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## Listening to Queens: Ghana's Women Traditional Leaders as a Model for Gender Parity

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Listening to Queens: Ghana's Women Traditional Leaders as a Model for Gender Parity

by

Kristen M. Vogel

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Anthropology  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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## Dedication

*Culture is a global art form: a beautiful living and moving mosaic of people's making.*

For centuries, especially since the dawn of many national declarations of independence, the tile makers have been mostly men, and the commissioner a man too. Women have predominantly been assigned to placing the tiles in predetermined patterns. What can that mosaic look like in the hands of a woman?

I am burning to know. And I am not the only woman burning.

This thesis is dedicated to the many women around the world who I share mutual respect with. Who are yesterday's, today's, and tomorrow's leaders. Who seek gender balance in all levels of leadership: in their homes; in their communities; in their *nations; internationally*. In their many nested political constructs in-between.

Thank you for your arduous service (I hope monetary value will grow to reflect its due worth) towards a more equitable and beautiful mosaic of diverse cultures. A mosaic in which women make tiles and commission works as often as men.

With Love and Gratitude,

Kristen Aviela Adwoa Akira Anjali Vogel (Yogini A. or Avi, for short)

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## List of Acronyms

AAL	.....	Affirmative Action Law
ADR	.....	Alternative Dispute Resolution
CEDAW	.....	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UN)
GDP	.....	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	.....	International Monetary Fund
LGL	.....	Let Girls Learn (USAID initiative)
MMDCE	.....	Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Chief Executives (Ghana)
MoGCSP	.....	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (Ghana)
NCWTL	.....	National Council of Women Traditional Leaders
NHS	.....	National House of Chiefs
PEPFAR	.....	President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (U.S.)
UN	.....	United Nations
UNDP	.....	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	.....	United Nations Population Fund
UN SDGs	.....	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
USAID	.....	United States Agency for International Development
WTL(s)	.....	Women Traditional Leader(s)

## Abstract

A movement begun in 2011 inspired multilateral organizations such as the United Nations to collaborate with Ghana's women traditional leaders on an inherently postcolonial indigenous and transnational feminist project, promoting Queens' national recognition. Despite the initial power of the movement, it faded over time. Yet it spurred the formation of various new Queens' associations throughout Ghana. The associations have grown and continue to grow, and the *National Council of Women Traditional Leaders* that spurred the first movement has returned stronger and with new strategies. As Ghana's Queens seek their traditional right, an equal voice at all levels of leadership, it is imperative that multilateral organizations and various stakeholders stand with them again, having learned lessons from the past. The impact of Queens throughout each of Ghana's key cultural groups, valuable evidence for arguing their case, remains largely undocumented. With this thesis, I humbly contribute one piece of this evidence: the voices of 22 women traditional leaders from seven of Ghana's 16 regions, that matter in both practice and policy. Ghana's traditional matriarchies represent an indigenous African feminism through complex structures enforcing gender mandates. This system should serve as a model for Affirmative Action laws that seek gender parity at local, national, and international levels of leadership.

## Chapter One:

### Introduction

Indigenous<sup>1</sup> expressions of African feminism merit renewed consideration in an age of globalized efforts to empower women (Chilisa 2020). My research in Ghana investigated how indigenous women's leadership can redefine global efforts to improve gender equality. Particularly, it focused on how contemporary Ghanaian Queens'<sup>2</sup> positions of power within a traditional<sup>3</sup> matriarchal government system, contribute to an indigenous African framework for understanding women's empowerment.

In an ethnographic study of women from four of Ghana's ten regional capitals during 2010, 2011, and 2012, Sylvia Bawa (2016), a Ghanaian scholar of African feminism, sought to contrast "neoliberal" (Western, individualized, normalized, and

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<sup>1</sup> In my use of "indigenous" I strategically align myself with Botswanan postcolonial scholar Bagele Chilisa, who recognizes that "The term *indigenous* has been used in different ways in the third world, fourth world, and marginalized people's struggles against invasion, political domination, and oppression," and uses the term to denote "a cultural group's way of perceiving reality, ways of knowing, and the value systems that inform research processes" (Chilisa 2020, 10). I use the term to denote Ghanaian cultural groups' ways of perceiving reality, ways of knowing, and the value systems that inform political processes.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use consciously use the term "Queen" rather than "Queenmother," though both are commonly used to describe women traditional leaders throughout Ghana. I do this in response to something I learned from one Queen interview, which is explained in the section on Defining a Queen(mother). "Queenmother" is used only when it is part of a quote or part of a name.

<sup>3</sup> "Traditional" has become a contested term in its use to describe a sort of static patriarchal culture in Africa. I consciously employ "traditional" to blend the gap between its emic and etic usages. By using "tradition" as I do throughout this thesis, I position myself in a meta-linguistic alliance with Ghana's women traditional leaders, validating a deeply marginalized *herstory* of Ghana's women as leaders.

choice-based) notions of women's empowerment with those of Ghanaian women by looking specifically at "women's rights and empowerment discourses within Ghana's postcolonial environment" (Bawa 2016, 120). Bawa's analysis calls for a deeper investigation into the socio-cultural aspects that shape a Ghanaian concept of women's empowerment.

I designed my initial key research questions in response to this call. Throughout the process of ongoing interviews and analysis, these questions evolved to have a broader geographical focus and a narrower participant focus to serve the goals of those I interviewed. Thus, my thesis addresses these key research questions: (1) What political, social, and economic powers do Ghana's Queens hold? (2) What are the implications of women's traditional leadership for the principles of women's empowerment valued in Ghana? (3) How can a Ghanaian framework for women's empowerment enrich national and UN frameworks to better serve women on a broad global scale?

The situation in Ghana is particularly relevant to a study of women's empowerment due to the continued presence of Queens as traditional leaders in a matriarchal system. Queens, in Ghana, are traditional women leaders holding various leadership positions. Colonial era European scholars often neglected the important role of Queens as counterparts to Akan Chiefs (Farrar, 1997). The Akan people, making up roughly 50 % of Ghana's population, are traditionally both matriarchal and matrilineal.

While the particularities of Akan matriarchy vary among communities, most follow a common model of election to traditional political office. While the senior family heads/lineage mates (both men and women) choose the *Ohemma* (woman ruler, or Queen), the *Ohemma* chooses the *Ohene* (man ruler, or Chief), and she acts as his advisor. The *Ohemma* and the *Ohene* preside at the top of an Akan matriarchy as a dual-gender<sup>4</sup> political system, which consists of woman and man “counterparts” at all levels of political office (Farrar 1997: 588). Traditionally, the gender of those who raise each political, economic, and cultural issue often corresponds to the gender of the leader assigned to it. Issues that involve both genders, such as adultery, rape, and marital conflict are in the jurisdiction of the woman officer. In both election and decision-making, women leaders arguably wield equitable political powers to men leaders.

This traditional matriarchal system has suffered not only at the hands of colonialism, but also at those of postcolonial<sup>5</sup> imperialism (Boateng, 2020). Since Ghana’s independence from Britain in 1957, the country has alternated between civilian and military rule, always with a man president (Bauer, 2017), arguably due to an encroaching Western political paradigm that reconstituted the colonial bias towards

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<sup>4</sup> Farrar refers to this as a “dual-sex” political system. I have chosen the term “gender” in lieu of “sex,” which I believe to be an important distinction since this study does not deal with the biological sex of leaders, but rather their socially constructed genders.

<sup>5</sup> In this thesis, I use the term “postcolonial” not to mean that colonialism has ended, but rather as Bagele Chilisa uses it to, “denote the continuous struggle of non-Western societies that suffered European colonization, indigenous peoples, and historically marginalized groups to resist suppression of their ways of knowing and the globalization of knowledge, reaffirming that Western knowledge is the only legitimate knowledge” (Chilisa 2020, 9).

men as leaders (Farrar 1997). From 1957 through 2016, the percent of women in parliament fluctuated between zero and 13.1 %, where it remains steady today (Bauer 2017). Women were and are struggling for equal representation in Ghana's national government. While the general trend is increasing, this percentage of women in parliament remains among the lowest in all countries worldwide ("Women in Politics: 2021" 2021). This pattern of gender inequality in post-independence Ghanaian politics reflects the effect of an imperial man-dominant political system that is not traditional to the majority of Ghanaians. National and international empowerment agendas may reinforce dominant systems of inequality/ inequity by not incorporating indigenous frameworks for women's empowerment and gender equality/ equity. My research investigated how the voices of Ghana's women traditional leaders<sup>6</sup> might improve these empowerment agendas both locally and globally.

This project aligns with current Ghanaian trends in women's activism. In 2001, ten Queens were sworn into the National Council of Women Traditional Leaders<sup>7</sup> and Queens in the North, who were nationally recognized for the first time in 2005, have

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<sup>6</sup> Not all of Ghana's ethnic groups relate to traditions of women leaders. There are those that have patriarchal and patrilineal systems. Yet the Akan (making up more than 50% of the population, with its several tribes) are traditionally matriarchal and matrilineal. The North is commonly and academically considered patriarchal. As I try to show in this thesis through my interviews with Queens in Wa, this representation of the North is a distortion of *herstory* and may perpetuate some colonial notions. The picture is more complex and there are some positions in different areas of the North that were *herstorically* (traditionally) reserved for women; there are even a few areas where Chiefs were *herstorically* women (Odame 2014).

<sup>7</sup> I had the opportunity to interview one current member of the National Council of Women Traditional Leaders. Updates on the council are found in Results and Analysis.

begun to organize on grassroots campaigns (Mistiaen, 2015). The creation of *The Women's Manifesto for Ghana* in 2004 marked a turning point in Ghanaian women's state activism for gender equality and equity in Ghana (Amoah-Boampong 2018). The 2007 "inherently transnational" *Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists* was published in Accra, Ghana ("Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists" 2007; James 2019). The movement for Ghanaian women to reclaim their own versions of empowerment calls for a deeper understanding of their culturally relevant transnational feminisms; particularly those pertaining to women's leadership.

In my research with 22 Ghanaian women traditional leaders, I found that Ghana's indigenous feminisms place great importance on the issue of gender parity in leadership. Ghana's Queens hold significant political and social power within their communities but seek greater political power at a national level and greater economic power at every level. The reverence that all interviewed WTLs showed towards the institutionalized gender parity of Ghana's traditional governance implies that equal representation of gendered lenses in all levels of leadership is a valued principle of women's empowerment in Ghana. Taking the institutionalized gender parity of Ghana's traditional leadership as a model for women's empowerment, their national government may benefit from similar gender quotas and multilateral organizations such as the UN should consider the number of national and local governments with



successfully passed Affirmative Action laws as an indicator of women's effective and equal participation in decision-making at all levels (UN SDG 5.5).

## Chapter Two:

### Literature Review

#### Transnational Feminisms and Feminist Ethnography

My theoretical framework draws from the field of transnational feminisms by recognizing that many expressions of feminism exist within and beyond national borders and institutions, and by seeking to better understand a particularly marginalized indigenous feminism in Ghana. Delineating the genealogy of the term “transnational” in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Laura Briggs recalls, “Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan introduced the term “transnational feminism” in 1994 as an alternative to “global” feminism... [and] argued for attention to the heterogeneity of what globalization produces, not just a hegemonic West versus the rest or a Disneyfication of the world” (Briggs 2019, 992). I subscribe to an understanding of transnational feminisms as a space for marginalized feminisms that recognizes European colonizers’ suppression of women’s roles in gynarchic and matriarchal systems around the globe (Gunn Allen 2013), problematizes the homogenized category of the oppressed “average Third World Woman” (Mohanty 2013, 22), and considers the silencing effects of neoliberal nationalization on the subaltern (Spivak 2010). Listening

to and collaborating with diverse Ghanaian women is a critical component to understanding, validating, and valuing the diversity of transnational feminisms.

I frame this attentive and collaborative work as feminist ethnography.

Throughout this thesis, I attempt to offer personal ethnographic memoirs and critical self-reflections to mitigate the pitfalls of narcissism and ethnocentrism in ethnography.

Feminist ethnographers have critiqued Bronislaw Malinowski, widely known as the anthropological “father” of ethnography, for his false and impossible claims to strict scientific objectivity since, “among other academic publications, when his diaries were published in 1989, his personal writing revealed ethnocentrism and insensitivity about his research subjects” (Craven & Davis 2016, 135). Nonetheless, anthropologists and other ethnographers continue to utilize the method he is most known for: long-term participant observation.

Following Malinowski’s pioneering of long-term participant observation, “feminist ethnography originally emerged in the 1970’s in an effort to correct women’s absence from previous scholarship” (Craven and Davis 2016, 10). While Davis and Craven argue that “feminist ethnography does not have one single definition,” they offer a working definition with five points (Craven and Davis 2016, 11). In my research, I utilize their working definition, that:

1. involves a feminist sensibility, and commitment to paying attention to marginality and power differentials; these include not only gender, but also race, class, nation, sexuality, ability, and other areas of difference

2. draws inspiration from feminist scholarship—in other words, our feminist intellectual genealogy is important
3. challenges marginalization and injustice
4. acknowledges and reflects upon power relations within the research context
5. aims to produce scholarship—in both traditional and experimental forms—that may contribute to movement building and/or be in the service of organizations, people, communities, and issues we study  
(Craven & Davis 2016, 11)

In line with this definition, I pay attention to and make note of power differentials between participants; primarily incorporate the work of transnational and African feminists; challenge the marginalization of Ghanaian women traditional leaders and the injustice of imperial man-dominant politics; acknowledge and reflect on the power differentials between myself as a US-based researcher, my research co-researchers, and Ghanaian women traditional leaders at all levels of authority; and aim to produce scholarship that contributes to building the movement for Ghana's women traditional leaders to gain national recognition, and to serve the various other organizations, people and communities with whom I conducted this research.

African and Africanist feminist anthropologists, sociologists, historians, lawyers, and political scientists have argued that, "The debates in many Western countries about essentialism, the female body, and radical feminism are not characteristic of the new African feminism," which they depict as "distinctly heterosexual, pro-natal, and concerned with many 'bread, butter, culture, and power' issues" (Mikell et al. 1997, 4). Salient to this thesis as it offers ground for my use of dual-gender analysis, this point is in line with many growing African feminisms. It would be a mistake, however, to focus

on African feminisms' use of heterosexuality and gender duality as antithetical to pro-LGBTQIA agendas. It is, rather, a political strategy for seeking a more just and equitable society in response to particular histories of structures and institutions that privilege men over women (the two majority socially constructed genders) and all other minority genders.

In *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Gwendolyn Mikell, an expert in African feminism and African political and economic transitions with extensive experience in Ghana, describes indigenous models of gender, polity, and state as three "cultural models," or "social compacts" that respectively emphasize "harmony and well-being of the social group" and "kin-based polities," inclusion of women's voices in public decision making, or a perceived threat of female rulers to state formation: "corporate," "dual-sex," and "gender-biased" (Mikell 1997, 10-13). While she is careful not to idealize any of these systems and claims that women often still faced adversity within them, the corporate and dual-sex systems offered African women unique opportunities to participate in public life and politics that remain absent in most nations. Mikell maintains,

African women have a quixotic relationship to traditional and modern political systems. Politics is the ultimate public realm, and on no other continent do women play as many different and important roles as in Africa. This is because African cultural models, or *social compacts*, that shape behavior have gender at their cores. (Mikell 1997, 10).

These cultural models, however, have been diluted by combination with dominant ideologies through processes of globalization.

Mikell juxtaposes indigenous African “dual-sex” and “corporate” polities with the male-dominant polities that arose from European colonization and the “gender-blind” and “superficially sovereign” polities that arose through the “artificial process of constitutional independence,” showing that both colonization and nationalization processes worked to disenfranchise African women through the necessity of adhering to dominant global gender inequities (Mikell 1997, 27-32). While colonial governments exercised overt gender bias, national governments now exercise covert gender bias through systems that claim to be gender-blind in pursuit of democratic processes, but do not account for their systemic gendered inequalities in domestic work and public opportunity.

Though African women have been increasingly excluded from the public realm and political leadership due to processes of colonization and nationalization, Mikell recognized the beginning of a synthesis taking place that required more documentation: “African women appear to be seeking ways of combining the traditional corporate and dual-sex compacts with the new participatory politics and the new individual possibilities that are struggling to come into existence” (Mikell 1997a, 341). As I explore in this thesis, women traditional leaders in Ghana are still seeking ways of combining traditional and national ideologies more than twenty years after Mikell’s publication.

As a transnational and Africanist feminist anthropologist, I agree with Mikell that, “Since gender ideologies are actualized within the context of social interaction, African women must draw on threads of continuity within African culture while reinterpreting them as they see fit” (Mikell 1997a, 341). This is precisely what I have observed women traditional leaders doing in Ghana, as they utilize their traditional platforms to effect positive change and seek greater influence on local, national, and global politics and decision making.

### **Anthropology on West African Matriarchy**

The earliest extensive ethnographic written records of Akan (or any Ghanaian) matriarchy come from colonial anthropologist, R.S. Rattray. Having obtained his degree in anthropology from Oxford, Rattray began his work in Ghana with the Gold Coast Customs Service in the early twentieth century. Appointed as the District Commissioner in Ejura, he developed an acquaintance with the Ashanti<sup>8</sup>—the most prominent Akan group of the time. He eventually became head of the Anthropological Department of Asante in 1921, remaining in this position for nine years before his retirement (Rattray 1923). While Rattray’s work provides a rich and extensive record of Asante culture and practices, it was ultimately carried out in service to colonial

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<sup>8</sup> I use two different spellings, here. Ashanti is the Anglophone term for the people of the Asante area. To avoid confusion, I use either spelling depending on what is used in maps and quotes, to refer the region of Ghana throughout this thesis.

administrators who guided the research goals, and thus constrained by colonial assumptions about gender roles.

More recently, historical anthropologist Tarikhu Farrar (1997) conducted extensive research in West Africa, particularly with the Akan, and critiqued the colonial biases in the earlier work of Rattray who had lived with and researched the Akan people of Ghana for a significant amount of time before realizing that men Chiefs had Queen counterparts. Farrar writes,

When he asked the elders who for so long had been his informants why, up until then, he had remained ignorant of the political power wielded by female stool-holders, he was told: 'The white man never asked us this; you have dealings with and recognize only the men; we supposed the European considered women of no account, and we know you do not recognize them as we have always done.' (1923/1969, p. 84). (Farrar 1997: 591)

It is indicated by the elders' response that European colonizers exhibited and assumed patriarchal values in their dealings with the Akan people, thereby devaluing and effectively suppressing their traditional matriarchy.

Nigerian-born and raised, feminist scholar Ifi Amadiume has re-evaluated, through a return to Nigeria for fieldwork, the many roles assumed by African women that had been previously overlooked by European and men anthropologists (Walsh 2006). Her extensive work uncovers academically underrepresented African matriarchal power dynamics (Amadiume 1987a; 1987b; 1993; 1997; 2000; 2002; 2017). In a time of global fixation on women's rights issues, defined largely by Western women via the United Nations, her works and theories are invaluable to the reimagining of a



transnational model of “women’s empowerment” that is both relevant in non-Western settings and enlightening to shortcomings within Western settings. I use quotations to indicate that “women’s empowerment” is a phrase born from hegemonic development discourse that homogenizes “third world women,” assumes an understanding of the agency they seek and, in the words of Lorde, may thus be a futile attempt to use “the master’s tools... [to] dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 1984, 112). Thus, I use the phrase in quotes for my lack of a non-Western understanding, which I sought through this research, and which yielded terminology different from that of the *master’s*.<sup>9</sup> The current momentum of globalization processes and the movement to decolonize anthropology demands that we listen to and learn from scholars like Amadiume, who have pushed through the cracks of institutional marginalization. Her work provides rich groundwork for anthropologists seeking to create spaces for academically marginalized African women’s voices, and thus is foundational to this thesis research.

Finally, when analyzing anthropology on West African matriarchy, it is important to include works of those in parallel academic fields, especially in Ghana because anthropology is not a field of study offered at Ghanaian universities. I would be remiss if I did not include mention of the work of Lydia Amoah, Teaching Assistant at the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy at the University of Ghana, which utilized ethnographic methods to document the changing roles of Akan Queens in

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<sup>9</sup> See subsection on *Power versus Pride* in Results and Analysis.

Ejisu, Asante Region of Ghana. Her thesis, *Changing Roles of Akan Queenmothers: A Study of Nana Yaa Asantewaa II* was foundational to my understanding of Akan Queens' and traditional Akan matriarchy, and how they have changed over time (Amoah 2014). It led me to research the provisions made for traditional authority in Ghana's constitution and gave me an initial impression of the Queen hierarchy and the contemporary roles that Queens play in Ghanaian society. Her work inspired many of the interview questions that I asked Queens and prepared me with a greater understanding of the traditional Akan offices and their Twi names. Amoah's thesis presented the most recent and comprehensive ethnographic study of Ghanaian matriarchy by a Ghanaian scholar that I could find. I am hopeful that her work will spur others in Ghana to research the contemporary impact of Queens on Ghanaian society.

### **Gender and Development: The Herstory of "Empowerment"**

"Women's empowerment" is a catch phrase with a variety of scholarly approaches in the humanitarian and development sectors. Economic indicators such as income may be disproportionately referenced. As Bawa notes, "Empowerment as a buzzword in development discourse gained prominence in the 1980s, no doubt reinforced by the prevailing neoliberal economic structural adjustment programmes in African countries at that time" (Bawa 2016). Thus, "empowerment" entered

conversation to treat the *symptoms* of destructive structural adjustment loan conditionalities,<sup>10</sup> while leaving the *disease* of economic inequality ultimately untreated.

International development and economist scholars argue that, “structural adjustment, the withdrawal of the state and its reduced role in providing social services, have had a particularly detrimental effect on women’s lives as they shoulder the burden of providing these services,” with little or no compensation (Kanji, Tan, and Toulmin 2011, xiv). Therefore, both colonial notions of gendered power structures and neocolonial structural adjustment programs worked to disempower women. The need to “empower” women arises from problems mostly created and enforced by the West. Improving women’s current incomes and money management skills may alleviate immediate poverty, but these solutions assume their lack of skill to be the problem and do not address the underlying structural issues of global gendered economic inequality and *underdevelopment*: those that assign monetary value to some types of essential work and not to others.

I subscribe here to Gunder-Frank’s assertion that “underdevelopment was and is still generated by the very same historical process which also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself” (Gunder-Frank 1966, 9). Bawa’s

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<sup>10</sup> Examples of structural adjustment loan conditionalities include privatization of social services, decreasing the government’s public spending, and “freeing” international trade by removing import and price regulations. These conditionalities were imposed on underdeveloped countries forced to borrow money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and while sometimes leading to a growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), have also contributed to widening the wealth gap in nations like Ghana (Terry 2019).

argument for a socio-cultural approach to understanding “women’s empowerment” is supported by Gunder-Frank’s ultimate argument for a “historical, holistic, and structural approach [that] may help the peoples of the underdeveloped countries to understand the causes and eliminate the reality of their development of underdevelopment, and their underdevelopment of development” (Gunder-Frank 1966, 16). I build on Gunder-Frank’s argument by suggesting that the elimination of the duality of underdevelopment and development requires collaboration between people from developed and underdeveloped places, and their ability to learn about development from each other.

Having defined my use of the term “underdevelopment,” I now discuss the field of “gender and development,” and what this research might contribute to it. Through her seminal work on *Women’s Role in Economic Development*, Danish economist Ester Boserup analyzed the unequal gendered structures of global development, and the undervalued roles of women within them (Boserup 1970). Her work on understanding impacts of development on women in the village, women in the town, and women who migrate from the village to the town, “inspired the UN Decade for Women (1976–1986) and heralded an era of research and enquiry on gender issues” (Kanji, Tan, and Toulmin 2011, v). While Boserup’s work was crucial for the conceptualization of gender and development in the 1970’s-1980’s and is foundational to arguments for improving

women's access to education and social services, she ultimately wrote from an economic lens and did not address certain critical aspects of the field.

Addressing some of these neglected facets, contemporary scholars point out that Boserup did not include considerations of citizenship or political representation in her analysis of women's empowerment (Kanji, Tan, and Toulmin 2011, xxi). The future of gender and development programming requires a deeper focus on women's political representation as a vital aspect of women's empowerment. Finally, Kanji, Tan, and Toulmin (2011) consider that "Boserup did not challenge accepted social, political and economic frameworks. Nor did she question the development paradigm. Rather she argued for an equal share of the pie for women. But is it possible to achieve equity within the current economic and political context?" (xxiii). I believe Lorde would say *no*, "for the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 1984, 112). Thus, equity can only be achieved by recognizing, learning from, and incorporating marginalized economic and political frameworks.

Seeking to recognize, learn from and incorporate one marginalized framework, this research project asks, *what kinds of equity is it possible to achieve in the political context of Ghana's matriarchies?* I suggest that an indigenous Ghanaian feminism comes from women's equitable roles in leadership and equal political representation. Thus, I question the dominant development paradigm that focuses on income-based economic empowerment indicators constrained to certain Western-valued occupations and seek

an indigenous expression of women's empowerment that stems from political representation.

I believe this premise would be supported by Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize recipient in Economic Science, who argued for a rights-based or capability approach to development. His approach analyzed various rights, capabilities, or freedoms of individuals that should be evaluated when determining the growth of development. According to Sen, rights to health, education, political freedom, and social opportunities are equally if not more important indicators of development as income. All of these, he argued, must be considered since they are complimentary freedoms, and the oppression of one leads to the oppression of the others (Sen 1999). While I view development less as an equation of individual freedoms and more as a balancing and constant exchange of individual and communal energies, I find certain aspects of Sen's arguments useful for framing this thesis. Sen brought gender into consideration in new and important ways for multilateral organizations like the World Bank and the United Nations by offering non-market-economy-based indicators for development.

As Ingrid Robeyns, a contemporary political philosopher and applied ethics scholar, writes in her analysis of Sen's capability approach for gender inequality evaluation, "Inequality comparisons based only on the market economy, such as comparisons of income, earnings, and job-holdings, exclude some important aspects of

well-being such as care labor, household work, freedom from domestic violence, or the availability of supportive social networks” (Robeyns 2003, 66). Thus, Robeyns argues that Sen’s capability approach to development is useful for feminist economists who wish to evaluate inequality outside the market economy, where “women spend much more time... than men” (Robeyns 2003, 66).

Where Sen’s capability approach becomes particularly salient to this work is through his distinction between capability poverty and income poverty. Taking a capability approach makes it possible to view poverty as a result of inequality of all rights or freedoms, not just income. Thus, according to Sen’s rights-based approach, the global income gender gap results from inequality of health, education, social, and political freedoms. Sen’s argument indicates that gender must be considered in relation to each of these capabilities/rights in order to promote human development (Sen 1999).

Women’s empowerment, as part of development discourse in Ghana, plays out on the ground in a few prominent ways. Ghana has recorded statistics for just ten out of UN Women’s twenty-three indicators for Gender Equality (SDG 5). Out of these, one deals with physical/ sexual violence against women and girls; two deal with child/ teenage marriage; one deals with genital cutting; one deals with domestic and care work responsibilities; three deal with women in leadership and decision-making positions; one deals with sexual consent and reproductive health; and one deals with ownership of mobile phones (“Country Fact Sheet: Ghana” 2021). The focus on some of

these indicators and donor priorities can be clearly seen in government and NGO development efforts to reduce violence against women and girls, prevent teenage marriage and deal with the consequences of it, promote girls menstrual health and prevent genital cutting, and promote girls' access to education (particularly STEM education). There is also a focus on women's microfinance, as disparity in education and other opportunities has made it less likely for many women to obtain bank loans. These were some of the women's empowerment trends that I observed in Ghana as a Peace Corps Volunteer from 2014-2016, and during my return for research in 2021.

While the number of indicators measured for women's leadership and decision-making opportunities is proportionally significant (3/10), women's political empowerment did not seem to me to be a prominent topic in development discourse. While many women who I spoke with agreed that there should be more women in leadership, I never came across an NGO seeking women's increased political representation. This is not to say they do not exist, but if they do, they are certainly less prominent than those NGOs that focus on women's economic, social, educational and health empowerment. This thesis focuses on women's restricted political freedom as an understudied inequality and seeks greater understanding of the political equality/equity afforded to women traditional leaders by Ghana's traditional matriarchies.



## Gender and Political Representation

African and American academics and practitioners argue that democratization, for as much as it has been credited with opening new opportunities for African women to take part in politics and compete for government positions, does not show a correlation with increased gender parity in leadership. As Aili Tripp, et al. state in *African Women's Movements: Changing Political Landscapes*, "... one finds many nondemocratic countries that adopted woman-friendly policies, including Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe" (Tripp et al. 2009, 8). Notably, included in this list is Rwanda, which has the highest percentage of women both in ministerial positions in Africa, and in parliament worldwide ("Women in Politics: 2021" 2021). If women's rights cannot be taken for granted as a product of democratization, the question then becomes, *what do those African countries with the highest rates of gender parity in leadership have in common?* While many factors may be considered, one critical constant is the implementation of some type of gender quota.

In their comprehensive review of African women's movements, Tripp et al. attribute the 1990s increase in women's political representation throughout many African nations to the combined factors of African women's movements; pressures from international, regional, subregional, and trans-African organizations<sup>11</sup>; and the catalytic

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<sup>11</sup> Some examples include the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Economic

environment of post-conflict countries. Arguing that the combination of these three components created a potent recipe for the advancement of women in African leadership, they maintain that implementation of gender quotas was a key element of women's advocacy, making the increase in gender parity possible (Tripp et al. 2009a). International pressures for women's increased political representation brought upon African national governments through ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 1985 UN Conference on women in Nairobi, and the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing supported women's organizations who lobbied for the implementation of gender quotas. As a result, Tripp et al. write, "The big change... occurred between 1995 and 2005, when twenty-three countries adopted quotas, bringing the ratio of countries implementing quotas to twenty-four out of a total of forty-eight sub-Saharan African countries" (Tripp et al. 2009a, 157). As Tripp et al. further point out, the African continent has been a leader in 50 % women's campaigns, interestingly ahead of Europe, the United States, and other "developed" nations.

Gender quotas for leadership positions are temporary affirmative action measures that seek to repair century-old systemic barriers that bar women from equal representation. Tripp et al. cite cultural, societal, economic, and institutional barriers to

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Community of Central African States (ECCAS), African Women's Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD), and Solidarity for African Women's Rights Network.

women's representation. I propose the important recognition of an additional barrier, colonial influence perpetuated through the formation of nation-states, which I have elaborated further in the section on matriarchy. Tripp et al. outline four main types of gender quotas found in Africa:

(1) reserved seats, which from the outset determine the number of seats that are to be won by women in an election; (2) measures determined through national legislation or constitutional mandates requiring all parties to nominate a certain percentage of women as electoral candidates; (3) measures adopted voluntarily by political parties aimed at influencing the number of women candidates; and (4) executive appointments to legislative seats. (Tripp et al. 2009a, 153-154)

Not all quota types have proven equally effective, and it is notable that Rwanda, achieving some of the highest levels of gender parity in leadership worldwide, falls into the first category of reserved seats, having made constitutional provisions for a quota of women in legislature since 2005 (Tripp et al. 2009a; "Women in Politics: 2021" 2021).

Political scientist Alice Kang contends that in Africa and "globally, gender quota laws are the most recent of gender quota innovations, newer than voluntary party quotas and reserved seat quotas" (Kang 2013, 95). Gender quota laws can come in a variety of forms, mandating certain percentages of women aspirants, candidates, and intended elected officials. Kang notes that African countries began implementing gender quota laws in the early 2000s and that ten had implemented a gender quota law for national legislative elections by 2012 (Kang 2013, 95). In her analysis of the effect of gender quota laws in Niger, she holds that their success in increasing women's political representation does not correlate to the country's status as democratic, authoritarian, or

autocratic. Instead, to determine the effectiveness of gender quota laws, she offers a formula of three important factors for consideration: “quota design, national institutions, and the agency of actors” (Kang 2013, 95).

In the case of Niger, Kang shows that gender quota success is contingent upon how it is designed: whether there is a high minimum threshold (30% or higher), whether there is a placement mandate to ensure that “parties place women in winnable positions on the party list,” and whether there is a strong “enforcement mechanism” such as those that “require that an independent authority examine and reject offending party lists” (Kang 2013, 95-96). She argues that national institutions such as Niger’s Constitutional Court and electoral system also determine the effectiveness of gender quota laws. While the Constitutional Court increases gender quota laws’ effectiveness by enforcing them, the electoral system undermines them since parties may win only one or two seats in a district and evade having to comply with mandated gender percentages (Kang 2013).

Finally, and particularly relevant to this thesis, Kang emphasizes that the agency of a country’s various women activists and women’s activist groups is a crucial component to hold governments accountable in enforcing new gender quota laws. She recalls the importance of women’s organizations in supporting efforts to encourage and educate women to run for office, lobby for women candidates, publicly legitimize quotas laws, and publicly dispute institutional failure to enforce quota laws (Kang

2013). Notably, Kang recalls in the case of Niger that, “women’s activists used UN reporting mechanisms, contacts inside the government, and, in a democratic context, the media to call the government out on its non-respect of the gender quota” (Kang 2013, 99). This highlights the importance of collaboration between multilateral organizations, governmental stakeholders, and public stakeholders that I also found to be the case for the efforts to increase women’s political representation in Ghana.

Initially implementing some voluntary party gender quotas just two years after their independence, Ghana now falls behind many other African countries with gender quotas. As Tripp et al. recall,

Ghana’s Convention People’s Party had a provision for the election of ten women to parliament already in 1959 when women held 10 percent of the seats in parliament, and by 1965 there were 19 women in a legislature of 104 members. This lasted until the 1966 takeover by General Joseph Ankrah, when female representation declined. (Tripp et al. 2009a, 156-157)

Since 1979, women’s political representation in Ghana has generally and minimally increased, but as of 2021 Ghana only ranks 147 out of 188 countries for its number of women in parliament, rising only 1.5% from 2016 to 2021, to a meager 14.6% (Bauer 2017; “Women in Politics: 2021” 2021).

According to *Abantu for Development*, a gender and justice policy advocacy NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, with a Regional Office for West Africa in Ghana and a claim to initiating the development of “The Women’s Manifesto for Ghana” in 2003, Ghana’s

fruitless attempts to implement Affirmative Action policy extend back to 1998

(“Affirmative Action” 2017). They elucidate,

Ghana has drafted an Affirmative Action Bill<sup>12</sup> in response to its mandate to promulgate an Affirmative Action Law (AAL) as called in Article 4 and 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW-1981) which Ghana ratified in 1986. The national urgency needed to direct the process to see this Draft Bill passed into law is agonizingly slow. Through the Affirmative Action law, measures can be demanded of government, public, and private institutions such as political parties and private institutions, educational establishments, corporations, and companies to address a history of systemic discrimination of particular social groups. (“Affirmative Action” 2017)

Unfortunately, though drafting of this bill began in 2011 and has garnered support from Ghana’s Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), gained Cabinet approval in 2016, undergone various revisions from stakeholders and the Attorney General’s Department, and been advocated for by several civil society organizations, it remains unpassed by parliament in 2021 (“Affirmative Action” 2017). *Abantu for Development* tells a story of hope for the day that the Bill will finally pass, asserting,

The Affirmative Action Bill presents itself as the most definite way of ensuring women’s adequate representation in Ghana’s decision-making spaces. The strategy has worked in various African countries such as Rwanda, Ethiopia, South Africa, Guinea, Kenya, Senegal, to mention but a few. There is therefore the urgency for Ghana to pass the Affirmative Action Law in order to remedy women’s low participation in political, social, and economic lives. (“Affirmative Action” 2017)

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<sup>12</sup> *Abantu for Development* explains that “The Bill will require government to ensure equitable gender representation at all levels. It will apply to the public service, ministerial positions, independent constitutional bodies, boards of state institutions, security services and political parties” (“Affirmative Action” 2017).

Thus, multilateral organizations, national institutions, and women's activist groups in support of gender quotas laws in Ghana eagerly work towards the day that their Affirmative Action Bill will finally acquire enough support to be passed into law.

Considering the opposition that countries (like Ghana) seeking to pass gender quota laws face, Kang offers three common critiques of gender quota laws: (1) election of women is still skewed towards the elite, (2) "the quota appears to becoming a 'new glass ceiling' for women," as institutions do not strive to go beyond quotas, and (3) women may still be relegated to lower positions within parties (Kang 2013, 101). While I concede that these are all valid limitations on gender quota laws, I agree with Kang that gender quotas may still be a valuable tool for reaching gender parity in leadership if they are designed well, supported by national institutions, and championed by women's activists. The skewing of political representation towards the elite is not a gender-based issue: it holds true for men as well. Thus, it may warrant another solution, but does not invalidate this solution for achieving gender parity. If quotas are becoming perceived as a new glass ceiling for women, then perhaps what is considered an effective percentage should be raised from 30% to 50% gender parity. Finally, marginalization of women within parties might call for a more robust design that outlines gender quotas at every level of authority, but it does not make them altogether futile to their task.

Studies like those by Tripp et al. and Kang are invaluable in the efforts to establish gender quota laws globally. Notably missing from their accounts of African women's pursuit of equal political representation, however, is the recognition that gender parity was achieved in some traditional matriarchies that have survived colonialism and the formation of nations, such as in Ghana. While these traditional forms of government have inevitably changed with the times, and women leaders have become disadvantaged within them, they do represent a pre- and postcolonial model of gender quotas at all levels of leadership. This suggests that gender inequality in leadership is not a *herstorical* problem inherent to African culture and traditional government, but rather a present-day problem faced by nations around the world. Developed nations are not immune to this problem and more could benefit from implementing political gender quotas as an affirmative action solution, as many African countries now do.



## Chapter Three:

### Methods and Methodology

Throughout the research process, I maintained an attitude of flexibility that I learned to be a critical cultural value during my Peace Corps service in Ghana. Time is not perceived in Ghana in the way it is in the U.S. In the U.S., there is an attitude of “time-is-money” and therefore it must be quickened and calculated. In Ghana, “tomorrow” could mean *tomorrow, next week, next year, or maybe never*. Of course, this is an over-simplification as those with more “modern” jobs or in the cities may be bound by some Western sense of time. Most of my co-researchers, hosts, and interviewees, however, did not fit that exception. So my timeline shifted to accommodate “Ghana-time.” Depending on cultural differences between urban and rural Ghana, this sense of time could be more or less cognizant of research timelines and schedules. While I tend to prefer the less strict adherence to timelines in Ghana to that of the United States, I reiterate what a Peace Corps trainer often said during my training: *It’s not good or bad. It’s just different*. There is a time and place for each sense of time and place.

Furthermore, due to my ethic of *doing no harm* derived mainly from *Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras*, and affirmed by postcolonial indigenous methodologies and feminist ethnography, my research priorities shifted. Thus, my timeline and research design

were altered. In the following sections, I describe my initial plans, how and why they changed, and the final research design.

## **Ethics**

I obtained verbal consent from all participants prior to their interviews: disclosing the goals of the research, the purpose for conducting it, and the intended dissemination. I use pseudonyms for each interviewee, unless they expressed a desire for their name to be used publicly.<sup>13</sup> As a non-Ghanaian woman researching a Ghanaian concept of women's empowerment, reflexivity is crucial. Transparency about my reasons for wanting to conduct this research, and the use of grounded theory and community-based participatory research help the data to reflect the voices of Ghanaian women, over my own. Furthermore, I look forward to sustaining long-term connections with the communities and individuals who participated, following my research. I received IRB approval from the University of South Florida and interviewees were all 18 years or older, in accordance with US and Ghanaian classifications for adulthood.

As I was a 500 hour Registered Yoga Teacher with Yoga Alliance before entering the academic fields of Applied Anthropology and Women's and Gender Studies, my code of ethics comes first and foremost from the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* of *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras*. The *Yamas* delineate five social disciplines, while the *Niyamas* outline five personal disciplines. Thus, I mostly invoke the *Yamas* as my code of ethics in engaging

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<sup>13</sup> IRB Approval for the use of verbal consent to identification can be found in Appendix B.

with others in research. The *Yamas* include *ahimsā* (harmlessness/ non-violence), *satya* (honesty/ truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing/ non-misappropriating), *brahmacarya* (living according to one's own true nature),<sup>14</sup> and *aparigrahāh* (living with what one needs, without greed) (Iyengar 1993, 142-143). My study and observance of Yogic ethics began before my first time in Ghana and grew as I studied Yogic philosophy while serving there as a Peace Corps Volunteer from 2014-2016. I had a unique opportunity to start a girls' self-empowerment yoga group in my Upper West community at the time, preceded by the community Chiefs' excited approval of Yogic ethics as appropriate to teach the youth. Thus, they have been a common thread throughout my life and work in Ghana, and anywhere I have lived.

Finally, I take as part of my code of ethics, a relational axiology. This is a value system that is foundational to both Yogic philosophy and African societies. As Botswanan postcolonial scholar, Bagele Chilisa contends, "The value system of most African societies is built around respect for others and oneself. There is an emphasis on values grounded on cooperation, collective responsibilities, interdependence, and interpersonal relationships among people as the highest value" (Chilisa 2020, 134). A relational axiology becomes evident in *Defining a Queen(mother), Qualities/ Characteristics of Queens*, where I show that "respectful" is the word used most

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<sup>14</sup> This definition for *brahmacarya* comes from my teacher, Yogi Sivadas. Visit his school site here: <https://www.yogatribe.org>

frequently by Queens to describe the qualities they value in Queenship. As part of my relational axiology, I value the lessons that Ghana's women leaders and Western women leaders have to learn from each other. I recognize that the pursuit of gender parity in leadership is a global issue, because women in leadership are interdependent upon each other's successes and failures.

I further align myself with Ghana's Queens in the belief that women and men leaders are interdependent upon each other's gendered perspectives, to serve a whole population. Finally, due to my observance of a relational axiology, I recognize that as much as I depended upon the women traditional leaders and multilateral employee participants of this research to write a thesis and complete my degree, they depend on me to utilize my findings to support their goals. I therefore aim to operationalize my findings to support their activism and engage in ongoing dialogue with them to determine the best methods of dissemination.

### **Methodological Approach**

This project utilized a mixed methods qualitative, inductive approach based on grounded theory, postcolonial indigenous methodologies, and feminist ethnography: seeking to draw out ideas led by the voices and experiences of Ghanaian women, rather than reconstitute Western theory that predominates in national and international women's empowerment initiatives. Following the processes of grounded theory, postcolonial indigenous methodologies, and feminist ethnography, I collected and

analyzed data simultaneously and integrated the ideas I found as the theoretical framework (Charmaz 2000; Chilisa 2020; Craven and Davis 2016). This process entailed deep discussions about each interview with my co-researchers. Based on trends observed in initial semi-structured interviews, questions were altered to better define and narrow the research problem.

By using common themes of women's empowerment identified throughout research to guide further interview questions, I hoped to learn from a Ghanaian women's epistemology, rather than impose an already established Western theory that is perpetuated by United Nations initiatives. I used an inductive approach to avoid the colonial research weakness of inflicting Western values on research findings. Utilizing research findings to shape the theory guiding research along the way helped me to lean into women traditional leaders' stories to produce new knowledge that is not grounded in Western positivist epistemology. Nevertheless, I lean towards a constructivist use of grounded theory and a postcolonial indigenous researcher/ feminist ethnographer reflexivity that ultimately recognizes any theory generated through this research as co-constructed between myself and co-researchers (Charmaz 2000; Chilisa 2020; Craven and Davis 2016).

Building on strong connections at the University of Ghana and two years of experience living and working as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ghana (2014-2016), my methodology is guided by approaches in postcolonial indigenous research and feminist

ethnography. By “conducting research in such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalization are given space to communicate from their frames of reference” (Chilisa 2020: 11), I aim to “correct women’s absence from previous scholarship” (Davis 2016: 10).

Thus, I actively avoid the *Othering* and subordinating notion of *giving voice* in favor of *listening*. As Christine Ward Gailey writes, “It is not so much an issue of giving voice as it is of hearing, listening for meanings, and helping project voices: those who have been disenfranchised, marginalized, or silenced because of their gender, race, class, sexualities, nationality, and other social positioning” (Bernard and Gravlee 2014: 174). I am passionate about this research because I have been personally inspired and empowered by many Ghanaian women, who exude power from within a national/international system of gendered oppression and marginalization, and I am convinced that their voices deserve greater consideration on the national and global stages.

My strong research affiliations at the University of Ghana: Dr. Yvette Ussher, Dr. Rabiw Asante, and Dr. Doris Akyere Boateng, were eager to support this research in Ghana. I am excited to be in this transatlantic dialogue with Ghanaian scholars, women traditional leaders, and other women leaders, working together to counter colonial representations of African power structures and facilitate understandings of African epistemologies. Furthermore, my conversational level in the local languages of Dagaare

and Twi (the primary languages of two main populations involved in this research) allowed me to integrate quickly into the communities I worked with.

## **Timeline**

Data collection took place from June through August 2021. My benchmark goals included deciding with my partners in Ghana on an appropriate Akan community to participate in the research, meeting with my affiliates at University of Ghana upon arrival, collaboratively determining a co-researcher<sup>15</sup>, settling into the community, and conducting all interviews in the community by August 2021. I planned for interviews with key informants in Kabile, Accra, and Wa during my last two weeks in Ghana.

Through a spontaneous conversation with a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer friend, I was connected to an appropriate Akan community (Himan, in Western Region) and co-researcher, which were then approved by my affiliations at the University of Ghana before I left the U.S. My first co-researcher planned to meet me at the airport in Accra, where we would rest for a few days, and I could meet with my affiliates at the university. When I arrived and left the airport to search for her amongst the busy crowd of welcomers, I was surprised to be flagged down by an unknown man holding a sign with my name. I had not yet changed the SIM card in my phone, so I had not received

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<sup>15</sup> Each co-researcher was invaluable to the research process, acting as translators, cultural knowledge bearers, and professionals in their various fields. Throughout this thesis, I refer to my three Ghanaian partners as “co-researchers” or “translators,” since they fulfilled both roles.

the pictures and messages he sent, alerting me that he was my co-researcher's uncle and he had come to get me because she had been in a bad auto-accident.

I was very concerned for her health based on the pictures he showed me on his phone, and perhaps a bit delirious from nearly three straight days of travel. He took me to her apartment, where I stayed that night, and I left at five the next morning to meet her in the village where we would be conducting the research. We stayed with her aunties: one elder whose husband had recently passed, and one middle-aged with her husband. Thus, the first two weeks of June were largely devoted to helping my co-researcher recover from her accident. During my second week there, however, we were able to meet with the Chief of the village and visit the radio station and information centers to send out recruitment announcements for the research. My co-researcher, as the executive director of a Ghanaian non-profit in the area, was an expert on methods of announcement and recruitment in the village.

As she began to recover and felt up to walking again, we were able to follow up with more and more research volunteers, conducting one-to-four interviews in a day. These interview days, however, were punctuated with three-to-four-day weekends for my co-researcher's best friend's wedding, and her other work obligations and meetings. Finally, she was invited to participate in a weeklong gender equity workshop in July, which was a wonderful opportunity. Not feeling that this research should keep her from the opportunity, we decided to finish as many interviews as possible and end our



time in the community two weeks early. I also felt that we had already accomplished a lot and I had already started planning many interviews in other locations throughout Ghana.

Thus, I moved on from the first part of the research in the beginning of July, giving me six and a half weeks rather than two, to conduct interviews in Accra, Kabile, and Wa. In total, I spent three weeks in Accra, one in Kabile, and two weeks in Wa/ the Upper West Region. I believe this was a good decision for many reasons: (1) My co-researcher had many responsibilities, and despite her enthusiasm about the research we were doing, I believed staying longer might violate my Yogic ethic of *ahimsā* and do harm to her as she needed time and rest to continue her recovery; (2) It gave me the opportunity to interview more Queens and women traditional leaders throughout Ghana; (3) My co-researcher was able to share some of what she learned at the gender-equity conference with me, and that has enriched my analysis.

### **Research Design**

I designed this research project to include semi-structured intergenerational interviews, key informant interviews, and participant observation. Within the Akan village of Himan (Western Region) where I spent my first month of research, my co-researcher and I conducted nine semi-structured intergenerational interviews with people ages 18-110, to understand how definitions and perceptions of women's empowerment have changed over time since Ghana's independence in 1957. I sought to

elicit locally defined indicators of empowerment during interviews, based on women's experiences in their work, home, family, and community.

I drew from a community-based participatory research approach (CBPR) that maintains humility and a co-learning atmosphere by critically examining the power relations between myself as a researcher and community members as participants (Hacker, 2017).<sup>16</sup> My positionality was a complex mixture of similarities and differences between myself and each research participant. As a white woman from the U.S., and a transnational professional and academic financially supported by the West African Research Association, and with connections to the University of South Florida and the University of Ghana, I was in a position to conduct this research that many of the Queens I talked to were not. This was particularly true in the more rural areas where I conducted interviews, and where Queens might have lived their whole lives and had less opportunities to pursue higher education, global travel, and occupations in Western professionalized fields and institutions.

Some Queens whom I spoke to in Accra were arguably in greater positions of institutional, economic, and professional power than I was. They ran well-established NGOs, owned houses in the city, held advanced degrees, had experience living and working in far more countries than myself, and had retired from lifelong professional careers. Thus, to discuss my positionality in relation to the group of research

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix A

participants and co-researchers would be to homogenize them and myself based solely on nationality. In reality, I shared various similarities and differences with each research partner/ participant.

Intergenerational “interviews with three women representing three generations (daughter, mother and grandmother)” captured interactions and differentiation across generations (Tsikata and Darkwah 2014: 83). They encouraged relational rather than individualistic answers and established a conversational tone. I planned for these intergenerational interviews to be 75% with women and 25% with men. I found, however, that it was very difficult to find an intergenerational group of men to participate. There were two reasons cited by participants and my co-researcher for this: (1) Men in the community tended to die an average of 20 years earlier than women, so it was difficult to find grandfathers to interview and (2) Those families with three generations of men were difficult to pin down in one place at the same time, since many of the sons went out of town for work. Thus, only one of the nine interviews was with a group of men (son, father, and grandfather), and even they required us to reschedule several times.

A stratified interview sample accounted for differentiation between economic and political statuses in the community. I planned to determine stratification of economic statuses by eliciting indicators such as landholdings, an inventory of certain household and personal items, receipt of financial aid and remittances from family and

friends outside the community, and estimated monthly family income, if available. Stratification of political statuses distinguished between those who hold state offices, those in traditional offices, and those not holding any office. In practice, I realized that asking about some of these economic indicators did not feel appropriate to the research I was doing. I did make note of some household items in my fieldnotes, but even these were not consistent, since not all interviews were held in peoples' homes.

The economic indicator I was most consistently comfortable and able to ask about was whether the family had land. This, however, became confusing sometimes as I realized that some people were talking about their extended family landholdings and some were talking about their immediate family landholdings.<sup>17</sup> In Himan, none of the research volunteers held state office, and none of the intergenerational interviews included traditional leaders. Thus, there was a clear political differentiation between those who participated in intergenerational interviews, and those Queens who we interviewed.

What were initially intended to be key informant interviews, however, became the bulk of the interviews that contribute to this thesis. I focus on these interviews, since

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<sup>17</sup> There is an implication that women do not hold land in patrilineal groups in Ghana, but they have held land in matrilineal groups. But this seems to be changing, as the nation-state has become involved in land ownership. Some Queens lamented that they used to have lands and no longer have them, but this could have been for a myriad of reasons: the Queenship going to an extended family member with no transfer of lands to the new Queen, for example. Other Queens disputed this and said Queens never held lands. Thus, landownership in Ghana is a very complex system, and could be a topic for further research.

I found through continual analysis that there was a great potential for application of findings from interviews with Ghana’s women traditional leaders. I discuss the potential applications of this research further in the following sections and chapters.

## Sampling Methods

**Table 1.** Sampling Methods and Interviewees by Category

<i>Interview Categories</i>	<i>Intergenerational Groups in Himan, Western Region (3 generations each)</i>	<i>Queens in Himan, Western Region</i>	<i>Queens in Kabile, Bono Region</i>	<i>Queens in Wa, Upper West Region</i>	<i>Women Traditional Leaders in Jirapa and Accra, Upper West &amp; Greater Accra Regions</i>	<i>Key Informants (Family heads, Man Chief, Employees of UNDP/ USAID)</i>
<i>Number of Interviews</i>	9	10	3	4	5	5
<i>Methods</i>	Voluntary Response Sampling: We interviewed those who responded to radio, information center, and driving announcements.	Convenience and Purposive Sampling: My co-researcher walked me to the clan houses in Himan to inquire about their clan names and who their Queens were. Some could help and some could not.	Purposive Sampling: My co-researcher contacted the Queens prior to my arrival to request interviews. There were fewer Queens, as it was a small village.	Purposive and Snowball Sampling: We began with the Wa Paramount Queen, and she suggested other Queens to interview.	Purposive and Snowball Sampling: My key informant at UNDP had expert knowledge of national groups of Queens and introduced me to the Convenor of Queens. She was the first interviewed, and she recommend others to interview.	Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling: Family heads were spontaneously found and interviewed. The man Chief, and employees of UNDP and USAID were purposively interviewed.

For this research, I used a mixture of non-probability sampling methods: convenience sampling, voluntary response sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. While I think that the sampling methods may have imposed a sampling bias on intergenerational interviews in Himan, I did not feel that the sampling methods used to interview women traditional leaders significantly biased the research.

As Queens and women Chiefs are an under-researched population in Ghana, I found non-probability sampling appropriate to build an initial understanding of women traditional leaders in contemporary Ghana. For a more detailed explanation of sampling methods used, see Table 1.

### **Women Traditional Leader Interviews**

I originally planned to conduct only three-to-five key informant interviews with the Queens and Chiefs of Himan and Kabile, women who work with USAID and the UNFDP in Ghana, and with available members of the *National Council of Women Traditional Leaders* (NCWTL) in Accra and the *Queenmothers Association* in Wa. In the field, I realized that there was potential to focus on these interviews rather than the intergenerational interviews when my co-researcher and I learned from the Chief that there were 24 Queens in Himan. As we continued to interview Queens, however, we learned that there were not 24 acting Queens. Perhaps there were 24 clans who should have Queens, but not all clans had chosen and enstooled<sup>18</sup> one. The final number we arrived at was 18 acting Queens, three of whom were unavailable to be interviewed: two had passed and one was sick. That left us with 15 possible Queens to interview. In the end, with some of them not residing in the area, we were able to conduct and record ten Queen interviews in Himan. The Chief originally planned to identify Queens for my

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<sup>18</sup> Enstooling is the process of making a Queen or Chief. Throughout this thesis, I refer to the process as either “enstooling” (which is the process used primarily in the South), or “enskinning” (which is the process used primarily in the North).

co-researcher and I to interview, but after our initial meeting, we were unable to reach him. Thus, we were fortunate that my co-researcher was knowledgeable about the many clan homes in Himan, so we were able to seek them out on our own.

With the collaboration of two other co-researchers, I was further able to conduct four women traditional leader interviews in Accra, three in Kabile (Bono Region), and five in Upper West Region. While I may draw occasionally from common threads found amongst intergenerational interviews in Himan, I focus this thesis on analysis of the 22 women traditional leader interviews we conducted across seven regions in Ghana. These included 21 Queens and one woman Chief.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

I conducted relevant key informant interviews with two family heads/ lineage heads, one man Chief, one UNFPA employee, and one USAID employee. These contribute to a greater understanding of societal and institutional perceptions of women traditional leaders in Ghana. Some of these interviews were planned and prioritized, and some arose somewhat spontaneously and serendipitously. I analyze these interviews in more-or-less depth depending on their relevance to my main research questions.

### **Participant Observation**

Participant observation in women's association meetings and within the communities of research enhanced my understanding of women traditional leaders'

priorities, self-imposed structures and institutions, and their impact on women and girls throughout Ghana. Throughout this thesis, I also draw largely from the participant observation I undertook as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Upper West of Ghana from 2014-2016. Utilizing memories from this experience, I can not only analyze, but also feel the activities of daily life that many women partake in throughout Ghana: bucket-bathing, fetching water, hand-washing clothes, farming, cooking local delicious and time-consuming dishes, etc. I also draw from my experience with the Ghana Education System, as I was a Junior High School teacher during those two years, when I offer my thoughts on topics concerning education.

I had the opportunity and honor to work with my co-researcher in Himan to collect the information of each Queen we spoke to and assist them in organizing their first Queen's association meeting. I participated in this meeting and recorded it for them to disseminate how they wish. My co-researcher has plans for helping them develop their Facebook page. This was a project born out of an interview question that garnered a unanimous response from each of the Queens. After learning that there was no Himan Queen's association, we began to ask each of the Queens if they would like to have an association and whether they would want a leadership role within it. All thought an association would be a good thing, and some expressed an interest in helping to lead the effort. My co-researcher collected this information and we sent out an invitation to the meeting on my last day in Himan. Ten Queens agreed to attend and during the



meeting, a president was chosen. They chose to call themselves “Himan Queenmother Divisional Association” and planned on holding an inaugurating group in December 2021.



**Figure 1.** First Meeting of the “Himan Queenmother Divisional Association.”

*\* Still frame from a video taken by author in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. The quality of the still frame was intentionally left blurred, in lieu of obtaining permissions from each Queen participant. The first meeting of the “Himan Queenmother Divisional Association” was held on July 4, 2021. The ten Queens that my co-researcher and I interviewed unanimously agreed that they would love to establish a Queens’ association. On my last day in Himan, there was a funeral in town. This was an ideal time to hold the meeting, since those Queens who lived and worked outside of Himan would all be present. Eight of the ten Queens we spoke to came for the meeting. Seven are pictured here, as one arrived later. The meeting was held in a local church, with the main, busy street outside. My co-researcher, Gina Odoom, and I sit to the right of the photo with our backs to the camera, wearing matching dresses that her seamstress friend gifted us. This was a herstoric day for the Queens of Himan!*

This meeting was conducted fully in Twi, so my understanding was limited to what my co-researcher was able to quickly convey from time to time. Beyond the logistics of the association, I know that a common issue of Queen interest in Himan was discussed: teenage pregnancy and how to address it.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the meeting, I felt

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<sup>19</sup> From my experience in the Ghana Education System, I’ve found that teenage pregnancy is often addressed in schools as a girls’ issue. Some Queens are pushing back on this issue, calling for attention to

immensely proud and content to have found this group of willing women traditional leaders and to have the privilege to play a small part in helping to facilitate their first meeting and the initiation of their association. Yet I really can take no credit for their wisdom, drive, and my co-researcher's wide base of social networking in Himan. I was truly an admiring spectator in those moments.

I also had the wonderful opportunity to participate in a Wa Queenmothers'<sup>20</sup> Association Meeting, while in the Upper West. It was held at the *Wa Naa Palace*,<sup>21</sup> and there was a total of 27 Queens present. At this point during my stay in Wa, I had interviewed four Queens, who were all present. At the front of the room sat six Queens at the "high table." I believe four of these were paramount Queens. The rest of the Queens sat in chairs lined up in rows, facing them. As is common in the North of Ghana, many of these Queens were Muslims. I learned that even Christian Queens and women in the area often dress according to Muslim codes because it is considered the common style in Wa. Therefore, all Queens in this meeting were dressed in headwraps

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boys and men as well as the girls. While back in the U.S. after my fieldwork and while writing this thesis, the Queen who I interviewed from Volta Region, Mama Atrato II, sent me an article on WhatsApp about a sensitization training she had done on teenage pregnancy at one of her community's schools. In it, she called for more punitive measures for those who impregnated teenage girls. I was happy to hear this and asked how it was received. She replied, "The male teachers squeezed their faces."

See article: <https://www.gna.org.gh/1.21218003>

<sup>20</sup> I use "Queenmothers" here because it is the main term I heard Queens use to refer to themselves in the Upper West. It was not until after my time in the Upper West that I would learn about the colonial origins of the term "Queenmother."

<sup>21</sup> *Naa* is the Waale term for "Chief," and *Pognaa* is the Waale term for "Woman Chief," but it is often used interchangeably to mean "Queen." The *Wa Chief's Palace* is utilized for Chiefs' meetings and Queens' meetings.

or scarves, and kente/ smock (traditional hand-woven cloth) or African wear. This meeting was different than the one in Himan for two main reasons: (1) they were an already-established association, and this was far from their first meeting and (2) it was a larger meeting with various levels of Queenship represented for a regional capital (municipality) association, as opposed to Himan's smaller meeting with only clan Queens represented for a divisional association.

Upon entering the Wa Naa Palace with my co-researcher, we were given the opportunity to introduce ourselves and the nature of our research. A woman sitting to my right translated. I learned that she was an educated woman chosen by the kings<sup>22</sup> for helping in Queenmothers' meetings, and not a Queen herself. As we introduced ourselves, and I described the research we were doing and the hopes we had to gain insight on the impacts of Queens in each of Ghana's key cultural groups to help make the case for Queens' inclusion in the National House of Chiefs, I observed a solemn tone in the room. The Queens clapped after each person spoke- that rhythmic clap that I could still feel from my days as a junior high school teacher: *clap – clap - clap, clap, clap - Clap*. After one Queen briefly introduced each of the others in the room, we were asked to conclude our meeting, as there was another delicate matter to be discussed which we should not be there for.

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<sup>22</sup> "Kings" is often used interchangeably with "Chiefs," when describing *Naa* in Waale.



**Figure 2.** Wa Queenmothers' Association Meeting.

*\* Photos taken by Queens' assistant and author in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Written consent for their usage was obtained using the Photograph Release Form in Appendix C: Copyright Permissions.*

*This Wa Queenmothers' Association Meeting was held at Wa Naa Palace on August 7, 2021. **Top:** Myself and my co-researcher, Kunta Paula, with the Queens who attended the meeting, on the steps to the Wa Naa Palace (Wa Chief's Palace). Most Queens in Wa are Muslims and wear a scarf. Those who are not Muslim may also wear scarves, as it is part of their local traditional dress. **Bottom Left:** Wa Naa Palace.*

***Bottom Right:** Balawa Pognaa (Amina Yakubu), is a newly enskinned Divisional Queen of Balawa. She is also in part-time teacher training and owns a provisional shop in Wa. We first met her in her shop, where we conducted an interview with her. Here, she is pictured presenting Paula and me with a gift of traditional hand-woven smock material from the Wa Queenmothers' Association. After the meeting, the Queens assembled inside with various swaths of cloth to choose one to present to us, as a "thank-you" for our work. Ours has pink, blue, and green stripes, with some gold sparkly thread.*

Before finally leaving, all the Queens joined my co-researcher and me on the steps outside of the palace for a group photo. Several photos were snapped, and the Queens profusely thanked us for our work. They slowly filtered back into the palace and the few who knew us from previous interviews remained to say their goodbyes.

Just as we were about to go, we were told to wait briefly. The Queens were deliberating between several different types of kente. Settling on one with pink, blue, and green stripes, and gold sparkles throughout, they handed it to one of our previous interviewees. She presented it to my co-researcher and me as a formal “thank you.” Before leaving, we presented the Wa Paramount Queen with a gift for the association and said, “*Bareka yaga zaa!*”<sup>23</sup> That concluded our formal participation in a Wa Queenmothers’ Association Meeting.

### **Data Analysis**

I use thematic coding and qualitative analysis of interviews to focus on identifying key themes in the data to answer the main research questions. Using grounded theory, analysis was an ongoing process throughout data collection. I reviewed, replayed in my head, and discussed with my co-researchers what we learned from each day’s interviews. This review and discussion led us to revise questions as we continued with new interviews, cutting out those that did not garner much response, and focusing on those that generated interest and discussion. We did our best to allow themes of interest to interviewees to guide the focus of interviews but recognize that themes of personal interest to us also got more attention. This was inevitable since the interviews were done in a conversational tone.

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<sup>23</sup> This means “Thank you so much!” in both Waale and Dagaare: the main languages of Wa and the Upper West.

My key informant interview with Dr. Esi Awotwi, who has worked with United Nations Population Fund and various Queens in Ghana for more than twenty years marked a turning point in my analysis and subsequent theoretical focus. I learned that she had assisted Queens around 2011 in seeking entry to the National House of Chiefs. She explained that this never happened and that the work needed to make this change was largely on hold. She believes that what is needed to help Queens gain entry to the National House of Chiefs is more research on the impact of Queens in each of Ghana's key cultural groups. This offered a practical application for the research I was doing that was both exciting and valuable. Thus, my focus shifted from a general concept of women's empowerment in Ghana and the ways in which Queens' roles changed over time, to Queens' current impact, particularly on women and girls. My original focus offers supporting details to this new focus, but it became less central in further interviews.

Throughout my time in Ghana, I periodically transcribed recorded interviews.<sup>24</sup> Upon returning to the U.S., I determined to use NVivo to analyze these transcripts. There was a learning curve for me, as I had never used the software before, but I enjoyed figuring out the basics and how to make some useful visual representations. I mainly used the software to code the transcripts for the common themes I identified throughout my time in Ghana. These are outlined in the following chapter. As I

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<sup>24</sup> I utilized [www.otter.ai](http://www.otter.ai) to initially convert recorded interviews to written transcripts.

analyzed the data, I reached out to co-researchers, interview participants, and friends in Ghana for answers to any questions that arose after the fact. For those residing in Ghana, we continued communication through WhatsApp and email.

### **Limitations**

There are various limitations that affected this research project. First, the global COVID-19 pandemic placed restrictions on my intended participant observation. Much of Ghanaian culture, as I experienced it as a Peace Corps Volunteer, takes place in large group settings such as church gatherings, funerals, weddings, and naming ceremonies. Due to my ethic of doing no harm (*ahimsā*), I actively avoided most large group gatherings. I also found that the use of a mask sometimes obscured communication, which is often aided by facial expressions. Furthermore, I had planned to participate in several Queens' Association meetings. I learned that many meetings had been put on hold due to the pandemic, so there was less opportunity for me to participate in them. Nonetheless, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in two Queens' Association meetings.

Another limitation regarded translation. Most interviews, except for a few in Himan and Wa, and those in Accra, required a translator. I was fortunate to find wonderful, passionate, multi-lingual Ghanaian women co-researchers to translate. However, the need to translate meant that answers were always filtered through two perspectives: my co-researcher's and my own. Not all concepts or words described in

Twɔ (Western Region interviews), Nafana or Fantra (Bono Region interviews), or Waale (Wa interviews), can be easily translated to English. This means that there may be translator bias, in addition to my own researcher bias, in some of the recorded answers and English words used. Nonetheless, I had friendly relationships with my co-researchers and felt comfortable having open discussions about topics and words that seemed to need more consideration than others.

The final limitation that I describe may not, in fact, be a limitation at all. Upon my arrival in Himan, the first community of research, I quickly realized that integration into Ghanaian culture would be different than it was for me as a Peace Corps Volunteer. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, I was fully immersed and my life and work were all in Ghana. I was a part of my community and a part of the Ghana Education System (GES). This time, I returned as a U.S. student researcher, maintaining a U.S.-based virtual job as the University of South Florida Peace Corps Recruiter. I could not, therefore, fully immerse myself in the cultural concept of time, and I had to forgo some activities that I felt important to participate in (such as spending hours cooking). I was constrained by U.S. timelines and deadlines for work and school. This presented a cultural clash that was obvious to me in working with co-researchers and interviewees. I felt limited in that I could not integrate deeply enough into the culture, like I could when I worked in the Ghana Education System, because this time I was integrating as a transnational professional.





**Figure 3.** Three Co-Researchers/ Translators.

*\* Photos taken of co-researchers and the author in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Written consent for their usage was obtained using the Photograph Release Form in Appendix C: Copyright Permissions.*

*My co-researchers and I gave our phones to radio station employees, non-profit team members, and personal friends to take the photos. **Left:** Me with co-researcher, Georgina (Gina) Odoom, making a radio announcement calling for participants on Energy 93.3 fm, in Prestea, Ghana. Gina is the founder of Ginodoom Waste Management Services in Bogoso and the founder and CEO of Grow Advancement Ghana Foundation, a non-profit organization focused primarily on Galamsey (illegal mining) communities. She translated interviews conducted in Wassa Twi. **Center:** Me with co-researcher, Benewaa Sophia. Sophia was rendering her national service as a teacher at Methodist Primary School in Sampa and is a team member for “Looking for Leaders,” a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer-initiated non-profit, funding youth leadership and gender equity workshops and camps in Ghana. I met Sophia through this non-profit that was founded by my RPCV friend, Alfredo Gonzales, and for which I am the Vice President of Operations and the Gender Equity Specialist. I was fortunate that the trimester only had two weeks left, and Sophia was able to take time off without putting her school at a disadvantage to help with this project. Sophia translated interviews conducted in Nafaanra. **Right:** Me with co-researcher, Kunta Paula, outside of a salon in Wa, where my little sister (Peace Corps host family) is learning to be a hairdresser. She did a fabulous job on both of us! Paula is a nurse but was waiting to be posted. So, I was fortunate that she was also able to devote her time during two weeks to this project. Paula has since been posted at a government clinic in Busah. Paula translated interviews conducted in Waale.*

At first, I thought this was a limitation on my participant observation: that I could not truly participate in Ghanaian culture. As time went on, however, I recognized this thinking as an essentialization of Ghanaian culture and I began to think of my hybrid lifestyle as less of a limitation and more of a reality for independent researchers with mounting student debt. I began to recognize my version of participant observation as a transnational integration of responsibilities: my responsibilities to my co-

researchers and participants, my responsibilities to my income-generating job, and my responsibilities to my academic pursuits. This experience spurred deep conversations with my co-researchers, comparing and contrasting the responsibilities we had to our respective jobs and societies. My schedule, and my co-researchers', had to fluctuate between spontaneous interview opportunities and my hyper-punctual virtual work and academic events and deadlines.

I was doing what was necessary to survive, while doing my best to pursue my dreams and do no harm. I think that doing what is necessary to survive was also a form of participation in Ghanaian culture, even if what I did to survive (sitting inside on my computer) was different from what my participants were doing to survive (a plethora of many different things: farming, teaching, hosting radio shows, carpentry, running NGOs, etc.). In this thesis, I attempt to write as honestly as possible from my unique perspective as an outsider researcher with some insider life experience in Ghana, while also recognizing that my limitations might be some of my greatest assets in disguise. I was fortunate to have already integrated deeply into one Ghanaian culture as a Peace Corps Volunteer. This time, I had the opportunity to be specific and intentional about the aspects of Ghanaian culture I sought to learn from.

## Chapter Four:

### Results and Analysis

Through ongoing analysis of my data, my initial research questions became more focused on *Ghanaian* Queens in general, rather than just on *Akan* Queens and women. I identified three main themes that became the focus of my thesis: (1) *Queens' political, social, and economic power*, (2) *Queens' roles and their effect on women and girls*, and (3) *Synergies between Queens and UN/USAID*. My decision to focus on these themes was largely driven by the practical applications they might have. During a key informant interview, an employee of UNFPA, who worked with Ghana's Queens around 2011 to help them gain entry to the National House of Chiefs, suggested that what is necessary to continue this important (though largely abandoned) work is more research on the impact of Queens in each of Ghana's "key cultural groups."<sup>25</sup> This information could then be used to write policy briefs and support initiatives, which might help Ghana's Queens have an impact at the national level. It is with this in mind that I decided to

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<sup>25</sup> During my interview with UNFPA employee, Dr. Awotwi, she used this particular wording to describe the scope of further research needed. I inquired further about what this meant. Key cultural groups do not necessarily correspond with the North or the South, or specific regions of Ghana. I believe that outlining the key cultural groups of Ghana for research on the impact of Ghana's Queens may require further research. As Dr. Awotwi discusses in her interview, policy briefs must be targeted towards specific political leaders. For whom a policy brief is written for may determine the key cultural groups of focus. While it is not an exact science, however, I think that researching the impact of Queens in the North and South; each region; and different ethnic groups will be a good start to document the contemporary impact of Queens across Ghana.

focus on the impact of the Queens I interviewed on their communities. I hope that this research might contribute to future research on the impact of Queens in each of Ghana's key cultural groups.

## The Setting

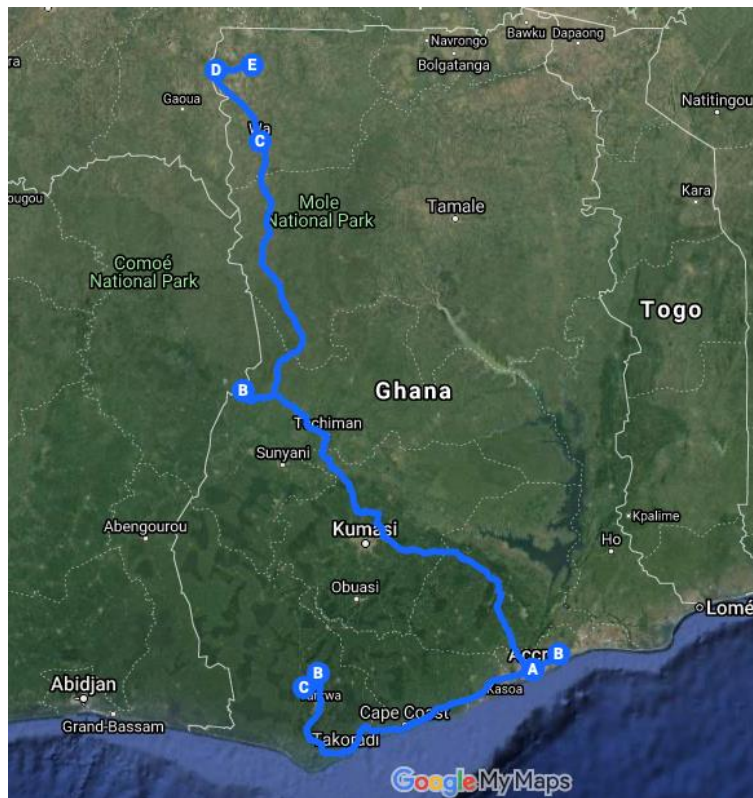


**Figure 4.** Map of Ghana's Sixteen Regions.

Reprinted from "Karte der politischen Gliederung von Ghana" by Karte: NordNordWest, 2018, retrieved <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=76321229>, CC BY-SA 3.0 de Reprinted with permission.

*\*I interviewed women traditional leaders from seven of Ghana's sixteen regions: Western, Bono, Upper West, Ashanti, Volta, Central, and Greater Accra.*

Accomplishing this research required me to spend time in several different locations throughout Ghana. Some could be classified as villages, some as towns, and some as cities. The location for these interviews ranged from rural to urban, and WTLs came from seven of Ghana's sixteen regions. Thus, the settings for this research were extremely diverse.



**Figure 5.** Satellite Overview of Fieldwork Travels and Sites. Screenshots from Google Maps. © Google. Used with Permissions.

*\*I flew from John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York to Kotoko International Airport in Accra (Point A). Points A to C to the west show my travels to Himan, Western Region. The route going north shows my travels to the town of Kabile in Bono Region (Point B) and the regional capital Wa (Point C), Lawra District (Point D), and the town of Ullo in Jirapa District (Point E). The route to the east shows my travel to Tema (Point B) to interview the Woman Chief.*

Ten clan Queen interviews come from the town of Himan, in Prestea District (Figure 5 and Figure 6). Within the town, there were many houses of different sizes, and the road leading to the houses had many shops selling provisions such as prepared foods, household necessities, and batteries (which I needed a lot of to keep my audio recorder running). There were several churches throughout the community, too (a primarily Christian community). Set in the southern hilly and humid part of Ghana, Himan was lush and many people in the town owned farms, both for selling and subsistence.



**Figure 6.** View of Himan from Path to Information Center.

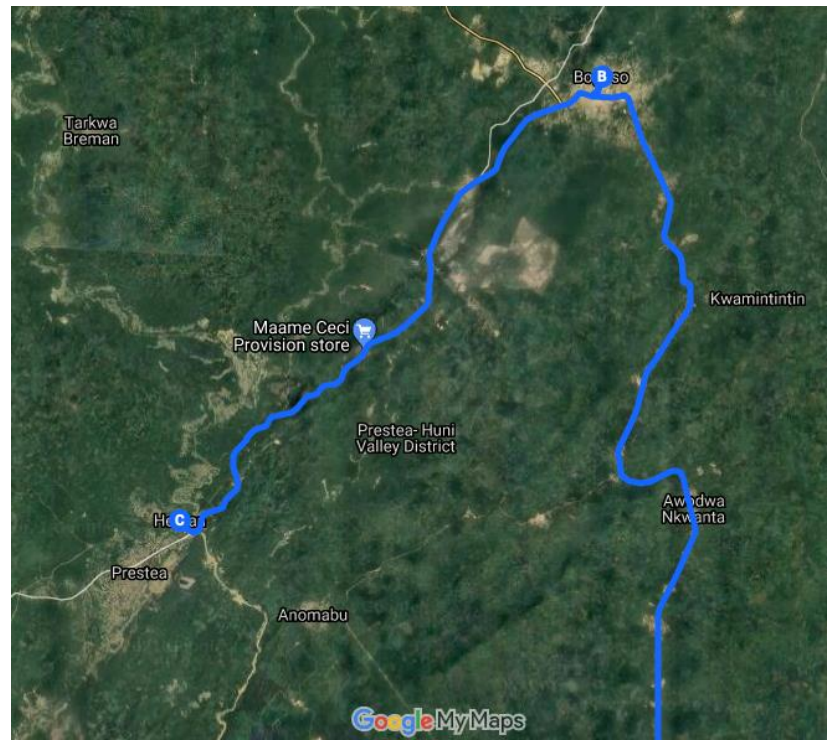
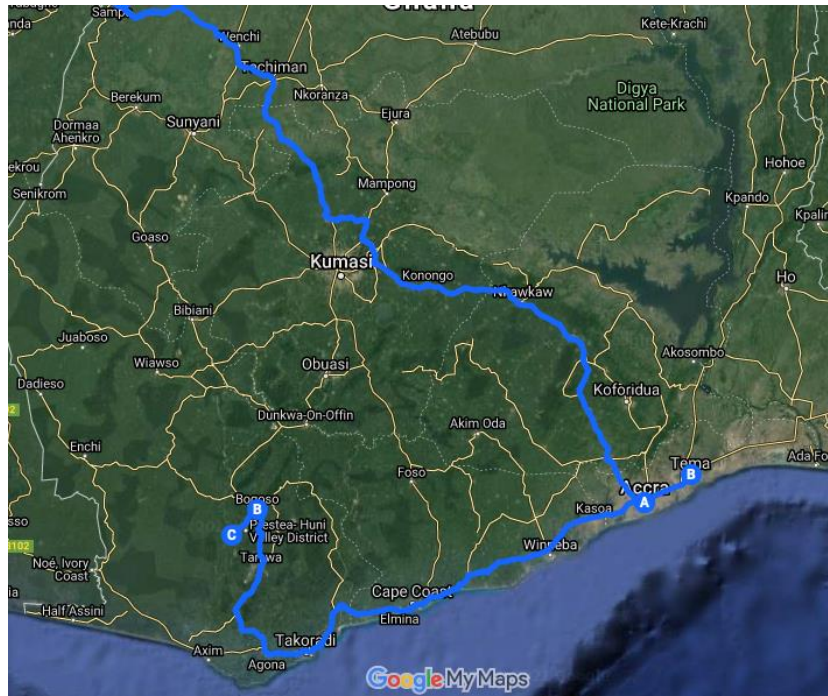
*\* Photo taken by the author in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study.*



**Figure 7.** The Road from Himan to Bogoso and the Town of Bogoso.

*\* Photos taken by the author in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Interestingly, the photo taken in Bogoso shows a campaign sign for Ghanaian woman politician, Honorable Barbara Oteng Gyasi, the Member of Parliament for Prestea-Huni Valley constituency from 2016-2020. As confirmed by my co-researcher, women in the area have been actively supporting the campaigns of more women politicians.*

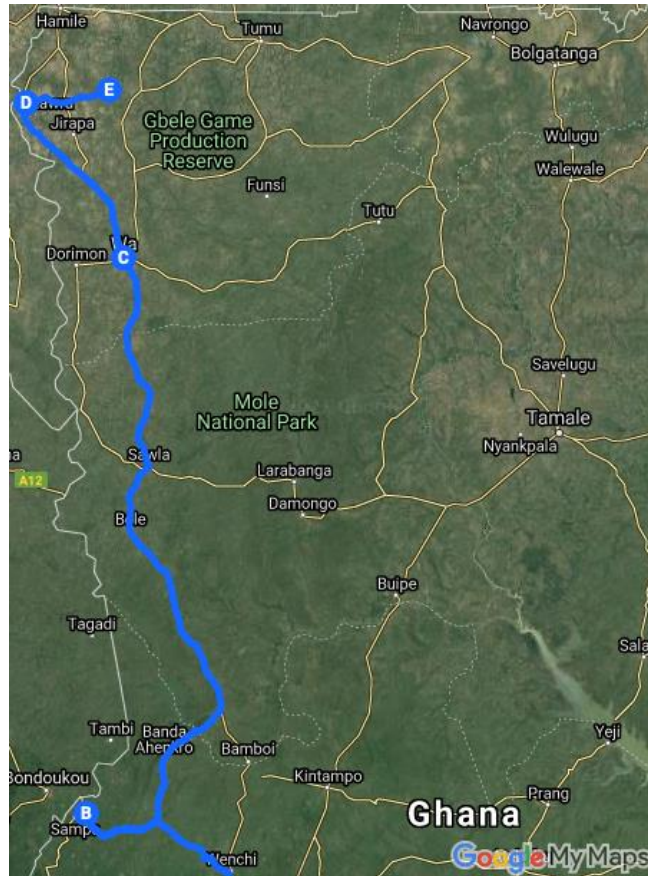
The nearest larger town to Himan is Bogoso. The road from Himan to Bogoso is a typical rural southern Ghana dirt road, except for short, paved stretches, full of stomach-dropping potholes filed with mud from *yesterday's downpour* and surrounded by forested and farmed hills full of palms, plantains, and ivy and ferns creeping up thin pawpaw (papaya) trunks (Figure 7). We passed the occasional town with earth and cinderblock houses, unfinished wooden structures, and kids weaving long baskets under full-up clotheslines. I wrote this description in my fieldnotes while traveling via taxi from Himan to Bogoso to use the ATM and get a new SIM card for my phone. I timed my scribbles with the slow, flat spots, and caught up with my thoughts on the pavement. A woman slept through the bumps on my right and woke up to enjoy the smooth paved portion. Only taxis take that route, plus the occasional truck or moto.



**Figure 8.** Satellite Maps of Southern Fieldwork Travel and Prestea District. Screenshots from Google Maps. © Google. Used with Permissions.

*\*From Accra (Point A), I travelled along the coast towards Takoradi, then up to Bogoso (Point B), where I met my co-researcher. From Bogoso, we then travelled together to the town of Himan (Point C), in Prestea District.*



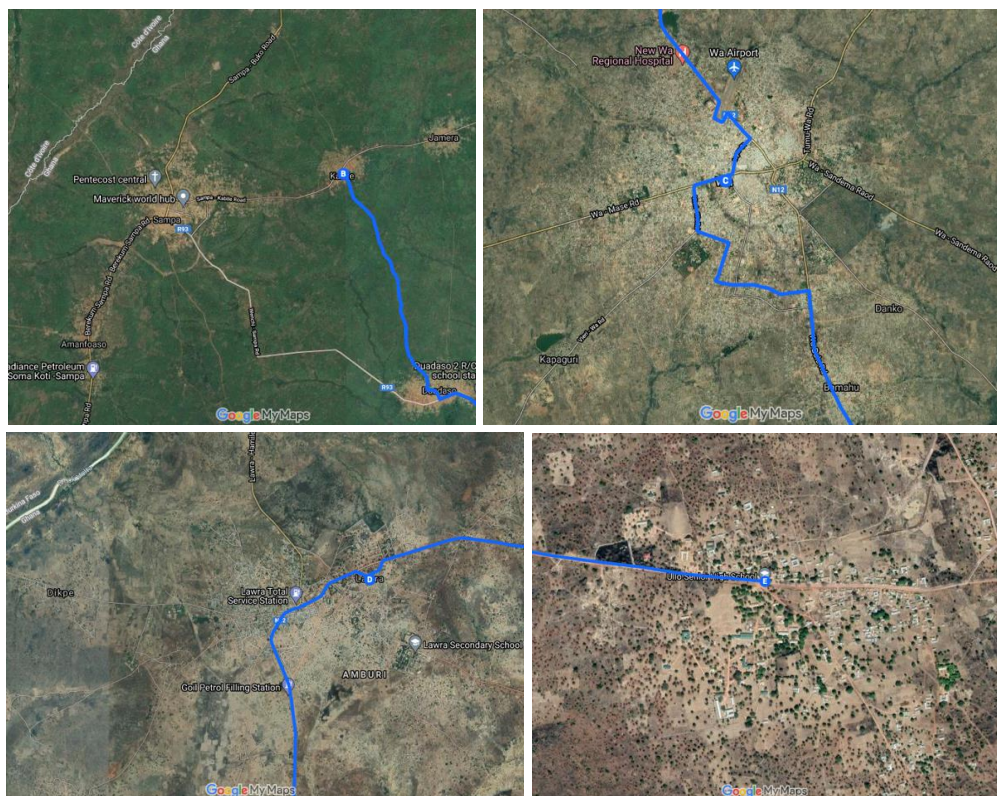


**Figure 9.** Satellite Map of Northern Fieldwork Travel.  
Screenshots from Google Maps. © Google. Used with Permissions.

*\*I interviewed Queens in Kabile, Bono Region (Point B). After, I travelled north towards Wa (Point C), then up to Lawra (Point D) and east to Ulllo (Point E). I interviewed Queens in Wa and Ulllo, utilizing Lawra as a base for my travel to Ulllo. My experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Upper West was foundational to my ability to conduct these interviews, as I could stay with a friend in Wa, had many friends with helpful networks, and knew Lawra well as my market town from 2014-2016.*

Throughout my research period, I often utilized travel like this as an opportunity to reflect on my experiences and collect my thoughts. Travelling north to Bono Region, and even farther north to the Upper West, I watched the familiar landscape change from a forest climate to a savanna climate, though it was not as dramatic a change as I remember from much of my Peace Corps experience, as I happened to be in Ghana during the North’s rainy season (Figure 9 and Figure 10). The

cultural shift from South to North was more evident than the climate shift. I knew I was in the Upper West as we drove through a town and I heard the call to prayer and saw a man outside his shop, leading six boys in their daily prayers. While there are Muslims in the South and Christians in the North, it is well-known that Muslims are more numerous in the North and Christians more numerous in the South. Interestingly, I recall seeing more signs for girls' empowerment through education as we drove north towards the Upper West. I am not sure if this reflects a greater focus on such issues in the North or if it was just my personal experience on a single road.



**Figure 10.** Satellite Maps of Northern Fieldwork Sites. Screenshots from Google Maps. © Google. Used with Permissions.

*\*Top Left: Kabile Village (Bono Region) shown to the east of the larger town of Sampa, near the Côte d'Ivoire border; Top Right: Wa Regional Capitol (Upper West Region) shown at the center; Bottom Left: Lawra Town (Upper West Region) shown to the east of the Burkina Faso border and Black Volta River; Bottom Right: Ullo Village in Jirapa District (Upper West Region) with a detailed view of its arid rural land.*

While one sees much of the rural landscape of Ghana while traveling by bus and taxi, like anywhere there is a gradient between rural and urban (Figure 11). During this trip, Accra, Takoradi, and Wa were the only major cities I spent much time in out of recognition that the cities were known hotspots for COVID-19, and I should thus avoid them. They had changed since my last time in Ghana, during 2016. Mostly, the cities have adopted global methods of travel and convenience such as Uber and Bolt (another rideshare service), and food delivery. While they are not as lush as the rural parts of Ghana, the influence of agriculture as Ghana's main economic sector can still be felt. Walking down the streets of Accra, it is easy to get a fresh coconut from a man opening them with a cutlass (like a machete), or a skinned orange with an opening at the top to drink it, or a fresh mango, or fried yam, etc. In Wa, I might buy a salted hard-boiled egg with pepe (fresh hot pepper and onion) from a tray that a woman carried on her head.

I offer this anecdote as a brief overview of the diverse setting of this research project. I met some WTLs in their homes, some in their offices, and some in convenient public locations like the Accra mall; some in villages, some in towns, and some in cities; some in the humid South and some in the arid North. I collected data through a complex set of comings and goings between many different places, environments, and cultures within Ghana.



**Figure 11.** Entering Wa from the South: Rural to Urban Gradient.

*\* Photos taken by the author in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Seeing people on motos (as motorcycles are commonly referred to in Ghana) becomes more common as you travel north in the country. It is common throughout Ghana to see new cinderblock buildings under construction, especially in rural and suburban areas. As I got closer to the heart of Wa, I transferred from a bus to a “Cambu” (a nickname given to these three-wheeled open-air taxis as a shortened form of “John Mahama Can Do,” referencing the government’s importation of motorized tricycles from India to the northern parts of Ghana during President John Mahama’s term of office, 2012-2016). Though Wa is the smaller and less developed of the three cities I spent time in, it is known as one of the cleanest cities in Ghana. They have a community cleaning day every week, and the absence of rubbish in the streets is noticeable.*

## **Demographics for Women Traditional Leaders**

Working with translators, when necessary, I conducted 22 in-depth semi-structured interviews with women traditional leaders from seven of Ghana’s sixteen regions, 22.7% from the North and 77.3% from the South, to gain understanding of their self-defined power. These included 21 Queens and one woman Chief. Ten were from the Akan community of Himan (Western Region), three from Bono Region, five from

Upper West Region, one from Ashanti Region, one from Volta Region, one from Central Region, and one from Greater Accra Region.

While I initially focused on Akan matriarchy, I planned key informant interviews in the Upper West, where I believed the institution of matriarchy and Queenship to be new- not traditional. It is widely disseminated in conversation and literature that the South of Ghana is matriarchal, while the North of Ghana is patriarchal. The five Queen interviews I conducted in the Upper West, however, proved the *herstory* to be more complicated than a division between North and South. According to those Queens in the capital of the Upper West, Wa, their ancestors migrated from even farther north and Queens were always a part of their traditional governance. I learned that there are several areas throughout the North of Ghana that traditionally had Queens, and even some women Chiefs. Validation of the traditional matriarchies of the North is a crucial endeavor towards understanding the impact that Queens have on their communities in each of Ghana's key cultural groups.

**Table 2.** Demographics for Women Traditional Leaders

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>North or South</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Traditional/Community Position</i>	<i>Jurisdiction Population</i>	<i>Other Occupation</i>
<i>Queen 1</i>	South	Ashanti Region	Ashanti	Ashanti Twi	Christianity	N/A	Development Queen	>130,000	Filmmaker, NGO Founder, Teacher, Social Worker
<i>Queen 2</i>	South	Volta Region	Wedome	Ewe	Christianity	72	Divisional Queen	4,000	Landlady, [Police Superintendent / Intelligence-retired]
<i>Woman Chief</i>	South	Central Region	Fante	Fantse	Christianity	61	Divisional Chief	>3,000	ADR Practitioner, Landlady, [Trader-stopped]
<i>Queen 3</i>	South	Greater Accra Region	Ada	Dangbe	Christianity	41	Paramount Queen	1,500,000	Businesswoman: Fish and Poultry
<i>Queen 4</i>	South	Western Region	Wasa	Wassa	Christianity	70	Clan Queen	500	Trader: Agricultural, Farmer: Cocoa
<i>Queen 5</i>	South	Western Region	Wasa	Wassa	Christianity	50	Clan Queen	500	Vendor: Food
<i>Queen 6</i>	South	Western Region	Wasa	Wassa	Christianity	50	Clan Queen	50-100	Farmer: subsistence and market
<i>Queen 7</i>	South	Western Region	Wasa	Wassa	Christianity	68	Clan Queen	400	Trader: Household Items
<i>Queen 8</i>	South	Western Region	Wasa	Wassa	Christianity	36	Clan Queen	>500	Trader: Fabrics
<i>Queen 9</i>	South	Western Region	Wasa	Wassa	Christianity	37	Clan Queen	300	Trader: Soft Drinks
<i>Queen 10</i>	South	Western Region	Wasa	Wassa	Christianity	N/A	Clan Queen	>200	[Trader: Hawker-stopped]
<i>Queen 11</i>	South	Western Region	Wasa	Wassa	Christianity	78	Clan Queen	>300	Farmer: Cocoa, Traditional Herbalist, [Trader: Market-stopped]
<i>Queen 12</i>	South	Western Region	Wasa	Wassa	Christianity	26	Clan Queen	1000	Shop Owner: drinks
<i>Queen 13</i>	South	Western Region	Wasa	Wassa	Christianity	65	Clan Queen	>400	Proprietress: Private School, [Teacher- on pension]
<i>Queen 14</i>	South	Bono Region	Nafana	Nafaanra	Christianity	N/A	Clan Queen	>100	Trader: Petrol, [Farmer: cashew and coco-stopped]
<i>Queen 15</i>	South	Bono Region	Nafana	Nafaanra	Christianity	66	Clan Queen	"Many"	Farmer: Cashew
<i>Queen 16/ Obaapanyin</i>	South	Bono Region	Nafana	Nafaanra	Christianity	85	Development Queen/ Obaapanyin	100	Farmer: Cashew

**Table 2 (Continued)**

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>North or South</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Traditional/Community Position</i>	<i>Jurisdiction Population</i>	<i>Other Occupation</i>
<i>Queen 17</i>	North	Upper West Region	Waala	Waale	Islam	75	Paramount Queen	>100,000	[Trader: Preparing Cosis-stopped]
<i>Queen 18</i>	North	Upper West Region	Waala	Waale	Islam	37	District Queen	>500	Teacher: NAPCO, Shop Owner: provisions
<i>Queen 19</i>	North	Upper West Region	Waala	Waale	Islam	51	Paramount Queen	>1000	Shop Owner: provisions, [Caterer-stopped]
<i>Queen 20</i>	North	Upper West Region	Waala	Waale	Islam	28	Sub-District Queen	500	Nurse
<i>Queen 21</i>	North	Upper West Region	Dagao	Dagaare	Islam	69	Paramount Queen	>80,000	Farmer: maize, groundnuts, beans, teak, cashew; [JHS Headmistress and Teacher-retired]

*\*These data were collected by the author in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Occupations in brackets indicate that the WTL no longer held that occupation at the time of the study.*

Also important for understanding the breadth of impact that Queens have across Ghana are the ethnicities represented by Queens. Ethnicities in Ghana are often traced by the language spoken, so I have also included each WTL's language in Table 2. While obtaining the perspectives of Queens from different ethnic groups was not part of my initial focus or my sampling method, I was able to interview WTLs (including the woman Chief) representing eight different ethnicities in Ghana: Wasa, Nafana, Waala, Dagao, Ashanti, Wedome, Fante, and Ada. Though the particularities of Queenship vary between ethnicities represented, a common theme amongst Queens of all these ethnic groups was a focus on women's empowerment, broadly defined. As Queens

organize into many associations at all levels- village, municipality, regional, and national- they continue to define their common goals. They simultaneously maintain cultural traditions particular to their ethnicities, such as language, royal dress, and observance of traditional ceremonies.

One demographic that was notably split between my interviewees from the North and South of Ghana was religion. All WTLs from the South identified as Christian (77.3% of all interviews), while all WTLs from the North identified as Muslim (22.7% of all interviews). While this does reflect the religion trends of the North and the South, it would be misleading to describe all southern WTLs as Christian and all northern WTLs as Muslim. Most of my interviewees in the North came from Wa, which has a majority Muslim population. Yet, Muslims live interspersed with Christians in Wa and throughout Ghana, and I confirmed with some of my interviewees that there were some Christian Queens in Wa, as well. Furthermore, Christians and Muslims live in harmony throughout Ghana, and a Queen with one religion may be enstooled or enskinned in a community with the other religion. As supported by Queen 18, who is a Muslim enskinned in a Christian community, religion does not greatly affect the roles of Queens nor how respected they are, in Ghana. I found this to be true with regards to Queens' responses throughout all interviews.



I interviewed WTLs ranging from 26 years of age to 85 years of age, though 73.7% were over the age of 40.<sup>26</sup> This is not surprising, as the age hierarchy in Ghana recognizes the elderly as wise and deserving of great respect. Many of the interviewed WTLs, therefore, were initially enstooled or enskinned<sup>27</sup> when they were middle-aged or older. The enstooling or enskinning of younger WTLs seems to be a more recent development, often as an effort to include more “educated”<sup>28</sup> women in the traditional government system (Amoah 2014). While it is vital for Ghana’s WTLs to include those who read and write in English (since English is the official language of Ghana and is useful for collaboration between tribes that speak different languages, at the national level), it is equally vital to maintain WTLs whose primary language is the local language and who have not migrated to the cities for schooling, as they hold valuable traditional and cultural knowledge that they often have to teach to the younger WTLs. I believe it will be important to watch this shift in WTL enstoolment/ enskinning, to see if there is a trend towards enstooling/ enskinning “educated” women that will eventually phase out those who are primarily cultural knowledge-bearers. In my interviews with these twenty-two women, I got a sense of genuine respect for both categories of WTLs.

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<sup>26</sup> This percentage is based on 19 responses, as 3 WTLs did not provide their ages.

<sup>27</sup> These processes of Queen-making are described further in the following subsection *Becoming a Queen*.

<sup>28</sup> Here, I use “education” in quotation marks to denote the way that the term has come to signify the modern, more Westernized forms of education and often the ability to read and write in English. I wish to convey that those WTLs who did not attend or finish modern forms of education are still *educated*. They are highly intelligent women with a wealth of traditional, local, and cultural knowledge.

WTLs hold various secondary occupations, to support their livelihoods since their traditional roles do not provide them with incomes. Many are businesswomen or traders or shop owners, dealing in fish, poultry, agricultural products, fabrics or household provisions and soft drinks. Some are farmers of crops like cocoa, groundnuts, maize, beans, teak, or cashew. A few are or have been teachers. One was a nurse, one a policewoman, and one a filmmaker. Thus, their occupations were diverse. I noticed a common theme of WTLs often changing occupations when they were given their responsibilities as traditional leaders. Several WTLs spoke of the difficulty of maintaining their previous occupations while taking on added traditional responsibilities. One even shared that her business collapsed when she became Queen, because she did not have the time to devote to it. This raises an important question as to why Queens do not currently gain financially for their traditional labor, and how this might change.

Finally, interviewed WTLs were positioned at various levels and forms of authority within their communities.<sup>29</sup> These included: development Queens, clan Queens, sub-district Queens, district Queens, a divisional Chief, a divisional Queen, and paramount Queens. The population of each WTL's community of jurisdiction<sup>30</sup> roughly

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<sup>29</sup> Community is broadly construed, here, as the population served by each WTL.

<sup>30</sup> Numbers shown in Table 2. are not exact. They reflect either the WTLs best guess, or Ghana's 2010 Population and Housing Census:

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj75O7jqJ3zAhUrRDABHWN1DAsQFnoECBIAw&url=https%3A%2F%2Fstatsghana.gov.gh%2Fgsscommunity%2Fadm\\_p](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj75O7jqJ3zAhUrRDABHWN1DAsQFnoECBIAw&url=https%3A%2F%2Fstatsghana.gov.gh%2Fgsscommunity%2Fadm_p)

correlates to their level of authority. Population of jurisdiction ranged from about 50-100 (clan Queen) to 1,500,000 (paramount Queen). There are other factors that contribute to population size, such as region, and two WTLs with the same level and form of authority may have vastly different population sizes. Nonetheless, level and form of traditional authority does have some impact on the amount of people a WTL is responsible for. Regardless of the amount of responsibility delegated, however, all interviewed WTLs currently hold, or have held other occupations. This is necessary because Queens do not receive remuneration for their traditional services.<sup>31</sup> Those who stopped previous occupations did so for health reasons, retirement, or inability to meet the demands of both their work and their traditional role.

### **Defining a Queen(mother)**

I begin this section by addressing my use of the term *Queen*, rather than *Queenmother*. Throughout most of my time in Ghana, I used the term *Queenmother*, thinking that it was a unique designation to women traditional leaders in Ghana. It was not until my third-to-last interview, that I learned of its colonial origins. As we were wrapping up our interview and getting ready to eat the delicious palava sauce (a green-leaf sauce with fish) and boiled yam that she had prepared for us, I asked Mama Atrato

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[rogram%2Fmodules%2Fdownloads%2Fget\\_file.php%3Ffile\\_id%3D27&usg=AOvVaw2ded6aoaQYSmkmLmfoYU4S](#)

This census will soon be updated. While I was in Ghana, the 2021 Population and Housing Census was taking place, and the data was being finalized while I wrote this thesis.

<sup>31</sup> See more about Queens' lack of funding in Queens' Political, Social, and Economic Agency, *Support vs. Respect*.

If there was anything that I didn't think to ask that she would like to share. She responded:

There was a time people were asking whether we said we are Queenmothers: are we the mothers of the Queen? It is because the British were here, and they don't want African Queens to be like the Queen of London. So, they started calling us Queenmothers... Queenmothers... Yes. This was what really happened. So now in Ghana, we... even though a Queenmother is accepted, a lot of places you go now they call you the Queen. It's no longer Queenmother... The British rule. You know, Ghana is a British country. So, they wouldn't like the Queens- the first Queens to be called Queens, because they were looking at the Queen Elizabeth, as a higher post than the Queens of Africa or Ghana.<sup>32</sup>

On that note, we concluded our interview, and I determined to no longer refer to Ghana's *Queens* as *Queenmothers*.

While one of my interview questions directly asked WTLs to define Queens, I found that definitions of Ghana's Queens also arose spontaneously throughout the interviews. I choose to share two definitions of Queens that I think are good representations of the definitions I received from most Queens. One comes from a Queen in the southern Akan community of Himan in Western Region, and one comes from a Queen in the northern Dagao municipality of Jirapa in Upper West Region. I choose these two because they are useful for pointing out the similarities and differences in the definitions of Queens between the North and South, and between the Akan and non-Akan. The Queen from Himan defined a Queen as,

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<sup>32</sup> Mama Atrato II, divisional Queen of Ho Dome in Volta Region, interview by Kristen Vogel, August 19, 2021, Greater Accra, Ghana.

... a woman who has been chosen to seek the affairs of all women in the family. One of the duties of a Queen- she's a person that plays a very critical role when it comes to enstooling a new Chief. They will bring a Chief on the stool. And if the Chief is not doing something, and they want to bring him down, it is their duty to do that. So, whilst they have a say in who should rule, they also have a duty of correcting or guiding the Chief or the King. That is also their responsibility, because they come together to bring someone on the seat to be a Chief or a King. So, it is their sole responsibility to guide the person: to make sure that the person is doing what is expected of him.<sup>33</sup>

This definition highlights two roles that are particular to Akan Queens: choosing a new Chief and acting as his advisor. Furthermore, Queen 4 highlights the responsibility and right of the Queen to de-stool a Chief if he is not adequately performing his duties.

On the other hand, Pognaa<sup>34</sup> Rebecca Dombo, Paramount Queen of Jirapa in Upper West Region contended,

A Queenmother is a woman leader that lives in the community, to also lead the woman, as how the men are leading the men. And we are saying that you don't have to lead only women, but the men too. This is our problem, that when we say we are Chiefs, the men say we are not Chiefs- we are leaders. A Queenmother stays in the house, oversees, and supports your Chief to work. You don't have to work single handedly, and if there's a problem, you consult your Chief. When the women have a problem and they can't go to a man, they will come and tell you, the Queenmother. And you, Queenmother- if you can't solve it, then you send it to the King. We are there to bring about peace; unity; hard work- the Queenmothers. Queenmothers... when we are in the community, we talk about cleanliness. Both in the house, outside, and around the palace. If a visitor comes, you the Queenmother will organize so that they will clean the place- that it's clean there... Make sure that the visitor gets water to drink before the man can come in.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Queen 4, clan Queen of Himan in Western Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, June 23, 2021, Western Region, Ghana.

<sup>34</sup> "Pognaa" is the Dagaare title for Queen.

<sup>35</sup> Pognaa Rebecca Dombo, paramount Queen of Jirapa in Upper West Region, interview by Kristen Vogel, August 12, 2021, Upper West Region, Ghana.

Further conversation with Pognaa Rebecca Dombo, who was the second Queen to be officially enskinned in the Upper West Region, confirmed that Queens' focus on cleanliness and hospitality was a way for them to promote the community's public health: a vital endeavor especially in the current context of a pandemic. I found that most Queens, in the North and the South, defined Queens in some way as promoters of public health and community development. Queens are involved in public health efforts to address issues like maternal and child health, girls' menstrual health, and community sanitation. They are involved in community development efforts such as promoting education (particularly girls' education), building the income-earning capacities of women, and drawing various development-focused organizations and funders to work with their communities.

In agreement with Queen 4, from Himan, Pognaa Rebecca Dombo also defined Queens as leaders of women. While all Queens spoke of working with both men and women, a focus on leading women was a common thread throughout all interviews. Thus, they made matters of representation in leadership tangible, by explaining that women did not always feel comfortable going to a man leader with their problems, so it was important to have a woman leader for all community members to feel heard and supported. This suggests an African feminism that rests on a philosophy of gender equity in leadership roles and gender equality in political representation. The need for women to have their own leaders is markedly different from Western feminism that

often views leadership qualities and capabilities as non-gendered. This African feminism, conversely, values gender lenses in leadership.



**Figure 12.** Pognaa Rebecca Dombo.

*\* Photos taken by author in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Written consent for their usage was obtained using the Photograph Release Form in Appendix C: Copyright Permissions.*

*Pognaa Rebecca Dombo is the Paramount Queen of Jirapa, Upper West Region. As Queens were only formally (nationally) recognized in 2005 (Mistiaen 2015), Pognaa Rebecca Dombo was the second Queen to be enskinned in the Upper West. I interviewed Pognaa Rebecca Dombo in her home in Ullo, a village in Jirapa district whose Chief she was married to. At the time of our interview, her husband had passed. On the wall over the television hung several portraits of Pognaa Rebecca Dombo, which is common in the homes and offices of Queens. Pognaa Rebecca Dombo allowed me to photograph them and told me a bit about each one. I have chosen two of significance for this research. **Left:** Pognaa Rebecca Dombo in Sunyani, previously in Brong Ahafo Region, for the 2012 presidential and parliamentary election. **Center:** Pognaa Rebecca Dombo seated in front of Wa Naa Palace (the Wa Chief's Palace). This photo was taken to send to the National House of Chiefs. **Right:** Pognaa Rebecca Dombo and me, as I presented her with a "thank-you" gift of traditional recycled glass beaded necklace and bracelet, after her interview in her sitting room.*

I was particularly interested in Pognaa Rebecca Dombo's assertion that Queens are Chiefs. Though Article 277 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution and Section 57 of the 2008 Chieftaincy Act both explicitly define a "chief" as, "a person, who hailing from the appropriate family and lineage, has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a *chief or queenmother* in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage," Queens' claims to being Chiefs in their own right

are often ignored or challenged in practice (Constitution of The Republic of Ghana 1993, 153; Chieftaincy Act 2008, 26). As I will discuss in the following sections and chapters, I am particularly interested in this messy division between Queens and Chiefs, and how this obfuscated divide has worked to exclude Queens from the national level of recognition, relegating them to often unpaid work. Nonetheless, I think my favorite definition came from one Queen in Kabile, Bono Region, who was also an Obaapanyin (woman family elder):

The Queenmother is the Chief for the women.<sup>36</sup>

It is concise, astute, and affirms the gendered necessity of recognizing Ghana's Queens as Chiefs.

### *Becoming a Queen*

There are many ways that a woman might become a Queen, depending on the region they reside in, the ethnic group they are a part of, or even the specific community they serve. Traditionally, Queens must come from a royal family. Royal families are abundant throughout Ghana, and those eligible for traditional leadership include extended family members. The process of making someone a Queen or Chief in Ghana is referred to as *enstooling* in the South, and *enskinning* in the North, generally. The difference of terms refers to the different cultural items of significance given to a

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<sup>36</sup> Queen 16/ Obaapanyin, development Queen and Obaapanyin of Kabile in Bono Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, July 29, 2021, Bono Region, Ghana.



Queen or Chief when they receive their titles: either a stool or an animal skin. The processes of enstooling and enskinning involve large cultural celebrations as diverse as the many cultures within Ghana. These are often followed by about three weeks of intensive training on their roles and responsibilities. Queens recalled being taught by elders in their family: some by both women and men, and some just by women.

Traditionally, Queens are chosen by the elders of the royal family (usually when the previous Queen has passed, or sometimes as the first Queen for a specific community). In some scenarios, Queens are given the chance to refuse, and in others, Queens are forced to be Queens. The Queen I interviewed from Volta region remembered having a white mineral (talc) thrown on her to signify that she was chosen as the next Queen. She was not happy about it because it was not her choice and she was a policewoman, with an already busy schedule. But she later grew to appreciate her role for giving her a greater voice in the community.

One Queen I interviewed in Himan recalled that her sister was chosen to be Queen but refused because she already held a leadership position in the church, and it was determined that she would be a better choice for the responsibility. While some Queens remembered the day of their enstoolment/ enskinning with frustration for their inability to contest their new designation, all Queens emoted a current sense of pride in their positions and gratitude for the authority it imbued them with. It seems that the main frustration arising out of becoming Queen involuntarily sprung from conflict with

previous occupations, coupled with the inability to earn an income through their new traditional roles.

### *The Hierarchy*

The hierarchy of Ghana's Queens and Chiefs is delineated in Section 58 of Ghana's Chieftaincy Act of 2008, from highest authority to lowest authority, as: paramount, divisional, sub-divisional, *adikrofo* (recognized Queens and Chiefs of known towns and villages), and others recognized by the National House of Chiefs (Chieftaincy Act 2008, 27). Therefore, to be gazetted in accordance with the Constitution of Ghana, a Queen must fall into one of these categories. In practice, however, I found that Queens who maintained categories of authority not gazetted by the Constitution often maintained tangible traditional authority.

Methods of categorization vary between regions and even between communities. Some clan Queens in Himan were not given a stool at their Chief's palace, and thus lamented their inability to participate in meetings there. While a Queen from the South asserted that there were no district Queens because they were not gazetted in the Constitution, district and sub-district Queens were recognized in Wa and took part in the Wa Queenmothers' Association meeting at the Wa Chief's Palace. When I asked a friend-of-a-friend who is a Chief from the South about the distinction between district and divisional Chiefs, he explained that they are similar, but "divisional" is the correct term (meaning that it is constitutional). The Queen hierarchy in Himan was explained

to me as including a paramount Queen and family/ clan Queens.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the hierarchy of Queens and Chiefs, in Ghana, is complex and walks an interesting line between constitutional and traditional.

To clarify the impressions I am working from, I offer a hierarchy to describe the relative traditional authority, from highest to lowest, of the 21 Queens I interviewed: (1) paramount Queens, (2) divisional/ district Queens, (3) sub-divisional/ sub-district Queens, (4) clan Queens. This hierarchy does not attempt to describe the overall hierarchy for all of Ghana’s Queens, but rather the hierarchy that describes the relative authority of the participants of this research project.

**Table 3.** Hierarchy of Queens’ Relative Authority as Relevant to this Study

<i>Relative Traditional Authority</i>	<i>Highest</i>	<i>Mid to Highest</i>	<i>Mid to Lowest</i>	<i>Lowest</i>
<i>Constitutional Titles</i>	Paramount	Divisional	Sub-Divisional	<i>adikrofo</i>
<i>Colloquial Titles</i>	Paramount	Divisional/ District	Sub-Divisional/ Sub-District	Clan/ Family

*\*This table was created by the author to explain her working understanding of generalized Ghanaian Queen hierarchy, utilized throughout her research.*

There is still one more category of Queens that I must explain: development Queens. These Queens are not part of the traditional hierarchies of Ghana but are a newer category that plays a vital role in advocating for and organizing Queens throughout Ghana. One prominent development Queen, NanaHemaa Adwoa Awindor,

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<sup>37</sup> Queen 4, clan Queen of Himan in Western Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, June 23, 2021, Western Region, Ghana.

gave a detailed account of the difference between traditional Queens and development

Queens:

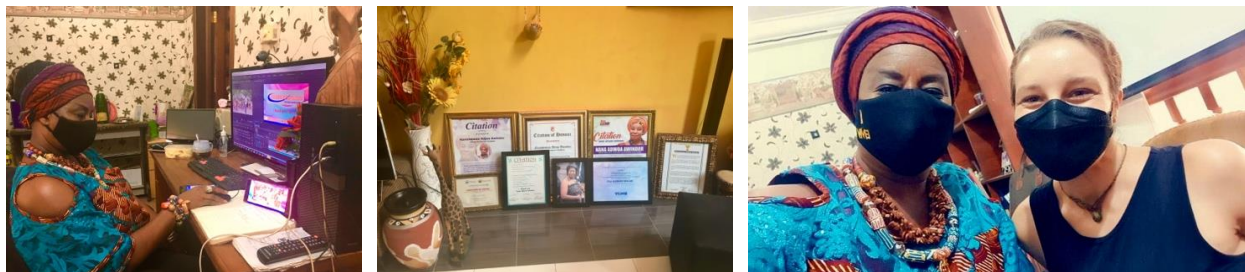
The case of the development Queenmother- You are... it's an honorary stool. And it's given because of what you have achieved already. So, they don't expect you to now come and be sitting here to learn what you have to do to become a development Queenmother. It is given to you by virtue of your abilities and your capabilities. It is given to you because of what you have achieved in the country. What you have achieved in the community, and some communities can actually adopt you, from your community. Like in America, you give honorary citizenship. People are given honorary citizenship from different countries and from different states. So I go to Arizona, and I'm given honorary citizenship of Arizona. I become a member of the community of Arizona, even though I come from Ghana. So, in communities like... communities in Ghana, people are given development Queenmothers, or development Chiefs too... from other communities, because they find you worthy to be brought to be part of them. So, you don't necessarily have to come from that community to be a development Queenmother of that community. Sometimes we have white girls... white women, black Americans being given development Queenmother/ development Chief stools in Ghana, by virtue of what they have done to support their community, or they are expected to do to support the community. So that is the difference.

So, in the case of the clan, community, or the traditional stool, or cultural stool, or town stool, divisional stool, paramountcy, for example, you inherit the stool of somebody who probably have passed, and you are of the next in line, or you are the next in line. Or your community or your family will propose you even if you are not in line, to become the next on the stool. And you are prepared and exposed to the community. And then you are adored. And everybody accepts you and appreciates you as the Queenmother, or the Chief of the community. So that's the difference. So, you can be brought from anywhere to become a development Queenmother. And you don't go through rigorous processes because you have already distinguished yourself, in a way. So, you are exposed, or you are adored in grand events, where you will be enstooled. And then that's it. You become the development Queenmother.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> NanaHemaa Adwoa Awindor, development Queen of Afigya Kwabre district in Ashanti Region, interview by Kristen Vogel, July 21, 2021, Greater Accra Region, Ghana.

NanaHemaa Adwoa Awindor explains one of the main differences between traditional Queens and development Queens: the criteria for enstoolment/ enskinning. Traditional Queens, though there are various factors considered when a community's lineage heads or kingmakers are choosing a new Queen, must come from a royal family.<sup>39</sup> While development Queens are not a traditional category of Queens in Ghana, I believe they are an important new category that advocates for Queens of all categories and levels across Ghana.<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 13.** NanaHemaa Adwoa Awindor.

*\* Photos taken by the author and NanaHemaa Adwoa Awindor in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Written consent for their usage was obtained using the Photograph Release Form in Appendix C: Copyright Permissions.*

*NanaHemaa Adwoa Awindor is the Development Queen for Afigya-Kwabre District in Ashanti Region, Founder and Executive Director of the Obaapa Development Foundation (an NGO that seeks to support women and children through advocacy, health, and education), and CEO of and Film/ TV Producer at Premier Productions Ltd. Also, as Development Queen and Continental Board Chair to the African Queens Women Cultural Leaders Network (AQWCLN), Nana Awindor has been instrumental in convening Queens from around Ghana to join the association and take part in trainings. I am grateful to Nana Awindor for introducing me to several of the Queens who I interviewed for this study. **Left:** NanaHemaa Adwoa Awindor in her "work den," where I conducted her interview and she showed me some of the film projects she is working on and photos from a recent Bragogo Festival (Puberty Rites Festival), involving several Queens from her district. Nana Awindor is always busy with some kind of project and works well into the night and early morning on the video projects she is passionate about. **Center:** In NanaHemaa Adwoa Awindor's living room, she has several framed citations of honor for her work as Development Queenmother and as a Filmmaker and film-school teacher. **Right:** NanaHemaa Adwoa Awindor took this selfie with me after our interview and after I gifted her the colorful beads she is wearing as a "thank-you" for her time and assistance.*

<sup>39</sup> Those who choose new Queens are typically known as lineage/ family heads in the South and kingmakers in the North. Throughout Ghana, there are many royal families, and a Queen or Chief may be chosen from extended family members. Thus, royal family is not what a Westerner often thinks of as a nuclear family.

<sup>40</sup> Nana Adwoa Awindor's advocacy is further explained in the section on Queens' Political, Social, and Economic Agency.



are outlined in Table 3. Some two-word phrases are combined into one word, to facilitate their inclusion in the word frequency query.

**Table 4.** Queens' Qualities Word Frequency Table

<i>Word</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Weighted Percentage (%)</i>	<i>Similar Words</i>
<i>respectful</i>	10	11	6.04	respectable, respected, respectful
<i>humble</i>	6	5	2.75	humble
<i>truthful</i>	8	5	2.75	truthful
<i>goodbehavior</i>	12	4	2.20	goodbehavior
<i>honest</i>	6	4	2.20	honest
<i>nonfighting</i>	11	4	2.20	nonfighting
<i>sincere</i>	7	4	2.20	sincere
<i>decent</i>	6	3	1.65	decent
<i>hardworking</i>	11	3	1.65	hardworking
<i>leader</i>	6	3	1.65	leader
<i>listening</i>	9	3	1.65	listening
<i>loved</i>	5	3	1.65	loved, lovely, loving
<i>patient</i>	7	3	1.65	patient
<i>rolemodel</i>	9	3	1.65	rolemodel
<i>smiling</i>	7	3	1.65	smiling
<i>traditionaldressing</i>	19	3	1.65	traditionaldressing
<i>approachable</i>	12	2	1.10	approachable
<i>bold</i>	4	2	1.10	bold
<i>correcting</i>	10	2	1.10	correcting
<i>good</i>	4	2	1.10	good
<i>goodcharacter</i>	13	2	1.10	goodcharacter
<i>helpful</i>	7	2	1.10	helpful, helping
<i>just</i>	4	2	1.10	just
<i>knowledgeable</i>	13	2	1.10	knowledgeable
<i>mingling</i>	8	2	1.10	mingling
<i>observant</i>	9	2	1.10	observant
<i>polite</i>	6	2	1.10	polite
<i>royal</i>	5	2	1.10	royal
<i>welldressed</i>	11	2	1.10	welldressed
<i>wise</i>	4	2	1.10	wise
<i>accommodating</i>	12	1	0.55	accommodating
<i>acting</i>	6	1	0.55	acting
<i>admirable</i>	9	1	0.55	admirable
<i>advisor</i>	7	1	0.55	advisor

**Table 4 (Continued)**

<i>Word</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Weighted Percentage (%)</i>	<i>Similar Words</i>
<i>calming</i>	7	1	0.55	calming
<i>changemaker</i>	11	1	0.55	changemaker
<i>cleanly</i>	7	1	0.55	cleanly
<i>commitment</i>	11	1	0.55	commitment
<i>communicator</i>	12	1	0.55	communicator
<i>communitydeveloper</i>	18	1	0.55	communitydeveloper
<i>confident</i>	9	1	0.55	confident
<i>counselor</i>	9	1	0.55	counselor
<i>discerning</i>	10	1	0.55	discerning
<i>earththatlistensbothways</i>	22	1	0.55	earththatlistensbothways
<i>educated</i>	8	1	0.55	educated
<i>empathetic</i>	10	1	0.55	empathetic
<i>encouraging</i>	11	1	0.55	encouraging
<i>frugal</i>	6	1	0.55	frugal
<i>godseeking</i>	10	1	0.55	godseeking
<i>goodlifestyle</i>	13	1	0.55	goodlifestyle
<i>goodthinking</i>	12	1	0.55	goodthinking
<i>great</i>	5	1	0.55	great
<i>lawabiding</i>	10	1	0.55	lawabiding
<i>maintained</i>	10	1	0.55	maintained
<i>maritalwisdom</i>	13	1	0.55	maritalwisdom
<i>motivational</i>	12	1	0.55	motivational
<i>nondiscriminating</i>	17	1	0.55	nondiscriminating
<i>nonquarreling</i>	13	1	0.55	nonquarreling
<i>privateeating</i>	13	1	0.55	privateeating
<i>reasonable</i>	10	1	0.55	reasonable
<i>responsible</i>	11	1	0.55	responsible
<i>secretkeeping</i>	13	1	0.55	secretkeeping
<i>selfrespect</i>	11	1	0.55	selfrespect
<i>senseofhumor</i>	12	1	0.55	senseofhumor
<i>senseofjudgement</i>	16	1	0.55	senseofjudgement
<i>strong</i>	6	1	0.55	strong
<i>supporting</i>	10	1	0.55	supporting
<i>sympathetic</i>	11	1	0.55	sympathetic
<i>understanding</i>	13	1	0.55	understanding
<i>uniting</i>	7	1	0.55	uniting
<i>waving</i>	6	1	0.55	waving
<i>welcoming</i>	9	1	0.55	welcoming
<i>wellread</i>	8	1	0.55	wellread



The most frequent word used to describe Queens was *respectful*, followed closely by *humble, truthful, goodbehavior, honest, nonfighting, and sincere*. All these qualities may also be functions and are helpful for holding together social networks. *Respectful*, in the word cloud, refers to Queens feeling *respectable, respected* by others and themselves, and *respectful* of others and themselves. Several Queens expressed their belief that you must respect others and yourself if others are to also respect you. It was viewed as a two-way street. This finding, showing that respect is a central value for Ghana's Queens, aligns with Chilisa's assertion that African societies hold relational axiologies (Chilisa 2020).

While *respectful* was mentioned by 11 out of 21 Queens, the rest of the terms were mentioned by five or less. This may not adequately show their importance, as some do not have the same stem, but are similar, such as *truthful* and *honest*. These words also often reflect the language used by translators to describe the Queens' responses. Nonetheless, recalling each interview as a holistic representation of the Queens' principles of leadership, I do believe this is a good representation of the values that Ghana's Queens bring to traditional leadership. It represents the values they will carry with them when they finally gain national recognition alongside the men in the National House of Chiefs.

### **Queens' Roles and Their Effect on Women and Girls**

Queens, like Chiefs, hold various traditional roles. Traditionally, they must attend community ceremonies like funerals, weddings, naming ceremonies, and

festivals. They are responsible for resolving conflicts between members of their communities, and they collaborate with organizations and institutions to develop their communities. These roles have expanded as new categories of Queens have arisen in Ghana. Development Queens are often enstooled now for the contributions they have already made to the development and social well-being of their communities. Thus, the roles that Queens of all categories play in Ghanaian society are vast and varied.

Therefore, I do not attempt to outline all the roles that Queens play in Ghana, but rather to expand on a few that became focus points during interviews.

#### *Conflict Resolution*

One of Queens' (and Chiefs') main traditional roles is conflict resolution. Most of my Queen interviewees could not recall the number of conflicts they had resolved because it was too many. The most cited conflict that interviewed Queens resolved were marital conflicts, closely followed by sibling rivalries. The paramount Queen in Jirapa spoke of settling a land dispute. Queens spoke of settling disputes in the palace, in their homes, and even over the phone for community members who traveled or lived elsewhere. Thus, conflicts resolved by Queens are many and varied in nature. But a common theme I found throughout discussion of Queens' conflict resolution was a focus on handling women's issues. Wondering more about the gendered role that Queens play in conflict resolution, I asked one Queen to explain what kinds of things a woman would go to a Queen to resolve, instead of a chief. She responded,

A typical example is marital issues. Sometimes in marital issues, women prefer going to the Queenmother because they see me as one of their own. So, they will go to me, and mostly marital issues will come to me. And sometimes when it's above me, even if it's a marital issue but it's above me, then I will refer to the Chief.<sup>41</sup>

This Queen, like many who I interviewed, thought women felt more comfortable bringing their issues to them rather than the Chief, because they shared the same gender identity.

Of course, her assertion that some issues were above her made me curious about what exactly that meant. Through further clarification, I realized that she was not explaining a hierarchy of power, with the Chief being “above” her, but rather that some conflicts required more than just her own resolution. She gave an example of a situation in which a man is cheating on his wife and a curse is brought on someone. Dealing with a curse transcends the conflict resolution jurisdiction of any single traditional leader. As she further clarified,

The moment that we get to know that the issue is on curse, it goes above me, above the Obusuapanyin<sup>42</sup>, and the Nana<sup>43</sup>, so it takes all of them to sit together to deliberate on the issue before they can get a final solution.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Queen 9, clan Queen of Himan in Western Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, July 2, 2021, Western Region, Ghana.

<sup>42</sup> Obusuapanyin is the Twi title for a man lineage head/ family elder.

<sup>43</sup> Nana means “Chief” in this context.

<sup>44</sup> Queen 9

Thus, Queens and Chiefs exercise similar authorities in handling conflicts within their communities, but there seems to be a gendered aspect that makes Chiefs crucial to conflict resolution for men, and Queens crucial to conflict resolution for women.

Throughout my interviews, I found that “conflict resolution” was not often the way that Queens referred to this role that they played. Rather, they used words like *counseling* and *peacekeeping*. An example of how a Queen might describe her conflict resolution role is as follows:

One of the things I have been doing is to make sure there is unity and peace in the family... Whilst we are humans living together, there may be issues. People may disagree on issues, but the moment I get to know of it, it is my duty to make sure that there is peace and harmony in the family all the time.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, Queens play a vital role in peacekeeping, at the local level: preventing Ghana’s legal courts from becoming overburdened with family issues and offering those involved in the conflict the time they need to deal with their emotions and come to a resolution. Queens’ peacekeeping is a variation of the role of mediation played by public interest lawyers.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Queen 4, clan Queen of Himan in Western Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, June 23, 2021, Western Region, Ghana.

<sup>46</sup>There is a colonial notion of linguistic and academic hegemony attached to the profession and title of “lawyer,” that has economically devalued some forms of mediation, while privileging others with incomes and professional recognition. Those who are indoctrinated in Western education receive the title and the subsequent salary. Those with Indigenous Knowledge of mediation methods are undervalued (economically devalued) in the context of Western development.

## *How Queens Help Women and Girls*

Most WTLs interviewed shared a focus on their roles in helping women, perhaps because they identified as women, themselves, and were familiar with gendered struggles not given adequate attention by men leaders. There is a plethora of ways that Queens help women in their communities. As mentioned in the previous subsection, Queens seem to play a vital role in conflict resolution for women. They also seem to be vital advocates for women's economic empowerment, women's health, and women's ability to lead.

Queens often look to help women gain financial stability by focusing on growing their skill sets and access to education. One Queen from Himan planned to implement various projects teaching women in her community to make meat pies and other things out of local materials. As she explains, if they have the local materials, it will not cost them anything, they may save money from buying these things in town, and they may make some money by selling them. She offered one example:

People from the village sometimes will come to town to buy soap. Meanwhile they have oil plantation farm. So out of the red oil that they've been doing, they can just add soda to the red oil, and they will get soap: the same soap that they have been buying from town. Then they will use it. But they don't have all this knowledge. So, I tried helping them.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Queen 13, clan Queen of Himan in Western Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, July 3, 2021, Western Region, Ghana.

While some Queens focus on working with women to improve their incomes and education, others may focus on sponsoring girls to go to school, which will increase their earning capacity when they are older.

While many Queens mentioned the work they were doing to prevent teenage pregnancy, promote girls' menstrual health, or encourage mask-wearing and good handwashing to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (a health issue for all), I share a quote from Mama Atrato II, Divisional Queen of Ho Dome in Volta Region, whose rule has particularly impacted the health of pregnant women in her division:

I have a pregnancy school. So once in a while, I bring the pregnant women, and then I invite the midwives from the hospital and the doctors to talk to them- Certain things they should do; certain things they should eat, which they feel is a taboo. Because a few of the pregnant women were not even eating pineapple, because people were deceiving them that if you eat pineapple and you are going to deliver, you'll have problems. So, we have to explain and advocate to that women. Especially the pregnant women. We encouraged them to go to hospital, instead of delivering in the house. And then when they have crises, you'll see them being carried to hospital. We should avoid this. Because once in a while, we had maternal mortality rising. So why do you allow yourself to be carried to hospital instead of you yourself walking to hospital, lying down for doctors to have full records about you? You go- they scan you and see [to] your safety before your time is due for you to deliver. Yes, I do all this.<sup>48</sup>

Taking this as just one example, it was clear to me throughout my interviews that women's health was a matter of great importance to many Queens, and they actively

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<sup>48</sup> Mama Atrato II, divisional Queen of Ho Dome in Volta Region, interview by Kristen Vogel, August 19, 2021, Greater Accra Region, Ghana.

worked to promote it in their communities: often providing vital and basic public health education not otherwise being provided.



**Figure 15.** Mama Atrato II.

*\* Photos sent to author by Mama Atrato II, via WhatsApp, and taken by a young woman staying with Mama Atrato II in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Written consent for their usage was obtained using the Photograph Release Form in Appendix C: Copyright Permissions.*

*Mama Atrato II is the Divisional Queen of Ho Dome, in Volta Region. She is a retired policewoman and has had a full and illustrious career including 40 years working as a security and intelligence analyst for the Ghana Bureau of National Investigations, and experience living in Bosnia Herzegovina for a peacekeeping mission, where she obtained a United Nations Certificate in Human Rights. **Left:** Mama Atrato II as a policewoman in Ghana. **Center:** Mama Atrato II in her Queen's traditional cloth and beads, as Divisional Queen of Ho Dome, Volta Region. **Right:** Mama Atrato II and me, in her driveway/ courtyard, by her beautiful plants, after my interview with her in the summer of 2021.*

Finally, interviewed Queens often spoke of their roles as mentors or role models to women in their communities. Many of them actively encouraged women to take on new leadership roles. A quote from one paramount Queen in Wa, Busah Pognaa: Barata Zakariya Ginsung, is particularly relevant to show the impact that Queens have on women's leadership capacity even in the North, where it is assumed to be less:

Posts given to a woman is not something that is appreciated here. Because here, people believe that men have a power for almost everything in this- our place. So, women going for such positions- they always have that kind of fear in them. So, we as a Queenmothers, we will just advise you; encourage you to have the braveness in you, to accept or to go in for such positions. We can encourage, “you can make it! If you go in for such positions, you can make it. More than even the men.” So, we have our encouragement talks to the women in our communities to motivate them into such positions.<sup>49</sup>

So, Queens can act as role models as women in traditional leadership, to encourage women throughout Ghana to pursue new leadership roles. Thus, even though they cannot themselves enter political positions, they actively encourage other women to run for office and support them in doing so. Thus, analyzing the 21 Queen interviews I completed in the summer of 2021, I found that the institution of Queenship, as a shared value-system, has the potential to directly benefit women’s and girls’ financial security, health, and leadership capacity.

### **Queens’ Forms of Power/ Sources of Pride**

#### *Power versus Pride*

During our initial interviews in Himan, my co-researcher and I quickly discovered that my interview guide needed to be amended. When I asked what made the women “feel powerful,” some would respond quickly that they did not feel powerful, or they seemed uncomfortable answering the question. Discussing this issue

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<sup>49</sup> Pognaa Barata Zakariya Ginsung, paramount Queen of Busah in Upper West Region, interviewed by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher and another Queen as translators, August 5, 2021, Upper West Region, Ghana.



with my co-researcher, I learned that “powerful” often had a negative connotation. This made me curious about the applicability of the word “empowerment” in the Wassa Twi language. My co-researcher confirmed that there was not a direct translation for powerful, but instead she had to use Wassa to describe, with more than one word, the specific type of empowerment we were talking about: economic, leadership, etc. We eventually determined that “proud” was the best substitute for “powerful,” and though it was not a perfect alternative, it garnered a much better response from some Queens.

*Implications for a Ghanaian “Women’s Empowerment”*

Amongst Queens, feelings of pride commonly came from the way that people recognized them and their ability to resolve conflicts. One Queen from Himan emoted,

[I’m] so proud because sometimes you get to know so many people. There are people, you don't even know them, but they know you. Sometimes when someone is doing something that you think maybe the person is angry or something, just a tap on the shoulder will calm the person down. And sometimes the person will look at you and say, "Had it not been [for] you, I wouldn't have done this." But because of you... So, it is something that you'll be proud of. Because with that position, you are able to calm every situation down, and people recognize you wherever you are.

There are people of high living standards, and even [more] knowledgeable than you are. But because of the title as a Queenmother, when they even greet you- when they see you, how they humble themselves before [you]. And some may even tell you they have issues- that they think they will come and see you to assist them. So, in all those things, looking at their position, and coming down to your level for you to assist them. It is something that [I am] proud of.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Queen 13, clan Queen of Himan in Western Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, July 3, 2021, Western Region, Ghana.

In addition to being able to resolve people's conflicts and calm them down, being known and respected by many (even those who would otherwise have a higher social status than her) and expanding her network made this Queen feel proud. I found this was a common thread throughout Queens in the North, as well. As one Queen in Wa stated,

As a Queenmother for the ladies, now, when people see me, they say "Queenmother," then they bow down their head. Give me that dignity. So, when it's like that, I become happy. It wasn't like that when I wasn't a Queenmother. They didn't give me that respect. So, like I was saying, the Wa Naa's place. Anytime that we go for gatherings- we have occasions- they have special chairs for us as Queenmothers. So, if anybody just mistakenly sat on your [chair], when you go and you stand before me, as I'm always smallest in the room, I will do like this, and will stand and be looking at them. So, you see a bunch [saying], "Oh, our Queenmother, you don't have to stand! Come, come, come, come!" So, they will do that. They will give you that respect. Be you a grown man.<sup>51</sup>

This Queen from the North spoke with animation as a newly enskinned Queen about the new-found respect she received from all those around her. She was immensely proud of her new social status that transcended age and gender hierarchies.

Considering Queens' responses to what makes them feel proud, exemplified by these two responses, I suggest that Queens in Ghana take pride in their ability to lead as peacemakers, which is supported by the social status accorded them by their title. This suggests that Ghana's Queens hold the political power of conflict resolution and the social powers of an elevated social status and an expanded network.

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<sup>51</sup> Queen 18, district Queen in Wa, Upper West Region, interview by Kristen Vogel, August 4, 2021, Western Region, Ghana.

## Queens' Political, Social, and Economic Agency

Throughout interviews, I found that many participants perceived *politics* as having a somewhat negative or corrupt connotation and thus hoped to distance themselves from it. Many felt that politicians were either corrupt or did little to help them. Others found politics important, but did not want to be associated with a political party (since that is against Article 276 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution for traditional leaders to engage in partisan politics) (Constitution of The Republic of Ghana 1993, 153). *Politics* may also be defined as *power*, connecting their dislike for *politics* with their rejection of *power* discourse. Those who disliked the term *politics*, however, did not directly associate it with *government*. Many who disliked *politics* recognized the importance of *government*: both national and traditional.

### *Traditional versus National Government*

As my interviews with WTLs progressed, I became fascinated by their perceptions of the relationship between Ghana's *national* and *traditional* governments. I wanted to know what the connections were, if any, and whether they thought the *national* system should adopt some of the gendered aspects of the *traditional* system. The relationship between the two systems is complex. While there is a focus on keeping them separate (Chiefs are not allowed to engage in partisan politics) certain aspects of the traditional government are codified in Ghana's Constitution and the Chieftaincy Act

(Ghana 1993; 2008). Furthermore, in practice they must work together. As one Queen from Himan explains,

There is a tight relationship between the traditional and the national political system because the political system is to look over the whole country. But the traditional one is on the grassroots. So, there are communities... It is communities, or towns that comes together to form a nation, and it is the Chiefs and the Kings that are ruling the community. So, if the national leadership is coming down to the community, there should be leaders that they will consult before they get into the community. So, it's a good, or a tight, relationship between these two.<sup>52</sup>

From my experience living in a village in the Upper West for two years, this explanation of the traditional system as the grassroots level of governance seems very accurate to me. Yet, following this explanation, Queen 4 did express a desire for the two systems to collaborate more. She even expressed a preference for the traditional system, stating,

In the traditional system, it is mandated for every family to have a Queen, and whilst there is a King, there is always a Queen. So, you can see there is a balance in the traditional system. Even the women we have in Parliament are too small. So, comparing the political system to the traditional system, you can see that in the political aspects, women are few, but in the traditional system, the men and the women are on the same level, a man to a woman, and it is mandatory... When you compare that to the political system, it is when the people like that we are bringing women. It is not compulsory. So, you can see so many men acting in, or sitting on high positions in politics, but when you come to the traditional system: a Chief to a Queen. So, that thing is the only difference thing that the political system is not having, and it is an advantage from the traditional system over the political system.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Queen 4, clan Queen of Himan in Western Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, June 23, 2021, Western Region, Ghana.

<sup>53</sup> Queen 4

Similarly, Queen 10 from Himan expressed a preference for the traditional system over the national system, due to a greater gender balance, saying,

The traditional system is the best one because with the traditional system, the Queen is seen as a mother to the Chief. So, when the Chief is going wayward or doing something wrong, it is the Queen that will direct him. In the same way, if the Queen is going wayward, it's like "you scratch my back, I scratch your back." They are there to help each other, but because the national politics is not like that, you don't see the involvement of women in that one. So, it doesn't help. So, if the men are misbehaving, they will all misbehave. But if there is a woman to check on them, sometimes it helps.<sup>54</sup>

Invoking a common idiom, or proverb, this Queen argues that gender balance in leadership creates a sort of gendered system of checks and balances. This system allows traditional leaders to ensure each other's effective and fair leadership through a balancing of gendered perspectives, advocating for the majority experience of both women and men. I believe there are many ways this plays out: in ensuring that there is a gender lens available to all conflict resolutions and upholding leadership behavior that benefits the socially constructed genders of woman and man equally. Responses from my 21 Queen interviews indicate that many of Ghana's Queens perceive the gender balance of the traditional system as an advantage over the national system.

I found that this common value led Queens to desire a greater gender balance in national government. Many argued that Ghana needed more women leaders at the national level. Paramount Queen of Jirapa municipality in the Upper West Region,

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<sup>54</sup> Queen 10, clan Queen of Himan in Western Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, July 2, 2021, Western Region, Ghana.

Pognaa Rebecca Dombo expressed her belief about the differences between men and women as leaders in Ghana:

The difference is that the woman has... sympathy. A woman, if they say, send something to the community, she will be even- she will take something, but she will bring something to the community. But the men, immediately they go there- they don't think of their communities. They don't think of "who is there?" or "somebody voted for me." They don't think of that. But if a woman is there, she will have the people at heart and think of bringing development to their areas, even though the men bring [development]. But it will be faster, or more, in their areas, than the men... At least 50% women should also be included [in national government].<sup>55</sup>

Pognaa Rebecca Dombo's argument for gender parity in national leadership rests on her belief that women leaders have qualities that are crucial to development. She was not the only Queen to express this belief. It was a common theme throughout interviews. This makes sense, since many participants also defined Queens as community developers. According to Nana Ama Efaah, the eldest Queen of Himan,

Men have wisdom, same as women. In the traditional system, they balance the two. But in the political system, they always suppress that of the woman's wisdom, which is very bad. So, if only in the political system, they won't lose it- they will release some of the powers from the men to women, we would develop more than we are doing because women also have wisdom that can help develop the country.<sup>56</sup>

Nana Ama Efaah felt so strongly about this, that after saying it she immediately requested we "tack her name to it." Evident in her response is the belief that the nation

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<sup>55</sup> Pognaa Rebecca Dombo, paramount Queen of Jirapa in Upper West Region, interview by Kristen Vogel, August 12, 2021, Upper West Region, Ghana.

<sup>56</sup> Nana Ama Efaah, clan Queen of Himan in Western Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, July 2021, Western Region, Ghana.

needs wisdom from both women's and men's gendered perspectives. It is also clear that she believes women's wisdom is crucial to the development of the country. Thus, she redefines nationalism and development with respect to women's wisdom, utilizing her Queen's agency to reshape the ideals of a current man-dominant system. Finally, it is also clear that she believes there is something or someone holding power back from women in national politics. This implies that she recognizes an underlying structural constraint in the political system. I find this Queen's perception of the national system's structural gender inequality globally applicable. And in observance of the Ghanaian age hierarchy, I deeply respect and consider the perspective of an elder Queen.

Thus, while Queens may face barriers to gaining national recognition and funding, they are an essential part of traditional government in Ghana and are afforded respected leadership roles. The participants of this study recognized this as an advantage of the traditional government, implying that they value a balance of gender lenses in leadership as a key principle of women's empowerment in Ghana. Many Queens would like to see a shift towards more women in national leadership roles that reflects this system. Perhaps the traditional Ghanaian framework for required gender parity in leadership as a crucial tenet of women's empowerment offers a new indicator to consider in respect to UN SDG 5.5 (ensuring women's equal opportunities for leadership at all levels): proportion of national parliaments and local governments with gender parity mandates or some type of gender quota.

## *Support versus Respect*

One of the questions I planned to ask was *Do you feel respected and supported in your role as Queen?* I found the response of one Queen to be useful in differentiating between the two feelings:

For the respect, it's a must. But the support from the family is where the challenge is. They will support in other duties, but sometimes anything about you, is you. They don't support you in any other way. Sometimes something will come up that you have to travel out of your community. If you tell them, they will say there is nothing there. So, if you have your own money you have to go with it. But sometimes if there is something, the Chief can give you. But if there is nothing, everything about you is you, and you alone. So, for the respect we have but the support is what we mostly don't get....

Previously they used to assist us, especially in Christmas- some occasions. Sometimes when the Chief gets some gifts, they'll call you and give you some. At times at the end of the Christmas, they will have something for you. But these days things are very difficult. So those things don't come anymore. So, whilst you are a Queenmother, everything about you, and all the vision you have, is you. So, if you may have the vision... you may have the vision, but if you don't have the support, you will be unable to do it. For the respect, we have, but the support is what we are lacking.<sup>57</sup>

Queen 10 articulated, like most interviewed Queens, that she felt respected in her traditional role and work. Other Queens spoke of how they were perceived and treated with respect in public and at community events. Equating the feeling of support to economic support, however, she conveyed the lack of funds that most interviewed

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<sup>57</sup> Queen 10, clan Queen of Himan in Western Region, interview by Kristen Vogel with co-researcher as translator, July 2, 2021, Western Region, Ghana.



Queens mentioned at some point during their interviews. The exact reason for this lack of funding is not quite clear and may differ from region to region, community to community, and even clan to clan. This particular Queen reminisced that Queens in Himan did not always lack funding, that they previously received gifts from the Chief, and attributes the current lack of funding to “difficult” times. Other Queens argued that the lack of funding was due to Chiefs not giving them their fair share.

Thus, while WTLs unanimously felt respected in their traditional roles, many did not feel financially supported. While some Chiefs may gain revenue from worked lands or the National House of Chiefs’ budget, Queens remain excluded from these profits and budget. Thus, their traditional roles (the equivalent of, or more than a full-time job) do not provide them with a living. So, most Queens hold other revenue-generating occupations. Their traditional roles, therefore, are expected and respected, but not supported. So, in contrast to the tendency in anthropological and development theory to assume the necessity to couple economic and social power, while Queens arguably wield significant political and social powers, they lack substantial economic powers.

#### *Queens’ Associations*

It seems that Queens’ Associations (often called Queenmothers’ Associations) are increasingly necessary to increase Queens’ political, social, and economic agency. As mentioned previously, I had the opportunity to participate in two Queens’ Association meetings: the first meeting to be held in Himan, and one in Wa. While my observation

was limited by pandemic precautions and language barriers, I was honored to attend and got a sense of their importance and structure. They provided Queens with a political, social, and economic support group.

I learned much more about Queens' Associations through several interviews. There are various types and levels of Queens' Associations throughout Ghana. Some are more politically inclined, while some focus more on social networking and development. They exist at community, district, regional, and national levels. It was common for Queens to talk about the social benefits of association: that queens could be there to support each other in life events such as marriage, childbirth, death, etc. Mentioned economic benefits of association were often tied to the social benefits. The associations can come together and pool their resources to financially help one of their members who is struggling in some way. My focus in this section, however, is on the political agency that Queens find in association.

Perhaps the most prominent politically inclined Queens' Association is the *National Council of Women Traditional Leaders*, now called the *Queen Mothers' Platform-Ghana*.<sup>58</sup> I was honored to conduct my final interview during the summer of 2021 with one member of the National Council, Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I: paramount Queen of Ada, and Vice President of the Greater Accra Region Queen Mothers'

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<sup>58</sup> You can learn more about the Queen Mothers' Platform-Ghana on their website: <https://www.qmpgh.org/members>

Council.<sup>59</sup> As I sat across the table from Naana Dumaaley I and her niece, tucked into the corner of a restaurant to hide from the noisy bustle of Accra Mall (the most convenient location for this immensely busy woman), she searched for something on her phone and sent me a PowerPoint presentation on the *Queen Mothers' Platform* that the council had used to present at a *National Durbar and Training for Queen Mothers* on June 22, 2021. It outlined a network for all the Queens of Ghana with a vision, "To have a well-structured institutional set up for Queen Mothers, which is recognized at all levels of governance, as the consultative space for engaging with Queen Mothers, and serving as the voice for women, children, and vulnerable groups in policy decisions" ("The Queen Mothers' Platform- Ghana" 2021).

I was fascinated to learn more about this association, which began in 2001. Naana Dumaaley I joined the council about three years ago, when it was being reignited and restructured. According to her,

They had it before. Before I was even enstooled. But it got to a time, it collapsed. It was not working again. So, it was then that we decided to strategize and raise the National Queen Mother's Council, again.<sup>60</sup>

The initial council consisted of two Queens from each of Ghana's regions. These were paramount Queens who held the President and Vice President titles for the council in

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<sup>59</sup> See Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I's official Facebook page: [\(5\) Naana Kabukour Dumaaley I | Facebook](#)

<sup>60</sup> Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I, paramount Queen of Ada in Greater Accra Region, interview by Kristen Vogel, August 22, 2021, Greater Accra Region, Ghana.

their respective regions. Thus, the current council consists of thirty-two Queens, two from each of Ghana's sixteen regions.



**Figure 16.** Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I.

*\* Photos sent by Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I to the author via WhatsApp and taken by Naana Dumaaley I's niece who attended her interview with her, in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Written consent for their usage was obtained using the Photograph Release Form in Appendix C: Copyright Permissions.*

*Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I is the Paramount Queen of Ada Traditional Area, in Greater Accra Region. She is also the Vice President for the Greater Accra Regional Traditional Council and a member of The Queen Mothers' Platform-Ghana. **Left and Center:** Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I and me, following her interview in the food court of Accra Mall. These are two of my favorites, out of the 54 photos taken by her niece! **Right:** Photo of Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I in her traditional cloth and beads, sent to me via WhatsApp in 2021.*

As I write this, however, the council is bringing more on board: two more Queens from each region, which will make a total of sixty-four Queens on the *Queen Mother's Platform-Ghana*. Naana Dumaaley I explained the purpose of this increase:

So that we'll get the number, so that when we move, they'll know, it is not something ordinary that we are doing.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I

The association seeks a political strength in numbers, to carve out an even more effective and recognized place for Queens in Ghana. By using precise language to define their association they are blending cultural cache associated with the traditional, the gendered woman, and the democratic developmentalist to further their goals within current dominant systems.

While the council would like to bring as many Queens on board as possible, they are not without constraints. As Naana Dumaaley I lamented,

We cannot bring everybody on board because financially we are not strong. Because when we normally have our meetings, people come from the North. Some come from South. Some come from the east. We need to accommodate them. We need to feed them. We need to give them transportation. So, because we don't have that money, that's why we are- now it's a voluntary work we are doing. It's a voluntary work, so we are praying, after everything.<sup>62</sup>

Yet again, a common theme of financial constraint arose, this time in relation to Queens' Associations, rather than individual Queens. As Queens' Associations form, they may economically empower those within them, but the need to search for funding is ever necessary as their goals grow. I was curious about what I had heard from many other participants who hoped that Queens might gain a budget if they gained entry to the National House of Chiefs.<sup>63</sup> Naana Dumaaley I confirmed that Queens' inclusion in the

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<sup>62</sup> Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I

<sup>63</sup> See the National House of Chiefs' website: <https://nhoc.gov.gh>

The website details the history and establishment of the National House of Chiefs: "The National House of Chiefs was established in 1969 under Article 154 of the 1969 Constitution. The Instrument covering the establishment of the House was enacted on the 17th of September 1971, that is the Chieftaincy Act 1971 (Act 370). The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana and Chieftaincy Act 2008, Act 759 maintained the House. The House perform research, judicial, administrative, financial and advisory functions to all

NHC would give them the money they need to support the work that they are currently doing voluntarily.

Seeking greater recognition for Queens is one of the main and loftiest goals for the *Queen Mother's Platform-Ghana*. While gender parity in leadership is preserved by much of Ghana's traditional government, WTLs seeking national recognition may be perceived as overly competitive with the men in leadership. This was evident in Naana Dumaaley I's interview when she declared

We are not competing with the men. We just want to be recognized. Because Queen Mothers are not being recognized. Even the Constitution says, "Chief." It doesn't say "Queen Mother." So anywhere they want Queen Mothers, they will address the letter to the original houses. They will never call us. They will call only the Chiefs. Any program concerning traditional leaders, it is only the Chiefs. So, we, the National Council that know- if we should be sitting down, this thing will go on, and it will never stop. We need to get up, organize ourselves, and let our voices be heard. So, we are working with the institutions: with the First Lady, the Second Lady, the ministries and MMDCE's<sup>64, 65</sup>

It is interesting, to me, that when women seek recognition in leadership to financially and institutionally further their goals, they are so often perceived as "too competitive." This, I think, is a double-standard prevalent in many systems of national governance around the globe, and it contributes to the extreme inequality of gender representation

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Chiefs in Ghana through the Regional Houses of Chiefs" (National House of Chiefs 2021). Since its inauguration by the Presidential Commission in Kumasi, the National House of Chiefs has excluded Queens from becoming members.

<sup>64</sup> MMDCE's are Ghana's metropolitan, municipal, and district chief executives.

<sup>65</sup> Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I

in political leadership worldwide. Yet, the *Queen Mother's Platform-Ghana* has taken this challenge as motivation to organize and collaborate with supportive institutions.

Naana Dumaaley I took pride in what the association had already been able to accomplish, exulting,

We are well structured. We've now registered. We've sent our letters-introduction letters to all the districts and ministries. Especially in gender, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education- where women matter most. We send letters there, to the First Lady's office; the Second Lady's office. Last time, we met with the Gender Minister. We had a meeting with her. We met with the Health Minister. And a whole lot.<sup>66</sup>

It was exciting to hear this prominent Queen speak of the strides they were making as an association, for all of Ghana's Queens. Through my interviews with WTLs and key informants, I had begun to see their admittance to the National House of Chiefs (initially sought around 2011) as a vital step towards their politically representative and economic equality. I wanted to understand if this was a primary focus for the *Queen Mother's Platform- Ghana*. According to Naana Dumaaley I, the law to include Queens in the National House of Chiefs has remained stagnant because the men still oppose it.

Yet, she remained hopeful, saying,

If by chance it comes, fine. But if it doesn't come, we are okay. There's been a proposal that we should be added: we should be called into the National House. But it's like the men are not willing to pass that law. So, we also want to just organize ourselves and be a voice for women. Yes, be a voice- not only Queen Mothers; traditional leaders and women in general.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I

<sup>67</sup> Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I

After about ten years of waiting, Queens have still not gained entry to the National House of Chiefs, even though the Constitution and the Chieftaincy Act define a “chief” as “a chief or queenmother” (Constitution of The Republic of Ghana 1993, 153; Chieftaincy Act 2008, 26). Yet, Queens continue to build their political, social, and economic power through all levels and categories of Queens’ Associations, and the National Council presses forward, strengthening in numbers, advocating for Queens’ greater recognition, and seeking policy change for the benefit of women and all vulnerable populations.

### **Synergies Between Queens and UN/USAID Workers**

In the hope of making the results of this thesis relevant to future collaboration between Ghana’s Queens and multilateral organizations with great power for effecting social and economic change, I interviewed one Ghanaian woman who has worked since 2005 with the United Nations (UNFPA<sup>68</sup> and UNDP<sup>69</sup>) in Ghana: Dr. Esi Awotwi, and one Ghanaian woman who worked with Peace Corps in the past and who currently works with USAID: Nadia Tagoe. I was excited and grateful to have the opportunity to interview Nadia, a dear friend of mine who was the *PEPFAR* and *Let Girls Learn* Program Coordinator for Peace Corps Ghana when I served as a volunteer. She had inspired me to enact my dream of leading a girls’ self-empowerment yoga group in my

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<sup>68</sup> UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

<sup>69</sup> UNDP: United Nations Development Programme



Upper West community, supported me in my dreams to pursue further education and research in Ghana, and it had been five years since I last saw her. Furthermore, I had been preparing for this research for two years, and she offered encouragement along the way and even connected me through the “multilateral organization grapevine” with my other key informant, Dr. Esi Awotwi.



**Figure 17.** Dr. Esi Awotwi and Nadia Tagoe.

*\* Photos taken by the author and Nadia’s mother in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Written consent for their usage was obtained using the Photograph Release Form in Appendix C: Copyright Permissions.*

*Left: This was a selfie I took of myself with Dr. Esi Awotwi after our interview by a basketball court, outside of the Junction Mall in Accra. It was an absolute honor and pleasure to be able to interview her about her work with UNDP and Queens in Ghana! Interviewing Dr. Awotwi renewed my respect for multilateral organizations like the UN and the work people do through them. She inspired me to seek work with UN Women or UNDP in the future! Right: Here I am with my long-time friend and role-model, Nadia Tagoe. I first met Nadia as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ghana. At the time she was the PEPFAR coordinator and the Let Girls Learn Grant Coordinator. When I wrote on my Volunteer Report Form that a “blue skies project” for me was to have a girls’ self-empowerment yoga group in my community, she wrote back, “You can!” She helped me think through the steps to implement it: seeking permission from the Chiefs, writing a Let Girls Learn grant, and just doing it! Nadia now works with USAID and has a beautiful family, who I finally got to meet at their home in Accra. I have cropped this picture to maintain her daughter’s anonymity, as she was included in the photo. It was a true gift to be able to spend time with her again, have the chance to interview her about her work with USAID, and be inspired by her once more.*

By the time I finally met with Dr. Awotwi in Accra, we had been talking for almost two years via email. I was excited to interview these women about their work in

relation to my research on Ghana's Queens, as both have a passion for women's empowerment and have worked on more than one women- or girl-focused project with a multilateral organization. While their opinions do not necessarily reflect those of their organizations, they are important in the discussion of Queens' goals and where they align with employees of multilateral organizations in Ghana.

Before delving into the synergies between these women and Ghana's Queens, I felt it was important to gain a better understanding on how or if their organizations collaborated with traditional leaders. As I cheerfully sat with Nadia at her kitchen table, her two sweet kids watching Looney Toons next to us, she confirmed the strong ties that USAID has with traditional leaders in Ghana:

USAID works with the Chiefs, with the communities, and with the government. So, all the stakeholders are involved. Yeah, we pay attention to that. And USAID works with communities. So, we engage the community leadership. We engage the Queenmothers. We engage the opinion leaders, you know, all those people who actually influence things in their community and they have leadership positions and roles to play. We engage them. I think that's the only way you can actually have a successful program- by engagement at all levels. So, at a national level, at the regional level, at the district, and also at the community. USAID does all of that.<sup>70</sup>

As Nadia made clear, collaboration with traditional leadership is a necessity for multilateral organizations in Ghana, because they are opinion leaders and influencers in their communities. This was something I also experienced with the Peace Corps in

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<sup>70</sup> Nadia Tagoe, Clinical Care and Quality Assurance Specialist at USAID, interview by Kristen Vogel, June 18, 2021, Greater Accra Region, Ghana.

Ghana. When introduced to my community, and whenever I wanted to involve the community in a new project, I was taught to always address the Chiefs first (there were no Queens in my community), and to seek their approval.

As Dr. Awotwi confirmed, working with traditional leadership is also a priority for the United Nations in Ghana:

One of our roles is to strengthen or build capacity. So, I mean, local groups. In the local groups: our community structures... So, we believe in, when you are going to develop a community for sustainability, you don't create a new set of structures. So, you work with existing structures. So, you go to a community- the traditional leader is there. We make sure that we work with them: build their capacity to also provide intervention... They are very powerful. And they really have their subjects who follow them. So, in identifying those kinds of people, it is important to ensure that we strengthen their capacities.<sup>71</sup>

It was clear from both women's responses that collaboration with traditional authority is important for the viability of multilateral organizations' agendas in Ghana, because they hold a significant amount of social and cultural clout. Dr. Awotwi even confirmed that the UN has been collaborating with traditional leaders in Ghana since its inception in the 1970's. This underlined the importance of understanding where these organizations and Queens might share common goals worth working towards together. In this section, I attempt to outline common themes between these interviews and those of Queens to suggest initiatives for future collaboration.

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<sup>71</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi, Technical Advisor at PAYDP, previous Joint Program Coordinator at United Nations Population Fund, interview by Kristen Vogel, June 16, 2021, Greater Accra Region, Ghana.

## *Women in All Levels of Leadership*

Queens and my two USAID and UN employee key informants unanimously agreed that there should be more women in national government and leadership in Ghana, and around the world. While the Constitution of Ghana and the Chieftaincy Act restrict Queens from partisan political pursuits, they do not restrict them from non-partisan encouragement and support of women seeking all levels of leadership positions (Ghana 1993; 2008). Likewise, USAID supports empowering women in “politics and governance through addressing fundamental legal, social, and economic constraints,” and UN SDG 5.5 makes, “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life,” a priority (*2020 Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy 2020*, 19-21; *Goal 5 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs*, 2021).

Furthermore, the 2020 UN General Assembly renewed a focus on increasing women in leadership. UN Secretary-General, António Guterres began a high-level meeting with world leaders on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, on the status of gender equality 25 years after the Beijing platform for women’s rights with the statement, “It starts with the equal representation of women in leadership positions – in Governments, boardrooms, in climate negotiations and at the peace table – everywhere decisions are taken that affect people’s lives. This is fundamentally a question of power” (“General Assembly Meetings Coverage” 2020). Immediately followed by South African politician

and Executive Director of the UN Women, Phymzile Mlambo-Ngcuka recalled that there were no Heads of State or Government when the UN was founded in 1945, 12 in 1995, and 22 in 2020, declaring, “All in all, progress, but not yet enough, and too slow,” and calling for “big bold steps” to achieve parity in all spheres (“General Assembly Meetings Coverage” 2020). Thus, the UN is concerned with achieving gender parity at all levels of leadership.

The potential synergies between the agendas of Ghana’s WTLs and USAID and the UN were evident during my interviews with Nadia and Dr. Awotwi. I was curious to know why, though most of Ghana’s traditional governments had gender parity due to a sort of gender quota created by the necessity of having both Chiefs and Queens at all levels, Ghana’s national government did not implement a gender quota. Dr. Awotwi shared her thoughts on this matter throughout our interview:

[That is when we have an Affirmative Action law, to make sure we bring a lot of women.]<sup>72</sup>... So even the government has tried to get females to be into governments, like to be in positions. Sometimes there's pressure because unlike- we wonder whether they have really been greedy, that this number of people should be... in Ghana, they believe that we shouldn't just leave a place for them like that. But we should encourage them that- they should be encouraged to be elected. You know, in some places, like Rwanda, in some countries it's like when a woman is standing, the man should not be standing again, but it's not that way. In Ghana, we feel that the woman and the man should compete, but then you should empower the women to win.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The Affirmative Action Bill was drafted in Ghana in 2012 but remains unratified. It will ensure women’s equitable participation in all levels of decision making, like in several other African countries such as Rwanda, Senegal, Kenya, etc.

<sup>73</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

Dr. Awotwi's statement reflects the national and multilateral value of gender-blind competition as opposed to the valued gender balance of Ghana's traditional matriarchal governments. Conversely, her belief in reaching gender equity in leadership through empowering women to lead was affirmed by Nadia, who said during our interview,

At the end of the day, we also want someone who is competent and capable, and has the experience to lead. So how can the women also build up their experience and their expertise, and prove that they can lead? ... Because we want women to go in there and show the men that they can do it! So how do we develop ourselves and build our own capacity for those positions, so that when the opportunity presents itself, and women stick into it, they can actually do their very best, and everybody sees them really shining?<sup>74</sup>

While both women felt that empowering women with the capacities that they need to win elections and lead well is crucial to the struggle against gender inequity in leadership, both also mentioned the Affirmative Action Bill when I asked why they thought Ghana's national government had not made specific provisions for the inclusion of women in leadership positions. Nadia expanded a bit more on this, saying,

I think they were talking about the affirmative bill or something. I don't know much about it. I have to go and read more about it. But I think it's something that the, how would I say it, that the government in power will have to try and deliberately do that. You know, if, for example, the President or you know, the government in power may decide that when we are selecting our ministers or heads of institutions, maybe we'll have to look out for having more women. And it's not just saying it but committing to it. So, what are some of the policies that can enforce that? I think there was one time, there was a policy that was being developed or so, and it got stuck somewhere. But how do they pick that and then really commit to it by enforcing it to happen. So that it's not just one political party that comes and does it and goes, and then it's lost. But it's institutionalized. And then it comes to stay. So, every four years, when a new party comes to

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<sup>74</sup> Nadia Tagoe

power, they actually continue from where the previous party ended. And I think that's how we can get more women involved.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, it seemed that both women truly supported efforts to empower women to take on new roles in leadership, and Nadia brought a focus to the power of institutionalizing gender parity, so that it could not be slowed by opposing forces and changing administrations. She clarified her belief that both grassroots and institutional changes were necessary, summarizing,

So, most women, I feel they are not really encouraged enough. They may have everything it takes to lead. But then that system: that support system to get them there, they feel, "Oh, maybe a man would be more suitable for this. I have children, I have these responsibilities. I have that. And I don't want to." But they may be [suitable], you know. But I think it also needs to be appealing from the top. So, what are the policies that are put in place that makes it easier for women to step into these positions? And we really... We are not there yet. If you look at the percentages of women in Parliament right now, it's way lower than men... So that needs to be institutionalized. It needs to be passed, like a sort of like a policy or a bill, or something. And so, every government that takes office knows that this- this percentage is reserved for women.<sup>76</sup>

As a researcher from the United States, where we are also still far from the reaching gender parity in all levels of leadership, and where we have also not implemented any form of gender quota for leadership positions, I find the idea of such a top-down approach intriguing. I wonder what we all might learn from the greater achievement of gender parity through Ghana's traditional leadership, which remains active and respected today.

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<sup>75</sup> Nadia Tagoe

<sup>76</sup> Nadia Tagoe

As I spoke with Nadia on this topic, I came to a realization that I shared with her. In Ghana, it is possible for a Chief to be a woman, but a Queen can never be a man. We laughed together. It was an unforgettable moment for me, as we laughed in her kitchen; me and this woman who had done so much to empower my own work and career with women and girls, enjoying a momentary flip in the conversation to revel in the existence of one leadership role reserved solely for women.

That's true. That's true. That's true. So that needs to happen. Whilst we also encourage more women to challenge themselves and go and shine, you know? So, I think we need to work on it both ways.<sup>77</sup>

At the heart of this realization is an affirmation of a new, though grounded in *herstory*, African feminism that is “distinctly heterosexual” as opposed to mainstream feminism that is distinctly non-binary (Mikell et al. 1997, 4). I believe both have something to offer a world seeking gender equity and equality.<sup>78</sup>

Ghana's Queens and Queens' Associations clearly have a similar agenda to empower women as leaders. As Naana Dumaaley I said, on behalf of the *Queen Mother's Platform-Ghana (NCWTL)*,

We want our voices to be heard. We want to be the voice for women. We want to be a voice for women. To have a well-structured, institutional setup for women.

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<sup>77</sup> Nadia Tagoe

<sup>78</sup> While some might argue that gender quotas exclude those identifying as non-binary, I am interested in and focused on their common achievement of greater gender parity in representation. If one takes from this new African feminism the core belief that gender lenses matter in leadership, gender quotas could be relevant to other feminisms, too. They could call for those in leadership to reflect the percentages of each self-identified gender in a society.



We want to be recognized at all levels. And we want to be the voice for the voiceless: the vulnerable in the society. We want to be the voice for all women.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, I suggest that there is a wonderful opportunity for multilateral collaboration not only to increase the effective and economic powers of Queens in Ghana, but also to support the efforts of women in Queens' communities to take on new positions of leadership at all levels: traditional and national, non-governmental and governmental, multilateral and international, and grassroots and institutional.

#### *National House of Chiefs*

As I have explored in previous sections, one vital step towards increasing Queens' political and economic power in Ghana is seeking their inclusion in the National House of Chiefs. This endeavor was also supported by my interview with Dr. Awotwi, who was deeply involved in the original attempts to achieve this goal. According to Dr. Awotwi, who has worked extensively with the National House of Chiefs, it is comprised of paramount Chief's: one from each of the Regional Houses of Chiefs in Ghana. It is a recognized organization, with government backing.

I spoke with Dr. Awotwi with the intent of learning more about the National House of Chiefs and what benefits they receive that Queens do not. It seems the intention behind institutionalizing the National House of Chiefs was a good one. Dr.

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<sup>79</sup> Naana Kabukour Dagojo Dumaaley I, paramount Queen of Ada in Greater Accra Region, interview by Kristen Vogel, August 22, 2021, Greater Accra Region, Ghana.

Awotwi argued the importance of enshrining the National House of Chiefs in the Constitution as a protection of indigenous governance, saying,

The traditional leaders were there before colonial rule and also when we got independence. And they're ruling there, so we should let them maintain that same thing... It's part of our constitutional mandate to ensure that the traditional system still works... So, after they've ensured the traditional system still works, then within each institution, you have to make sure that we have a budget plan to support the traditional system... That is why the National House of Chiefs came. Just that they really moved with the Chiefs and left the Queenmothers.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, the creation of the National House of Chiefs was a protection from national erasure of indigenous governance, but it did not protect all traditional leaders equally: at least not in practice. Affirming the concerns voiced to me by several Queens, she lamented,

The challenge was that the National House of Chiefs was even recognized under the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture. And government has a budget for them. The government supports the running of the National House of Chiefs. The government supports their quarterly meetings... If there is vehicles... It's like there's an office for that. But there was nothing for the Queenmothers. So, even still, I will still say there's nothing like that because unlike- we have a secretariate, which is strong for a Chief- Queens still don't have that much.<sup>81</sup>

Dr. Awotwi's confirmation that one of the key benefits received by the National House of Chiefs is a government budget, along with my findings that one of Queens' greatest limitations is inadequate funding for their often-voluntary work, indicates that seeking Queens' entry to the National House of Chiefs remains a vital goal for Queens to remain

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<sup>80</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

<sup>81</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

effective in their communities. Thus, it is also a vital goal for ensuring their equal participation in all levels of leadership.

Queens in Ghana have been chasing this goal for about ten years, and Dr. Awotwi has been involved from the beginning of their efforts in 2011. She explained that her advocacy for Ghana's Queens was a part of her role with United Nations Population Fund, and came as a result of her work with the National House of Chiefs and Ghana's Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture:

So, while we were working with the National House of Chiefs, strengthening their capacities, (We give them training, and then we give them action plans. We go back, have review meetings, and follow up on them) then we realized that we still also have to work with the Queenmothers. They were not as organized as the Chiefs. And seriously speaking, in some of the communities, the Queenmothers are more active. The Chiefs are just... They don't...They [Queens] are more pro-active. So that is when, as UNFPA, we started- myself and a few others assigned to that schedule- started with talking to the Ministry of Chieftaincy, to see how we could get- because we're already working with traditional leaders- how we could get the support.<sup>82</sup>

I believe this narrative solidifies the importance of collaboration between Queens and multilateral organizations such as the UN, who have the positionality to work with various recognized institutions and ministries in Ghana. As Dr. Awotwi further explained, UNFPA had already been working with the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture, providing them with funding to build the capacities of traditional leaders. Though not absolute, the funding relationships that multilateral organizations such as

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<sup>82</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

the UN have with official ministries and institutions gives them a position of authority in the issues they take up and the change they promote.

Dr. Awotwi further explained that she thought the Queens were less organized than the Chiefs because they did not receive a government budget: that the National House of Chiefs and the Regional Houses of Chiefs had “stuff” and offices and that, as a whole institution, “naturally, that moves faster than the Queenmothers, who don't have that opportunity.” She also explained,

I think it is also because the government really took up the National House of Chiefs. So, we have National House of Chiefs. We have Regional Houses of Chiefs. There are even Divisional Houses of Chiefs. And they are sponsored. The government has a budget line supporting them. So once the government has a budget line- and you know, one of the things that makes these associations work is meetings: networking. So, if they were to have quarterly meetings- they deliberate, they move, they go-and-come- that alone really brings them together. But there's no budget left for Queenmothers. So, most of the time, they struggle to do this on things on their own and really, coming together is difficult.<sup>83</sup>

This insight aligns with Nana Dumaaley I's assessment of the financial restrictions of the *Queen Mother's Platform-Ghana (NCWTL)*, once again reiterating the importance of Queens obtaining a national budget to support their collaborative efforts. Again, this could be made possible if Queens were included in the National House of Chiefs: what seems to be the most frustratingly elusive goal for Ghana's WTLs.

Dr. Awotwi recalled her involvement in Queens' initial attempt to gain entry to the National House of Chiefs:

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<sup>83</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

I think 2011/ 2012. We tried to work with Ministry of Chieftaincy to include females in the National House: so, it should be the "National House of Chiefs and Queenmothers." ... So once in a while, we will get Chiefs that will bring them on board, because they said they had to do a lot... They call this gazetting and there are so many issues that they have to go through, and the men were very resistant of that... Okay, so we used to have meetings with the National House of Chiefs, but sometimes you say you specifically want to see this number of Queenmothers as part of the meeting. So those were ad hoc, but really institutionalizing it to say that "In this National House of Chiefs, we have this number of Queenmothers" and all that, is still a process that is going on. However, it's based on that, that the Queenmothers also knew that they are a really strong force, and based on them meeting in groups, others also decided to form groups of Queenmother associations... So at least they will have some kind of force to reckon with, to be able to also move. Because sometimes it is difficult with them as one. But when they become an association, they'll be able to really push to get things done... Even though they are strong, and they have an NGO, they are not being really taken up by the government, or supported by the government like the way they really support the National House of Chiefs... So that is that's the challenge. That is the dynamics at the country level.<sup>84</sup>

Dr. Awotwi's advocacy for Queens through her position with UNFPA was invaluable, but she made sure to also give credit to civil society and other groups who were advocating at that time. From her own experience advocating for the inclusion of Queens in the NHC, she suggests that the process to institutionalize their involvement continues. Though, when I spoke with her, she believed the effort had died down since about 2012. Hopefully, through the revival of the *National Council of Women Traditional Leaders* as the *Queen Mothers' Platform-Ghana*, and the many other growing associations and networks of Queens in Ghana (such as the one that Dr. Awotwi connected me to through development Queen NanaHemaa Adwoa Awindor, *Obaapa Development*

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<sup>84</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

*Foundation*<sup>85</sup>), the cause will be taken up with even more force than before.<sup>86</sup> I here

conclude on what I believe is a hopeful note, and with the voice of Dr. Awotwi:

I know that there's- a lot of work is still going on, but it doesn't mean that it's easy. But at least we have moved far, because at those times, we did not hear of any of these associations. Or even if the associations were just bringing them together, they didn't have a voice. They were just coming together. Now they really have a voice. Some of them really- like especially Nana Awindor's group, as a convener- they have a voice and a whole lot of things. And they're recognized both nationally and internationally.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See *Obaapa Development Foundation* website: <https://obaapadevelopmentfoundation.org>

<sup>86</sup> See Conclusion, Implications for Applied Anthropology, Areas for Continued Research *Queens' Impact in Ghana* for areas of research that might assist in this movement.

<sup>87</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Conclusion**

In my research with 22 Ghanaian women traditional leaders and key informants working with the UN and USAID in Ghana, I found gender parity in leadership to be a central tenet of Ghana's indigenous feminisms. Ghana's Queens are politically and socially powerful, with respected voices and growing networks, but their social and political power is stifled by current economic constraints. In my research, I found that women traditional leaders from across Ghana valued the institutionalization of gender parity in traditional governance as a key principle of women's empowerment. I suggest that Ghana's national government may benefit from modeling gender quotas after their traditional and indigenous matriarchal governments, and that the proportion of national and local governments upholding Affirmative Action and gender quota laws may serve as an indicator of women's effective and equal participation in decision-making and leadership at all levels (UN SDG 5.5) for multilateral organizations. This is an important indicator because Affirmative Action laws are necessary temporary measures taken to ameliorate systemic oppressions and have proven quite effective in increasing women's political participation ("Affirmative Action" 2017; Kang 2013; Tripp et al. 2009b; 2009a).

Validation of Ghana's women traditional leaders' perspectives on women's empowerment contributes indigenous African perspectives to the fields of postcolonial indigenous feminisms, feminist anthropology, and gender and development. I am grateful to have had, and to still have the opportunity to be in dialogue with several of Ghana's women traditional leaders, scholars at the University of Ghana, and Ghanaian professionals in the field of gender equality, on new critical postcolonial discourse seeking to understand and promote non-Western, indigenous definitions and traditional indicators of women's empowerment. Transnational feminists such as Mohanty, Abu-Lughod, Stanlie James, Morris, Spivak, and Gunn Allen maintain that academics have underestimated women's agency among marginalized and subaltern women in places like Ghana, and there is a need to highlight women's voices and insert them into larger policy dialogues (Mohanty 2013; Abu-Lughod 2002; S. James 2019; S. M. James 1989; Morris 2010; Spivak 2010; Gunn Allen 2013). I found this to be particularly true in speaking with 22 of Ghana's women traditional leaders and realizing the efforts they have made, and continue to make, to insert their own voices into larger policy dialogues.

Qualitative research on the impact of Queens in the matriarchal systems of Ghana offers insight to the growing conversation on the socio-cultural aspects of women's empowerment in Ghanaian, African, and global politics. It also contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5.5 to "ensure women's full and



effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” (UN: 2019). I have explained how Queens in Ghana participate in forms of political, social, and economic empowerment, what the local understandings of women’s empowerment amongst Ghana’s women traditional leaders are, and how a Ghanaian framework for women’s empowerment can enrich the Western (UN) framework to better serve women on a broad global scale. A postcolonial indigenous<sup>88</sup> and transnational feminist approach to women’s empowerment in Ghana recognizes that Ghanaian women are traditionally “empowered” (or to use what I think is a more culturally appropriate term, *respected*) through strategic *representation*. While there are many implications, I have reasoned that mandated gender parity in all levels of leadership is a key indigenous Ghanaian principle of women’s empowerment. This model of women’s empowerment that is indigenous to many Ghanaian peoples has not been implemented by national government. In such a case where women’s representation remains much higher in traditional government than in national government, multilateral organizations such as the UN and USAID should be looking to that traditional government for solutions and continued opportunities to collaborate towards the shared goal of gender parity in all levels of leadership: community leaders,

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<sup>88</sup> Again, I use the phrase “postcolonial indigenous,” as it is defined by Bagele Chilisa in her book, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, to recognize “the continuous struggle” of Ghana’s cultural groups’ “to resist suppression” of their ways of perceiving reality, ways of knowing, and the value systems that inform political processes, “reaffirming that Western knowledge is the only legitimate knowledge” (Chilisa 2020, 9).

organization leaders, multilateral organization leaders, parliamentarians, and politicians, etc.

Maintaining the social powers of expanded networks and authority on public health and community development, and the political powers of peacekeeping and conflict resolution, Ghana's Queens deserve recognition and respect for their impact on Ghana's communities, especially on Ghana's women and girls. More importantly, they deserve and need greater financial support for the immensely important work they do keeping peace, promoting health and development, and leading as role models to community members. They are the equivalent of public health professionals, peacekeepers, advocates and public interest lawyers, and community leaders, yet they are not being financially compensated for the work they do to hold the country together.

Since Queens are expected to perform their traditional roles without pay, they hold little economic power and are often forced to financially support themselves through other income-generating occupations which they find difficult to manage alongside traditional leadership duties. Often struggling to financially support themselves and their immediate and extended families, their ideas for their communities are frequently relegated to the status of unattainable dreams. Therefore, their inclusion in the National House of Chiefs should be a project garnering maximum attention from the UN and any researchers willing to advocate with them. This would

improve Queens' political, social, and economic powers. The push for their inclusion, initiated by the *National Council of Women Traditional Leaders* and supporting multilateral organizations like the UNFPA around 2011, has renewed hope through the revitalization of the NCWTL as the *Queen Mothers' Platform-Ghana* and new national associations such as *Obaapa Development Foundation*. Therefore, supporting multilateral organizations must meet the growing movement with even more support than before.

This may require a review and reformulation of multilateral frameworks for women's empowerment, such as the UN's framework and indicators for SDG 5.5, which do not currently include the number of national and local governments with successfully passed and implemented Affirmative Action laws. I believe that my interviews with 22 Ghanaian WTLs and two Ghanaian women employees of multilateral organizations confirm their common belief that the mandated gender parity of traditional leadership is preferable to the gender inequality of national leadership, worldwide. Thus, gender parity Affirmative Action as an indicator of achieving UN SDG 5.5 may better serve women on a broad global scale.

### **Implications for Applied Anthropology: Areas for Continued Research**

#### *Queens' Impact in Ghana*

Interested in how I might make my own research applicable to Queens' efforts to join the National House of Chiefs, and how other researchers might go even farther

than me, I asked Dr. Awotwi what she thought social scientists like me could do that would be of service to their movement. She responded,

I think that there has been a lot of research on Queenmothers and tradition, but there has not been this kind of research of how they've even developed from the ages- how you can demonstrate that based on this development, if they are able to give them more voice or more power, they will be able to really influence decision-making or developing their communities. I don't think there has been much research on that. Because it is important to do more with evidence.<sup>89</sup>

Determining together that an impact analysis would be most useful, Dr. Awotwi continued:

I don't think anything about this has happened. You know, most of the things we do will be on, maybe issues of development or Queenmothers, but really that kind of analysis- and especially looking at their journey, how far they have gone... recommendations can really come out to show that it is important to get these kinds of structures in place for the Queenmothers as well. I think that is very good.<sup>90</sup>

Dr. Awotwi stressed the importance of cultural breadth in any further advocacy research on Queens' impact:

If you want to go and make a case to the government or parliamentarians, you'll not select just one [community] in the South. You have to cut across the North. So that kind of study, too, should be a bit more robust, because the cultures are different in area places. That's why it should have all the areas in it, and that is why it is a challenge. Because there are different dynamics. So, if you really want to make a case, you have make sure to have some kind of evidence- at least the different key cultures- to say, "this is what is happening." So, if you just do it in Akan, then you take it, and people will say that you have not prepared. "What about these people?" But if you are able to have from [each key culture], and say "look from this part, this is how the changing roles are. This is how I have

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<sup>89</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi, Technical Advisor at PAYDP, previous Joint Program Coordinator at United Nations Population Fund, interview by Kristen Vogel, June 16, 2021, Greater Accra Region, Ghana.

<sup>90</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

analyzed for the various sections, which at least represents the key cultural groups, or the regions.” And that makes it more robust.<sup>91</sup>

As we discussed the possibilities, Dr. Awotwi expressed the common frustration that research is not often turned into policy briefs and that it just sits on shelves (or now in cyber-space) after students graduate. So, we discussed what would be necessary in a policy brief to assist Queens in their movement. Her advice for writing a policy brief, or more than one policy briefs follows:

In doing the brief, you target. You have to target the people. Some of the information that to give to UNFP, it may not be relevant for the parliamentarian... For example, if you are going to give a policy brief to the Minister of Finance, you don't have to waste your time to talk about the roles, whatever-whatever-whatever. You have to be sure that you have something that talks about the fact that these are the issues, and this is how they can contribute to GDP... You know, the financial person goes, "OK, uh-huh." So, it varies... One policy brief may not be enough for one person, so you look at the target that you're sending to. And that is how you're able to do it... In doing the policy briefs, you target certain arms of government. You can target the parliamentarians. You can target the traditional leaders. You can target religious leaders. You target, maybe any group that you think that can be involved... So, for one, one issue, you can turn it in different ways to target about four groups because it varies.<sup>92</sup>

Dr. Awotwi particularly stressed the importance of targeting the Ministry of Finance, but her suggestion to target “any group that you think that can be involved,” leaves space to determine several routes for activism: the press, non-profits and community-based organizations, grant-writers for non-profits and community-based organizations,

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<sup>91</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

<sup>92</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

public interest law firms, public health workers, etc. Finally, Dr. Awotwi recommended that advocacy should target the general public through social media, recalling,

So, when we want to address an issue we have a media group, and then we used to tell them that, "Okay, everybody, on this particular day, write or broadcast or do articles on this particular topic." So, you realize that, for that particular day, they are all talking about something- the same thing. So, it gets more attention than one person just writing it.<sup>93</sup>

To summarize, Dr. Awotwi recommends continued research on the impact of Queens on their communities in each of Ghana's key cultures: spanning north to south, and east to west. This research must then be targeted towards several ministries and parliamentarians. She put particular emphasis on the importance of targeting the Ministry of Finance. The research must then be crafted into targeted policy briefs and advocated for at meetings as well. Finally, the general public must be reached through social media advocacy, and perhaps social media movements.

#### *Alternative Dispute Resolution*

One interesting finding that came from my interview with Nana Ogyedom Ama Tsetsewa I, the divisional Chief of Gomoa Akyempem (and the only woman Chief I interviewed), was the potential applicability of her work with Alternative Dispute Resolution to the roles of Ghana's WTLs. Realizing that she could not sustain her work as a trader while also putting her time, effort, and passion into her work as a traditional leader, Nana Tsetsewa I became an Alternative Dispute Resolution practitioner. This

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<sup>93</sup> Dr. Esi Awotwi

allowed her to practice dispute resolution (already a traditional leader's role) and collect a small fee (\$10 at most: about 50 Ghana Cedis). It is a formalized version of what Queens often do, with a paper trail, but it could possibly help them to gain financially from the work they currently do without remuneration.

According to Nana Tsetsewa I, becoming certified as an ADR practitioner in Ghana is easy. She explains the process:

We have the training sessions that come on from the judicial service. And then we have private schools that are also teaching ADR. With that of the government- it's 48 hours. So, it's like if you don't have the passion of solving problems, it's not enough. They gave you the fundamentals on how to do it. Then from that you have to continue to teach yourself- to learn. You have to know the acts of the state. So, when somebody comes and he's talking about children, you know that the government, the Act of Children, says *this* and *that*, so you can tell the person- probably *this* and *that*. You're not quoting the law or interpreting it, but they've made it simpler. That and then they have Divorce Act, and 'distin' Act... So that's how it goes.<sup>94</sup>

For those Queens who may not utilize English, Nana Tsetsewa I believes they can still do it, but they may just need to get a secretary. And if there is a case that requires more advanced knowledge of certain acts, she says they can just refer the case to someone else (as they already do). So, it seems that Queens may have little to lose from pursuing ADR training, but at least something small to gain. Nana Tsetsewa I offers this final encouragement:

So, it's a good practice that the Queenmothers should adopt. Because we are in the homes, and we settle issues. So, when you have all this training... they can

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<sup>94</sup> Nana Ogyedom Ama Tsetsewa I, divisional Chief in Gomoa Akyempem, Central Region, interview by Kristen Vogel, August 21, 2021, Greater Accra Region, Ghana.

still use their local way of life to do it. But this style might help. They can have a secretary to document it. And it becomes binding.<sup>95</sup>



**Figure 18.** Nana Ogyedom Ama Tsetsewa I

*\* Photos taken by author in the summer of 2021 for the purpose of this study. Written consent for their usage was obtained using the Photograph Release Form in Appendix C: Copyright Permissions.*

*Nana Ogyedom Ama Tsetsewa I is the Divisional Chief (Osumpahen) in Gomoa Akyempem, Central Region. She has also been enstooled as the village Chief (Mankrado) of Gomoa Oguan (2004) and the leader of the Fantes (Fantefohen) in Tema (2013). Nana Tsetsewa I broke down the etymology of the Fantse terms “Osumpahen” and “Mankrado” for me. “Osumpa” means “You have served your people” and “hen” means “Chief”: thus “Chief who has served their people.” “Man” means “town” and “krado” means “key”: thus “Town Key.” **Left:** Nana Ogyedom Ama Tsetsewa I at her desk in her Alternative Dispute Resolution Centre in Tema. Behind her are several higher educations (in Chieftaincy Studies) certificates and photos of her in traditional dress. The photo slightly to the right of center, behind her, shows the traditional black and white cloth that distinguishes her as a Fante traditional leader. **Right:** View of Nana Ogyedom Ama Tsetsewa I’s Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Centre in Tema, from the street. Nana Tsetsewa I has found a way to “legitimize” her traditional role in conflict resolution as Chief in modern Ghanaian society, by becoming certified as an Alternative Dispute Resolution practitioner. She urges other traditional leaders to follow her lead, to increase their knowledge of the current legal system and gain the ability to put monetary value to their work.*

## Significance for Transnational Feminisms and Anthropology

Framing this research as postcolonial and transnational feminist work provides a space for the voices of Ghana’s women traditional leaders to express their own indigenous feminisms and push back against the colonial de-emphasis of women leaders in global matriarchies and gynarchies (Gunn Allen 2013; Amadiume 1987a), the

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<sup>95</sup> Nana Ogyedom Ama Tsetsewa I



homogenized category of the oppressed “average Third World Woman” (Mohanty 2013, 22), and the silencing effects of neoliberal nationalization on the subaltern (Spivak 2010). Engaging with Ghana’s WTLs and validating their perspectives on Ghana’s traditional matriarchies is my activist response to the claim of Native American feminist scholar, Paula Gunn Allen that, “The root of oppression is loss of memory” (Gunn Allen 2013, 20). It supports a narrative that recognizes gender parity in leadership as an indigenous feminism to Ghana’s women, and not something new that multilateral organizations and the West are trying to *help* them achieve for the first time. It allows me to write from the humbled perspective that I, as a U.S. citizen, have much to learn from the women of Ghana about sustainable development and gender equality/ equity.

This research is relevant to the field of anthropology because it speaks back to colonial notions of leadership belonging to men, perpetuated (whether or not unknowingly) by anthropologists like Rattray, and it furthers the work of anthropologists like Farrar and Amadiume, who argue for the merits of West African matriarchy as a gender-equitable system. Through this work, the voices of 22 WTLs in Ghana have the opportunity to claim gender parity in leadership as an achievement of their traditional systems of governance, and to express their preference for the traditional systems’ institutionalized gender parity over the national system’s lack of progress and empty promises towards gender equality. Thus, this research contributes the voices of Ghana’s women traditional leaders to the field of anthropology, where

they have for so long been absent. It further provides a basis on which other applied anthropologists and social scientists might begin to build a repository of research with Ghana's Queens, towards the goal of writing policy briefs and advocating for their national recognition and economic support.

### **Personal Reflections**

As I started this project, I harbored some academic frustrations with the bureaucracy of multilateral organizations. I felt skeptical about the women's empowerment initiatives of the United Nations: that they were Western-centric and not applicable to many women in Ghana. While browsing their website, some of these feelings still surface. But my experience in Ghana during the summer of 2021 took me off the page and into peoples' lives. My five years in the U.S. after Peace Corps service in Ghana solidified a need in me to return, but by the time I finally went back, I felt jaded. I felt like the world system was a mess, beyond hope (Wallerstein 1976; Gunder-Frank 1966), and perhaps it still is. But meeting the people that work in the organizations I read about so often; learning about their postcolonial indigenous and transnational feminist work on the ground: that renewed a hope in the people that make the organizations.

I conclude this thesis with renewed hope in the many flawed systems of the world: that for every cynic there is at least one optimist, and that maybe we can all be both, as we journey through life experiences. There are Queens in Ghana steadily

seeking the support they deserve. Likewise, there are women and non-binary gendered individuals of all intersectional identities seeking and winning leadership positions in the United States. Perhaps, over time, multilateral organizations and nations will begin to seek out and validate marginalized indigenous principles of women's empowerment, allowing them to transform global models of women's leadership.

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## Appendix A:

### Semi-Structured Interview Guides

#### Woman Traditional Leader Interview Guide

##### *Background Information:*

- Ethnicity/ tribal identity
- Age
- Gender
- Number of people in household (immediate family/ extended family)
- Estimated household income (if willing)/ property owned or inherited/ production of food to last through the season
- Receipt of financial assistance from relatives outside of Ghana
- Any occupations
- Age of marriage when appropriate
- Age of motherhood when appropriate

##### *Queens' Roles in the Community*

- Who is your community?
- What do you do daily in the community?
- Are you involved in any women's associations/ projects?
- What are your responsibilities?
- What things are you in charge of?
- What is important for women to teach their daughters? ... sons?

##### *The Roles of Queens*

- What is a Queenmother?
- What do they do?
- How are Queenmothers elected?
- How do they help women in the community? (Do they?)
- How has their role changed over time, since you were younger?

### *Forms of Empowerment*

- What makes you feel powerful?
- Do you feel respected and supported in your role as Queenmother?
- ... in your work, home, family, and community?
- Why do you (or do you not) feel respected and supported in these areas?
- When have you felt more or less respected and supported throughout your life?
- What kind of decisions do you make throughout your day for yourself?
- ... for others?
- What decisions do others make for you?
- Do you earn money? If so, what do you do to earn money?
- What do you use your money for?
- What control do you have over your family's finances?

### *Common Conflicts*

- What are common conflicts in the home?
- ... in the community?
- How do you seek to resolve these conflicts?
- Who is in charge of resolving these conflicts?

### *Women's Political Participation*

- What does *political* mean?
- Are you involved in any associations?
- ... political parties?
- ... other groups?
- Do you vote?
- Have you ever run for any office?
- Would you want to run for any office?
- Who represents you in politics?
- How important is politics?
- What is the relationship between traditional Akan government and national politics?

### *Future Goals*

- What goals do you have for yourself?
- ... for your family?
- ... for your community?
- ... for your country?

- How would you like government, NGOs, and nonprofits to serve women's goals in your community?

## UN/USAID Employee Interview Guide

### *Background Information:*

- Ethnicity/ tribal identity
- Age
- Gender
- Number of people in household (immediate family/ extended family)
- Estimated household income (if willing)/ property owned or inherited/ production of food to last through the season
- Receipt of financial assistance from relatives outside of Ghana
- Any occupations
- Age of marriage when appropriate
- Age of motherhood when appropriate

### *Women's Roles in the Community*

- Who is your community?
- What do you do daily in the community?
- Are you involved in any women's associations/ projects?
- What are your responsibilities?
- What things are you in charge of?
- What is important for women to teach their daughters? ... sons?

### *The Roles of Queens*

- What is a Queenmother?
- What do they do?
- How are Queenmothers elected?
- How do they help women in the community? (Do they?)
- How has their role changed over time, since you were younger?

### *Forms of Empowerment*

- What makes you feel powerful?
- Do you feel respected and supported in your work, home, family, and community?
- Why do you (or do you not) feel respected and supported in these areas?
- When have you felt more or less respected and supported throughout your life?

- What kind of decisions do you make throughout your day for yourself?
- ... for others?
- What decisions do others make for you?
- What things do you use your income for?
- What control do you have over your family's finances?

### *Common Conflicts*

- What are common conflicts in the home?
- ... in the community?
- How do you seek to resolve these conflicts?

### *Women's Political Participation*

- What does *political* mean?
- Are you involved in any associations?
- ... political parties?
- ... other groups?
- Do you vote?
- Have you ever run for any office?
- Would you want to run for any office?
- Who represents you in politics?
- What is the influence of Queenmothers in national politics?
- How can women's participation in politics increase?
- What are the barriers to women's participation in politics?
- How important is politics?

### *Women's Empowerment Work with the UN/USAID*

- What influences got you to where you are today?
- What was your first job/ occupation?
- How did you come to work with the UN/ USAID?
- Which women's empowerment initiatives in Ghana have you seen be effective?
- What are the main issues women face today and what solutions do you propose?
- Where does funding come from for various projects?
- What are the donor's priorities?

### *Future Goals*

- What goals do you have for yourself?
- ... for your family?
- ... for your community?

- ... for your country?
- How would you like government, NGOs, and nonprofits to serve women's goals in your community?

## Appendix B:

## IRB Approval

### IRB Determination Letter



#### EXEMPT DETERMINATION

March 29, 2021

Kristen Vogel  
1709 W Richardson Place  
Tampa, FL 33606

Dear Ms. Vogel:

On 3/29/2021, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY002382
Review Type:	Exempt 2
Title:	An African Women's Empowerment: Listening to Ghana's Matriarchs
Funding:	None
Protocol:	• Protocol, Version #1, 3-26-21;

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

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#### Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance

FWA No. 00001669  
University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638

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# Indication of Verbal Consent Approval for Name Use

## 14.0 Risks to Subjects

14.1 The reasonably foreseeable risks of this research include privacy and/or confidentiality. This risk is low because pseudonyms will be used unless otherwise specified by participants. Those who choose not to use pseudonyms will be apprised of the risks before their names will be used in academic papers or public settings.

## 21.0 Consent Process

21.1

<input type="checkbox"/> Obtaining Signed Consent (Subject or Legally Authorized Representative)	<input type="checkbox"/> Obtaining Consent Online (Waiver of Written Documentation of Consent)
<input type="checkbox"/> Obtaining Signed Parental Permission	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Obtaining Verbal Consent (Waiver of Written Documentation of Consent)

21.2 The consent process will occur at the private location of the interview and will be completed by the Principal Investigator. Informed consent will be obtained immediately following informing the prospective subject about the study.

The subject of the study and the option to withdrawal will be reviewed before each subsequent interview in order to ensure ongoing consent. As much time to communicate the purpose of the study and potential risks will be devoted to the consent discussion in order to ensure subjects' understanding. A frequent reminder that answers to questions are voluntary and that the subject has the right to withdrawal from the study will minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence.

21.3 Verbal consent will be obtained. The consent process will take place at the private location of the interview and will be completed by the Principal Investigator, with the assistance of a translator if necessary. Informed consent will be obtained immediately following informing the prospective subject about the study.

The subject of the study and the option to withdrawal will be reviewed before each subsequent interview in order to ensure ongoing consent. As much time as needed to communicate the purpose of the study and potential risks will be devoted to the consent discussion in order to ensure subjects' understanding. A frequent reminder that answers to questions are voluntary and that the subject has the right to withdrawal from the study will minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence.

21.4 N/A

21.5 Once the English consent document is approved by the IRB, the Principal Investigator will work with her translator to ensure that the document has been adequately translated into the local language, Twi. The translator is to be determined upon arrival and availability by the PI's collaborators at University of Ghana. There are several options for translators.

21.6 N/A

## Appendix C:

### Copyright Permissions

#### Google Maps Copyright Permissions

These permissions pertain to Google Maps images used in Figure 5, Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10.



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#### Google Maps, Google Earth, and Street View

If you want to use one of these products in your work, review these guidelines to see if your specific use is allowed and whether you need to submit a request for approval.

General Maps Earth Street View Attribution

#### General guidelines

You generally don't need to submit a request to use our mapping products for the purposes covered in these guidelines. As long as you're following our [Terms of Service](#) and these guidelines, as well as [attributing properly](#), feel free to move forward with your project. But do continue to read these guidelines thoroughly to make sure your use is permitted. If your use isn't allowed, we're not able to grant exceptions, so please don't submit a request.

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You may annotate our maps with additional information – like points, lines, or labels. In fact, many of our tools have built-in features that make it easy to do just that. For example, [Google My Maps](#) lets you [draw lines and shapes](#) on a Google map. We also offer a [Styling Wizard](#), and a [cloud-based styling tool](#) that allow you to edit the colors of individual map components (for example, changing water to purple), as well as toggle visibility for each component (for example, making roads invisible).

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You may use our trademarks to accurately refer to our products or services, as long as such references are appropriate and consistent with our trademark guidelines. You may only use approved versions of our marks, and you must follow all of the general trademark [usage guidelines](#), the [Google Maps Platform Terms of Service](#), and the [Street View Trusted badge usage guidelines](#). The trademark usage guidelines apply even to marks that were previously (but are no longer) used in connection with our products.

Refer to our [brand elements guidelines](#) for more information about using our icons, logos, and names.



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You may print Google Maps content for non-commercial or personal use (for example, a map with directions). In all uses where you'll distribute printed materials that include the content, first be sure to read the general guidelines above, especially with regard to [fair use](#) and [attribution](#).

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**GO FOR IT**

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Example: A local dentist's office using a small map at the bottom of a mail ad to show where it's located

- ✓ Print links to a Google Maps location, such as with short links or QR codes

**DON'T DO THIS**

- ✗ Inside of books (more than 5k copies), or as cover art for a book
- ✗ Used as the core part of printed navigational material (for example, tour books or guide books).
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- ✗ Primary or creative use in printed promotional or advertising materials:

Example: A full-page magazine ad for a car company using a Google Maps screenshot to show how far the car can travel

## **Photograph Release Form**

Photograph permissions were obtained via written consent using the following verbiage:

*As I am writing my thesis and preparing it for publication, I would like to seek your permission to use photos of you, and to use your name to identify you in the photos of you and quotes from your interview [during my research period in Ghana from June through August 2021]. Do you give consent to having your image and name published in a thesis online?*

## **About the Author**

Kristen (Avi) Vogel is a transnational gender equity specialist and feminist activist anthropologist. With service and ethnographic research experience in Ghana (2014-21), she has research interests in Ghanaian matriarchy, transnational feminisms, women in leadership and politics, gender quotas, indigenous/traditional governance, women's empowerment, and gender and development. Also a Yoga student/teacher (RYT 500) with experience in Ghana, India, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Costa Rica, Kristen has a growing interest in the Yogic philosophy of the feminine and masculine.

With a BA in Mathematics and a minor in Green Building and Community Design from University of Vermont, Kristen served in Peace Corps Ghana (2014-16) as an Education Volunteer. She completed her MA in Applied Anthropology with a graduate certificate in Women's and Gender Studies from University of South Florida. She is the VPO and Gender Equity Specialist of Looking for Leaders, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) supporting youth leadership conferences in underdeveloped countries. Recipient of a Paul D. Coverdell Fellowship for her master's program, and a West African Research Association Pre-Doctoral Fellowship for her thesis research in Ghana (2021), Kristen has presented at Society for Applied Anthropology (2020) and National Women's Studies Association (2021) conferences. She plans to collaborate with Ghana's Queens on future activist projects to further their effective power in present-day Ghana.