different than those countries with “natural” rulers. I will return to this topic in the next chapter.

Consequently, the Zongos were treated as “mini emirates” with their own “native” chiefs and laws. The “Mohammedan quarter” as the British designated it, was legally recognized by colonial officials who sanctioned the Hausa chief, as head of the zongo.<sup>127</sup> These Muslims were now under the authority of the British, not the Asante. No longer were these Muslims “subjects” or guests of the Asante. They were now British subjects. As a result of this relationship, they were able to expand and “regain control over almost all items of long-distance trade including kola nuts.” The ban against Muslims to enter Kumasi was now lifted, allowing them access that they had not enjoyed before. In addition, Northerners seeking jobs, especially in the cocoa industry began migrating into

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<sup>126</sup> Owusu-Ansah, “Ashanti Responses to Islamization,” 123.

<sup>127</sup> Jean Marie Allman, “Hewers of wood, Carriers of water:” Islam, Class, and Politics on the Eve of Ghana’s Independence, *African Studies Review*, (1991): 4.

Kumasi in greater numbers than before.<sup>128</sup> This new affiliation with the British certainly had a negative impact on Asante-Muslim relations. These Muslims had helped the British exile their beloved king Prempeh. No longer were they acting on the behest of the other, they were now on the opposite side of politics.

It is within this context that new religions were able to establish schools and churches among the Asante. No other Islamic group made more use of the changing times than the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. They recognized the importance of converting the major ethnic group in the Gold Coast. They knew that Islam would only make an impact if they were able to attract the Akan and Asante to the religion. I now look at British colonial rule and the coming of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in the Gold Coast.

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<sup>128</sup> Enid Schildkrout, "Islam and Politics in Kumasi: an analysis of disputes over Kumasi Central Mosque," *Anthropological Papers of American Museum of Natural History*, (1974): 116.

### Chapter 3

#### *British Colonial Rule*

British control of the Gold Coast intensified after defeating Asante in 1896. Asantehene Prempeh was exiled and Asante was left in flux. The physical removal of the king signified new beginnings for the Asante; one which signaled the British as new kings. After this war, the British became de-facto lords of the region once dominated and controlled by the Asante Empire. The Gold Coast was administered based on the indirect rule policy, developed by the British in Nigeria and was considered a success among the Muslim population there. Akin to divide and rule, indirect rule aimed to maintain the Muslims in Asante as distinct “states” or polities with their own kings or *zarki*. To do this, the British selected heads of the various Muslim populations, based on ethnicity, to manage individual Zongos or “states.” The Zongos were a slap to Asante which for centuries maintained the Muslims as visitors and not “locals.”

British colonial rule further alienated the Asante from their Muslim neighbors to the North. The British divided the region into three, the Colony which was at the coast, Asante and the Northern Protectorate. This division also affected administration. The British promoted education and missionary activity in the south and in Asante, but not in the North. The British resisted and restrained missionary activity and education among the Muslims for fear that it might “spoil” them. Education, it was argued, “would make

them discontented with their lot.”<sup>129</sup> By so doing, the North was used as the source for menial workers, unable to compete in the colonial order.<sup>130</sup> This notion of the North as “backwards” and uneducated further fed into the existing prejudices of Muslims as inferior.

The British also understood the North to be “Muslim” and the Southern portion of the country as “pagan” or lacking religion.<sup>131</sup> Thus they promoted efforts of the missionaries in certain areas that needed “civilization” while making sure that “too much civilization” did not “spoil” others. However, because education and Christian activity was promoted among the Southerners, they were the ones able to find employment and social status within the colony. Muslims and Northerners were maintained as second class citizens; rarely finding a respectable foothold in the colonial administration. For some Northerners, colonization meant, “foreign rule, the need for new identities, the creation of chiefs, the imposition of taxes and a money economy, extensive labor migration, Christian evangelicalism, and the attempted regulation of their lives by the courts.”<sup>132</sup> These changes, especially the labor migration, also meant institutionalizing Northerners as second class citizens in the colony. In addition, because few Northerners were Christian converts or educated in English, they were not able to climb the socioeconomic ladder as well as some Southerners.

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<sup>129</sup> R.G. Thomas, “Education in Northern Ghana, 1906-1940: A Study in Colonial Paradox” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1974): 434.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> J.S. Pobee, “Church and State in Ghana 1949-1966” in *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 122.

<sup>132</sup> Sean Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 22.

### **“Christian Missionaries and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission”**

Islam was not the only foreign religion which failed to convert the Asante at this time. Christian religious activities were also limited and sidelined in the kingdom before colonial rule. Islam, even though contained, due to the activities of the Muslims, was more respected and recognized than Christianity. Christian missionaries tried for years to “save” the souls of the Asante, but were disappointed at how unreceptive the Asante were. The history of Christian missionary activity further differed in the sense that Muslims were of service to the kingdom and royals, while Christianity later found converts among dissidents, slaves and people outside of the matrilineal.<sup>133</sup>

Unlike Islam, the Asante royals did not have much need for Christianity. Possibly because the Traditional Religions and Islam had answered the spiritual needs of the people. Andreas Riis, the first Basel Evangelical Missionary to visit Kumasi, did so in 1839, however, he “had to report to the Basel society in 1840 his failure to make even one statistical convert.”<sup>134</sup> One of the impediments to adopting Christianity among the Asante, reported Riis, was the belief that Christianity was the white man’s religion and not relevant to the Asante. Most importantly, the Asante, as subject of the king, followed his religion. He was the political and spiritual head of the Asante. The Asante religion was the king’s religion. Slaves however, whose spiritual beliefs were of no threat to the

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<sup>133</sup> This was not the case in other parts of West Africa. Among the Igbos for example, Christian missionaries won converts among powerful “big” men in society as oppose to the powerful “big” women. See Ifi Amadiume’s *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, (Zed Books: London, 1987).

<sup>134</sup> Correspondence Letter from Mobley, Ashanti Mission, Colonial Records, 1840, 22.

king, were handed over to the Christians. During this period, Christianity was associated with slaves and lowly peoples. Colonial rule, however, changed that perception, when Christianity would become the religion of power.

Christianity had “languished” in Asante, but that did not stop the Methodist Mission from establishing a presence there in 1843. The Methodist understood and analyzed this was due to the “circumstance of the people being afraid to expose themselves to the ire of the king, whose frown is dead for people becoming Christians.”<sup>135</sup> In 1876, Thomas Picot, a representative of the Wesleyan Mission went to Kumasi to try revive the school and chapel. Although he was able to get the king’s audience, the king was not impressed. He answered that “he did not want to have anything to do with Christianity and schools....The Bible is not a book for us. We will never embrace your religion.” The anger and scorn in his statement is all the more understandable when we consider that the Wesleyan request is being made just 2 years after the British had burned down Kumasi in 1874.<sup>136</sup>

A major problem for the Christians at this time was fruition of the Day Schools which targeted the youth. As late as 1898, missionaries reported “a decrease in numbers” in regards to the Day Schools. This was a problem because such schools were the “foundation and means by which we are enabled to build up churches for Christ in Ashanti.”<sup>137</sup> It was not until after the British defeat that Christianity was “established in any permanent way” in Ashanti. Missionaries were invited from the Basel and Wesleyan

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<sup>135</sup> Report on the state of the work of God in the Gold Coast District, 1904.

<sup>136</sup> Colonial Records: Ashanti Mission Report of the day Schools 1897.

<sup>137</sup> Gold Coast District: A Report of the Sunday Schools in the Ashanti Mission for the year ending of 31<sup>st</sup> December 1898.

missions at the “special invitation of the Governor of the colony.” The presence of Christian missionary activity was the clearest sign of British defeat of the Asante and the beginning of colonial rule. Although free to practice and convert the Asante, Christian missionaries found the process “slow and laborious.”<sup>138</sup> However, British power was not the only source of the change. With King Prempeh exiled, the conversion of ex-chiefs helped change the perception of Christianity as the white man’s religion. Prempeh would later convert to the Anglican Church while in exile at the Seychelles Islands in 1917. His conversion would do little to stir interest among the general population. In fact semi mass conversion to the Christian churches would come in late twentieth century, namely between 1980s-1990s.<sup>139</sup> By this time locals had taken over as leaders of various congregations and conversion was spurred by the use of the local languages. As early as 1898, it was concluded that, “the vernacular reading has been introduced and the scholars [converts] are greatly delighted by the innovation. The love of Christ expounded in the mother tongue has evidently a firmer hold upon the scholars.”<sup>140</sup>

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission use of the local languages to preach was one technique used to set them apart from the other Muslim groups. While Christianity was given a new life in Asante, it was the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission which stirred the most uproar in the former kingdom. Invited to the Gold Coast in 1921 by a group of orthodox Muslims, who had not known that “white Muslims” existed, the Mission’s missionaries

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<sup>138</sup> Gold Coast District: A Report of the Sunday Schools in the Ashanti mission for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 1898.

<sup>139</sup> Claire Robertson, “Ga women and socioeconomic change in Accra, Ghana,” in *Women in Africa*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 112.

<sup>140</sup> Gold Coast District: A Report of the Sunday Schools in the Ashanti Mission for the year ending of 31<sup>st</sup> December 1898.

intended to do what the older Muslim communities failed to do. They sought out to publicly convert the Asante.

Asantehene Prempeh was returned to Asante as a “private citizen” in 1924, after 28 years in exile. Enough time had passed in exile to subdue any inclination to rule the Asante Empire. Time had also allowed him become “imbued with true feelings for the crown,” in the words of Chief Commissioner Fuller.<sup>141</sup> The British were also waiting for time that would allow the Asante become loyal to the Crown and British administrative rule. This was completed by 1924. Agyemang Prempeh returned to an Asante that was no longer as he left it. But he had also changed. He was a new convert to the Anglican Church and monogamous. He was, in the eyes of the British, educated, Christian and civilized; far different than he had left and thus a promising ally of the Crown. He promised not to be involved in colonial politics. He agreed to live as a normal citizen.

Prempeh’s changes also indicated his weakening political stance and clout in his former empire. His differences also proved his inability to be as powerful as he was in the past and his inability to control the Asante people. While he was politically weak, at least in the eyes of the British, he was still regarded as Asantehene in the eyes of his people. They had made no provisions to replace him. His changes also mirrored what was taking place in his former empire. Christian missionaries were more present among the Asante than he had remembered. Asante’s economy was now dominated by cocoa farming and exports. Roads were built linking the interior to the ports. The brain drain started at this time as more of the educated found jobs in the colonial administration and in the cities.

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<sup>141</sup> Adu Boahen, *The history of Ashanti Kings and the whole country itself and other writings*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 32.

Chiefs were empowered at the expense of the Asantehene's position, which was no longer recognized by the British. The highest authority Prempeh could have was that of Kumasiene. He had more respect than power. As much as his people saw him as king, the new educated elite also witness the changes. He unfortunately died before the British restored the title of Asantehene in 1935. Indeed, Prempeh's death signaled the end of the fear the British had towards his reinstatement and recognition of the title of Asantehene.

British colonial rule also alienated women from politics. "Even in cases where women were actively engaged in pre-colonial community political structures, colonist gave recognition to men and not to women."<sup>142</sup> British cultural beliefs had merged with the effects of the Atlantic Slave Trade, to deny women access to politics and voice.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Kathleen M. Fallon, *Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movements in sub-Saharan Africa*, (The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2008), 36.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

## Chapter 4

### *The Coming of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission*

The Ahmadiyya (the True Islam) Movement was formed by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad 1835-1908 in the late nineteenth century.<sup>144</sup> He was born in a small religiously plural town in the eastern Punjab at a time when activities of Christian missionaries influenced how the major religions in that area (Hinduism and Sikhism) vied for converts. Because Ahmad came of age “at a time when many religions competed to attract converts in a colonial order shaped by British rule,<sup>145</sup>” he was influenced by such methods and unlike other Muslim sects, promoted active proselytizing and converting in his Movement. After briefly working with the colonial government, he withdrew into contemplation during which he received revelations of being the *mujaddid* from God.

As Mahdi and Messiah, Ahmad asserted that he was the spiritual manifestation of Jesus and his “heir.” In 1901 he announced he was a prophet sent to renew the religion. He believed he was “the recipient of Divine Revelation and announced that God had appointed him the Messiah and Mahdi.<sup>146</sup>” He was ordained with the responsibility to “clean up” an Islam that had gone astray and thought “he was commissioned by Allah with the task of disseminating the true teachings and beauties of Islam as were practiced

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<sup>144</sup> When the Subcontinent was divided in 1947, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad migrated to Pakistan with other Muslims. The Mission is currently headquartered there.

<sup>145</sup> John H. Hanson, “Jihad and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community: Nonviolent Efforts to Promote Islam in the Contemporary World,” forthcoming in *Nova Religio*.

<sup>146</sup> Humphrey Fisher, *Ahmadiyya: A Study in Contemporary Islam on the West African Coast*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963): 1.

by the Holy Founder of Islam.”<sup>147</sup> His writings analyzed and interpreted Islam as more “peaceful” and accommodating than other older sects. As a result, he gained prominence and attention from other Muslims and the colonial government.

The British were particularly interested in his interpretations, especially on controversial topics such as jihad. His writings also questioned the true definition of jihad and by the late nineteenth century, “had tempered” the definition. In his *British Government and Jihad*, he argued “against military resistance to the British and in favor of his interpretation of jihad as nonviolent efforts.”<sup>148</sup> He argued that the Ahmadiyya Movement “believes that the fight for supremacy over all other religions should be entirely spiritual, devoid of the use of material weapons but the use of the weapons of reason and arguments based on religious truths.”<sup>149</sup> He further gained popularity by arguing that because the British would protect freedom of religion, military resistance against them was unwarranted.<sup>150</sup>

The relationship with the British was used to protect Ahmadis from other Muslim groups who denounced the Mission as a colonial ploy. Because of this affiliation, after decades of persecution in Pakistan, the Movement moved its headquarters to London in

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<sup>147</sup> Yusuf K. Effah, *The Early History of the Ahmadiyya in Ghana*, (Headquarters: Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>148</sup> John H. Hanson, “Jihad and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community: Nonviolent Efforts to Promote Islam in the Contemporary World,” *Nova Religio*, 2007, 2.

<sup>149</sup> Effah, *The Early History of the Ahmadiyya*, 2.

<sup>150</sup> Hanson, “Jihad and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community,” 3.

1984. Missionaries called upon this relationship in the Gold Coast and reaffirmed their loyalty to the colonial government and promised to be “helpful” and “on its side.”<sup>151</sup>

The Mission’s relationship with the British colonial authorities is used by anti-Ahmadi Muslims to denounce the movement as a colonial ploy, manipulated to silence the epoch’s radical Islamic movement in India. For Muslims who consider themselves Sunni or orthodox, the Ahmadiyya Movement is *kufur*, or disbelief. An anti-Ahmadiyya webpage claims that the Ahmadis are “following in the footsteps of Christian missionaries” by spreading false messages.<sup>152</sup> These messages also include propagating the “false notion” that non-Ahmadi Islam is violent and those Muslims ignorant of the “true” message. Some Sunni Muslims believe the Movement was able to spread due to British imperialism and financial support. The leader was considered an agent of British imperialism and allegedly swore allegiance to the imperialist. They argued he received British backing by making jihad un-Islamic, an act which worked to the benefit of the British. In their dismissal of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s declaration, they have reduced the mission to a cult following.

The 1974 Declaration by World Muslim League (*Rabita al-Alam al-Islami*) renounced his claim to be a prophet, a claim all the more “blasphemous” when they cite Quranic verses that state that Muhammad is the last and final prophet. Due to this “blasphemous” declaration, Ahmadi Muslims were prohibited from entering holy cities

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<sup>151</sup> Letter to the AG: Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, Kumasi from Head of the Gold Coast Ahmadiyya Community, Hakeem, July 2, 1928, ARG1/30/2/42.

<sup>152</sup> This is one of the anti-Ahmadi web pages.  
<http://www.irshad.org/qadianism/crushed.php>.

and taking the hajj, one of the five pillars of faith made mandatory if believer has the physical and financial means to do so.

The first Ahmadiyya Missionary arrived in Saltpond, Central Region in 1921, having been invited by Sunni Muslims and ex-Christians from that region.<sup>153</sup> The invitation to the Mission was sent by Benjamin Sam, a former Methodist catechist who had converted to Sunni Islam by Abubakar Sadique, a Hausa soldier from Nigeria. He proceeded to convert many people in that region, including the chief, whose wife had problems conceiving. Sam had succeeded in converting so many Fantis to Islam that he was known as “the father of Islam in Fantiland.”<sup>154</sup> The newly converted decided to form a community in Ekrawful or new township. The story begins in 1920, one of the first converts dreamt that “he was praying with white men.” The story continues that “the strangeness of this dream was that the local Muslims believed that the white man’s religion was Christianity. To them it was unthinkable for a white man to be a Muslim.”<sup>155</sup> In Haneef Keelson’s version of this account, he explained that people had thought “it was only the Hausa who prayed as Muslims.”<sup>156</sup> A Nigerian, then resident in Saltpond informed this community of the Ahmadiyya and their presence in his country and other parts of West Africa. Consequently, a formal invitation was sent to the Indian Muslims’ headquarters in London. After raising £170 pounds to sponsor the transport and “speedy arrival” of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II, a companion of the founder, he arrived in Saltpond in 1921. After his first lecture, the community “believed there and then and made the oath

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<sup>153</sup> Effah, *The Early History of the Ahmadiyya in Ghana*, 8.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

of initiation.” This was how the “seed of Ahmadiyya Movement” was planted in the Gold Coast.<sup>157</sup>

The local Mission grew so fast in the colony that by 1961, there were 25 missionaries, stationed throughout the country, and only four were Pakistani.<sup>158</sup> The community became localized really fast considering that only one Pakistani missionary was sent over to initially lay the foundation. And unlike East Africa, which has a significant percentage of Indians, Ahmadis in the Gold Coast were mostly Akans.<sup>159</sup>

The colonial authorities in the Gold Coast did not know much about the Ahmadiyya Movement in India or what their difference was. Nonetheless, Ahmadis presented themselves as the antithesis of the older communities found in Kumasi’s zongos. They spent a great amount of time and resources proving this fact within the educational sector. For the first decade, the Mission was headed by an Indian missionary and his Fanti interpreter. While the local population was used as imams, it was not until the coming of Maulvi Hakeem was attention paid to creating a local “cadre of an educated class” of missionaries.<sup>160</sup> Two more missionaries arrived from India in 1946 and by that time, there were five African missionaries and four teachers.

From the very beginning of their presence in the Gold Coast, the Ahmadis defined themselves as learned and peaceful Muslims to the British colonial government. Furthermore, they defined the older communities as potential “social menace” in their belief of a violent impending Mahdi. This was done to justify their presence and further

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

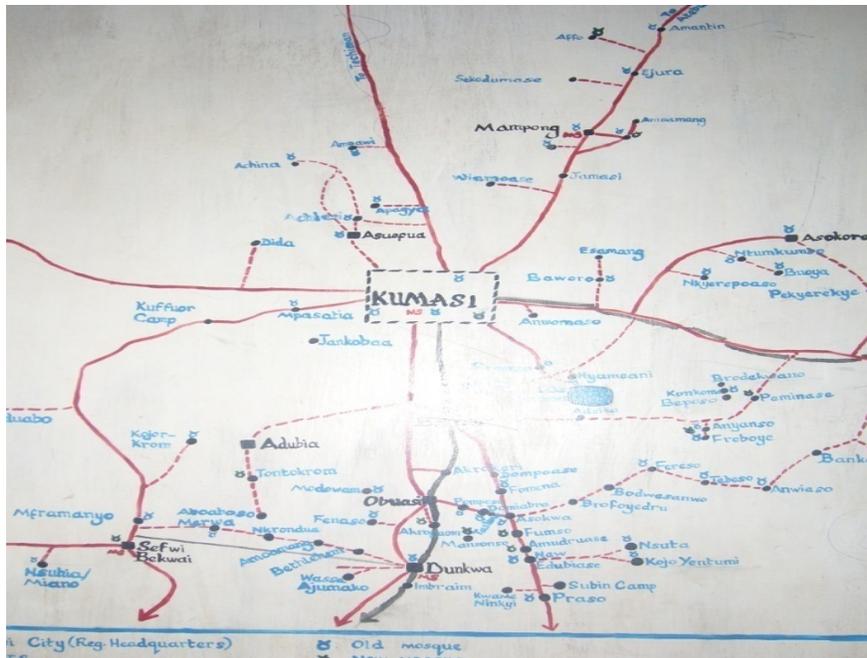
<sup>159</sup> Ameer. *Second Interview*. Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. October 18, 2008.

<sup>160</sup> Effah, *The Early History of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Ghana*, 14.

align their vision and mission with the colonial authorities. And while these groups may “appear” peaceful, “as soon as they would find a man claiming himself, rightly or wrongly, to be the Mahdi, in their religious madness they will burst out like lava of a great volcano.”<sup>161</sup> As a result, the Ahmadis thought this community in need of “uplifting from the slough of ignorance into which they are sunk.” And while the Kumasi communities are far larger in numbers, the Head of the community assured the colonial authorities that in terms of educational and religious clout, this community had “no life.” Furthermore, the Ahmadis perceived this alleged ignorance to be dangerous, particularly in reference to their belief of a “blood thirsty Mahdi” and usage of talismans and other “fetish beliefs.”

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<sup>161</sup> Letter from the Ahmadiyya Movement to the AG: Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, Kumasi, July 2, 1928. ARG1/30/2/42.



**Figure 1: Ahmadi mosques, schools and hospitals in the Asante Region. Picture shows extent of Ahmadi influence among the Asante. Photo by Mikelle Antoine from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in Kumasi. 2007. For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation.**

It's no surprise that when permission was finally given to the Mission to set up schools, mosque and missionize in the North in January 1932 that inevitably tension would escalate. With colonial support, a school was opened in Tamale in early 1932 but closed down “by the end of the year in consequence of the apostasy of such converts as had been made.” Although the Mission was not well received, the colonial records do not report any disturbance until 1934. This involved the chief imam, Limam, head of the Wala Muslims and his newly converted nephew who took over the Mission in Wa. His “conversion” was a major problem for his family, not least because his uncle, who raised and educated him in Islam, was the religious head of the entire community. Secondly, his conversion implied competition with his uncle for religious dominance. His uncle and the

elders read this move as impatient and youthful exuberance. He feared even if “they do not follow his religion,” Salihu would still “never follow Islam” or return under his authority. This statement seems to imply an already existing tension between the educated youth who could read and interpret the Qur’an and the elders in the community who could not. The coming of the Ahmadiyya was one more example of the changes taking place. The youth was more educated than the elders, a situation which worked in favor of the Ahmadis. The National Missionary revealed that it was easier to convert the educated youth than the illiterate elder to Ahmadiyya.<sup>162</sup> Education worked because they would have developed analytical skills to question the status quo. No longer were they accepting what they no longer understood.

***“They brought amulets, we bring hospitals:” Ahmadiyya and the Colonial Order***

Unlike the older community of non-Ahmadis, the Ahmadiyya Mission was able to win over the southern population due to their efforts within the educational and health sectors. According to the Head Missionary, the Ahmadis targeted Asante because,

Kumasi is a very important place in Ghana. [Its positioning is] Central. After being on the coast, the next place is Kumasi. It’s just a natural progression. Kumasi was so crucial that Missionaries walked to Kumasi because the Asantes are an important segment of the Akans. [They are] numerically more than the others.<sup>163</sup>

If efforts at conversion were successful in Kumasi, the majority of the Gold Coast’s population would be won for Islam. Islam had not made much headway into the region, despite its history. One indicator of this was that Muslims continued to live

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<sup>162</sup> National Missionary Naib. *Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. November 2008.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 2008.

separated in the zongos, an occurrence that further worked to keep them as un-Asante and “foreign.” My informants reveal that the bias the Asante had for the (Hausa) Northerners was based on the fact that they were not educated, and were menial laborers on Asante farms. The assumption was created that Muslims were socially inferior because of their association with farms. Prior to the arrival of the Ahmadiyya Movement in the Gold Coast, good Muslims were educated in the Makaranta school system<sup>164</sup> and lived outside of the colonial “Christian” education system. They were educated in Arabic and taught to memorize the Quran. Because of lack of professional transferrable skills in the colonial era, they became menial laborers, working as watchmen, farm assistants, and other jobs that “were not regarded.”<sup>165</sup>

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission modern viewpoint on education embraced western education and advocated for an Islamic curriculum that included subjects such as English language, math and science. As Muslims they knew few parents would send their children to the colonial “Christian” schools for fear of apostasy. They also knew that there were (poor non-Muslim) parents looking for affordable schooling for their children who would not mind it being run by Muslims. In 1934, the Provincial Inspector of Schools noted after his inspection of the Light of the World Islamic School in Accra that out of 55 children, “only 11 are children of Hausas [read Muslims] or Yoruba’s.” He went on to say “the rest are Gas, evidently attracted by the low fees.”<sup>166</sup> Similarly, at any point in time, most Ahmadi schools in Kumasi were attended by as many non-Muslims as

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<sup>164</sup> Basic Islamic training which stresses memorization of Quran and not “western” subjects such as math, science, language arts.

<sup>165</sup> PRO. *Interview*. Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission Headquarters, Accra. June 2006.

<sup>166</sup> CSO 18/3/6 No. 395/34

Ahmadis.<sup>167</sup> They also knew that they were able to fill a void that merged the best of both worlds. Due to this outlook, the Mission perceived itself to be more progressive than the older Muslim communities. The leaders realized that “the rapid expansion of the Movement depended not only on preaching but also on the production of a cadre of an educated class.”<sup>168</sup> To tackle this task, they sought to revamp the colony’s educational services by attracting the Muslim population.

To date, the Mission has built more schools and hospitals than mosques in Ghana. Their interest in education was to “dispel the erroneous notion that Islam is opposed to secular education”<sup>169</sup> and to change the prejudice that Muslims were socially and culturally inferior. Although the Ahmadis saw a need for their services in the field of education, they had a hard time convincing the colonial authorities of their relevance and difference. In 1928, after only five years in the Colony and Ashanti, the Mission petitioned to the Lands Dept of Kumasi<sup>170</sup> to “erect a mosque and school in Kumasi” because of Kumasi’s “central position.” Their petition was denied to “great astonishment” because the colonial authorities argued “there already exist[ed] a strong Muslim Community in Kumasi,” and thus no need for an additional Ahmadi mosque and school. To this the Ahmadi leadership responded, as “loyal British subjects,” they want

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<sup>167</sup> Some of Ghana’s top non-Muslim officials were trained and educated in Ahmadiyya schools.

<sup>168</sup> Effah, “The Early History of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Ghana,” 14.

<sup>169</sup> “Ahmadiyya Movement,: What is it? *Daily Graphic*, August 25, 1980.

<sup>170</sup> Interestingly, there are few documents on the Mission in the Asantehene’s Archives at the Manhyia Palace. This is striking since the archives are from the personal papers of the various Asantehenes since the colonial period. However, because there was not an Asantehene at this time, the Mission had to go through the colonial authorities for land in Kumasi at this time.

their “share of the broad minded and generous policy of religious freedom” which the British propagated. Furthermore, Maulvi Hakeem, the Head of the Gold Coast Ahmadiyya community, retorted,

it can also be argued that any Protestant Christian Mission other than those that have already established in Kumasi now applying for a piece of land to erect a church in Kumasi will not be granted facilities to acquire or select a site because there already exist many strong Christian communities in Kumasi?

He felt this ignorance on the Mission’s relevance warranted time to educate the authorities on the difference between the Mission and the older communities. In this letter, he continues that “there exists a vast gulf of differences which exists between the beliefs and practices of the Kumasi Muslim community and the community I represent.” He went on to explain that the Kumasi Muslim community’s belief in the coming of a “blood thirsty vindictive tyrant” of a Mahdi that will lead them to explode like “lava of a great volcano” to attack all who denounce Islam, despite “how peaceful” they “may appear at the moment,” as the major bone of contention. He went on to describe this belief of the Kumasi Muslim community as “menace to society and the peace of the world” and against the “real Islam” which stands for peace and love. He was astonished that the authorities could not see the difference between the two, especially since the Mission’s focus on education had resulted in educating all, and “uplifting them from the slough of ignorance into which they are sunk-----a characteristic which the Kumasi Muslim community badly lacks.” And if the Mission were to unite with the Kumasi Muslim community, “it will lose that precious gem like quality.” Maulvi did not see the validity of this community which “may look stronger” but “as far as the religious and

educational sectors are concerned,” he saw no signs of life in them. And even if the Kumasi Muslim community were to begin building schools and mosques, the Head of the Ahmadiyya community concluded that he “could not permit my sincere and loyal followers to join the ranks of the holder of such abominable religious views.” He concluded that the Mission had secured “several hundreds of adherents,” resident in Kumasi, Obuassi, Konongo and Mampong, centers of some of the region’s major royal families.<sup>171</sup> In 1929, another letter was written asking for four acres of land in Kumasi to build a mosque, school, Mission House and play grounds. This was because of the “rapid progress” of the Mission. The petition was signed by 400 Asante members.<sup>172</sup>

Seeing that education had bypassed the Muslim community so much so there were just 100 Muslim students in government schools in the Northern Territories and none in the mission schools and no numbers were provided for Ashanti as late as 1931, the head of the Mission petitioned to have Muslims part of the board of education to change this imbalance. This, he argued must be done because “existing facilities, so generously provided by the Government do not satisfy the educational needs of 63, 609 Muslims in Gold Coast, excluding Ashanti.”<sup>173</sup> He reasoned that Christian mission education was to “Christianize the African.” While this effort was fine for the “pagan” African, he argued that Muslim Africans “have a world religion which civilized their native land through the generous Arab missionaries, a thousand years before the era of

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<sup>171</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG1/30/2/42 July 2, 1928, letter to the AG Chief Commissioner of Ashanti from F.R. Hakeem, Head of the Gold Coast Ahmadiyya Community.

<sup>172</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG1/30/2/42, Letter to the Chief Commission of Ashanti from Head of the Gold Coast Ahmadiyya community, F. R. Hakeem, September 5, 1929.

<sup>173</sup> Ahmadiyya Mission---“Request for Representation on Boards of Education Gold Coast and Northern Territories,” C.S. No. 476 May 12, 1931.

Steamers, Railways, Aeroplanes, motor Cars, and even roads and maps.” Thus even in cases where some may have forgotten about the teachings of Islam, they “still have it” and would not trade it for any education system which threatens to take it away from them. He stated that, out of 579 schools, there is “none for Muslim religious instruction.” And with the state of Islamic instruction left mostly to “the Hoi Polloi” of mendicants malams, exploiting their positions “to the utmost,” the Ahmadiyya Mission is desperately needed.

In 1934, a meeting was held by the head of the Mission, Mr. Ahmad with the Colonial Secretary to discuss the Ahmadi petition to get on the colonial Board of Education. The two men “agreed” that the majority of the malams were “of the worst kind,” fetish in their understanding of Islam. The Colonial Secretary went on to ask, if the “teachers were such, then what sort of people were the pupils?” While he acknowledged that the older Muslim community was not “true” to their said beliefs, he was unwilling to accept the Mission’s self-proclamation of speaking for all Muslims, or even being accepted as Muslims by the larger community. “In view of the fact that Mr. Ahmad pleads on behalf of Muslims generally,” the Colonial Secretary created a questionnaire sent throughout the Muslim community, enquiring to the status of Ahmadi Muslims in their midst and if they were regarded as Muslims and or leaders.<sup>174</sup> This was not the only questionable claim with Mr. Ahmad’s petition. First the Secretary did not believe that the Muslim population was 63,609. He referred to the census report of 1921 which stated that “the number of *genuine* Muslims in the Gold Coast is relatively small.” And that the

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<sup>174</sup> Ahmadiyya Mission—“Request for Representation on Boards of Education Gold Coast and Northern Territories,” C.S. No. 476, September 14, 1931.

5,000 Ahmadi converts within this population was doubted because it was not sure they believed in the Prophet “but rather with the deep religious feeling which the African has for his belief.” Mr. Ahmad took offense to questioning a Muslims’ belief. He responded that, according to the “Koranic point of view,” “if a man calls himself a follower of the Prophet, then he has to be accepted as such, and no test of any sort should be made.”<sup>175</sup>

Furthermore, because the questionnaire given to the Muslim communities confirmed the colonial perception that the local Muslims did not regard Ahmadis as Muslims or as leaders in the community, but that they were just “tolerated,” the Secretary concluded that “I am of opinion that the Manager of the Ahmadiyya Mission is not in a position to represent the views of the local Muslim and that he should be informed that his petition cannot be granted.”<sup>176</sup> Mr. Ahmad was disappointed that they were denied land to build progressive and modern institutions in the colony. He was further frustrated that the colonial authorities did not acknowledge the Ahmadi difference.

In his reply, dated May 12, 1931, he reminded the Secretary of the British Empire’s mission to its subjects and the role of Ahmadiyya Muslims within that mission. He stated, “as loyal subjects we have been exerting ourselves to the utmost to carry out the spirit and the letter of the law.” However, they felt the educational policies were unfair in regards to Muslims. On top of having their request rejected to be part of the colony’s Board of Education, to represent the Muslim “loyal subjects,” the new

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<sup>175</sup> Notes referring to taking of Census of Mahammedans in the Colony, Extract from page 46 of 1921 report.

<sup>176</sup> Ahmadiyya Mission--- “Request for Representation on Boards of Education Gold Coast and Northern Territories,” C.S. No. 476, September 14, 1931 letter from Director of Education.

requirements for teachers in all schools would also negatively impact their efforts and retard their progress. He asked the Colonial secretary for help from the Government to consider the “exceptional circumstances” of Muslim schools and thus exempt them from Rule 45 which insisted on “at least four certified teachers in every Assisted or Non-Assisted school.” Mr. Ahmad felt particularly wronged since “it is a well known fact that there are no certified Muslim teachers in the country,” and with “the new salary scale” they would not be in a good position to attract the small population of certified non-Muslim teachers either, the majority of whom would have to be pulled out of retirement.

This pay raise, which was “reluctantly introduced threatened to undo the entire educational work of a section of British subjects as in the Muslim case.” He pleaded that his petition would be granted considering that “more Muslims live under the protection of the British Crown than under all the Muslim Governments of the world.” Considering this fact, the Government should grant this petition because “the unfortunate Muslims are wiser at present than they were twenty years since and their eyes have now been opened as to the benefits of education.”

In 1946 another letter was written, informing the Chief Commission of Ashanti, that there was a need for a secondary school in Ashanti because “the Muslims are being deprived of their just share in Government Services and other positions of importance in the affairs of this country.” They reasoned that the increase in educational programs was due to the British “advanced constitution in such a way that most of the rights and privileges” have been given to the Christian, while the Muslims who were “soldiers and policemen during the Ashanti wars and the two world wars should have deserved a better

treatment.” He concluded that “we hope to succeed better in Ashanti and the Northern Territories than in the Colony where Christian influence is stronger.”<sup>177</sup> Despite their arguments, it was not until 1950 was the colonial government prepared “to offer encouragement” to the Ahmadiyya Secondary School in Kumasi.

Apart from education, the Ahmadis also made a difference in the health sector. They stressed the need for modern medical facilities, and in the process, denounced Sunni practices such as divination “and making or keeping talismans as means of warding off evils or exercising luck” as backwards and useless. They built hospitals and clinics in the villages, in areas where malams were once unchallenged in terms of their medical expertise and precision of amulets. Understandably, “those whose livelihood depended on Talisman-making and selling and divination were vehemently opposed to the new Movement.”<sup>178</sup> The early leaders found the opposition they received was based more on “economic than religious grounds.”<sup>179</sup>

The first African Head Missionary is Maulvi Wahab Adam who took over in 1975. His rise to the status of Ameer was well received around the world, but he notes that there were others “justified to raise concern” over whether he could do the job. His main priorities as Ameer were to help Mission development in terms of health and education. One of the first things he did was move the Mission’s headquarters from Saltpond to Accra. That move was met with some resistance but he reasoned that they

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<sup>177</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG1/30/2/42, “Letter to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti from Alhaji Maulvi N. Ahmad,” Director of Ahmadiyya Missions of West Africa, December 6, 1946.

<sup>178</sup> *The Early History*, 10.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

must be close to the seats of power if they are to impact change on the nation. While the first African Ameer was appointed in 1975, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission was nicknamed “Akan” mission early on. This was because the “foreign” missionaries were not many to begin with and that the local people far outnumbered any Indian or Pakistani Ahmadi in the country. Thus the Ahmadis that most Ghanaians knew or met were Akans, not Indians or Pakistanis.

According to the Ameer, “they brought amulets, we brought hospitals.” The Ahmadi difference did not go unnoticed. The Ahmadis branded themselves as educated professionals and by so doing, attracted attention to Islam in general, and their version in particular. They preached using the Twi language because that was the only language that could reach the majority of the Akans. In addition, the Indian Ahmadi missionaries were only 2; too few to popularize English as the dominant language for conversion. Most importantly, because the Indian missionaries were only English speaking, their presence was felt more at the administrative level and combating the colonial administration for social space. Preaching and conversion was left to the locals. However, converting to Islam was not without its problems, especially for the Asante. I now take a look at how the Mission established itself in the colony and among the people.

I now turn to analyze the matrilineal system and conversion.

## Chapter 5

### *On the Matrilineal System and Conversion*

The Asante follow a matrilineal system of inheritance which means they inherit property and identity via the maternal line. It also means that the child does not inherit directly from its mother/father but from the mother's brother or maternal uncle. In addition, royal families with stools, land, and other forms of royal property pass on this wealth via the maternal line. This is the way that families guard wealth and pass it on. All Asantes trace lineage, wealth and property from a woman; a system established centuries ago. This new invention of the Asante state seeking to control belongingness and identity formation occurred during the 1700s. This was a very turbulent period in its history, when Asante rose against the hegemonic power and worked to reconstruct and formulate a new identity for itself.<sup>180</sup> One way of doing this was by controlling women's bodies.

However, this does not mean that men don't matter or that men are not valuable in this system. In fact inheritance is passed directly from the maternal uncle to his niece and nephews. In this regard, the female is absent within this transaction, which proves that matrilineal societies can also be patriarchal. "The belief is that a sacred blood sustains and maintains the physical body while a sacred spirit is responsible for the development of one's full personality and being."<sup>181</sup> The woman represents the *blood*, while the man

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<sup>180</sup> Faustine Ama Boateng, *Asante*, (Rosen Publishing Group: New York, 1996), 15.

<sup>181</sup> Kofi Awusabo-Asare, "Matriliny and the New Intestate Succession Law of Ghana," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1990): 2.

represents the *spirit or personality*. One major reason why Asante Muslims are often bypassed when it comes to inheritance is the fear that the woman's property would become that of her husband's and thus maintain it for the nuclear family as oppose to keeping it within the *abusua*.

Ethnological studies carried out in the 1940s and 50s by the likes of Meyer Fortes revealed that while the child is perceived as belonging to his mother's matrilineal line, "women as well as men are bound to honour paternity."<sup>182</sup> In addition, traditional society sees fathers as passing on identity or spirit to their children. It is because the child's father is equally as important as his mother that makes the Muslim father such a threat to this system. The notion that the father has a right over his child and can influence or pass on spirit to this child makes the child of a Muslim parent, automatically Muslim in the eyes of most Asante people and Islam. There does not seem to be an in-between, like the compromise struck by Asante Christians. The de-stoolment of Osei Kwame, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is a good example of the tensions which arise between the matrilineal Asante and the patrilineal Islamic system. The process towards his de-stoolment, headed by Queen Konadu Yaadom, was allegedly influenced by the fact that his "attachment" to Islam, and probable adoption of the Shari'a would have also led him to changing the system of inheritance. Instead of his sister's son inheriting his property or his title, his son would have.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Meyer Fortes, "Kinship and Marriage among the Ashanti," in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, ed. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde. (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 267.

<sup>183</sup> Patrick J. Ryan "Islam in Ghana," 75.

A popular Asante proverb states, “nobody ever married a fellow villager and lived to regret it,” which undercuts the potential tensions which comes out of a relationship that takes the woman outside of her social and cultural norms.<sup>184</sup> The conflicts such marriages can create are often heard in interstate contestations. There are cases, one cited by Gwendolyn Mikell where a Muslim Asante male left his property to his children and wives, as opposed to the matrilineal, which denies wives and children access to the deceased’s family’s property. The case was contested by his maternal family members because within the matrilineal system, children and wives do not inherit from their father and husband respectively, especially when the wealth did not belong to him individually. The logic here is that at times that man’s move up the economic ladder was provided by family property and funds which need to be returned to the pool to help others within the family achieve their goals. The goal of the matrilineal family is to keep family wealth within the family to help others within it, and not to delegate it to specific individuals which would mean not providing for future generations. The tension such decisions can create often lead members to court, contesting the right to keep family property within the matriclan.<sup>185</sup>

It was this friction between tradition and modernity that led to the adoption of the PNDC Laws by J.J. Rawlings in 1985. These laws sought to undermine the matrilineal system by allowing spouses and children to inherit property which the matrilineal

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<sup>184</sup> T.C. McCaskie, *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village 1850-1950*, (London: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 51.

<sup>185</sup> This is also the objective of a series of Ghana’s Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) Laws passed in 1985. They are a series of laws on intestate succession, marriage registration, and administration of estates. See Gwendolyn Mikell’s “The State, the Courts and ‘Value.’”

considered as belonging to them and should stay within the family. However, an interviewee mentioned that his father's wealth was confiscated by the maternal family and although they knew the law was on their side, for the sake of "keeping their father's name quiet" they decided to do nothing about it. "We were deprived from these properties. Right now some family members are rich because of all these things. As for us, we are now surviving."<sup>186</sup> Many of my informants mentioned that they are unjustly denied inheritance which includes property and wealth from the matrilineal because they converted.

Jean Allman has worked on the concept of *ntamoba*<sup>187</sup> and revealed the transitions that fatherhood has undergone among the matrilineal Asante in the twentieth century. From the late eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, the role of fathers has changed from being second class parents to full scale owners of their children. This is attributed to the rise of the colonial (cocoa) economy and rise in mission schooling, which fathers had the responsibility of paying fees for. By so doing, "he now had certain legitimate duties toward and claims which the child's mother and her *abusia* were bound to recognize." Before this period, a father's claim to his children could be removed by the *abusia*, depending on his role in the life of the child.<sup>188</sup> As a result, "his relationship to his offspring were no longer part of a complex process of exchange with their *abusia*. It stood alone as fact."<sup>189</sup> Fortes in the 1950s noticed great changes and demands being levied on

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<sup>186</sup> Adjei. *Interview*. Islamic University College, Accra. May 2006.

<sup>187</sup> Literally means, "child begotten out of an oath or oath child" or marriage contract.

<sup>188</sup> Jean Allman, "Fathering, Mothering and Making Sense of Ntamoba," *Africa: Journal of the International Institute* (1997): 6.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

the Asante matrilineal system. He found that the move towards modernization and urbanization meant an increase in nuclear families and less of a tie and dependence on the matrilineal way of life.

City life also impacted the matrilineal system. Rural-urban migration meant an increase in males leaving the villages. Their absence created a vacancy in terms of responsibility to the family. This meant that the absence of these uncles and brothers forced fathers in the city and rural areas to provide for their children's future in a way they never had to in the past. In the past, this was considered a phenomenon happening among the educated or Christians or elites. For example, William Godson Bruce, a Christian merchant in the late nineteenth century, had barred "any of his brothers, sister, uncles, aunts, cousins, or any branch of the family" from inheriting his property which he had left to his children.<sup>190</sup> By the 1970s, the problems of high unemployment and the rural-urban migration were the key factors impacting changes in this tradition. With migration at an all time high, curtailing it became top priority for most of the governments.

There was an increase in movement to the urban centers in search of employment, and while there the stark realities of unemployment, housing shortages and costly urban life created new norms. As a result the social norms of kinship held less sway over this population and often abandoned certain practices. For example maternal uncles who had the responsibility of caring for their sister's children as well as their own found ways to free themselves from this financial strain by being absent from the village and less

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<sup>190</sup> Roger Gocking, "Competing Systems of Inheritance before the British Courts of the Gold Coast Colony," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* (1990): 5.

interested in the matrilineal system. City life forced the realization that while obligated to his nephew, he also had the moral duty to provide equally for his sons, since their uncles were no more active or present. With the rise in unemployment and the proliferation of nuclear families and the move away from the village, the role of the uncle became more distant than before. Furthermore, Fortes found certain practices being rejected by the urbanites. One of which is a brother marrying his late brother's widow, which is practically unheard of today among the educated urbanite.<sup>191</sup>

The 1960s was a decade for much speculation about the longevity of the matrilineal system. Anthropologists such as Mary Douglas wondered about the future of matrilineal system in the twentieth century and during times of shifting loyalties. She noticed cases when the matrilineal system of inheritance was slowly changing. Instead of a sister's children to inherit from their mother's brother, she noticed that more and more maternal uncles passing on property to their sons, and not nephews. She concluded that "matrilineal descent groups are likely to be more short-lived, more liable to dwindle and die out." This she reasoned "in a matrilineal descent group, if a woman dies or is barren the group suffers an irreplaceable loss of reproductive powers."<sup>192</sup> Emphasis is put on the woman's ability to reproduce members for the group, while women who marry outsiders are reproducing for another group, as the case of the Muslim Asante woman.

Poly Hill's study of the matrilineal Akwapim also sheds some light as to what may already be taking place among the Asante. She noticed as the economy worsened,

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>192</sup> Mary Douglas, "Is Matriliney Doomed in Africa?" in *Man in Africa*. ed. Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1969), 127.

the ties that bind the matrilineal weakened. That is, the ability for uncles to pass on property to their nephews lessened as they feared the future of their sons and the ability of their maternal uncle to provide and support them. Thus fathers, for fear that their sons may have nothing to inherit from a poor (distant) uncle, felt obligated to pass on property to their sons. As a result, uncles held less authority over their sister's children, the nuclear family gradually became more central than the extended, and women began choosing partners who could provide, regardless of religion.

One of the interviewees stated that his mother's conversion created such uproar that she was forced to leave the village. She never returned and up until today, none of her children have ever gone back to visit their mother's place of origin.<sup>193</sup> The upset a woman's conversion creates is due to the fact that women are "valuable to the group as a whole, filling important domestic, communal, ritual and political roles." Thus with one convert a series of jobs and positions are also taken away and left vacant within the woman's matrilineal home.<sup>194</sup> Gwendolyn Mikell also states that traditionally, because Asante women often married men within the ethnic group either in the same or nearby villages, their families continued to benefit from their labor, on the farm or elsewhere. But as they marry or convert to Islam, many are forced to leave their homes and thus neither their labor nor their participation within the family can be counted upon.

Furthermore, as Muslims, many may reject partaking in certain activities as before, such as inheriting a stool, due to various un-Islamic rituals she may be called

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<sup>193</sup> M. Adjei. *Interview*. Islamic University College, Accra. May 2006.

<sup>194</sup> Gwendolyn Mikell, "The State, the Courts, and 'Value': Caught Between Matrilineages in Ghana," in *Money Matters*, ed. Guyer (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Press, 1995), 227.

upon to perform. This also means that the family cannot depend on this group as active members or laborers and inheritors. My informants concur that a “good” Muslim cannot accept a traditional stool because they would be asked to pour libation and prepare food for the ancestors, activities considered un-Islamic. An informant mentioned that if a family were to ask a Muslim to accept such a position, it would be their “polite” way of asking that person to stop being a Muslim. He further added that if a Muslim were to accept, it would be his way of saying he is no longer a Muslim.<sup>195</sup> However, the Ameer affirm that they could accept a stool, stressing that being Muslim does not keep them from partaking in their cultural practices.

Not much has been done in factoring the role of women within Ghana’s Islamic history and how their conversion is changing their ethnic group. When women are analyzed within this time frame (1960s-1990s),<sup>196</sup> it’s within the context of the period’s “woman problem” or “kalabule”<sup>197</sup> but not within the context of the changing religious landscape.<sup>198</sup> Cultural anthropologist Takyiwaa Manuh and the economist Dan-Bright Dzorgbo are two scholars who have analyzed how women were victimized by the

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<sup>195</sup>M. Adjei. *Interview*. Islamic University College, Accra. May 2006.

<sup>196</sup> See Dan-Bright Dzorgbo, *Ghana in Search of Development: The Challenge of Governance, Economic Mangagment and Institution Building*, (:Ashage Publishers, 2001).

<sup>197</sup> Kalabule is a Hausa word which means “keep it hiding.” It is an indication of the fraudulent period in Ghanaian history. While the word generally is used to discuss fraud and corruption, it gained a gendered reputation. Consequently, people would assume I wanted to talk to market women once I mentioned “kalabule.”

<sup>198</sup> There are many books and articles which have analyzed the lives of market women during the 1960-1990 period. Some of the more prominent books are Gracia Clark’s, *African Market Women* and *Onions are My Husband*.

shaming of the various governments, but not how that period influenced religious changes among Ghanaian women.

My work contributes towards a fuller understanding of the period, especially in regards to women, the state and conversion to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. These changes were also taking place within the shifting matrilineal system. Roles of men and women began to change due to colonization, migration, missionary activity and education. The youth migrated out of the villages and into the cities for work and access to education. By so doing, they became physically and socially removed from the village and its customs. Economic prosperity of the youth also changed the power dynamics between young and old. Elders, as custodians of the matrilineal system, came to depend on the youth from the cities. This certainly compromised their power and authority. Understanding this aspect of religious change is just one part of my study. Furthermore, my work provides a fuller understanding of women and Islam in Africa in general, especially since the current discourse tends to focus on Francophone nations, and even less on Islam in contemporary Ghana.

Another significant contribution this dissertation makes is to examine how women were used as scapegoats from the 1960s-1990s by various governments and how that period shaped the religious landscape. Feminist historian Akosua Adomako-ampofu states there are few studies which has “examined how women are used by the legal system to reinforce gender stereotypes through the monitoring and policing of their

activities, to the extent of criminalizing their activities as deviant.”<sup>199</sup> Indeed, this aspect of Ghana’s history is a well known secret. While many Ghanaians remember this period, few have fully analyzed the period and its impact on women and their gender. In addition, because the problems of women and the state have not been given enough attention in the Ghanaian discourse, few in the West know of this period and its dire consequences for women.

Women were not always perceived as anti-state. Pre colonial West Africa had many women in government and as rulers.<sup>200</sup> However, the Atlantic Slave Trade and colonialism negatively affected the status of women. Nonetheless women survived in some West African states as queens, diplomats and military officers. For example the Asante kingdom and later empire operated with a king and queen. In the midst of all the changes brought on by the Slave Trade, women were not completely sidelined or disempowered. As a “violent and gendered process,” colonialism also meant the “coercive control of women.” Furthermore, the colonial state institutionalized violence against women.<sup>201</sup> Women’s treatment by the post colonial state was inherited from the colonial period. It’s alarming that women were treated in such a manner by post colonial states considering that “women’s activism was linked to nationalist struggles for independence.”<sup>202</sup> Women were at the forefront of the struggle for independence in many

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<sup>199</sup> Akosua Adomako-ampofo Ampofo, “Women’s and Gender Studies in English Speaking Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Gender and Society* 18, 2004: 693.

<sup>200</sup> Ifi Amadiume, *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*, (London: Zed Books, 2001), 91.

<sup>201</sup> Adomako-ampofo Ampofo, “Women and Gender Studies,” 692.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 686.

countries.<sup>203</sup> Indeed, it was clear that the men had “sold out” the women for monopolization of the same power they had overthrown the colonial regime over. Instead of providing women the freedom they had fought for, women found the perpetuation of their second class standing rationalized as culture and tradition.

Scholars agree that in cases when the states promoted anti women campaigns that these battles occurred during periods when the state struggled “against society.”<sup>204</sup> I also realized that these tensions escalated during periods such as high unemployment, high inflation, political instability and social transformations. But most importantly, anti women campaigns were launched when women sought to redefine themselves within the social, economic and political landscapes that excluded their participation. In general, as more people moved away from depending on the state to forming local associations, the more threatened some governments and politicians became. In many cases, the survival and development of nongovernmental associations were considered a threat to the state’s ability to appear in control. During this period under review, most of these women lived outside and apart from the state. The state’s inability to control the economic activities of these women, led to their suppression.<sup>205</sup>

By state, I am referring to the political apparatus inherited from the colonial period, capable and in charge of collecting taxes and charged with the responsibility of

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<sup>203</sup> See Naomai Chazan’s “Gender Perspectives on African States,” in *Women and the State in Africa*, ed. by Jane Parpart and Kathleen A. Staudt.(London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989).

<sup>204</sup>Jane Parpart and Kathleen A. Staudt, “Women and the State in Africa,” in *Women and the State in Africa*, ed. By Jane Parpart and Kathleen A. Staudt.(London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989, 9.

<sup>205</sup> Robert Fatton, Jr. “Gender, Class and State in Africa,” in *Women and State in Africa*, ed. Jane Parpart and Kathleen A. Staudt (Rienner Publishers: London, 1989), 48.

providing jobs, housing and education. In other words, the state is the political machine which controls not just who belongs, but how and when. The Asante kingdom, while culturally vibrant, does not have that power. Colonialism limited the Asantehene's power and he is regarded more like a "father" or cultural symbol, as opposed to a politician. The Asantehene's responsibilities no longer include the above, which has been transferred or supplanted by the post colonial nation. When such governments fail, the people react to hold presidents accountable. Asante people do not strike or voice anger against their king when they do not have jobs, housing, food and education because that is not his responsibility. They understand that they are part of a state whose mission is to provide for those things and that the state functions separately and differently from their king. In addition, the king and president in Ghana have different responsibilities and duties. Paramount for the kings and chiefs are to be custodians of the traditional boundaries and cultures for their particular ethnic groups. In addition, the kings and chiefs are signs that these people existed in history and before the state of Ghana.

Women were not always considered outside and apart from the state in pre colonial Gold Coast.<sup>206</sup> This tension often escalated when women "challenged the meaning and makings of marriage and childrearing in Asante." As a result, "conjugal expectations, obligations, and responsibilities became sites of ongoing contestation as women and men sought to reshape marriage and parenting to the demands of the cocoa economy." By the 1920s, women "were making the move from being the most common form of exploitable labor during the initial introduction of cocoa to themselves exploiting

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<sup>206</sup>Ifi Amadiume, *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*, (Zed Books: London, 1997), 165.

the new opportunities for autonomy and security afforded by an expanding cash economy.”<sup>207</sup> Women interviewed for this dissertation had mothers who were farm owners and who had Muslim men as laborers on their farms. One such Asante woman married one of her Muslim laborers, to the detriment of her royal status.<sup>208</sup>

I present this part of Ghana’s history in this thesis. The situation may appear to be an inevitable conflict between the alleged Asante superiority complex<sup>209</sup> versus a culture deemed inferior, however a deeper analysis of this situation uncovers how conversion to Islam marked attempts at controlling women’s belonging-ness during periods of their economic independence and the matrilineal families waning authority. In addition, this trend also marked their break from the matrilineal traditional culture that sought to control their belonging-ness. By so doing, these women changed what it meant to be Asante and threatened the longevity of the matrilineal system.

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<sup>207</sup> Jean Allan, *“I Will Not Eat Stone” A Women’s History of Colonial Asante*, (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000), 133.

<sup>208</sup> M. Adjei. *Interview*. Rare Book Room, Balme Library, Accra. May 2006.

<sup>209</sup> It is commonly believed that Asantes are the most ethnocentric group in Ghana. This is most evident in Asante policies towards their Northern subjects. See Ivor Wilks’ *Asante in the nineteenth Century*.

## Chapter 6

### *The social and economic situation of Ghana the first 3 decades after independence*

The period during which women sought religious change was a turbulent time in Ghanaian socioeconomic history. Owusu-Ansah's theory that people convert as a way of finding relief and support during stressful moments in their lives is applicable to the cases of the women presented here. From the 1960s-1990s, conversion to Islam and Christianity were at their highest since their arrival in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively. One reason being that by the late 1960s, the economic and social decline of Ghana's economy and society, coupled with unstable governments began a growing process by which Ghanaians came to depend less and less on the state. As a result, people began to rely more on the networking and social groupings of their churches and mosques. Ghana's religious landscape was forever changed during this period, with more churches, mosques and new religious associations providing support when governments were unable to.

Ghanaian women were particularly vulnerable during this period. Women were blamed for the economic and social problems facing the State. All the major newspapers carried stories of nefarious women and how they needed to be changed if things were to return to normalcy. They suffered beatings, imprisonment, rape, and confiscation of produce by the police. As the economy worsened, notions that women were the cause of the problems rose. Before the Structural Adjustment Program, women were considered

the source of the economic problems. This was not specific to ethnic groups, but to all market women. In a way this was a clash of the classes. Elite and educated women were considered just as much of victims of the market women as men were. Market women in Accra and Kumasi had their stalls burned and produced confiscated. It is not clear to what extent women in other parts of the country were victimized since the newspapers only covered happenings in Accra and Kumasi. In “Gender Perspectives on African States,” Naomi Chazan states, “women demonstrate the broad strokes of sociopolitical conflict in contemporary Africa: formal versus informal, official versus off-the-books, manipulation versus agitation, repression versus avoidance, hegemony versus escape.”<sup>210</sup> The economic activities of women were considered the antithesis of “normal.” However, it was women who were supporting families, left behind by migrating husbands, fathers, brothers and uncles.

I believe that women sought religious associations as a way of finding solace and assistance. Religion also offered a way to recreate a sense of respectability at a time when they were either labeled greedy, prostitutes, or witches. It’s not surprising that women were the majority of converts at this time. It is believed that women continue to be the majority of church goers in Ghana.<sup>211</sup>

Conversion theorists agree that religious change takes place during some kind of social turmoil. This is the case for the women interviewed in this dissertation, for the

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<sup>210</sup>Naomi Chazan, “Gender Perspectives on African States,” in *Women and the State*, ed. Jane L. Parpart and Kathleen A. Staudt (Lynne Rienner Publishers: London, 1989), 196.

<sup>211</sup> Bernadetta Jules-Rosette, “Privilege without power: Women in African cults and churches,” in *Women in Africa and t African Diaspora*, (Baltimore: Howard University Press, 1987), 112.

majority of them converted during a time when women were blamed for the economic and social failures of Ghana's society. Due to the labeling and blaming of these women, many turned to religion as a way of redefining themselves spiritually and socially. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission was one such association and Asante women particularly took interest in this brand of Islam because of its stress on modernity and education. Joining the Mission was one way of protecting themselves against popular notions of women as nefarious. The stereotypic Muslim woman conjured a different perception; mostly of submission and passive. Unlike the "other" women, Muslim women were not thought as "smart" or "tricky" enough to cheat. This chapter explores the socioeconomic and political problems facing Ghana during the time women began converting en masse.

#### ***"The State and Women 1957-1990"***

The socioeconomic problems of the 1970s were partly inherited from the colonial period. The source of the structural imbalances, lack of roads, poor educational policies and subsequent lack of skilled manpower the newly independent nation needed to develop was older than 1957. British colonial policy sought to exploit the colony without having to modernize it beyond necessity. The problems of lack of roads and education showcased the colonial regime as outdated and exploitative. In addition, from 1951-54 the government spent more money than it created, a process that continued well into the 1960s. Poor food production also became a problem at this time.<sup>212</sup> The premier newspaper *Daily Graphic*, established in the colonial era, ran countless articles on the rising cost of commodities during the colonial era. In response to the growing prices of

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<sup>212</sup> J.H. Frimpong-Mensah, *The Vampire State: The Political Economy of Decline in Ghana*, (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1992), 73.

foodstuffs, the colonial authorities blamed the women and urged them to go to the market early because they were making life “intolerable” for their husbands by going late to the market, and having no choice but to buy the expensive residue.<sup>213</sup>

The rise of Kwame Nkrumah’s socioeconomic ideas to correct the errors of the colonial era were well received, leading to his election as the first African prime minister of the Gold Coast in 1957. The oppressed groups consisting of market women and the unemployed youth sought solutions from Nkrumah. Women food sellers had urged Nkrumah to do something about the rising cost of living which was turning kenkey<sup>214</sup> into an expensive food item.<sup>215</sup> The “veranda boys,” or the urban unemployed youth who made the bulk of his followers, pressurized Nkrumah for jobs. As a response, when he became president in 1960, Nkrumah built schools which meant fewer young men on the farms, which also meant less food production. The educated youth also migrated out of the villages and into the towns, beginning a long process of brain drain and urban rural migration.<sup>216</sup> Nkrumah’s modernization campaign unfortunately, did not pay enough attention to farmers and the food producers.<sup>217</sup> By ignoring the food producers, Nkrumah indirectly contributed to the atmosphere under which women would be blamed for the economic hardship and rise in foodstuffs, since they were the majority of the food sellers.

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<sup>213</sup> “Go to Market Early,” *Daily Graphic*, August 21, 1951, 5.

<sup>214</sup> A staple meal for most Ghanaians made of corn and cassava dough.

<sup>215</sup> “Nkrumah gets proof of high cost of living in shilling kenkey,” *Daily Graphic* Dec. 29, 1951.

<sup>216</sup> J.H. Frimpong-Mensah, *The Vampire State*, 75.

<sup>217</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 12.

As wives, sisters, mothers, aunts and daughters of the farmers, these women became visible in the markets selling items which few could afford.

Nkrumah's government sought to modernize the nation within seven years, but due to the underdevelopment of the colony he inherited, his efforts were limited. This fact was made all the more difficult due to lack of skilled workers, education, and technological know-how. As a socialist state, the nation's resources were overstretched and "had expended" well into a fiscal crisis.<sup>218</sup> Free medical and education from primary to university level were part of the fiscal problems. The government spent money importing new technological machinery, but the nation had few skilled workers to operate them. In addition, because the machines were imports, when they broke down, few local people had been trained in their repair. Consequently, these machines, besides the cost laden on the economy were redundant and more trouble than they were worth.<sup>219</sup>

Apart from the stretch levied on the economy from national development initiatives, Nkrumah also used the limited funds to support pan-Africanist ideals in other parts of Africa as well. Costs were incurred "promoting liberation movements" in other part of Africa. In addition, loans were given to countries to offset the break from their colonial powers. For example, 10mGBP was loaned to Guinea and Mali at independence. All of these expenditures, added to the economic mayhem, which worsened in the agricultural sector.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Dan-Bright Dzorgbo, *Ghana in Search of Development: The Challenge of Governance, Economic Management and Institution Building*, (:Ashage Publishers, 2001), 160.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>220</sup> J.H.Frimpong-Mensah, *The Vampire State*, 76.

The socioeconomic crisis continued as Nkrumah, “like most theoreticians and policy-makers were unfamiliar with the problems of the rural economy.<sup>221</sup>” As a result, there was confusion as to which way to directly and effectively help the small scale farmers on the ground. This led to problems in cocoa production. Subsequent agricultural production needed to move the nation away from its dependence on the mono-crop was also not adequate. Farmers were alienated from these policies and were not part of the modernization scheme needed to develop the nation. Nkrumah further alienated the local bourgeoisie for fear that empowering them might lead to overthrowing the government. Thus his policy supported foreign capital over indigenous capital and capitalism.<sup>222</sup> This issue would be one reason behind Busia’s expulsion of “foreign” businessmen in 1969. During Nkrumah’s time, “the various establishments and middle class groups (the professionals, mercantile and managerial classes) and institutions such as the church, the judiciary, the bar, and other professional associations as well as the traditional rulers came under severe attack. They were denigrated as “neo-colonial” and “regressive” social forces that had to be eliminated.”<sup>223</sup> By so doing, they were sidelined within the process of development and their potential benefit to the state, including their resources, ignored.

As a result, once overthrown in 1966, Nkrumah’s socialist policies were abandoned. This became a pattern of successive governments, which tried to dismantle the efforts of previous regimes. This “led to a considerable lack of continuity in policies.” In addition, this issue was exacerbated by the fact that some of these governments lasted

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>222</sup> This problem will be resolved by Busia in 1969 by exiling the foreign businessmen.

<sup>223</sup> Dzorgbo, *Ghana in Search of Development*, 7.

less than two years. In *Ghana in Search of Development*, Dzorgbo states, that “the political instability thus prevented policies from having enough time to take effect and for the usefulness of policy measures to be adequately evaluated.”<sup>224</sup> The coup against Nkrumah was led by the National Liberation Council, headed by Kotoka who was himself assassinated shortly thereafter. The NLC eventually allowed elections and three years later, Dr. Busia from the Progress Party became Ghana’s new president. In contrast to Nkrumah’s statist policies, Busia privatized and sold many “state-owned enterprises,”<sup>225</sup> initiated by Nkrumah. The Progress Party (1969-1972) believed that the country’s economic problems were due to the socialist stance of the Nkrumah government and sought the “patrimonialization” of the state or to rely on the private sector for development.<sup>226</sup> As a result, they were seen as puppets of the bourgeoisie and cause for the next coup.

Failed IMF measures included cutback in the state’s expenditure on infrastructure, education, and commercial productive activities. Furthermore, food production suffered mainly because the activities of the small scale farmer continued to be neglected by the government. However, a 1967 report blamed the problems on the hoarding activities of market women “rather than governmental policies.”<sup>227</sup> With the rise in unemployment and discontent, the government also targeted businessmen as “illegal immigrants” and

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Claire Robertson, “The Death of Makola,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, (1983): 8.

expelled them from the country in 1969.<sup>228</sup> Margaret Peil in analyzing this period argues that the immigrants were scapegoats for a failing economy and a government lacking in direction. The government sought justification for this move by declaring that 90 percent of the criminals in Ghana were foreigners.<sup>229</sup> Unfortunately, expelling the non-Ghanaian population did not alleviate the socioeconomic problems in the main market, even though “the departing aliens vacated about 1000 market stalls of which there were 10, 000 [Ghanaian] applicants.”<sup>230</sup>

In 1971 the world price of cocoa collapsed “leading to a reduction in national earnings.”<sup>231</sup> Rural urban migration was at its peak and to redress it, plans were made to develop the rural areas as well. However with rising unemployment and the slow rate of that development process, the youth had no other choice but to seek greener pastures in the city, and eventually outside the country.

From 1970s-1980s Ghana was described as a malfunctioning state. This period was marked with shortage of commodities from batteries to medicines. It should be stated that on one level, the commodities lacking in Ghana at this time were mostly imports, and thus luxury goods catering to the middle class. As the Ameer of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission explained, these goods were “items that sophisticated people would want to take.”<sup>232</sup> On the other level, items needed by all were also not available. Hospitals were

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<sup>228</sup> Dzorgbo, *Ghana in Search of Development*, 219.

<sup>229</sup> Margaret Peil, “Ghana’s Aliens” *International Migration Review*, (1974): 6.

“Foreigners” here mostly referred to “illegal” Nigerian businessmen in Ghana at the time.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>231</sup> Dzorgbo, *Ghana in Search of Development*, 221.

<sup>232</sup> Ameer of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. *Interview*. Headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Accra. September 2007.

said to have turned patients away for lack of medicine and bandages. The rising cost in items that were available, coupled with low food production, rising unemployment, shortage of housing, increase in rural-urban migration, and hunger created a situation of detachment from the state. That is, the lack of performance from the state to alleviate the rising cost of the socioeconomic problems for all Ghanaians led many to escape the nation spiritually and physically.

Some sought the churches and other civil society organizations while others, mostly educated men, fled the nation for Western Europe, America, Nigeria and Togo. Dzorgbo explains that “the deterioration in living conditions led to a large exodus of people, with an estimated two million Ghanaians leaving the country to otherwise where living conditions were perceived to be better.”<sup>233</sup> He continues that according to FAO estimates, “in 1981-83, Ghana’s food supply was better than only war-ravaged Chad.”<sup>234</sup> During the 1960s Ghana’s GDP had “stagnated and per capita incomes declined at the average annual rate of about 3%. Inflation averaged over 50% during that period and reached triple digits in some years.” To the further detriment of the socioeconomy, Ghana also experienced three “successful coups” from 1970-1983 and one palace coup. Furthermore numerous attempts of coups and rumors of such, led to suspicion which encountered violence from the ruling government, further intensifying the unstable climate. As Dzorgbo confirms, “this political instability could be considered as a cause,

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<sup>233</sup> Dzorgbo, *Ghana in Search of Development*, 14.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

as well as a result, of the poor economic performance, and contributed to the economic malaise in a number of ways.”<sup>235</sup>

Acheampong took over in 1972 after the coup against Busia. His rule was marked by the rise in corruption or kalabule. My 73 year-old father-in-law<sup>236</sup> remembers this term as emanating under Acheampong. He states that Acheampong and his “cronies” were known for giving money to their girlfriends, who in turn used this money to import commodities into Ghana which they resold at exuberant prices. These women owned shops, specializing in imported commodities targeting the middle class. By so doing, they were able to start driving “big” cars, a phenomenon not seen in the past. In addition, these women were also owners of “mammy wagons,” or public buses used to ship food and people from the villages to the cities.<sup>237</sup> Kalabule also refers to smuggling and hoarding of goods to increase prices. Cocoa was smuggled out of Ghana into Cote d’Ivoire and Togo, where prices were more favorable. This practice was “illegal” but was mostly dominated by government officials. Brydon asserts that

this was the era when the basis for giving out government contracts was at its most blatantly corrupt. It was widely rumored and believed that in order to secure

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>236</sup> John Eric Sam-Bossman worked as a member of the BNI (Bureau of National Investigation), akin to the CIA, under Kwame Nkrumah until the coming of the National Democratic Party, when he decided to retire early. He was one of the authors of the famous note warning Kwame Nkrumah of an impending coup within the military. His training in Russia was funded and supported by Kwame Nkrumah.

<sup>237</sup> Mammy Wagons were so named because women were mostly the owners of these public buses. They are presently referred to as “tro-tros”, and mostly owned by men, a change that also reflects decline of women’s economic activities in Ghana.

a contract for work, a bribe had to be given and often the cost of the bribe was such that the contract could not be fulfilled.<sup>238</sup>

These licenses often led to the import of unwanted commodities such as “rubber ducks and canned asparagus.”<sup>239</sup> Licenses of these commodities, used mostly by the elite, were in the hands of Acheampong’s families. In 1976 he ordered that all street vendors buy kiosks as office spaces. The government was the only source for kiosks.<sup>240</sup> Jeffries argues that the alleged high prices were also due to having to buy from “monopolistic suppliers operating at black market prices.”<sup>241</sup> Acheampong’s Operation Feed Yourself put much emphasis on agricultural production but he sidelined the population most active in that field. For example he was able to get loans for farmers from the Agricultural Development Bank, but these loans were mostly given to men. At the time in question, the men were moving away to the cities and migrating out of the countryside, thus leaving their farms in the hands of women. It was the women, as Gwendolyn Mikell shows, who were left behind tending the land. As one woman farmer recounted,

Men easily get credit from the rural bank. We don’t. They will ask for your husband if you were to approach them for a loan. No one would listen if you were to tell them you will spend the money on your food farm. Yet, we are the ones who feed everybody here.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Lynne Brydon, “‘With a little bit of Luck...’Coping with Adjustment in Urban Ghana, 1975-90,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, (1999): 69, 4.

<sup>239</sup> Claire Robertson, “The Death of Makola,” 8.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>241</sup> Richard Jeffries, “Rawlings and the Political Economy of Underdevelopment,” *African Affairs*, (1982): 81, 3.

<sup>242</sup> George J. Sefa Dei, “The women of a Ghanaian Village: A Study of Social Change,” in *African Studies Review*, (1994): 9.

The women interviewed by Gwendolyn Mikell stated that the program was much needed, but it failed to provide the land and laborers to the actual farmers, which were the women.<sup>243</sup> The managing director of the Ghana Co-operative Bank had urged the youth to return to the land and “raise the agricultural image of the nation...so that people would no longer consider farming as inferior to other professionals.” He pledged the bank’s support for farmers and agricultural development and urged the youth to take full advantage of the institution.<sup>244</sup>

However, the youth were more excited about city jobs that yielded much needed money fast. As a result, cocoa exports had reduced from 557, 000 tons to 271, 000 tons between 1977-8. Timber exports plunged from 168 million in 1973 to 33.8 million in 1978.<sup>245</sup> It was clear that the failures of these commodities to increase in production were due to lack of government policy, vision and mismanagement. Inflation had risen from 150 to 300 percent.<sup>246</sup> Acheampong was forced to step down amid rumors of corruption and nation wide strikes by students, teachers and other trained professionals. Akuffo replaced Acheampong in 1978 and a few months later, he was displaced by J.J Rawlings. Keeping to his word, Rawlings allowed elections to take place and Ghana’s fourth republic was born with Dr. Hilla Limann as president.

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<sup>243</sup> Gwendolyn Mikell, “Filiation, Economic Crisis, and the Status of Women in Rural Ghana,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, (1984): 21.

<sup>244</sup> “Youth Told to Give Agric New Image,” *The Ghanaian Times*, June 23, 1981.

<sup>245</sup> Donald Rothchild, “Military Performance: An Appraisal of the Ghana Experience,” *Comparative Politics*, (1980): 4.

<sup>246</sup> D. Paul Lumsden, “Toward Ghana’s Third Republic,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, (1980): 3.

By the time Limann came to power, women were considered the enemy from within, impeding economic and social progress. Thus his presidency was remembered as the first time when women were publicly whipped and imprisoned for their economic activities. Limann came to power on September 24, 1979, channeling the ideas, policies and affiliations of Kwame Nkrumah. Thus he sought a modernization campaign which neglected the agricultural sector and food producers. Scholars and citizens alike realized that Limann had inherited a daunting task. The nation had plunged into such a dismal state that, while people expressed optimism to see democracy ushered in, they could not deny being skeptical. The Ameer remembered that, “when Limann came, he came with so much anger to try to change these things.” This anger was felt by everyone, so much so that a few months after his election, a journalist lamented,

seven years of military misrule had produced a multiplicity of ills whose complexity and magnitude were and still are enough to daunt the most determined of specialists. The phenomenon of kalabule, run-away inflation, chronic shortages of the most basic of man-made necessities of life, low morale and low productivity, prostitution and irresponsibility in high places you named it and Ghana had it. He [Limann] may claim with some truth that the petrol lines have almost disappeared but rationing is still with us. The shops are still empty, the telephones do not work, the roads are bad, etc.<sup>247</sup>

Nonetheless, most people expressed renewed enthusiasm in the new democracy. They hoped his rule would save Ghana from its desperation. His election can best be understood by this satirical note on how Ghanaians felt about the difficulties they faced by the end of 1979.

Good Bye 1979 because...We wished you never had come to disappoint our hopes by leveling up kings and raising up the under-dog...Myriads of political

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<sup>247</sup> “The Doctor’s Dilemma,” *Daily Graphic*, January 1980.

parties sprang up when the soldier-government of the day freely opted to go back to the barracks after eight years rule of mess and kidding. We agreed with him because however well khaki is treated, it cannot be turned into silk, while the gun had always remained so as distinct from the pen.<sup>248</sup>

Everyone realized the political terrain was intimidating for Limann. He inherited a malfunctioning state amid a drought, low food production and rising inflation. In addition, the population growth rate was on the increase of 3%. Limann thought this “as rather high adding that the government will soon come out with a solution.”<sup>249</sup> Furthermore the brain drain was heavily impacting the socioeconomic sector. Limann had reminded teachers (and university lecturers) that “salvaging the country is a collective responsibility of all Ghanaians and that running away from it to seek fortunes elsewhere is not a good solution or the best way out.”<sup>250</sup> Apart from teachers, officials “expressed grave concern about the alarming rate at which doctors in government hospitals have been leaving the country.”<sup>251</sup> The amount of money the nation invested in each doctor only to have them leave for the betterment of other nations worried Limann. Problems stemmed from all aspects of the society. Speaking to the Muslim population, he advised that they desist from “smuggling, hoarding and currency trafficking which should be eradicated by all means from our social, economic, political and spiritual life.”<sup>252</sup> Things had become so bad that a news article read that 3,120 Korans shipped from Saudi Arabia

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<sup>248</sup> “Goodbye 1979,” *Daily Graphic*, January 1980t.

<sup>249</sup> “Limann: Don’t Give in to Cheap Criticism,” *The Ghanaian Times*, November 21, 1981.

<sup>250</sup> “Let’s all stay and Fight: Limann Tells Teachers,” *The Ghanaian Times*” November 24, 1981.

<sup>251</sup> “The Great Brain Robbery,” *The Ghanaian Times*, December 4, 1981.

<sup>252</sup> “Muslims Must Unite” *Daily Graphic*, September 20, 1980.

to the Ghana Muslims Representative Council had been stolen.<sup>253</sup> Furthermore a shortage of housing for the worker due to “lack of foreign money for the importation of clinker and other raw materials meant for the manufacture of building materials,” was also impacting the situation.<sup>254</sup> Banks were believed to have been discouraging opening new accounts because of the “inflationary situation is such that people dump huge sums of money in the banks as savings which attract huge interests. The banks therefore stand to lose as the money cannot be invested in any profitable ventures.”<sup>255</sup> On top of this, oil importation was limited.

Sovereign Ghana nearly grounded to a half as neighbour Nigeria denied us sale of crude oil. But the Ghana public stood ruffled as the vital oil trickled in from distant Algeria and Libya...the squeeze was nevertheless complete. In rural homes lanterns flickered their last embers for lack of kerosene. We hear that whenever some gas oil could be obtained, it was passed for kerosene after having been diluted with some quantity of common salt, which continues to be one cheap commodity at our markets... the year did not spare women some of whom were stripped naked in public and endured much abuse of the whip of the soldier and jeers of the applauding on-lookers...but it happened justifiably they say because the woman in particular has been a partner in the crime with the looting soldier from whose sake the scrub was applied.<sup>256</sup>

On the social front, Ghanaian culture and tradition were said to be crumbling. Parents were chastised for adopting “Machiavellian tactics” by “giving” their daughters away to rich old men. This practice had also impacted the Muslim community. Speaking at symposium, Hajia Amina Baby Ocansey, president of the National Assembly of Moslem [sic] Women urged Muslim parents to stop this practice of giving their daughters to men

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<sup>253</sup> “Missing 3, 120 Korans...GMRC Executive Helps Police,” *The Mirror*, Friday, September 19, 1980.

<sup>254</sup> “Shortage of Housing Units,” *The Mirror*, October 3, 1980.

<sup>255</sup> “Banks Refuse Money,” *The Mirror*, August 8, 1980.

<sup>256</sup> “Goodbye 1979,” *Daily Graphic*, January 1980.

who were rich and wealthy, especially when not even Muslims.<sup>257</sup> The chief Mallam of Accra explained that Muslim marriages are cheap and simple by nature, but that things had changed because parents started adopting extravagant practices showing that their daughters came from rich homes.<sup>258</sup> This new practice was said to have been developed by “city folks,” but it was impacting those in the villages as well.

The popular movie of the period, “I Told you So,” tackled this issue of a young girl persuaded to marry an alleged rich man returned from making his riches in Nigeria who turned out to be a thief. Owusu states that the “considerable negative impact of ‘hunger’ on morality, morale and economic productivity was evident everywhere.”<sup>259</sup> Young girls were said to be prostituting themselves and were using hotels as their base. Hotel owners claimed “waywardness on the part of our girls has registered a stigma on Ghanaian womanhood.”<sup>260</sup> Limann expressed “concern about the immoral behavior of Ghanaian young women abroad” and at home and asked the PNP’s women’s wing to develop leadership skills such as

hardwork, accountability, honesty and devotion to the task of rescuing the country from its economic mess and rising its tarnished image abroad. Mrs. R.E.Ametor-Williams [the director] stated that the women [PNP women’s wing] were determined to be “good leaders” in the society and had resolved that they would not allow the Ghanaian womanhood to be subjected to degradation<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> “Muslim Women Told to Keep Chastity,” *The Ghanaian Times*, November 1981.

<sup>258</sup> “Cost of Marriages: Expenses Low with Islam Religion,” *Daily Graphic*, December 14, 1951.

<sup>259</sup> Maxwell Owusu, “Tradition and Transformation: Democracy and the Politics of Popular Power,” in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, (1996): 7.

<sup>260</sup> “Stay out of Hostel Premises...Ghanaian Girls told” in *The Mirror* Friday, June 27, 1980.

<sup>261</sup> “PNP Govt wants to Save Ghana----Limann,” *Daily Graphic*, Sept 20, 1980.

The cost of living was so high that West Africans nicknamed Ghanaians “magicians” for being able to survive on “small money.” The movies, songs and governments of the period were all saying the same thing that the economy was worsening and that society was decaying morally. Women became the culprit to be rehabilitated. Scholars agree that women were targeted at this time because they were undergoing a socioeconomic transformation, redefining what it meant to be women at a time when many men did not feel “manly.”

While women in Ghana were always active economically, they became less and less dependent on men during this period. Women began acquiring and owning cocoa farms on their own and producing food commodities used to support their families and local communities since the 1930s. This period marked a transition when women were enjoying economic freedom surpassing the men, and thus became easy blame for the financial ruin.<sup>262</sup> This change in social configuration has been described as a period of “chaos” in Ghanaian history. Allman attributes this “chaos” or confusion to the changing social and cultural identities of Ghanaian women. As it was the first time in Ghanaian history that women were buying and owning such luxury, they were said to be causing the problem.

There was confusion as to what the Ghanaian woman’s role should be. While it was agreed she was expected to support the family, she was not supposed to be the primary breadwinner. She was expected to work, but not to surpass that of a man, or

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<sup>262</sup> Gwendolyn Mikell, “Ghanaian Females, Rural Economy and National Stability,” *African Studies Review*, (1986): 6.

partake in his sector.<sup>263</sup> While the cocoa farmers (mostly men but some women) were facing economic hardship, the newly “arrived” women driving the “big” cars came under scrutiny for having allegedly used immoral means to gain wealth. They were driving cars when most men couldn’t afford to put food on the table, explained my father in-law. There was an increase in women headed households at this time and the men were migrating out of the city and out of the country.

Because women were perceived to be the cause of the socioeconomic problems, they were also blamed for rising cases of fraud and corruption in the country. A journalist lamented that, “The Grains Development Board has been ordered not to sell rice to the public yet a woman goes there with a chit and collects 1,000 bags of rice!”<sup>264</sup> The men were ignored in this equation since they were mostly in powerful positions, and the women for the most part were not and thus silenced. Ms. Sherry Ayittey, a prominent member of the 31<sup>st</sup> December Women’s Movement and the Finance/Projects Coordinator added that

The issue is that in society, men are chauvinists, they look down on women and think that women should do all the dirty work for them. And when they see that women are fighting for their rights, they try to intimidate you. A lot of men in this country found this movement as the enemy, because we were teaching women to be themselves.

I will return to this issue later.

In addition, from 1979 to the 1980s,

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<sup>263</sup> Christine Oppong, “Woman Power: Retrograde Steps in Ghana,” *African Studies Review*, (1975): 3.

<sup>264</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, Thursday June 11, 1981.

Ghana's relatively solid base of economic and social infrastructure was also rapidly deteriorating. Roads had been rendered impassable by potholes and broken bridges, the railway system was nearly defunct, the postal and communication network was collapsing, the supply of water and electricity, even to the urban and industrial centers was erratic, hospitals went without doctors, nurses and drugs and schools had no books and were losing teachers. Destitution and despondency had become widespread among Ghanaians and many of them, including the better trained and skilled were immigrating to neighboring countries, Europe and North America. State institutions, notably the bureaucracy, were rent by official corruption and were in a severe malaise. Public confidence in the State itself as well as the processes within it was at very low ebb.<sup>265</sup>

In addition to the woman problem, doctors were said to have been in a "gold-digging business" due to the exuberant rates which had made health care accessible only to the rich. The diminishing middle class made many Ghanaians angry. An article on the Limann administration claimed "the average Ghanaian cannot afford going sick." Due to these disparities, an elite class was established while most Ghanaians were "famishing, roaming about in tattered clothing. They sleep beneath leaking roofs [while] some have no roofs over their heads and unemployed."<sup>266</sup> An editorial in the same paper exclaimed, "love of ill-gotten money and naked abuse of power have become cherished institution in the land. Everybody is lying, cheating, robbing and everybody is trying to become rich overnight."<sup>267</sup>

The fact that the situation was worsening and that Limann was perceived to be in over his head motivated Rawlings to launch a second coup on December 31, 1979. He reasoned the coup was to resuscitate the dying economy, and to bring an end to kalabule which was rampant throughout the society from high to low places. Because of this, the

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<sup>265</sup> E. Gyimah-Boadi, "The Search for economic development in Ghana," in *Ghana Under PNDC Rule*, (Senegal: Cordesia, 1993), 2.

<sup>266</sup> "Holy War in Ghana," *The Mirror*, Friday January 8, 1982.

<sup>267</sup> "Okromouth on 'Values'" *The Mirror*, Friday January 8, 1982.

women who were considered cohorts of the “big men,” who were also “the most prosperous of people in the country,” were targeted. Thus “naturally when overthrown, the new government found the first anger should be reserved for them. They felt that everything that was hidden, should be brought out...[and they] did that with iron hand.”<sup>268</sup>

Dubbed “Junior Jesus” by his supporters, Rawlings saw his mission similar to that of Jesus. He came to clean out a system that was exploiting the majority for the enrichment of a very small minority.<sup>269</sup> The People’s Defense Committees were set up initially to guard against the rise in bribery, fraud and corruption. However this group was later dismantled for having turned on the people. Made up mostly of the unemployed young men and some alleged criminals, this band turned violent. There were reported cases of men and women whipped for being “enemies” of the revolution by not following price control. The comment section of *The Mirror* urged “the greed of yesterday must give way to the needs of today in establishing a just society where exploitation of man by man will be a dead letter.”<sup>270</sup> To create a “just society” meant “fixing” the wrong aspects of society. These included fraud, corruption and women. This task was not going to be easy, especially since the 1980s would prove to be the decade of great socioeconomic problems in Ghana. This was due to the fact that,

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<sup>268</sup> Ameer of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. *Interview*. September 2007. Headquarters, Accra.

<sup>269</sup> One group of people considered to have stolen from the state were three judges which were executed under Rawlings. One of the judges was a pregnant woman. See *Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

<sup>270</sup> “All Hands on Deck,” *The Mirror*, Friday January 8, 1982.

By 1981 cocoa output was less than at independence in 1957 and only 45% of the 1965 peak. The other major export commodities---gold, diamonds and timber---had all suffered significant reductions in output. The greatly reduced import capacity resulting from the low level of exports and negligible capital inflows, generated by the donor disenchantment with the country's economic policies, led to very severe shortages of consumer goods, raw materials and spare parts.<sup>271</sup>

In 1982 Ghana experienced a drought which would last until 1983. Food and cocoa production was low followed by mining which was half of its amount a decade earlier. Education, transportation and communication sectors were in "disarray." As a result, hospitals were unable to function "for lack of basic medicine and essential supplies such as anesthetics and bandages."<sup>272</sup> The near collapse of the economy was met with the surge in brain drain as doctors, lawyers, engineers, educators and other professionals sought higher returns for their knowledge elsewhere.

To add to this problem, in 1983, over 1 million "illegal" Ghanaian immigrants from Nigeria were expelled and returned to Ghana. The additional mouths and bodies created by the expulsion further impacted a situation already severe. Rise in unemployment, food, housing shortages and electricity problems created an atmosphere of desperation and anxiety. In addition, this was the period marked with the highest number of migration among Ghana's educated and professional class. There was low food production because "everyone wants to sell but no one wants to produce." Food production was at its lowest due to a major drought and bush fires which ravaged south of the nation. The Ameer recounted that,

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<sup>271</sup> Dzorgbo, *Ghana in Search of Development*, 13.

<sup>272</sup> Robert M. Price, "Neo-Colonialism and Ghana's Economy Decline: A Critical Assessment," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, (1984): 165.

you would travel from here [Accra] to Kumasi and see the whole forest burning. The only thing that people could get to eat was the hard coconut, called cobra, because it's not easy for the fire to reach them [up in the tree]. Then they said it was not too good to eat because it contains a lot of oil. Whatever leaf somebody came across was good enough to eat. Everything had been burned. Very little the government could do for all these people except to encourage them to return to the land to farm. This put a lot of economic pressure on the economy.

Because of this, “by July the main Accra markets, were practically empty of fresh food and customers had to wait for food to arrive before queuing up for it.”<sup>273</sup> While the food situation was arguably better in the rural areas, migration among the youth was at its highest. Thus, the able bodies of the youth were moving away from working the land and into the urban areas where jobs were few and food scarce. Furthermore, “as women became target of ‘anti-commerce’ policies, most refused to bring food from the rural to the urban areas, causing further food shortages in the cities.”<sup>274</sup> One of my interviewees admits that she feared bringing her food stuffs to the market because of the treatment of market women. She affirmed that all market women were considered fraudulent and the cause of the economic problems. She felt no incentive to go to Accra and be treated poorly when few would be capable to afford the stuff to begin with.<sup>275</sup> Money was so scarce that a portion of the youth became so desperate that they began selling their blood to hospitals to make money.<sup>276</sup>

The era of lack continued as, “seamstresses complained not only of lack of cloth but lack of thread. It was not uncommon to buy food wrapped in what looked like official

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<sup>273</sup> Brydon, “With a little bit of luck. . .,” 5.

<sup>274</sup> *West Africa*, November, 1979, 26.

<sup>275</sup> Sarkina Pokua. *Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. November 2007.

<sup>276</sup> “Blood Selling at c400 a Pint in Kumasi”, *The Ghanaian Times*, November 21, 1981.

documents: pages from receipt books, company reports, even pages from the archives.”<sup>277</sup>

When Rawlings’s Provisional National Defense Council came to power on New Year’s Eve 1981, they inherited a state almost bankrupt. This revolution was intended to unite Ghanaians and to bring Ghana out of its misery by installing democratic ideals and have the state accountable to all citizens. Thus his second coming was hailed as a revolution “champion of the underdog” in all sectors. Attempts were made to return people to work the land and efforts were made redirecting the Nigerian returnees back to the countryside. With the rising inflation, high unemployment, the drought and bush fires, and the 1 million returnees, Ghana had to turn to outside help to feed and clothe its rising population. A month after the arrival of the first returnees, the PNDC appealed to the United Nations for financial support. Ghana needed an estimated \$188.9 million to revamp its economy.<sup>278</sup>

The government also sought to attract foreign investment, especially in the mining sector, by enacting a relatively liberal investment code and holding conferences in Accra and London to advertise Ghana’s prospects in Gold mining...As these initiatives failed to yield substantial results, the Government turned to the World Bank and the IMF for a loan of one billion dollars.<sup>279</sup>

It is agreed that Ghana’s success in undertaking this initiative was due to the fact that “there was a high degree of consistency between the macroeconomic tools urged by the Fund and the Bank and the regime’s original agenda.”<sup>280</sup> The Structural Adjustment

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<sup>277</sup> Brydon, “with a little bit of luck,” 9.

<sup>278</sup> Lynne Brydon, “Ghanaian responses to Nigerian Expulsions,” *African Affairs*, (1985): 16.

<sup>279</sup> Eboe Hutchful, “Why Regimes Adjust: The World Bank Ponders ‘Its Star Pupil’,” in *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, (1995): 3.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Program (SAP), while it has been hailed as a success and Ghana as a model nation, the poor, and women in particular did not fare as well as the rich. This disproportionate level of development meant that women had to find alternative means of adjusting and coping with the economic difficulties. The women realized they were able to pull through these hard times due to their own “hard work” and not “governmental policy.”<sup>281</sup>

By all accounts, SAP has been described as severe in the case of Ghana. Scholars agree that it has “been successful at a macroeconomic level.” The GDP grew and roads were built, which fostered transportation and export of commodities. Richard Jeffries conducted research on this topic in Ghana during the period of SAP’s implementation. His interviews revealed that the urban poor felt they were worse off than they were before these measures were adopted. In 1990, a minimum wage worker earned 400 cedis. The price of a ball of *kenkey* was 50 cedis, one chicken 2, 500, small fish 300, one loaf of bread 250, and a bottle of beer 350 cedis.<sup>282</sup> Interestingly, this amount was not enough for one person to live on, and even more impossible to support a family. By the time Rawlings took over, the average worker was paid 40 cedis a day, which meant that,

It would take a worker more than a week to buy an American tin of rice (3kg), more than a day to buy 3kg of maize, ten days to buy a tuber of yam, over ten days to buy an bottle of edible oil, more than a day to buy an American tin of gari (cassava grains). One finger of plantain costs more than half a day’s wages, and one egg cost a little over one-third of a day’s wages.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> George Sefa Dei, “The Women of a Ghanaian Village: A Study of Social Change,” *African Studies Review*, (1994): 11.

<sup>282</sup> Richard Jeffries, “Urban Popular Attitudes towards the Economic Recovery Program,” *African Affairs*, (1992): 6.

<sup>283</sup> Maxwell Owusu, “Tradition and Transformation,” 7.

Jeffries found out that because the minimum wage was so low, by the end of the month, the worker basically had to rely on credit from the market women to survive. Also, if this worker was married, his wife would more likely be engaged in some form of trading to bring in money to support her and the children.

Similar to past governments, the PNDC sought to control the market and the reasons behind the high cost of living and the scarcity. To accomplish this task, women became the culprit whom the governments sought to control and rehabilitate lest “they destroy the society.” There was an attempt to consign women and their work solely to the home which would make their old public jobs available for the male newcomers. There were two outright battles which the government sought to fight with women. There were the women who were accused of “immorality, prostitution and other social evils.” These women were believed to have gained BMWs with their “bottoms” or to have prostituted themselves for wealth. An ex-mayor of Accra related that during the 1980s a woman could be seduced with a can of baked beans. Takyiwaa Manuh asserts that there developed a “generalized resentment of women who were perceived to have outflanked men in their pursuit of wealth, and to have gone outside of their traditional roles of reproducers and nurturers.” These women (and later wealthy women merchants) came under great attack and scrutiny throughout the 80s for allegedly having exploited the social climate by selling their products at exuberant rates.

Rawlings inherited the stereotype-turned-belief that women were the cause of the socioeconomic peril facing Ghana. One of the first things on Rawling’s to-do list was to “replace the bottom power” of the “big” market women, referring to the popular notion

that these women were the cause of Ghana's economic mess.<sup>284</sup> Market centers in Accra and Kumasi were targeted because they had become the alleged center of corruption. This was the reason why Limann in 1979 and Rawlings in the 1980s razed the Makola market, the most popular center for trade in Accra. He sent in bulldozers "after the soldiers had plundered money and goods" from these women. The average Ghanaian also believed women to be the cause that jeering onlookers and young men partook in whipping and beating these women. These women were stripped naked and whipped in their private parts. Others were raped while in police custody.<sup>285</sup>

One of my interviewees stated that as a Muslim market woman, the police did not harass her, because "they see me with my veil and know that we Muslims don't do that."<sup>286</sup> The Ameer remembers that at times, a son would say, "I don't want to see my mother flogged, if you could flog me in her place, then they would flog both of them." To curb the rising practice of kalabule, the market, seen as women's place of economic power and corruption, was destroyed. As the center of the alleged kalabule, and where men were made to feel inadequate due to their inability to afford the foodstuffs, Rawlings

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>285</sup> The fact that some women were raped while in police custody gives the impression that the conflict during this period was fought akin to a civil war. Rape was used "to assert power" and as a "strategy of war." I believe a greater problem here is that women were perceived in many ways as "other" similar to ethnic conflicts. This is similar to Jews of Europe, Lebanese in West Africa and other ethnic groups whose economic activities are perceived as exploitable and nefarious. See Akosua Adomako-Ampofo's "Gender Studies," for an analysis of this.

<sup>286</sup> Sakina Pokua. *Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. September 2007. This was probably due to the notion that Muslim women were too timid to be "smart or conniving." The notion here is that they understood their positions within society as second-class citizens and thus had no reason to surpass their husband's income.

was so anti-market women that he turned a group of wealthy women merchants away when they came to show their allegiance to his revolution.

Poor market women were not spared the whippings, even though the initial anger was targeting “big” market women who owned stores dealing mostly in imports for the middle class. In an article expressing the empty shelves, the author portrays how hard the middle class had been hit by the shortage of goods. Having gone around the “big” department stores, she found the only items available were locally made and that the shelves once full of dress fabrics and curtain materials were now empty. At one store where some luxury items were available, the author found that they “were being sold to only those known to the sales girls and boys.”<sup>287</sup> Smaller traders and vendors came under greater scrutiny than the larger store owners because the “average” Ghanaian male was not able to buy the foodstuffs provided by the “smaller” market women. Robertson acknowledges that “such gender-related class differences have exaggerated male-female distrust and helped to make the women powerless and victims of abuse.” In addition, Robertson argues that the “death” or destruction of Makola can be seen as an attempt to destroy the last vestige of female economic power in Ghana.<sup>288</sup>

Ghana’s economic situation was so severe that it was accepted as a test case for the IMF/World Bank in 1983. The term “Rawling’s Chain” was invented at this time to explain the rise in hunger and subsequent protruding of collar bones made visible as people lost weight.<sup>289</sup> By this time, it was no longer fully accepted that women were the

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<sup>287</sup> “Search For Goods,” *The Mirror*, Friday, September 5, 1980.

<sup>288</sup> Robertson, “The Death of Makola,” 9.

<sup>289</sup> Brydon, “With a little Bit of Luck,” 6.

sole cause for the economic mess. Turning to the IMF indicates the realization that measures on a national level had to be taken to save the economy. Steps were taken to stabilize the economy by stifling the black market, regularizing the currency, and cutting jobs. Steps were also taken to increase revenue in cocoa and other agricultural products that could be traded overseas.<sup>290</sup> As a result, maize production rose by 43 percent, rice 122, and cocoa by 25 percent.<sup>291</sup> Efforts were made to fix the public sector as well, including roads, education, electricity and construction. Due to this, Ghana was hailed as a World Bank success story.

As the economy and political situations stabilized, socially, military rule created a “culture of silence.” As Ghanaians feared speaking out against the government, they turned to the civil society for support. The rise in religious organizations is one product of this period. And women came to make up the majority of the Christian charismatic congregations. While the activities of the IMF were proof those women were not the cause of the economic ruin, these ideas died hard in the minds of most Ghanaians. I now turn to analyze the woman problem in detail and how various governments contributed to the shaming and blaming of Ghanaian women during the period.

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>291</sup> James C. W. Ahiakpor, “Rawlings, Economic Policy Reform and the Poor: Consistency or Betrayal,” in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, (1991): 14.

## Chapter 7

### *Ghanaian women as scapegoats during economic and political instability*

In *Gender, Class and State in Africa*, Robert Fatton affirms, “women have been victimized by the hegemony of the male vision of the world.”<sup>292</sup> I think this happens during periods when men’s ability to appear in control and natural leaders wanes. Indeed, Ghanaian women were victimized during the period when the male image of strength and power was weakening. This was especially so towards the “small girls” whose status and wealth was presumed illicit and begotten from prostitution. By the 1960s, the inability to curb Ghana’s worsening economy pushed government officials to blame women as the source of the problems.

Ghanaian women, young and old, were blamed for all sorts of societal problems. Market women were thought liable for the rising costs of food and commodities. Young women were responsible for the deteriorating values and the rise in prostitution. And older women were chastised in villages as witches impeding the socioeconomic advancement of young men in their communities. Ghana’s woman problem had its roots in the shift of gender roles stemming from the colonial period and the rise of independently wealthy women and the predominance of women in once male dominated sectors in the post colony.

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<sup>292</sup> Robert Fatton, Jr. *Gender, Class, and State in Africa*,” in *Women and the State in Africa*, ed. Jane L. Parpart and Kathleen A. Staudt, (Lynne Rienner Publishers: London, 1989),53

In *Re-creating Ourselves*, Molaria Ongudipe-Leslie states, “women are neither saints nor devils; they are just human; capable of both good and evil. The question is, how does society contribute to their nature and behavior?”<sup>293</sup> I don’t think the women presented here sought to overthrow men’s power in Ghana. Nor do I believe they were selfish and blind to the suffering of their fellow citizens. The source of the problem was not women and their pricing, but in the breakdown of societal rule and law that made doing business in Ghana expensive and nearly impossible. I don’t think women united against the state because they have not been consulted in “creating the modern state system, nor have they been able to establish regular channels of access to decision makers.”<sup>294</sup> This is to imply that the market women did not seek sophisticated reforms by attempting to overthrow the system, but simply to starve their fellow citizens. If their high prices were to make things hard for the men, they failed, because commodities were expensive for women as well. In any case, men and women would suffer. The condescending underlying theme here is that women’s responses would take the shape of greed to satisfy their stomachs and egos and not permanent change for the good of the nation.

In the cases discussed here, the women were victims of a collapsing state and of men unable to stop the downward spiral of a system that used to work in their favor. This paranoia of submissive female activity was inherited from the colonial era. This notion that women’s activities would not only upset the status quo, but overthrow it results from the fear of women’s responses to being treated as second class citizens dependent on their abilities to produce and reproduce.

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<sup>293</sup> Ongudipe-Leslie, *Re-creating Ourselves*, 172.

<sup>294</sup> Naomi Chazan, “Gender Perspectives on African States,” 186.

Women had always been part of Ghana's economic sector.<sup>295</sup> In the pre-colonial period, women were "conspicuous in high places."<sup>296</sup> Not only have women worked as producers and reproducers, but their work was "indispensable to state economies," although "invisible and devalued."<sup>297</sup> However, from the 1930s, women's activities began to support many communities abandoned by male migration away from the villages. As a result, women began making headway into areas traditionally dominated by men. Their transition into those areas was met with resistance from the colonial to the period under study. One reason for the resistance had to do with the state's inability to curb migration and refocus male labor back to the farms and away from the city unemployed.

Jean Allman explores the problem of Asante women working in male dominated fields during the colonial period. She found that a system of naming and shaming was implemented to disgrace women back into "their space." She attributes this to a time in the 1930s when cocoa prices had augmented and when women began owning cocoa farms and its produce, which made them independent for the first time since the affects of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Her oral research revealed that during this period, women thought they were working harder than the men, thus could live without them and were

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<sup>295</sup> Ann Whithead, "Wives and Mothers: Female Farmers in Africa," in *Gender, Work, and Population, in sub-Saharan Africa*, (London: James Currey 1994), 36.

<sup>296</sup> Niara Sudarkasa, "The "status of women" in Indigenous African Societies," in *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Sharon Harley, (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1987), 25.

<sup>297</sup> Adomako-Ampofo, "Women and Gender Studies," 699.

refusing to marry.<sup>298</sup> Unmarried women were labeled prostitutes and blamed for having caused venereal diseases and disturbing the peace in the society. These women, considered a threat to traditional society, were rounded up and jailed until they could name a potential husband who would then be called upon to pay their fine and marry them when released. That was the reason given by chiefs and the colonial authorities for imprisoning these women. However, a deeper analysis of this issue reveals that it was also the period when women began trading in commodities, once dominated by men.

Allman affirms that

the chaos unleashed by the movement of women into the cash economy, combined with a host of other factors---urbanization, western education, Christianity, and British colonial courts---warranted drastic action by the Asante chiefs, those empowered to restore order out of chaos.<sup>299</sup>

Historian Nancy Hunt asserts that “where women most often appear in the colonial record is where moral panic surfaced, settled and festered. Prostitution, polygamy, adultery, concubinage, and infertility are the loci of such angst throughout the historical record.”<sup>300</sup> In addition, women retailing and distilling local gin in the colonial era were also victimized for their participation in an economy that was historically male dominated. They were criminalized for partaking in an activity that went against the colonial intent to dominate the trade in alcohol, women and local economy.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Jean Allman, “Rounding up Spinsters: Gender Chaos and Unmarried women in Colonial Asante, *The Journal of African History*, (1996): 12.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>300</sup> Allman, “Rounding up Spinsters,” 14.

<sup>301</sup> Akyeampong, *What’s in a Drink*, 20.

Similar to the colonial period, the post colony operated in ways to control the social movement and economic activities of women. Women's economic activities were perceived to be beyond the control of the state and their male family members. And as Fatton states, this was also a form of resistance on the part of the women.

Resistance takes the form of withdrawal from the public realm rather than confrontational assaults against the state. "Exit" is the preferred means of voicing discontent since it does not necessarily provide the immediate exercise of state repression. It embodies the more common reaction of the most marginalized groups and classes. Women whose independent access to the state is limited and whose struggle for sexual emancipation is neglected tend to exit from the conventional political arena.<sup>302</sup>

Men and women in Ghana exited from the state at that time. They came to depend on their religious associations for support and guidance. It's still not clear why women's decision to "exit" would become so taboo. Consequently, women had become the subject *par excellence* in Ghanaian socioeconomic discourse. So much so that a young woman was featured on almost all the front pages of one of Ghana's premier daily newspapers at this time, *The Mirror*, prompting a reader to write, "men too are good for the front page."<sup>303</sup> Beauty pageants as well as dancing competitions were new comers on the cultural landscape, with focus on women and their bodies. Interestingly, the emphasis on women and their activities was what most people thought the societal problems stemmed from. Consensus had it that these new cultural activities of young women, with emphasis

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<sup>302</sup> Robert Fatton, "Gender, Class and State," 55.

<sup>303</sup> "Let us See the Men too," *The Mirror*, Friday January 29, 1982. These women were portrayed for their beautiful faces. They were mostly young and single semi-professionals.

on their bodies, were demoralizing Ghanaian womanhood and morals in general.<sup>304</sup> On the economic front, it was believed that middle-aged women were making food products unaffordable and hoarding goods causing the food shortage.

An article, entitled, “The Woman Problem,” published in *The Mirror* argued that Ghanaian women were hampering socioeconomic development because their talents and resources hadn’t been fully tapped by the nation. It had become popular knowledge that women were the problem, and this article reasoned that it was not their fault that they were hurting the economy. The problem was that previous governments had created monsters by ignoring the role and voice of women in guaranteeing equal rights and access to social and economic advancement. Thus these women became enemies of the state because of having been ignored and uneducated for too long. As the author argues, marriage, children, and employment all worked to disadvantage women. And “considering all these things, the women should not be blamed at all for not contributing positively towards the nation’s progress.”<sup>305</sup> The assumption was that uneducated women were hurting the state since they were ignorant of how to help it or were unwilling to be productive citizens in a nation that had denied them full access.<sup>306</sup>

Women were alleged enemies at a time when their participation in the food producing sector was more visible than the men. This is because most of the men were

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<sup>304</sup> Dance competitions were popular during this period. In addition, most of the newspapers featured competitions and club announcements. These “youthful” activities were chastised and considered the hotbed for young women, often believed to be prostitutes.

<sup>305</sup> “The Woman problem,” *The Mirror*, Saturday, December 18, 1982.

<sup>306</sup> Costantina Safilios-Rothschild “Agricultural Politics and Women Producers” in *Gender, Work and Population in sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Sharon Harley, (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1987), 56.

migrating out of the village areas and out of the country.<sup>307</sup> With the farms left mostly to elderly women, food production had become a female activity, and the lack of food was women's fault.<sup>308</sup> This period was also marked with constant political coups and instability which affected food production. In *Ghana in Search of Development*, the author affirms, after decades of failed political and economic policies to foster development, the state had "institutionalize[d] uncertainty, unpredictability, and anarchy."<sup>309</sup> Without some degree of stability and political sanity, investors, donor nations and the local entrepreneur found it risky to invest (resources, time and skills) in such a climate. As a result of political instability, the nation was plagued with low production in food, mining and timber industries. This led to "the erosion of the tax base due to declining domestic production, exports and imports, as well as inefficient tax collection, forced a cutback in expenditure for essential social and economic infrastructure."<sup>310</sup> As the political and economic situation worsened, trained teachers, doctors and other professionals found it difficult conducting business and living in Ghana. This group began what would be a long trend in the migration of Ghana's professionals or the brain drain. Alongside migration, this period was marked with the rise in disengagement from the state. That is, people sought to distance themselves from the instability by relying on ethnic, local, religious and other civil society organizations for support. As a consequence, the surge in Protestant-charismatic churches in Ghana and the ascendancy of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission.

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<sup>307</sup> Adomako-Ampofo, "Women and Gender Studies," 700.

<sup>308</sup> Clark, *African Market Women*, 35.

<sup>309</sup> Dzorgbo, *Ghana in Search of Development*, 26.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

The religious groups and civil society organizations provided support for Ghanaians at a time when the governments were unable to. Unlike popular belief, the governments were unable to provide, not due to a neo-colonial relationship as popularly suggested. It seems that during Ghana's most severe economic period, it was least dependent or in relation with external forces.<sup>311</sup> The downward turn of the economy, they argue rests on specific factors in Ghana's socioeconomic history and political instability.

The failing governments needed to present themselves as handling the situation.<sup>312</sup> They joined the media in constructing women as witches, greedy, unpatriotic and hurtful to the nation. The acting Executive Secretary of the National Council on Women and Development explained that women's hurtful activities stemmed from societal imbalances, thus keeping women as second-class citizens turned them against the nation.

From being unequal through lack of formal education and training, women today have lost their dignity and respect because it is believed that women cause the chaos that we found ourselves in. And Ghanaian women have lost their respect in other countries because all along the West Coast of Africa, Ghanaians are blatantly indulging in change of sugar, sardines and fine dresses.<sup>313</sup>

She went on to say, "I don't believe that women caused the economic mess. But I do know that women contributed a great deal to it."<sup>314</sup> In *Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Kathleen M. Fallon states that Ghanaian women would only come to see each other as "sisters" in the late 1990s and early 2000.

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<sup>311</sup> Robert M. Price, "Neo-Colonialism and Ghana's Economic Decline: A Critical Assessment," in *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, (1984): 167.

<sup>312</sup> Gracia Clark, *Onions are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 377.

<sup>313</sup> "Women Asked to Salvage Lost Image," *The Mirror*, Friday March 21, 1980.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

Prior to that period, class, ethnicity and religion divisions were barriers and did not allow women to “place pressure on the government.”<sup>315</sup> Indeed, elite and educated women echoed the media and government officials and supported their attempts to “teach” market women about “proper” womanhood.

Women became more visible within the economic sectors of the rural and urban centers at a time when the men were migrating in large numbers outside of the villages and the country as a whole.<sup>316</sup> As the men left, women became heads of households, having to support their immediate and extended families. Migration had further impacted women and their economic activities as they were left, at times without the support of the matrikin.<sup>317</sup> By 1970s women dominated as farm labor force, bypassing men in the Central, Western and Ashanti regions. This has led many to comment that the agricultural system as female system in southern Ghana.<sup>318</sup> Furthermore on average, men owned more acres than the women. Although they had access to more land, due to migration, this land was often under worked. At times however, this land was left in the hands of mothers, sisters and aunts to work. This, coupled with their rise in women owning land and cultivating food for mass production, made farm labor women’s work.

Christine Oppong in “Women’s Power: Retrograde Steps in Ghana,” found that women were more engaged in food production than their male counterparts, who focused

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<sup>315</sup> Kathleen M. Fallon, *Democracy and the rise of women’s movements in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 110.

<sup>316</sup> Richard Anker, “Measuring Women’s participation in the African labor force,” in *Gender, Work and Population in sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Sharon Harley, (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1987), 66.

<sup>317</sup> Clark, *African Market Women*, 115.

<sup>318</sup> Christine Oppong, “Women’s Power: Retrograde Steps in Ghana,” *African Studies Review*, (1975): 3.

more on cocoa and commodities for export. Some of the women benefited from food production. Consequently, some were able to build homes and support themselves independently of a male. It was for such reasons that some of the women, particularly those over 50, were labeled witches. That they were interpreted as “enjoying” when everyone else was suffering, was the real problem.<sup>319</sup> The allegations revealed that if a group were to be suffering in society, it would “normally” be the women. Anything contrary to that is abnormal.

During this period of economic difficulties, Dei’s research shows that it was women’s ingenuity that fed entire communities.<sup>320</sup> Due to the drought and subsequent shortages in certain foodstuffs, women in the village of Ayirebi experimented with different roots previously not consumed. They cultivated wild plants used for making soup and collected nuts, roots, fibers, leaves, bark, fruits to supplement food. They also collected kola nuts for sale and started making soap for sale to bring in additional income. In addition, women also

devised additional food processing techniques for basic staples like cassava and coco yam. For example, the skins of cocoyam which, under favorable conditions would be discarded, were dried and later milled into a flour before being heated at extremely hot temperatures for consumption.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Claire Robertson, “Ga women and socioeconomic change in Accra, Ghana,” in *Women in Africa*, ed. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 126.

<sup>320</sup> Barbara C. Lewis, “The Limitations of group action Among Entrepreneurs: The Market Women of Abidjan, Ivory Coast,” in *Women in Africa*, , ed. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 135.

<sup>321</sup> Dei, “The Women of a Ghanaian Village,” 6.

The Ameer of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission commented that, “whatever leaf somebody came across was good enough to eat,” familiar food was scarce. Entire societies were kept alive by women’s culinary innovations.<sup>322</sup>

When the governments and the media started pointing fingers at the socioeconomic problems in Ghana, women were an easy target because they came to dominate the informal market sector, responsible for food production and bringing it to the markets for sale in the cities.<sup>323</sup> This was particularly dangerous at a period when the market represented the actual failures of the state in its inability to provide enough food for its citizens and control prices which would increase access. As a place of contestation, the market represented economic activities outside of the state’s control and a structure in the hands of women, the population most ignored in government policy. While the “average Ghanaian” found it difficult to put a finger on the macroeconomic problems, the role of women active in the informal sector was more visible than any government policy. While “he” did not know the economic difficulties resulting from poor governmental policies, he was aware of rising costs, and lack of food, which seems to be congregated in the hands of market women. These women represented the efforts of local entrepreneurship, least dependent on government and having started their small businesses with the small capital they were able to save and without relying on bank loans for help.

In addition, these women were easy targets because they were mostly illiterate in the English language and were thought to be ignorant of their rights. Often, most of these

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<sup>322</sup>Ameer of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Missin. *Interview*. Headquarters, Accra. June 2007.

<sup>323</sup> Luisella Goldschmidt-Clermont, “Assessing women’s economic contributions in domestic and related activities,” in *Gender, Work and population in sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Aderanti Adepoju and Christine Oppong, (London: James Currey, 1994), 76.

women were from poor families and struggled to get the money to start their trade. They lived outside of their villages, and had no direct communal support to rely on for protection.<sup>324</sup> Yet they were targeted as though they had used the nation's money to start a trade, and later turned on the economy by exploiting the situation. A scenario not unlike what the doctors and other professionals trained using the nation's resources had done. Most often, these doctors eventually migrated outside of Ghana to enrich other nations with their skills. The general malaise was felt everywhere: no food to keep healthy, and no doctors and medicines when you do fall sick. Research conducted in 1970 and 1975 indicate that the majority of Ghanaian adults felt they were worse off than when they were children.<sup>325</sup> All of the people interviewed for that survey agreed that the problems were due to kalabule.

The term kalabule, a Hausa derivative of *kere kabure*, means keep it quiet or hidden. It was initially used to express the new level of fraud and corruption brought to life by the Acheampong regime.<sup>326</sup> Acheampong and high ranking men in his cabinet became infamous for having many girlfriends whom they bestowed the nation's wealth on. These women used this money to buy and operate shops catering to the middle class and started driving big cars, for the first time in Ghana's history. They were unmarried and were

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<sup>324</sup> Ann K. Blanc and C.B. Lloyd, "Women's work, child-bearing and child-rearing over the life cycle in Ghana," in *Women, Work and Population in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Aderanti Adepoju and Christine Oppong, (London: James Currey, 1994), 112.

<sup>325</sup> Fred M. Hayward, "Perceptions of Well-Being in Ghana," *African Studies Review*, (1979): 3.

<sup>326</sup> Richard Jeffries, "Rawlings and the Political Economy of Underdevelopment," *African Affairs*, (1982): 2.

perceived as prostituting themselves to these big men. It was these middle-class expensive items which gained the women the reputation of exploitative and fraudulent.

By the time that the bashing commenced, these women proved more organized than their poorer counterparts and knew how to work themselves into the political system. They had formed a block, showing support for presidential candidates at appropriate times. Their political activism was also used against them, as some saw it as prostituting to all governments to protect their “fraudulent” businesses. As one letter to *The Mirror* states,

I always wonder why some people become shameless opportunist. They like to fix themselves into every situation in order to satisfy their whims and caprices. The Makola mammies supported the PNP and even donated heavily in cash for the retention of the infamous trade liberalization policy. They gave J.J. Rawlings names and labels, and with the PNP planned to rebuild the Makola Market, the citadel of their “kalabuleism.” Now they are turning round to sing praises to J.J.’s name.

Their political savoir-faire was interpreted as opportunistic and selfish. The writer warned that these women should not try linking themselves with the PNDC because they “cannot be corrupted.”<sup>327</sup>

But over the years, as the socioeconomic situation worsened, the term came to apply to all women, visible in economic activities that were once dominated by the men. However, the majority of these women were not mistresses of big men, but hard working mothers seeking to keep food on the table during a time when the men were moving out of the country. Furthermore, the previous chapter proved that these women could not control the prices of these commodities because they did not hold a monopoly on

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<sup>327</sup> “Shame, Makola Women,” *The Mirror*, Friday January 29, 1982.

“sources of supply.” In addition, high prices are more an indicator of the deteriorating rural economy, especially in the context of urban migration, brain drain and environmental issues. Hoarding of goods could not have helped either side much considering that the foodstuffs would most likely rot after a few days, creating a bigger loss for the traders. Campbell goes on to state that the trade in imported commodities, however, could be hoarded but that these items “were controlled by male members of the petty bourgeoisie,” not the women.<sup>328</sup>

While many thought the average market woman ignorant of the real issues, they knew that they were being unjustly criticized and singled out. A market woman explained that, “the public is under the erroneous impression that it is the market women who have made the cost of foodstuffs unbearable for the ordinary man,” while the cause is poor roads, high cost of transportation and police guards seeking bribes and “drink money.” These women also knew that they were scapegoats because the problems were too much for the government to handle. For example, in *The Mirror*, market women asserted that the high cost of food stuff on the market was due to the fact that they had to import the stuff from long distance, high cost of limited transportation and they were forced to pay “drink money” to the guards who would also seize part of their produce. In another newspaper article, a market woman was asserted “she paid c20.00 and a bottle of the drink for the guards and confirmed that this uncalled-for attitude of the guards has been

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<sup>328</sup> John Campbell, “Ideology and Politics in the Markets of Ghana,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, (1985): 5.

going on since September last year.”<sup>329</sup> The women stressed fraudulent on the part of the authorities cause the rising prices, not them.

It is not surprising that particular women, young and old, would be targeted at the local levels and within their communities. Women were targeted in witch hunts which left many banished from their homes. Sons and daughter-in-laws often labeled these women witches at times when attempts to obtain a job, a pregnancy and economic mobility failed. Owing to the fact that these elderly women were economically dependent on their sons and daughter-in-laws, coupled with in-law tensions in the home, branding them witches was pretense to rid of that responsibility, particularly during these hard economic times. The Nigerian Ghanaian movies at this time visualized these fears, focusing on how elderly women threaten the peace and stability of the nuclear family. This was also a period when a woman would be sent out of her husband’s home (or his family’s home) after his death while all his property, including shirts and furniture would be taken away from her.

Thus even though governments were no longer putting all the blame on women, the film industry took up this battle with women being portrayed as the source of men’s ills and woes.

Even from the colonial period, films such as “Amenu’s child,” which came out in 1951, was used to teach women “how to feed their children properly and how old ways and old superstitions can be overcome by new and better ways.”<sup>330</sup> As the notion that women were the cause of the failures in Ghana lessened, this theme was to reappear in

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<sup>329</sup> “Drink Money” *The Mirror*, May 9, 1980.

<sup>330</sup> “Value in Cinema” *Daily Graphic*, December 1, 1951.

the media/film industry in the late 1980s-1990s. During this period, the Ghanaian Film Industry Corporation, and the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, was government controlled. The “censorship, training of technicians, and production of documentary and information films,” was handled by the government.<sup>331</sup> As early as 1992, Ghana was producing more than 12 films a year. However, this number has greatly increased since then with the help of independent film makers. Such directors, argues Manthia Diawara, “choose their films on an artistic and financial basis.” This means that films which echo societal taboos and norms are favored. Thus the films tend to voice and express concerns already being battled.<sup>332</sup> Diawara continues,

Films draw on local culture and experience. [They] blend comedy and melodrama and emphasizing the tragic clash between tradition and modernity. A look at the films reveals the contradictions between the values of the city and those of the village: they denounce acculturation and attempt to raise the consciousness of the characters in the end.<sup>333</sup>

The popularity of movie houses at this period cannot be overstated. The newspapers are full of advertisement from this sector, popularizing this new social space where the youth can go and view their malaise. There are few Ghanaian and Nigerian films focusing on the modern family, which do not depict women as avaricious, hurtful, evil and threatening to the stability of a man and his world.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 118.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> I am a collector of Nigerian and Ghanaian films. I have been an advent viewer of Nollywood films since the late 1990s and currently have a collection of over 500 “classics.” Patience Ozokor from Nigeria and Grace Nortey from Ghana are the two women actors who epitomized the image of women as wicked wives, evil mother in-

The Ghanaian video industry, with a pervading theme of charismatic Pentecostalism, focuses on a constant battle between good and bad, or God and the devil. Where older and unmarried women often appear, they do so as the force of evil. The filmmakers, who are predominately male,

are sure to be highly positive about the married woman----the heroine of virtually every Ghanaian popular movie----who has to struggle in order to defend her family against intrusions from her weak husband's extended family and against girlfriends who try to make him leave his wife and spend all the money for fun.<sup>335</sup>

Meyer notes the active participation of the audience as they cheer and jeer the villains or praise the hero or "the moral engagement of the audience." The audience jeered and cheered based on their beliefs that the characters were portraying real life incidents that either they experienced or believe could happen. The general theme being, "that if only [married] men could be convinced to stay away from their [older women in family, including aunts, grandmothers, etc.] mothers, family life would be a beautiful reality, rather than an unattainable dream."<sup>336</sup> Thus movie producers reproduced this notion of younger women as enemies of stability and older women as threats to progress and the immediate family. Highlife musicians were also active in putting their discontent in music. Kalabule and other social ills were common themes in music during this period.<sup>337</sup>

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laws, annoying neighbors and jealous friends. The notion of "wicked women" was popularized by them.

<sup>335</sup> Birgit Meyer, "Popular Ghanaian Cinema and "African Heritage" *Africa Today*, (1999): 9.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>337</sup> Emmanuel Akyeampong "What's in a Drink? Class Struggle, Popular Culture and the Politics of Akpeteshie (Local Gin) in Ghana 1930-1967," *The Journal of African History*, (1996): 2.

The laws were often anti-women because few women helped make the laws. As late as 1990 no woman “held the position of cabinet member or state” and as late as 1988, women only made up 9 percent of district assemblies.<sup>338</sup> To deal with this growing lack of social respectability, women basically turned their backs on the government and rather turned to the religious associations springing up around the capital with the aim of gaining new identities for themselves. These women along with the exit of the professionals could be seen as beginning of de-participation from the government “construed as a protest against falling living standards in Ghana and the state’s inability to serve any common good, other than the interest of those who have patronized it.” (249)

Nana Konadu Agyeaman-Rawlings’ 31<sup>st</sup> December Women’s Movement sought to rectify these gender issues while helping to weave women into the political domain. This movement aimed at uplifting the socioeconomic disparities that hurt Ghanaian women. Agyeaman-Rawlings was instrumental in Ghana’s adoption of the PNDC Intestate Laws (PNDCL 111-114) which for the first time, permitted wives and children to inherit property from their husbands and fathers, permitted his wealth was independent from the *abusia*. Wealth that was obtained mutually could be inherited, but often times, it was the educated and literate women who could argue in court over such issues, which are often hard to prove. Agyeaman-Rawlings was also instrumental in changing the status of Ghanaian women in the constitution as well. The constitution inherited from the British defined women and children as people who needed “compassionate protection.” In

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<sup>338</sup> Kathleen M. Fallon, “Transforming Women’s Citizenship Rights in an Emerging Democratic State: The Case of Ghana,” *Gender and Society*, (2003): 7.

addition, a woman had to become a “mother” before “constitutionally protected.”<sup>339</sup> Agyeaman-Rawlings was active in the UN’s conferences for the upliftment of women.

Inaugurated on May 15, 1982, the 31<sup>st</sup> December Women’s Movement was a grassroots non-governmental organization aimed at “bringing women together, following the UN proclamation that women should be supported socially, economically, financially and politically.” Sherry Ayithey clarified that the Movement was established because its leaders realized “the only way a nation advance is to preserve the rights of women and to promote women’s development, enhancement in the decision making process, informed us that we needed to do something.” According to her, the Movement was “not the normal sipping cups of teas, but really to look for solutions to women’s problems.” When they got to the villages, they realized that women were already engaged in agricultural activities, mostly processing and farming. But they had problems with child care. So the Movement decided to open preschool/early childhood developmental centers for working mothers in the villages. She continues that the Movement was “to improve the living standards of women. If women are re-oriented, the nation stands to gain.” On the shaming and blaming of women, she continued,

Why blame women? Who are the ones who gave them the goods, it’s the shop managers? A lot of women in the informal sector, been traders from pre-colonial time. Empowering them in the positive way, made them confident and understand the role they play in nation building so that they would not be used as scapegoats. That is why we had to get women organized.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> W.C. Ekow Daniels, “The Impact of the 1992 Constitution on Family Rights in Ghana,” *Journal of African Law*, (1996): 7.

<sup>340</sup> Sherry Ayithey. *Interview*. 31<sup>st</sup> December Women’s Movement Headquarters, Accra. December 2008.

In the villages, they launched income generating activities, such as gari processing machines to convert *kasava* to *gari* for the market. They also brought in machines to make palm oil. These machines “cut down on the laborious work on making food stuffs.” Some were making soaps, weaving,

we trained in color selection and how to design. Gained export market to Germany. Some did tie and dye, batiks, beads making. Had World Bank program which “trained women artisans to repair broken down buildings, fixing roofs and they were able to build a whole clinic in the Central Region.<sup>341</sup>

According to Ms. Ayithey, not everyone was welcoming to this new level of education and progress being made by the women. She states,

initially a lot of resistance from the husbands. [They thought we were] teaching women to take over and come and beat them. Later, when they saw that the women were becoming economically sufficient and domestic budget was being supported by these women, [and] some had opportunities to travel, [they changed their minds and later joined the Movement’s efforts.]<sup>342</sup>

The Movement also brought Federation of Women’s Lawyers together to get counseling to push for certain laws, particularly the PNDC 111-113, which gave wives and children the right to inherit property from their husbands and fathers respectively. Furthermore, they encouraged women to get educated. Women were also pushed to run and stand for office.

Women are well empowered due to 19 years of PNDC rule. They speak their minds, know what they are about, [they] cannot be taken for granted as before. We also set up the PAJUL to launch complaint against domestic violence.

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<sup>341</sup>Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

The Movement also tried to combat the growing stereotype of women as evil, popularized in the movies. They started a television program, “Fire Side Chat,” modeled after traditional African story telling sessions. These programs, affirmed Ayittey, were to teach the youth morals. The movies were not doing it. The movies were teaching that young women are a threat and older women harmful. They feared that children growing up watching such movies will not have respect for women. Thus they sought “to inculcate to the children about good habits, being a good citizen, how to relate to each other. Also [the program has] folk stories about Ananse, each region have its own stories, which adopted for the show.”

Currently, the Movement’s activities have been reduced. Because of its association with the PNDC it has become “political target of harassment from Kufuor, but because we were founded on sound moral,” there is nothing to fear. She continues, “this new government does not want to recognize the work this Movement has done. They equate the Movement as an arm of the NDC, and have used all executive powers to cripple the Movement.” As she states, before the Movement, Nima, the poorest community of Muslims in Accra “was a no go area,” and “few politicians considered them.” But they were able to meet with the Muslim chiefs and brought Nima on the political map.

Nonetheless, other women’s organizations felt harassed by the 31<sup>st</sup> December Women’s Movement. As the women’s wing of the PNDC, nonpartisan women’s groups felt sidelined and members feared retribution if they spoke out against the government or if they did not join its umbrella efforts. Fallon’s work on Ghanaian women’s ability to

fight for rights under the PNDC is of great relevance to this study. She found that under the PNDC, women were more likely to unite around non-political issues and feared that agitation for political and social rights would lead to retribution from the state. They also believed that the 31<sup>st</sup> Women's Movement served as a mole, spying on other activities of other women's organizations. A member expressed this concern. "It's unfortunate; the women's issues in this country are governed and dominated by the 31<sup>st</sup> December Women's Movement. And they feel if you are not part of them, then you are a threat to them."<sup>343</sup>

An example of this is the Women in Development (WID) initiative launched by the PNDC government. While this program targeted rural and poor women, women from the Northern Region, Ghana's poorest region, were not included. It should be stated that Northern region was perceived as anti-PNDC at this time. A government official sought to justify this absence by claiming, the "reluctance of its women to accept group loans and undertake meaningful projects with our guidance. It seems they are too used to public gifts and grants to seek the Secretariat's assistance to improve their human condition."<sup>344</sup> This initiative is sponsored by the 31<sup>st</sup> Women's Movement and the National Council on Women in Development (NCWD). Due to the common belief that women were unjustly pricing goods and thus creating an economic mayhem for Ghana, WID sought to teach the participants "pricing skills" to be used to trade.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Fallon, "Transforming Women's Citizenship Rights," 11.

<sup>344</sup> George O. Assibey-Mensah, "Ghana's Women-In-Development Program," *Journal of Black Studies*, (1998): 9.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

In general, women's associations realized the threat posed by the state to their rights, which is why they welcomed the transition to democracy and organized as voters.

One responded stated,

elections are very important because for a long time we were under military rule. Elections give us the opportunity to select who we [women] want...even if we don't work in the formal sector, we still work hard. Many women are the head of the household. So, if women know the right thing to do, it will help a lot. We the women's organizations want to educate on their right to vote and the importance of voting and on putting support behind women running--- regardless of the political parties.<sup>346</sup>

Fallon found women who were part of the organizations tended to vote more and that all the women who were contacted by women's ngos voted in the elections.<sup>347</sup> The transition to democracy meant that women's rights became a priority for the state. From focusing on income-generating activities under the dictatorship, women became more politically active with a focus on their rights as citizens with the transition to democracy. Dei's research also complements this trend. Women are using the democratic environment to agitate for rights and taking opportunities to better their socioeconomic positions in Ghana. The efforts of the PNDC to curb interstate inheritance issues are one example of how women's rights were changing in Ghana. Although some scholars have urged that this has helped more the literate and educated woman, they still brought much needed attention to this issue.<sup>348</sup> Three women were able to inherit property from their husbands in 1990, while none had in 1982-3.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Fallon, "Transforming Women's Citizenship Rights," 12.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>348</sup> Dei, "Women in a Ghanaian Village," 13.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 14.

Rawling's invitation to the IMF/World Bank measures and the transition to a democratic government led to a decline in the labeling and blaming game. By this period, Jeffries found that people were less willing to blame women and the popular belief was then "if you are good enough and prepared to do hard work," then wealth will come. People had become so desperate for change that Jeffries' research reveals that some people were in favor of the ERP.

The 1980s was also marked with a rise in religious ngos, followed by churches and mosques. No longer were the failures of the economy resulting from women, but they were now understood in terms of religious dogma. People began theorizing that "God willing," things would change in due time. In response to the continued economic disparity between the classes, Jeffries found that people were less willing to blame 'kalabule' but attribute it to hard work and "their own efforts."<sup>350</sup> This religious language was probably influenced by the rise in Protestant/Charismatic churches and missionary activity of their members. Conversion theorists agree that an individual's search for religious change is highest during times of turmoil and socioeconomic troubles. These churches, argues Larkin and Meyer, link

the prospect of prosperity with deliverance from evil forces such as witchcraft, ancestral sprits and other demons, particular young men and women , who desperately seek to make progress in life, (and often think, perhaps realistically, that the only way to succeed is by way of a miracle).<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Richard Jeffries, "Urban Popular Attitudes Towards the Economic Recovery Programme and the PNDC Government in Ghana," *African Affairs*, (1992): 11.

<sup>351</sup> Brian Larkin and Brigit Meyer, "Pentecostalism, Islam and Culture: New Religious Movements in West Africa," in *Themes in West Africa's History*, ed. Emmanuel Akyeampong, (London: James Currey, 2006), 290.

When the religious associations failed to alleviate the problems, the *Free Press* had proven things had indeed changed. In a front page article printed in 1996, they claimed Rawlings was the problem. And a “result of the price hikes in school fees, beer, cooking oil, rice, flour and other “consumables.”<sup>352</sup>

I now turn to analyze how the converts to the Ahmadiyya Mission understood and remembered this period in their history. And most importantly, what led to their conversion to Islam.

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<sup>352</sup> Hasty, *The Press and Political Culture in Ghana*, 114.

## Chapter 8

### *Voicing the Converts*

My focus in this chapter is to voice the concerns and reasons why Asante women converted to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission at the time they did and in their own words. This is particularly important because the oral sources not only complement the written text, but also enriches them. The oral sources are further important because they expose aspects of this period not mentioned in the literature. Furthermore, because most of these women are still alive, it is necessary to get their interpretations of that period as they lived it. In this chapter, I give voice to a number of such women, particularly those who used conversion as a way of self redefinition. As Muslims, they are a smaller number within the overall female population, however, their decisions to convert was just as significant.

Ghana's socioeconomic problems affected everyone. From the market women blamed for allegedly causing the economic mess, to the men and "elite" women unable to afford food in the market, everyone suffered. Due to the rising socioeconomic problems and the governments' inability to solve these problems, more and more people turned to local associations for support. Some of these associations provided food and other forms of support for their members. As more people sought support from the local sectors, this resulted in detachment from the state and greater reliance on civil society and religious

organizations. That Ghana's rising socioeconomic "mess" affected the turn to religion for spiritual and moral support cannot be over stated.

The Ghanaian economy was at a standstill. Low food production was matched with high prices and scarcity. In addition, the rise in brain drain, an impending drought and rise in unemployment exacerbated the situation. Furthermore, women, believed to be the majority of the converts, were considered the cause of all the "mess." Women, young and old were treated as the enemies of a progressive and healthy Ghana. And following Owusu-Ansah's conversion theory that people convert during stressful times in their lives, it is clear that life was worrying for all Ghanaians. It is understandable under such situations why women would seek a spiritual space away from the "mess." However, this theory only partly answers why women sought the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission at this time.

The other part can be understood using Humphrey Fisher's emphasis on the role of the missionary in making converts, particularly to the Ahmadiyya. Unlike other Islamic sects, Ahmadis advocate preaching and follow active measures to boost conversion. One of the ways they do this is by using local languages. The women's stories presented here affirm how much "more pleasing" it was to learn of Islam using Twi. Some acknowledge that they would not have converted if missionaries had used Hausa or Arabic to preach. By using Twi, the missionaries consciously reconfigured Twi into local Islamic languages. Consequently, they also reassured the community of the adequateness of using local languages to disseminate information and preaching. By so doing, they incorporated Twi as a "world language." Ahmadi missionaries won converts

for Islam not because the religion was perceived as belonging to the international community, but because of the efforts of the missionaries to localize it.

I interviewed over 50 men and women for this dissertation. They were either Asante Ahmadis themselves or related to a woman convert. I began by speaking to Muslims in my neighborhood and professors at the University of Ghana, Legon. I was quickly dismissed by my first informant, Fati, who believed that the Asantes were not Muslims. If some are, she continued, “they are a small number, and not true Muslims,” as opposed to herself, a Northerner. In fact, she had not heard of a good number of Asantes becoming Muslims. They are Christians and Traditionalists, she added. Fati’s response represents the larger misconception that Asantes are not Muslims and the idea that “true” Muslims are Hausas or Northerners. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they were turned off by non-Ahmadi Islam precisely because they did not want to play second fiddle to the Hausa and have to learn that language. While the announcements I put up asked to interview Asante Ahmadi women, a few non-Ahmadi Asantes and non-Asantes responded and were interviewed.

It is not difficult to find Ghana’s Muslim population. For a “minority group,” they are quite visible and active. While watching television one morning, I caught the announcement of an upcoming conference by Ghana’s premier Muslim women’s associations. The Federation of Muslim Women Association, Ghana (FOMWAG) held their annual conference at the University of Ghana. There I met Muslim women from all ethnic backgrounds, but few Asantes and no Ahmadis. I later found out that Ahmadis do not participate in non-Ahmadi Islamic activities. However, through that meeting, I was

able to meet one of the University's prominent Muslim professors teaching in the Religion Department. Prof. Rabiatu is a Ga Muslim. Although she was not an Ahmadi, she was a great help in connecting me with the Ahmadi community and Asante Muslims in general. She had heard of the problems faced by Asantes as they convert, and as a Ga, she could relate.

She told me about the Islamic University College of Ghana, where she also teaches. She arranged for me to talk to some of her Asante Muslim students. They concurred that becoming a Muslim for an Asante is more difficult than becoming a Christian. I spoke to 5 Asante Muslim students whose mothers and grandmothers were the first in their families to convert to Islam. They remembered the troubles the extended families put their mothers through and how their mothers remained outcasts in the family. From the Islamic University College, I moved on to the headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Mission in Ghana. While there, I had the chance to talk to these women directly. My first informant there was the Ahmadiyya's national president of the women's association, Hajjia Muslim. I became a regular participant in their meetings and celebrations, which allowed me to move freely within the organization.



**Figure 2: Ahmadi women celebrating Eid al Fatul, 2007. Ahmadiyya Muslim Secondary School, Accra. Photo by Mikelle Antoine.**

***“Muhammad was born in Tamale”***

Asante Ahmadis are quite aware of the stereotypes against Islam in the country. Alhaji Adusei, a senior missionary and translator of the Quran into Twi, added that the Asante looked down on Northerners for economic reasons. Because it was “so cheap” to bring in a Northerner to work Asante cocoa farms, and because of the Asante configuration of Islam with Northerners, they perceived the religion to be the creation of Northerners as well. The Ahmadis in contrast, were educated, well dressed and had status. As Fisher explains, the role and physical appearance of the missionary accounted for attracting attention to the religion. Alhaji Boateng was the first to convert among his family recounted being asked why he would want to be like the Northerners by being a Muslim. When he said that Islam does not belong to Northerners, he was corrected that “Muhammad was born in Tamale.”

Importantly, while the Asantes looked down on their Northern Muslim neighbors, they did not directly see Islam as an inferior religion. Islam was indirectly perceived as inferior because of its relation with northerners, but not on its own terms. Many of my interviewees affirmed that the Asante did not know much about Islam, except that the “northerners are Muslims,” and as an Asante, you shouldn’t want to be like Northerners.<sup>353</sup> The history of Muslim intellectuals in their kingdom affirms the respect they had for Islam and Muslims. However, with the downfall of the kingdom and the upsurge in Muslims in Kumasi as farm workers and later as gate men, and watchmen, all jobs which the Asante looked down upon, their inferior social positions was linked with their religion and ethnicity. However, now, as more of Asantes travel, some even now living and working in the north, while others have moved on to Muslim countries to do “any work,” (inferior jobs) the feeling of superiority over the Muslim slightly diminished but not over the Northerner.

Furthermore, as one of my interviewees mentioned, the Asante does not want to be a “second-class” citizen to the Northerner, so the fact that he/she would have had to learn Arabic from a Northerner, or “worse, learn Hausa” from them, deterred the Asante’s interest.

Adjei’s father was the first to convert in his family and he remembers the “bad” things people use to say about Muslims and Northerners. Back in the 1960s, his father was constantly sick. Neither the doctors nor church members were able to cure him. He then decided to give the Muslims a try. Once healed, he decided to take Islam seriously

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<sup>353</sup> M. Adjei. *Interview*. Islamic University College, Accra. June 2006.

and convert. However, his family did not take it lightly. He reasoned that the tension and anger in their response to his converting was not really about Islam, but about what they perceived to be the “violent” nature of the Northerner.<sup>354</sup>

Basically Islam came into Asante from the northern territories. Most Asantes, because of the behavior of the northern people, the way they behave violent and their culture. The Asantes are peace loving people. They have mixed Islam with their culture, so its difficult to come out with the real Islam from that [of Northern]. Syncretism. So when Asantes saw these things, said it was not a good religion. Violent nature, some places like Nima, you witness some things, fight, which Islam talks against. If you go there you find it difficult to reconcile Islam with their behavior. They have a lack of knowledge and understanding [of Islam].

In addition, the National Missionary, whose worked with the Mission since the 1970s, added that Asantes did not convert because they were not educated by Northern Muslims on the “beauties of Islam.” He continued that the Mission was able to win Akans to Islam because of “the way of presentation of the message that is the secret of the success of the Ahmadiyya,” among the Asante. “We present a sweet Islam. It’s not that bitter, jihadist Islam.” Unlike the Northerners’ “hard” Islam, Ahmadi follow the “beautiful” Islam. Ahmadi portray the Northerner’s Islam as zealous in anticipation of a “blood thirsty” Mahdi.

This idea that Ahmadi Islam is different from what the “ignorant” Northerner practices, presented in Twi, has made Islam acceptable to the Akans. The National Missionary added that unlike the Northerners, the Asante no longer follow the religion of

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<sup>354</sup> The image of Muslims as violent is common in West Africa. Igbo Muslims are experiencing similar prejudices. As a “peace” loving people, non-Igbo Muslims fear their counterparts will change and seek “blood” once they become Muslims. See Uchendu’s “Being Igbo and Muslim.”

their chiefs. Since the toppling of the Asante Kingdom, religion amongst the Asante has since become individualized. People follow religions of their choice, not that of the king or chief. Thus the strategy in converting the Akans differs from that of Northerners. Because “in matters of religion, they do not follow strictly the leadership, they are a bit independent minded.” So Akans convert, unlike the Northerners, not because they are following their chiefs or other notable personalities in their communities. They convert because “you were able to prove to them the beauties of Islam.”



**Figure 3: Map of Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission national projects. Picture taken from Headquarters, Accra. Photo by Mikelle Antoine.**

The women interviewed converted during the economically trying period in Ghana’s history, from 1960-1992. Ghanaians suffered from hunger for the first time in their history. The drought and constant bush fires set the entire countryside and arable farming land ablaze. Because of these problems and low food production, market women

had fewer commodities to sell. Furthermore the cost laden of transporting their products to the cities, at a time when there were few vehicles linking the villages to the cities, rendered their products expensive. And because even fewer people were able to afford those items, the average man saw her as part of the problem. These women responded that it was the expensive travel cost, “drink money” to the police and non-existent foreign exchange which hurt Ghana’s economy, not them. It was also a period when governments would “come and go,” and the media targeted women as enemies of the state and the cause of the economic failings.

But economic difficulties were not the only reason for conversion. In particular cases when women were targeted as enemy to the state, some of the women mentioned that Islamic dressed helped in protecting them from the hassle that non-Muslim women faced.

**Table 1: List of People Interviewed August 2005-2007**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
Fati	West Legon	40s	Female	Author	Aug-05
Fati's friend	Teacher College	40s	Female	Author	Aug-05
Dr. Rabiatu	University of Ghana, Legon	50s	Female	Author	Sep-05
Adjei	Islamic College	20s	Male		May-05
Shakoor	Phone/AMM	40s	Female	Author	Many times in 2007-2008
Owusu	Islamic College	30s	Male	Author	May-05
PRO: Malam Twumasi	Ahmadiyya Mission	50s	Male	Author	Mar-07
Ameer	Ahmadiyya Mission	60s	Male	Author	(many times 2007-2008)
Ms. Ewisei	Kumasi	60s	Female	Author	Nov-08
Hajjia Muslim	Ahmadiyya Mission	60s	Female	Author	Mar-07
Fatiha	Ahmadiyya Mission	30s	Female	Author	Mar-07
Aisha	Islamic College	20s	Female	Author	Apr-07
Naeema	Phone	20s	Female	Author	Oct-07
Rashida	Phone	20s	Female	Author	Oct-07
Farida	Phone	20s	Female	Author	Sep-07
Hafiz	West Legon	50s	Male	Author	(many times 2006-2008)
Ms. Sherrie Ayithey	31st December Women's Movement	50s	Female	Author	Jun-08

**Tab Table 1 (Continued)**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
Mrs. Konadu Agyemang-Rawlings	31 <sup>st</sup> December Women's Movement	50s	Female	Author	Jun-08
Kwame Owusu	Islamic College	20s	Male	Author	May-05
Table 1 (cont'd)					
Alhaji Adusei	Kumasi	60s	Male	Author	Nov-07
Emilia Aggrey	Kumasi	60s	Female	Author	Nov-07
Sakina Pokua	Kumasi	60s	Female	Author	Nov-07
Sewaah Amoah	Kumasi	60s	Female	Author	Nov-07
Mariama Beatric Nuhu	Kumasi	60s	Female	Author	Nov-07
Sakina Issah	Kumasi	60s	Female	Author	Nov-07
Yaa Hawa	Kumasi	60s	Female	Author	Nov-07
Mariam Ama Serwaa	Kumasi	60s	Female	Assistant Fatima	Nov-07
Yaa Bereku	Kumasi	60s	Female	Assistant Fatima	Nov-07
Mrs. Hajjia Salamat	Kumasi	60s	Female	Author	Nov-07
Sakina Malick	Kumasi	60s	Female	Assistant Naeema	Nov-07
Kojo Sam-Bossmen	Accra	70s	Male	Author	Jun-08
Hajjia Muhammad Danquah	Kumasi	60s	Female	Assistant Naeema	Nov-07
Akua Abiba	Kumasi	60s	Female	Assistant Naeema	Nov-07
Hajjia Amina Adusey	Kumasi	60s	Female	Author	Nov-07
Abdullai Boateng	Kumasi	60s	Male	Author	Nov-07

**Table 1 (Continued)**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
Eva Kotei	Accra	70s	Female	Author	(many times 2007-2008)
Paulina Kotei	Accra	70s	Female	Author	Jun-08
Baraka	Accra	20s	Female	Author	(many times 2007-2008)
Alhaji Baraka	Accra	60s	Male	Author	Jul-07
Table 1 (cont'd)					
Auntie Mariama Abukari	Kumasi	60s	Female	Assistant Naeema	Dec-07
Ayesha Ibrahim Appiah	Kumasi	60s	Female	Assistant Naeema	Dec-07
Hawa Joyce Boakye	Kumasi	60s	Female	Assistant Naeema	Dec-07
Hajia Salamat	Kumasi	60s	Female	Assistant Naeema	Dec-07
Sister Jamila	Accra	60s	Female	Author	Dec-07
Alhaji Abbas Okai Addy	Accra	60s	Male	Author	Apr-07
Prof. Asenso Boakye	Accra	60s	Male	Author	Dec-07
Prof. John Collins	Accra	60s	Male	Author	Mar-06
Fatima Ewudzie	Accra	30s	Female	Author	Mar-06
Hajia Nuhu	Accra	60s	Female	Author	Feb-06
Professor Mumuni	Accra	40s- 50s	Male	Author	Feb-06

***“On Needing Religious Change”***

It was a “hard time” in Ghana’s history, and “government was not finding it well, so things were difficult.” The overthrows made the “country’s economic system unstable, so things were difficult,” remembers Sakina Pokua through an interpreter. It was during this time she converted to Ahmadiyya. Busia was overthrown and things were difficult. He had earlier expelled foreign (mostly Nigerian) businessmen in hope of making space for Ghanaian presence in the markets. However that did not help the economy and things worsened. During this time, Pokua was a market woman selling tilapia fish. She was a Roman Catholic, but did not feel like a complete member of the church. I interviewed her in Twi, assisted by a fellow Asante Ahmadi interpreter. “She was not taking communion because she was not married in the church and her husband was not doing it. So she was not qualified for communion. Since she was not taking the communion, she was not full Catholic.” Thus Pokua did not feel herself as a “full” Catholic and the fact that her husband married her outside of the church, further distanced her from the church community. So when the Ahmadi missionaries would come to her market and preach, she began paying attention. Although she grew up among non-Ahmadi Muslims, she was not impressed with their lifestyle. “These Northerners,” she remembered “were not dressed nicely. They would chew kola nut and have it stain their mouth and teeth. Their clothes were not neat and they were mostly uneducated and lived on the fringes of the mainstream.” For the Ahmadis, she was impressed with their style and way of dressing. She would go and listen to the Ahmadiyya preaching. And after some time, came to understand that their practices were good. She

learned that when women are in menstruation they don't go to mosque, and if you are going to meet your husband, you must bathe well. And some meats, they don't eat. If a car hit an animal you don't eat. Certain things that the Muslims abstained from made her think the Muslims more pure than the Catholic.

Her family did not like her choice of religion. It's only after a dying uncle's wish to leave her alone since he had seen that she "would not recover" from her decision that her mother stopped "disturbing" her. She has been a Muslim ever since.

### ***"On Kalabule"***

Market women were constructed as enemies of the state. The Media helped in propagating this message and governments continued sending out these messages that women young and old were behind the "mess." Maame Serwaa Pokua, who was a market woman at the time, remembers when they were all labeled as kalabule. The newspapers often ran articles on how women were fraudulently raising prices at the market and making things expensive for the "average man." "Things were so hard, no one would buy," she said. And when they would come to buy, "they would fight" because they thought prices were too expensive and ask reductions. No one believed that after all calculations which included transport prices were correct and not inflated.<sup>355</sup> In addition Pokua remembers seeing "smoke at night" and knew it was either from burning a market, or burning an individual market woman's items. She also saw policemen publicly whip market women, often naked and whipped them in their private parts. Although the other market women mocked her when she "started wearing the veil," she was not whipped as a market woman.

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<sup>355</sup> Clark, *African Market Women*, 33.

She attributes this to her Muslim clothing which she believes saved her. She said, “since she started wearing the veils, when they start talking about kalabule, they know as Muslims we don’t do that.” The reason was partly because the officials assumed Muslim women to be too timid to engage in cheating as opposed to the idea of them being more pious.<sup>356</sup> The women who were labeled kalabule were constructed as bold and greedy anti nation women wrongly influenced by modernism and materialism.

Similarly, Sakina Issah, a market woman had heard of kalabule and that all market women were blamed for it. However, as a Muslim, she felt she was given special treatment because they believe the “Muslims will not do that as such I wouldn’t even venture near.”<sup>357</sup> Mariam Ama Serwaa converted after marriage. She met a Muslim man who would only “take care of her” if she converted. They had ten children together, but only one remained a Muslim. She explained that “they mostly go through marriage.” One of her (non-Muslim) daughters fell victim to the kalabule terror. “Her goods were seized when she was returning from a trade trip. We later had to plead with them and even bribe them before the items were released.”<sup>358</sup> Her daughter was not a Muslim and was not dressed as one. She believes the clothing would have saved her from being terrorized. They know Muslim women are too “timid to venture forth.”

### **“On Being Asante”**

Women in the market were confused when they would see an Asante woman veiled. Yaa Bereku knows of these tensions between an Asante Muslim and the non-Muslim Asante first hand. “In Asante culture, it’s the Northerners who are fan of wearing

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<sup>356</sup> Sarkina Pokua. *Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. November 2007.

<sup>357</sup> Sakina Issah. *Naeema’s Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. November 2007.

<sup>358</sup> Ama Serwaa. *Naeema’s Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. November 2007.

veils [being Muslims].” And because of this configuration, although people would come to her table, “they would make fun of her.” People at the market wondered if her “family [would] accept her being a Muslim. Why she had become like the Northerner, with the veil.” Their reactions echoed the ethno-centric sentiments so many Asante Muslims constantly face.

Even people who are not part of her family, when people see she is a Muslim, people are worried. Because the Asante and their chieftaincy is very strong. So when you become a Muslim you do not qualify to be by the stool. So they ask why does she want to forgo the stool and the future of her children? She responds, she does not want to be enstooled on earth here.<sup>359</sup>

The family tensions an Asante Muslim faces surpass that of their Christian counterparts. The family and other members of the ethnic group perceive them to throwing their identities away and replacing them with that of the Northerners, or worse, “removing their intestines and replacing it with filth.” For Adjei, a student who remembers the problems his mother faced when she converted,

sometimes they [the Asante] use some derogative words. Mostly they believe if you have become a Muslim, than you have become a Northerner. That you have become half Northerner, half Muslim. I am still 100% Asante. Because you are Muslim, you are not pure. Then you are half Asante, half Northerner.

He responded that Christianity also came from Middle East, is the Christian Asante also half Northerner?” He remembers a young girl who was crying after hearing a Christian pastor say, “unless she is a Christian, than she is a Northerner.”

He said this was as a common tactic used by some pastors to “shame” Asantes into converting [back] to Christianity.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Sarkina Pokua. *Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. November 2007.

<sup>360</sup> Adjei. *Interview*. Islamic University College, Accra. June 2006.

Fatiha, daughter of a convert to the Ahmadiyya Mission remembered that,

Before when we would go somewhere, and they would see that you are Muslim, they would start talking to you in Hausa language. Because you are Muslim they think you are a Northerner, and when you say you don't understand, they would be perplex. Islam is a religion and Hausa is a language. [But they would ask] can you be a Muslim without understanding Hausa? So you can't speak one Hausa? They would be surprised. Even now there are people who think if you are Muslim, you should speak Hausa. [They ask] don't you pray using that language? We would answer that we pray using Arabic.<sup>361</sup>

Adjei's mother was excommunicated from the family when she converted. "They abandoned her." She converted after hearing the missionaries preach, and after losing countless children, each time she would "cook food and pour libation" for her family's stool.

The family did not take it lightly with her because as for royal family, its difficult to convert to Islam. She was excommunicated from the family. And punished. My grandfather was called to the palace and forced her to come back, but she refused. So they abandoned her. They took the properties, stool, land for farming and gold. Those who remained, had access to gold and some other properties. We were deprived from this properties. Right now some family members are rich because of all these things. As for us, we are now surviving.

Being a royal complicates these matters drastically. Similar to Adjei's mother, as a royal, Aisha Sewaa's<sup>362</sup> "family did not have it well with her. They worried her a lot. They did not understand why as a royal she could inherit and all of a sudden she divert into Islam," and forsake that chance.<sup>363</sup> There are other cases where the silence from the extended family does not necessarily mean they are less anti conversion. Sewaah Amoah's case attest to this. Her family did not "disturb" her as the others. But she

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<sup>361</sup> Fatiha. *Interview*. Headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Accra. June 2006.

<sup>362</sup> Aisha is from one of the royal houses around Kumasi. She is a market woman.

<sup>363</sup> Aisha Serwaa. *Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. November 2007.

realized the reason was because her conversion made it easier for her family to withhold her inheritance and pass it on to someone else. In many of these cases conversion is going against the family, and by so doing, they can respond by withholding wealth and property. When a female member, who was already on the fringe of the family converts, this allows the family to take drastic actions against her, not because of her conversion but because of other issues as well.<sup>364</sup> And according to Amoah, she would not contest their decisions “for the sake of peace.”

She is not interested in inheritance. She has queen mother’s stool in her family. Whether or not her children inherits, she does not care. They wouldn’t ask me anyways. They don’t put Muslims as chiefs. Some times they know you qualify, but then say this person with the veil, as a Muslim you wouldn’t like it. [They] assume you are not interested. Because of her religion she does not go into family property.<sup>365</sup>

For many of the non-royal women, their families did not give them much “problem,” especially if they were poor. Poor families often had no or less wealth to pass on. Comfort, an Asante who married an Ahmadi, said her family gave her problems for the same reason everyone else mentioned, but because her family had not much wealth, she wouldn’t have inherited anything anyways, so she did not care.

Among the Akan, family property cannot be passed on to the nuclear family. If a man inherits family property which he uses to enrich himself, when he dies, that property,

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<sup>364</sup> Mrs. Hajia Salamat’s grandmother refused her inheritance because she thought it was against Islam to accept them. When she found it was permissible, she went back [to the family to say she can inherit] but it was too late and created problems with the family. And when her grandmother’s children appealed to the uncle for funds to continue their education, he asked them to stop being Muslims and come and join his Adventist Church, but grandmother said no.

<sup>365</sup> Serwaa Amoah. *Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. November 2007.

and its interests, goes back to the family to help another member. The wife and children of this man get nothing of that family property. To address this situation, the PNDC, in 1998, instituted the 111 Laws, a series of laws which guaranteed to wives and children “the lion’s share” of a man’s inheritance. Emilia Aggrey, an Asante Ahmadi notes, “at times when you inherit somebody and the properties of the person come to you and then you [try] convert it to your children, that is where the problem lies.”<sup>366</sup> Fatima Adusei teacher at the Ahmadi school says,

Normally we may not be interested in their [family] property. Sometimes if you involve yourself with the property, there is a problem. If you use their property to gain your wealth. Then they can say they will not allow you to give that wealth to your own children because you used theirs to gain it. To be safe it’s better not to inherit and make your own property and wealth to give to your children.

One major reason why tensions exist in these families is because of the notion that becoming “like the Northerner” is like choosing to not be Asante anymore, or to opt out of the family. And funerals are one form of cultural expressions where such tensions come out. Funerals are crucial to celebrating the life of the deceased for all Asantes. However, Asante Muslims are changing funeral practices and rituals which have been criticized and met with fierce resistance. Some funerals can take years to finish celebrating; especially when weekly, monthly, and yearly anniversaries are considered. For many in Ghana, they are a waste of money and resources. Funerals are getting more and more extravagant and many say such extravagance is not worth the money, money that could have been used for development of living members of the family, or while the deceased was alive. The Asante Muslim feel the same way, and one way they are

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<sup>366</sup> Emilia Aggrey. *Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. November 2007.

changing the way funerals are celebrated in Ghana is by refusing to wear the traditional black cloth or *ensawan*. While Muslims continue attending funerals of their dearly departed, they chose not to wear the black cloth, which has become a problem for many of their non-Muslim family members.

Hawa Akua Efriye, a student and young Ahmadi, remembered that the family found it suspicious that she would attend a funeral wearing white when they were all dressed in black and mourning. She said some of them would read that as though she was happy that the person died.<sup>367</sup> As an example, Asantewa Eva, attends the funerals,

but the practices which are contrary to Islam, she does not do. Such as wearing black cloth to attend funeral. We Muslims don't wear black when somebody dies. Some monies they pay called *ensawan*, funeral rites. They don't do it. She will give a token to help in the preparation.

Sewaa Amoah, also a market woman added,

the Muslim they don't wear black to attend funerals. Sometimes after a person is buried or even in the process the person is laid in state, they will be playing music and dancing. Being a Muslim, you don't wear your veil to dance and drink...it does not mix up at all.

The interpreter added,

their presence at these funerals, which can take all night, is short. They don't stay on for the drinking and eating, which is the social time when people get a chance to talk and catch up with each other. They agree that anything that happens after the burial is of no use to the dead person.

Another costly aspect of the funerals has to do with keeping the body in the morgue. This can take years. The reason is, often family members are scattered around the globe and it can take years for all of them to return for the funeral. It is this situation that sparked a

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<sup>367</sup> Interview translated by Fatima Ewudzie.

pending bill to be passed making it illegal to keep a body in the mortuary for more than 3 years. This is a thorny issue between Asante Muslims and their non-Muslim family members. Hawa Akua Efriye, Asante Ahmadi, explained that if Wednesday a person dies, “we Muslim can burry them on Friday, and the family does not like that.” Furthermore, as part of the family, she felt obligated to partake in all affairs of the funeral leading up to burial. Once the person is buried, she no longer continues in the celebrations, an action that disturbs her family. And it is these issues which are brought up when issues of inheritance come around. If the family feels that you are not as active as other members, they would tend to overlook your due inheritance in some cases.

***“On Being an Asante Ahmadi”***

Sakina Pokua’s family had initially tried to get her to change her mind, but when her uncle saw “she would not recover” from her state of mind, he asked the other members to leave her alone. She said it was because of that her mother also stopped disturbing her about her choice. But simply because the family stopped discussing re-conversion does not mean they accepted her choice. Their silence means you are “now free” to be a Muslim, but also to stop being a member of the family. According to Sewaa Amoah, her family did not disturb her. But if she were to contest decisions made for stool and inheritance, things would change. “They assume you would not be interested, and they would not put a Muslim as chief.”<sup>368</sup>

One reason the people interviewed believe they would not put a Muslim as a queen mother is because the stool requires many activities that the Muslim sees as “non-Islamic.” These include pouring libation, preparing food for the ancestors, and making

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<sup>368</sup> Sewaa Amoah. *Interview*. Kumasi, Ghana. November 2007.

sacrifices. In addition, these women affirmed that, while the family may be silent on the conversion after a while, the fact is that your participation in the family changes. You go from being an active member to a distant relative. “So if you become Muslim you become opposite to the tradition. To abandon your own way of life that you know for something different.” This is what their family members do not understand.

First Muslims were not going to school. All they could do was downtrodden work as laborers, watchmen and other things. Now Ahmadis came, established schools. There are many Muslims who are well educated in all sectors of society. Even the clothes of the Muslim is now being patronized nation wide. It is becoming part of the culture. But there are few others who still in their own way, still think they are superior to Muslims. Ahmadis have done tremendously well in changing these perceptions. Because Asantes had never seen a Muslim doctor before. But with the establishing of Ahmadis hospitals, second cycle institution. Ahmadis were the first Muslims to have started this. So Ahmadis have influenced this concept of equality. And for those who have traveled outside of the country. They have come to bear testimony. Those who have gone to Libya, united Arab emirate. They see that what they use to think of Muslims was not true.<sup>369</sup>

In some other cases, the family response was so drastic that it tore the nuclear family apart. Amina Anabrabo converted along with her father. They were the only two Muslims in the village. When her mother got the news, she filed for divorce and tried to reconvert her child from Islam. As a result, her father took her and they moved out of the family home and into Kumasi, where they remained. Amina was raised there and eventually married and had children. When she was a child, her maternal family thought her father was “forcing” her to be a Muslim. Although she married a Muslim man, the family continued to believe that he was forcing her to continue being Muslim.

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<sup>369</sup> Amina Anabrabo, *Interivew*. Kumasi, November, 2006.

They did not come to visit her. Even when she gave birth, because she was different [no longer part of the family]. Wearing veil, different cloth. But she was going to them. When there was anything in the village, she would go. She was living with an uncle before conversion, but did not want to see her anymore because she converted.” Fatiha recounts that it’s only when the family got news that her father had made some money as Ahmadi missionary that things began to change. “As time went on, they came to accept her, but not as before. Because they had something they will give them. They don’t mind that they are Christians or idol worshippers, they just come to take.<sup>370</sup>

As a child, Fatiha Adusei, teacher at the Ahmadi school in Accra, remembers the situation with her maternal kin as being more difficult for them as children, than it was for her parents. “Father did not care, but us. They always tried to come to us, saying what our father had put us in is not good, that we should stop and come to Christianity and all these things we are the ones who suffered from them.” They would say, “Jesus said he is the way, the light and that no one goes to God unless through him. So if we don’t go through Jesus Christ, we cannot get to heaven.” Even now as a married woman things haven’t changed much. Fatiha Adusei is still being preached at by Christian Asantes when she meets them at public institutions such as the banks.

People believe you are a Muslim because you were born into it, not by choice. Because your father is one, or your mother is one or that your husband is one, especially when they see that you are a bit learned. Anywhere I go, people try to convert me and try to tell me that I shouldn’t be a Muslim. Even going to the bank, people would tell me, your name is Fatiha, so you are an Asante, why are you a Muslim? Then they try to tell you shouldn’t be a Muslim. They think you are a Muslim by force. I tell them I am old enough, traveled, learned and live on my own. If I decide I don’t want to be a Muslim, no one can force me. I am a Muslim by choice. They still think that Asantes should not be Muslims.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Fatiha. *Interview*. Headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. June 2007.

Most of the people interviewed affirm that the problem stems mostly from their Christian family members and Christian Asantes in general.

Most of the problems come from the Christians. The traditionalists respect Christians and Muslims. And we Muslims too, we respect them. But Christians would not leave us alone. Just a few Christians understand us. It's only the Christians who have read wide, [that] respect Islam. If they are learned, they want to convert us because they fear Islam because they know it's the fastest growing religion in the world.

When Afua Ofensu married a Muslim, her family was not as annoyed as when she converted to Islam. They were so opposed to mixing the "mogya" that she was forced to leave her family home. Up until today, things have not amended and her children have not visited her hometown.<sup>372</sup>

***"On Ahmadiyya Islam versus orthodox Islam"***

Ahmadis believe the reasons their families do not support their conversion has to do with how Northerners portrayed Islam before the coming of Ahmadiyya. The Northerners' "hard" Islam was a turn off to the "peace loving Asante." Adjei, student at the Islamic College whose grandmother was the first to convert, stated the "violent nature" of the Northerners is one reason why the non-Muslim Asante look down on Muslims. Ahmadi Islam is winning over the Asante because it is more appealing to them in many ways. One way is through language, making it accessible to Asante. By so doing, the non Muslim Asante learns about the Quran and Islam.

They will have Friday sermon in Arabic, without interpretation so they don't get the meaning. But if you go to Asante, they will recite in Arabic and translate in Asante. So they get the teachings of Islam, which is the main difference why Asante Muslims are practicing Islam a more perfect way than

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<sup>372</sup> Owusu. *Interview*. Islamic University College, Accra. May 2006.

the north. The north if you go there, most of them can recite the Quran without meaning. That is the problem lack of knowledge and they don't practice the real Islam.<sup>373</sup>

Another major difference among Asante Ahmadis and orthodox Northerners is that Asante Muslims keep their names. My informants mentioned that one can always tell an Asante Muslim, because they are proud of their culture keep their names. By so doing, it is possible to determine an Asante Muslim from Northerners. This pride, according to my informants is crucial in maintain their difference.

Asantes are proud of our culture. We find it difficult to leave our names. The notion is that if you become a Muslim you become a Northerner, so if you use Ibrahim Mohammad then its difficult to distinguish yourself from the Northerner. That is why we keep the Asante names so when you hear Adjei, you know I am Asante. But Northerners, they forget about their traditions. They take Musa Muhammad. They don't care. We are wise. We don't abandon, we add. We keep the connection.<sup>374</sup>

Indeed, most of the Asante women interviewed here have a combination of Asante and Arabic [read Muslim] names. They do not want to lose their names for fear of being confused for Northerners. One reason is to also maintain a link to their family and Asante ethnicity. By refusing to drop the Asante names, they refuse to relinquish who they are.

Being denied inheritance is not the only way Asante Ahmadis are insulted. The term pepeni is a derogatory reference to Muslims. The term's etymology is not conclusive. However, it is understood and implied as derogatory and insulting. Comfort, a market woman, explained the history behind pepeni. Pepeni, she said stemmed from the fact that the Northerners were known for being straightforward and honest people. "The

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<sup>373</sup> Adjei. *Interview*. Rare Book Room, Balme Library, Accra. May 2006.

<sup>374</sup>M. Adjei. *Interview*. Rare Book Room, Balme Library, Accra. May 2006.

Northerners, when they came, they always say the truth. What they know is exactly what they say. They don't tell lies. So they became known as *pepepe*, or true-true." While she had a nice definition for the term, it is not understood today as something positive. Referring to someone as such would be taken as an insult, similar to calling someone a vagabond.

Asante Muslims continue to straddle two identities with the aim of turning the two into one. For now, they continue to fight individual battles as they come, although less now than before. Because Ahmadis have risen to become "superior" Muslims due to their efforts in the health and educational sectors, they have forged a different identity for themselves that separates them from the others. Nonetheless, being a Muslim in Ghana is to be part of a minority, and with an Asante name, people continue to see that as problematic.

## Chapter 9

### *Conclusion*

Asante society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was based on a strong matrilineal system resistant to change. This was evident in the way identity and belongingness was constructed. Women became the biological line through which wealth, property and identity was inherited. By so doing, women are central this system. In the words of anthropologists studying matrilineal systems, each woman who marries out and converts to a foreign religion potentially threatens the longevity of this system.

This construction also worked to limit outside religious influence. Islam and Christianity, not based on a matrilineal society, were potentially a threat to the longevity of this system. As a result, Islam and Christianity were labeled “non Asante” and incompatible with Asante culture. This was why only slaves and non-Asantes were allowed to be converted to these religions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But the Asante respected Islam and the powers associated with the religion. Muslims worked within the courts as diplomats and held high office positions. Although they were foreign, Muslims were held in high esteem within the Asante Empire.

That Asante women are converting to Islam speaks volumes that need be explored and analyzed. As discussed above, Asantes had a long history of incorporating Muslims and Islamic knowledge to their political and religious sectors. However, along the way, negative stereotypes emerged, demoting the Muslim from an ally to inferior social

menace. And as one of the interviewees mentioned, converting to Islam meant “wanting to be like the Northerner” who was considered socially inferior. The matrilineal system, in many ways, was the reason why Islam was curtailed and limited among the Asante.

British colonial rule changed the dynamics of conversion for Christianity and Islam as well. British rule brought about the changes the Asante had feared in so many ways. First as the new political leaders, the British overthrew the political system the Asante had developed. One major change was allowing Christian and Muslim missionaries access to Kumasi to set up schools and mosques, respectively. There was also an influx of semi-skilled Muslim laborers in the colony. It was the first time the Asante were getting to contact with low skilled Muslims.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission’s practice of Islam provided an alternate version for the Akan, who had known Muslims, but were prohibited from converting. British colonial rule also changed that. Not only were Muslims allowed to preach but they were free to convert as well. The Ahmadi version of Islam blended the best of both worlds for some Asante who did not want to be associated with the “backwards” Islam of the “Northerner.” Ahmadiyyat was consistent with modern educational institutions that taught math and sciences. In addition, they preached using the Twi language which all Asantes understood. As a result, the converts realized they had “come to know” Islam better than before.

The rise of the post colony was marred with problems inherited from the colonial period. Rapid economic decline and food shortages were met with high rate of migration outside of the villages and eventually out of the country by the youth. The high cost of

living was particularly blamed on market women who were thought to be hoarding products to increase cost. There developed a strong tendency to blame women for having caused the economic meltdown. As the producers and sellers of agricultural products deemed too expensive, women became central to the discourse on the rising costs of food. The newspapers and governments made use of women as scapegoats. Market women were targeted and their stalls burned down and goods confiscated. Some of the women were arrested, others beaten and some raped. Their “lack” of economic “sense” spelled trouble for the nation and politicians discussed ways to educate them on the proper rules of “womanhood.”

While only “big” market women were technically blamed for the problem, petty market women in Accra and Kumasi were attacked as well. It’s unfortunate that women were blamed for the economic problems, especially when they were the ones heading single parent families; since most of the men had migrated away from the country or just completely abandoned them during this harsh period. Women were also the ones holding the economy together. They worked farms left barren by the young men in search of greener pastures elsewhere. They also sold their produce to make money for the family, funerals, tuition fees and everything else the changing times demanded of them.

Life continued to unravel during the post colony for many Ghanaians. The 1960s to early 1990s in Ghana was marked by repeated coup d’états, high unemployment, low food production, rural urban migration and shortages of every commodity deemed necessary for a nation to function. With few physical commodities, many turned to the religious realm, in search of ways to escape their situations. The construction of churches

was at all time high in Ghana during this period. It was also during this time that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission was able to win over such a huge percentage of the Asante to Islam.

On top of the high rates of unemployment and the rising cost of living, Nigeria repatriated a million of “illegal” Ghanaians which further exacerbated the problems. It was at this juncture that the government sought ways to fix the problem from an economic perspective. Ghana adopted one of the most stringent Structural Adjustment Programs in history of the IMF. While the SAP did not do much for the economy, Ghanaians did come to associate the worsening economy on poor planning and policy and not women.

It was during these conditions that some Asante women broke barriers by converting to Islam. Religious change helped these women reconstruct themselves, away from the media and the society. They rejected the notion that they were greedy and guilty of economic wrong doing. As the violence against them intensified, they sought the spiritual realm as a way to escape and create new networks of belongingness.

The women converts described the religious change due to the efforts of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission to spread Islam using the Twi language. They also were impressed with the Ahmadi emphasis on modern education and health facilities. In addition, Ahmadi Islam was particularly attractive since it was not associated with Hausas or Northerners; whom the Asante regarded as social inferiors. In addition, because the British imported a slew of illiterate and low skilled Muslims into the colony, the Asante came to regard Muslims as social inferiors. British colonial policy also limited

educating Northerners, and as a result, they were not readily seen in the new colonial economy. Where they were present, they often worked on the cocoa farms or as low skilled laborers; doing jobs which the Asante considered inferior.

Religious change was a common occurrence in Ghana in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Men, women, Akans and non Akans sought religious change for some of the same reasons analyzed above. The reason why this dissertation focused on Asante women converts to Islam is because this part of the period's history has been overlooked. While some scholars have looked at conversion in general, they tended to spotlight Christian converts. Secondly, because the literature on Christian converts often dealt with Akan women; it presents the false impression that Islam is not an important religion amongst the Akan. Lastly my dissertation sought to dispel the myth of the "Muslim North" and Christian everybody else; which is not the case. My research has found Islam more important among present day Akans in the southern part of the nation than the literature suggests.

Although their family and other community members sought to deny them access to the ethnic group and question their loyalty, Asante Muslims refused to be sidelined. They have fought for royal stools which traditionally have been kept from Muslims and other converts. They also attended funerals, despite the stigma to their Muslim garb. Most interestingly, Asante Muslims have kept their Asante names. Contrary to the assumption that conversion suggests giving up Asante identity, by keeping their names, they have reinforced their commitment and loyalty to the Asante ethnic group. In addition, they are Twi speaking. Few speak Arabic or think it particularly important for their relationship

with Allah. The Quran has been translated into Twi and sermons are held in Twi. Besides the average greetings in Arabic, Twi is the most common language heard spoken by these Muslims; not Hausa or Arabic.

Conversion also highlights change in the matrilineal system. Tension escalates when Asante women convert to Islam from family members seeking to showcase control and authority over them. The problems faced by the Muslim Asante is also inadvertently related to the dying influence of the matrilineal system as expressed in family heads' incapability to control the women. While such family heads are powerless in dominating the converts, they have shown great command and force in their ability to control family wealth and inheritance. Often times, these women do not inherit property not because they converted, but because they went outside of the matrilineal system or against the family head. By going outside of the matrilineal system is to be beyond the control of the family. One way such women are punished is by denying them access to family wealth, and thus the matrilineal system.

Family reactions also have to do with attempts to keep the matrilineal system as the significant center and powerful entity it used to be. The matrilineal system is changing. Urbanization, migration and the rise of the nuclear family is changing the way this traditional system is practiced. Family heads and elders are not as important as they used to be; they are also not as present. Family wealth is often concentrated in the villages, and not the cities where most young people have migrated.

It was because Islam had not been normalized among the Asante that family members of the women interviewed threatened to disown them. The Muslim Asante is

still perceived as the exception even now when Muslims are contested half of Ghana's population. But their conversion is not just about them becoming Muslims, but about them leaving the matrilineal system. Could the fact that conversion to Islam is a relatively recent phenomenon among the Asante mean that they are still "under conversion" as implied by Michelle Gilbert? Is the tree of Islam just now bearing fruit? Furthermore, although conversion was limited in the past was the tree in fact planted? This is particularly revealing for research on Islam among the Asante. More scholarly contributions are needed on contemporary conversion to Islam among the Asante.

The importance of voicing market women victimized at this time was my main aim. I wanted to bring out the voice of the market women to supplement our understanding of the period. This time in Ghana's history was better analyzed and understood by intersecting the activities of the State, market women and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission to better shed light on why women made the decision to choose Islam at this time.

My research also wanted to showcase another aspect of late 20<sup>th</sup> century Ghanaian history. While the socioeconomic and political period has been analyzed, few scholars examined how the "problems" could have possibly influenced the period's religious explosion. Furthermore, my research is one of the few which centered women during this period and how they responded to the time. I intersected the socioeconomic and political problems of that period, and Asante women's religious and spiritual quest. I also found that religious conversion was one of the ways women responded to the blaming and shaming. Not all Ghanaians, or all Asante women converted to Islam or Christianity

during this period. I decided to focus on Asante market women who converted to Islam, because their story had been overshadowed for too long.

My research contributes to our understanding of this major part of Asante and Ghanaian history, a history that has been overlooked and understudied. By focusing on stories from the market women, I also present the changing nature of the matrilineal society and how Asante converts are creating new identities for themselves. Furthermore, I hope to include the Asante within contemporary geopolitical dialogue on Islam with the aim of a greater understanding of the Muslim world. No longer is this the religion of the sidelined and marginal Northerner, but a vibrant religion amongst Ghana's largest ethnic and linguistic group.

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