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JOURNAL OF AFRICAN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION



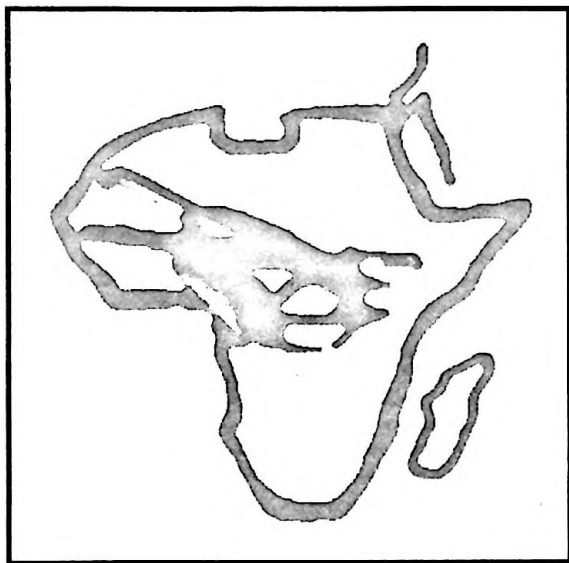
A Publication of the Department of History  
University of Cape Coast, Ghana

VOLUME 8, 2019

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# **The Contribution of Muslim Women's Associations to the Development of Kumasi, 1970–2019**

**Victoria Agyare APPIAH and Edmund ABAKA**

## ***Abstract***

*This paper investigates the contribution of Muslim Women's Associations towards the development of Kumasi. It argues that the urbanization of the Kumasi increased the number of women in Kumasi as in other cities and, eventually, resulted in the emergence of Women's Organizations that, from the mid twentieth century, became advocates for women and women's issues and rights. In the process, they negotiated a space for self-expression as Muslim women. In this case, the Muslim Women's groups advocated for Muslim Women and played important roles in the development of Kumasi. They empowered women, offered seminars and skills-training programmes and provided opportunities for personal growth, religious and self-identity and self-fulfillment through a deeper study of the Qur'an. They assisted with education for the young and sponsored people to study locally and in Saudi Arabia. The paper groups the women's association into five and highlights their contribution to the development of Kumasi.*

**Keywords:** FOMWAG, Muslim Women, Asante, Hausa, Islam

## Introduction

Until recently, ethnic associations and gender-specific associations were limited largely to urban areas of the Gold Coast, later, Ghana. In the post-independence period and, specifically, since the 1970s, the rate of rural-urban migration has increased tremendously, especially, to the major towns of Southern Ghana and thus to Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi among others. This increase in urban population resulted in an increase of the number of women and women's groups in the urban centers.

Roberta Ann Dunbar notes that women, as members of society, "reside in social and political contexts that propose images and expected roles often prescribed by patriarchal hegemony."<sup>1</sup> However, women have, and especially in the twentieth century, interpreted, mediated and acted in ways that have given self-expression and identities and Muslim women have done just that.<sup>2</sup> She further asserts that:

Muslim women in the late twentieth century resided in an era of great promise and great danger: great danger in that authoritarianism, in the hands of agents of military or social class, but justified in the name of religion, will impose greater physical, material and psychological hardships on women than on men; great promise in that through political groups, ceremonial organizations, and education campaigns, women are finding new, essentially democratic arenas for public engagement and influence in the broader society.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roberta Ann Dunbar, "Muslim Women in African History," in *The History of Islam in Africa*, eds. Nehemiah Levtzion & Randall L. Pouwels (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 397.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 412.

That is the context in which this analysis of the role and contribution of Muslim Women's Association in Kumasi is undertaken to examine organizing and political activism that these women engaged in with a view to carving out political, economic and educational spaces in which they could negotiate spaces for self-expression, empowerment and social activism. This paper focuses on the emergence of Muslim gender-specific associations, especially, Women's groups in Kumasi and the advocacy of these groups around issues that are of importance to them as Muslims and to disabuse the general notion that the woman's place, and the Muslim woman at that, was only in the home. To get at this, the paper discusses the arrival of Islam in the Volta Basin, the Gold Coast in general and Asante in particular, the emergence of Muslim Women's voluntary associations and their contribution to the development of Kumasi and Ghana between 1970 and 2019.

### **Introduction of Islam into the Gold Coast/Ghana**

Islam's introduction into modern day Ghana, according to many scholars, date from the middle of the sixteenth century when it was introduced into Gonjaland. By the seventeenth century Islam had made adherents among the Dagomba and the Waala people and its reach into the heartland of Asante Kingdom would follow later in the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Mervin Hiskett argues that Islam was introduced into the Volta Basin, specifically, in the Gonja area, before the end of the sixteenth century. The Gonja Kingdom is believed to have been established by Mande speakers who used superior military organization, largely the use of cavalry, to overwhelm the Dagbon.<sup>5</sup> Ivor Wilks, on the other hand, attributes the founding of Gonja to Mande-Dyula Muslims and to one Nabanga, who was in the company

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<sup>4</sup> Nathan Samwini, "The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana Since the 1950s. Its Effects Upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations," PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2003, 22.

<sup>5</sup> See Mervin Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London: Longman, 1984), 120.

of Muslim Clerics.<sup>6</sup> In this case, Islam was introduced at the moment Gonja was founded. Nehemia Levtzion also suggests a Mande-Dyula connection to the founding of the Gonja Kingdom through Ndewura Jakpa and Fati-Morukpe. But Levtzion also avers that early Muslims from Hausaland and Bornu possibly settled in the area before the Mande conquest and founding of Gonja.<sup>7</sup>

The introduction of Islam into Asante in the eighteenth century is connected with the arrival of Hausa Muslim traders in Gonja to trade in kola and, later on, to Kumasi, the heartland of the “Kola Kingdom.” As the midway point between Hausaland and Asante, Salaga became an important center for the Hausa kola trade between Northern Nigeria and the Volta Basin. Apart from kola, the Hausa merchants traded in salt, spices, and enslaved persons.<sup>8</sup>

Hiskett notes that:

The Hausa occupation of Salaga had important consequences for the spread of Islam [in Ghana]. It meant that an important center of Hausa, and to some extent also Bornu Islam, was established in the midst of an area that had previously been dominated by Dyula Islam.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Ivor Wilks, “The Juula and the Expansion into the Forest,” In *Islam in Tropical Africa*, (ed.) I. M. Lewis, Oxford: International African Institute, 1966, 127–143.

<sup>7</sup> Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa, A Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-Colonial Period* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Abaka, *Kola is God's Gift. Agricultural Production, Export Initiatives & the Kola Industry of Asante & the Gold Coast c. 1820–1950* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 84–86; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola. The Hausa Kola Trade 1700–1900* (London & Zaria: Oxford University Press, 1980). See also Lovejoy, “Long-distance Trade and Islam: The Case of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Hausa Trade,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, V. 4 (1971): 537–547.

<sup>9</sup> Hiskett, *Development of Islam*, 131.

The position of Salaga as a mid-way town between Hausaland and Northern Nigeria and Kumasi in the forest belt of Ghana opened the way for Hausa penetration not only into Asante, but also to the southernmost parts of the country.<sup>10</sup>

The Asante kept the Hausa kola traders at Salaga on the northern fringes of the kingdom in order to control access to the source of kola nuts and, thus, regulate the price of the product. This continued until the British defeat of Asante in 1874 led to the decline of Salaga and the commencement of a southward orientation of the kola trade through Salaga and down through Kumasi to the coast by sea to Lagos.<sup>11</sup> In the post-1874 period, Hausa-Muslim traders entered Asante in large numbers trading in kola nuts and other forest products.<sup>12</sup>

The Asantehenes of the early nineteenth century believed in the efficacy of Muslim prayers and amulets as important vehicles for protection and, throughout the century, invited Muslims from the Central Sudan to their court.<sup>13</sup> The significance of the Muslim presence in Asante is borne out by the use of Muslims in the Asante army and, more important, by the Asantehene's *batakarikese* ( a fugu or smock embossed with leather pouches containing Qur'anic writings and supposed to protect the user from bullets in battle) and antedating the British defeat of Asante in 1874.<sup>14</sup> The Muslims were also to pray for Asante victory in war or help them snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Furthermore, literate Muslims were also utilized by the Asantehene as civil servants and Osei Kwame,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Samwini, "Muslim Resurgence in Ghana," 31; Abaka, *Kola is God's Gift*, 84-86; Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola*.

<sup>12</sup> Abaka, *Kola is God's Gift*, 68-69; Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola*; Wilks, "The Position of Muslims," 332.

<sup>13</sup> David Owusu-Ansah, "Prayer, Amulets and Healing," in Nehemia Levtzion and R.L. Pouwels (eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa*, 479.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 618; Hiskett, *Development of Islam*, 131.

in particular, between 1777 and 1798, increasingly relied on Muslim advisors.<sup>15</sup>

Between 1764 and 1776, and even before, the Asante recruited literate Muslims for utilization in official correspondence. Hiskett avers that one Muslim, 'alim Abū Bakr Kyeame and his son, Imam Sa'aid Bamba, all served in this capacity between 1777 and 1798.<sup>16</sup> It was these people who "compiled the records in Arabic about the history and administration of the Asante Kingdom and they did for Gonja in the north of Ghana."<sup>17</sup> Other Muslims served the Asantehenes as secretaries and accountants.<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, an eighteenth century madrasa at Buna, west of the Black Volta and headed by 'Abd Allah b. al-Hajj Muhammed al-Wattari, trained Asante civil servants.<sup>19</sup> Osei Bonsu, in particular, had Muslim advisors and an office of government records staffed by men who had trained at the Buna madrasa.<sup>20</sup>

Above all, Muslims were Hausa trade representatives or agents who were to look after the interests of the northern kola traders and also doubled up as political representatives of the northern kingdoms from which the traders came to Asante.<sup>21</sup>

As well, Muslims in Kumasi were the driving force behind the Kumasi Cattle Trade. They brought cattle and incense from the northern towns for sale in Asante and, in return, they purchased kola nuts from the forest region to transport to Hausaland using the caravan routes via Jenne, Timbuktu to Hausaland.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hiskett, *Development of Islam*, 133.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Samwini, "The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana," 34; Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 278; Hiskett, *Development of Islam*, 134.

<sup>18</sup> Samwini, "The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana," 34.

<sup>19</sup> Hiskett, *Development of Islam*, 133.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>21</sup> Hiskett, *Development of Islam*, 134.

<sup>22</sup> Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola*; Abaka, *Kola is God's Gift*, 80-81; Samwini, "The



## Muslim Women's Associations

In the post-independence period, specifically in the 1960s, Muslim Women began to organize into groups and publicly engage in advocacy to improve their condition and standing as Muslims and to come out from their confinement to debunk the perception held by many people that the Muslim woman's place and role in society was confined to the home. According to Iqbal, "the very mention of Muslim women brings to the minds of many a vision of veiled maids in a dark room."<sup>23</sup> But as Abdur-Razak has noted, this is a very warped perception about Muslim women.<sup>24</sup> Muslim women formed various associations with the aim of projecting Islam and contributing to the development of the societies where they lived. These Muslim women who formed the Muslim Women's Associations in Asante lived in different communities in Kumasi, but majority of them were domiciled in West Tafo, Asawase, and Suame, the predominant Muslim areas in the Kumasi metropolis. Apart from these Muslim-dominated areas, the Muslim Women's Associations could also be found in other areas which were not considered predominantly Muslim areas. These included Oforikrom, Atonsu and Ayigya.

The paper is focused on the activities of five selected Muslim Women's Associations in Kumasi, some of whose members were interviewed about the activities of the associations and their contribution to the development of Kumasi. As previously indicated, Muslim women in Ghana, particularly, Kumasi, deemed it necessary to form strong groups to project Islam, raise the standard of living of the Muslim women through learning trades like hair-dressing, dress-making, soap-making and batik making and thus contribute to the development of their communities. Prominent among these Muslim Women's Associations in the Kumasi Metropolis are *Lajna Immaila* (literally maidservant of Allah), the *Al-Ansariya* Islamic Society

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Muslim Resurgence," 340.

<sup>23</sup> S. Iqbal, *Women and Islamic Law* (India: Adam Publishers, 2004), 2.

<sup>24</sup> H. Abdur-Razak, *Islamic Awareness in Women* (Nigeria: Center for Islamic Education and Propagation, 1995), 49.

(*Al-Ansariya* – literally fighting for the will of Allah), the Federation of Muslim Women's Association (FOMWAG) and the Tijanniya Muslim Women's Association.

### **The *Lajna Immaila***

According to Hajia Hajara Is-hag Nuhu, the Ashanti Regional President of *Lajna Immaila*, the name of the organization literally means maid-servant of Allah and it is an Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association which was established by Hadrat Khalifah Maimud Ahmad in 1921, in Pakistan.<sup>25</sup> Hajia Nuhu notes that Hadrat Maimud Ahmad saw the need to mobilize Ahmadiyyah Muslim women to study the Qur'an in order to be very well versed in its teachings. The association is a non-governmental organization headquartered in Pakistan and with about one hundred branches worldwide. In Ghana, the association's national headquarters is in Accra with regional branches in ten regional capitals and local branches in over one hundred and sixty metropolitan, municipal and district centers.<sup>26</sup> The association has a youth wing and an adult wing all of which operate under one umbrella. The national executive is made up of twenty-five members including the President, two Vice-Presidents, a Secretary, an Organizer, a Welfare Secretary as well as officers in charge of education, health, sports, handicrafts and preaching the word of Allah.<sup>27</sup>

As far as membership of *Lajna Immaila* is concerned, Kumasi has been zoned into three local branches: the Asafo Central mosque, Oforikrom and Atonsu. Members pay ten Ghana cedis as dues every month. After collection, the money is deposited into the accounts of the national secretariat in Accra.<sup>28</sup> Any time the executives need money for any business related to the running of the association, they use this money for that

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<sup>25</sup> Hajia Hajara Is-hag Nuhu, Ashanti Regional President of *Lajna Immaila*, interviewed in Kumasi by Victoria Agyare Appiah on December 4, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

purpose. Apart from the monthly dues, members of *Lajna Immaila* make special contributions toward funding its programmes. No set amount is levied for this special contribution. Members make such contributions based on their ability to pay.

*Lajna Immaila* has achieved a number of successes and has made important contributions to the lives of its members in particular and to Kumasi and the Ashanti region in general. First, through sponsorship, many of the members have attained higher levels of education. Majority of the beneficiaries have studied in a Saudi Arabia University and at the Islamic University of Ghana. Many of these people are now professionals – medical doctors, teachers and lawyers and are making important contributions to the political economy of Asante and Ghana as a whole.<sup>29</sup> Attempts to find out the percentage of the beneficiaries via a vis the size of the membership, however, proved futile. In spite of these achievements, the association is not resting on its oars but making provisions to sponsor more females abroad for studies and to establish a vocational institute to train more females in employable skills.

Secondly, *Lajna Immaila* assists the needy in the society, especially, orphans and elderly people who find it difficult to make ends meet.<sup>30</sup> Third, it donates regularly to institutions such as hospitals, orphanages and prisons and undertakes clean-up exercises in these institutions as well. The members of the association also settle the bills of discharged members who have been detained at the hospital for their inability to settle their bills.<sup>31</sup> Finally, through member contributions, the association has been able to purchase a motor vehicle which is used to carry out outreach programmes such as preaching or Islamic evangelization<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

On her part, Halimah Pokuah of *Lajna Immaila* noted that the organization has assisted many females to learn trades such as hair-dressing, soap making, bead making, batik and dress making. Through this training, many of the women have established their own businesses and are no more at the mercy of their husbands.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Halimah Pokuah noted that the learning of trades has reduced the number of jobless women in Asante and many are now contributing to the growth of Asante.<sup>2</sup>

Fatimah Issaka, on her part averred that members of *Lajna Immaila* have also set aside a day for embarking on clean-up exercises in institutions such as hospitals, prisons as well as in the Islamic communities and their environs. As part of the clean-up exercises, the women weed, collect rubbish and distil choked gutters in the metropolis in order to reduce the volume of rubbish or garbage all of which contribute to ailments such as malaria and cholera.<sup>3</sup> These clean-up exercises contribute to cleaner environments and overall reduction of sicknesses in Kumasi and Asante in general.

### ***Al-Ansariya* Islamic Society**

As noted by Hajia Sakinah J'afar, a founding member of the Al-Ansariya society, *Al-Ansariya* means "fighting for the will of Allah." It is the women's wing of *Ahlus-Sunna wal Jama'a*. The *Al-Ansariya* association was formed on February 23, 2004, by Hajia Hajara Siddik and Hajia Sakina Ja'far who saw the need to form an association to uplift the image of Islam in the Sofo Line area and its environs in Kumasi. The association was formed in the Sofo Line area of Kumasi because Islam was not practiced according to the mode and exemplary life (Sunna) lived by the prophet Muhammad, the founder of the

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<sup>1</sup> Halimah Pokuah, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi on January 10, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Fatimah Issaka, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi, on January 11, 2019.

Islamic religion.<sup>4</sup> The founding members of *Al Ansariya* Islamic society were ten in number, but all efforts to get the names of these founding members proved futile. Informants could not provide the names of the founding members due to old age or lack of record keeping by the Association. Some of the people who served as executive members of the association included Abubakar Shamsudin as Chairman, Hajia Hajara Siddik as Vice Chairman, and Muhammed Kassim as Secretary. Abdul Rafiq was the Treasurer for the organization. Usman Is-hak and Amina Seidu, who were also prominent members of this early group, did not hold any executive position but they played active roles in the society.<sup>5</sup>

Although the *Al-Ansariya* Islamic Society is a women's association, men were initially given key positions to ensure that the association's foundation was firmly rooted before handing over the association's administration to women. The main objectives this Islamic Society included, among others, uplifting the image of Islam in Kumasi and its environs (because the practitioners of Islam in Kumasi at the time did not hold the religion in high esteem), educating children in line with Islamic principles and improving the social standing of Muslim women through learning trades such as soap-making, dress making, hair dressing and batik making, promoting interest in the pure form of Islamic practice and fostering good relationships among members. As well, the Society aimed to teach members how to recite and read the Qur'an in its original Arabic text and to become very knowledgeable in its interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

The main source of finance for the society is the weekly contribution of thirty pesewas by members as at the time of collecting data for this project between 2009 and 2010. However, members make special contributions towards the execution of

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<sup>4</sup> Hajia Sakina J'afar, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi on 20-12-2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

specific programmes such as donations to hospitals, orphanages and prisons.<sup>7</sup> The society, which started from a humble beginning in 2004, now has about 250 active members.

The *Al-Ansariya* Association has made important contributions to the lives of its members, to the Sofo Line community and Kumasi in general and even the country as a whole. The society has established an Arabic school at Sofo Line with an average enrolment of about 200 pupils.<sup>8</sup> In this way, the organization is contributing to the provision of education in the country. The teachers of the school are paid monthly from the coffers of the society and women are taught how to read and memorize the Qur'an in Arabic.

In addition to the above, the society had already established an adult night school (*Makaranta*) purposely for the *Ummi* (unlettered) in order to help them read and interpret the Qur'an.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the association assists members with donations in cash and in kind during child naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals and other programmes that usually attract high costs.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the association is able to alleviate some of the financial challenges faced by its members.

### **Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Ghana (FOMWAG)**

The third important Muslim women's association in Kumasi is the Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Ghana (FOMWAG). As already stated, some Muslim women in the Kumasi Metropolis saw the need to form a women's association for the development of their community in the post-independence period. In 1992, a nationwide Muslim Women's Association known as (FOMWAG) was started in Accra. In that year five well-educated Muslim women including Aisha Lamin Futa,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Hajia Katumi Mahama, Zalia Ali, Rukaya Ahmad and Zainab Yakubu saw the need to mobilise their fellow Ghanaian Muslim women under one body.<sup>11</sup>

What was uppermost in the minds of these women in question was the need to give Muslim women a voice and recognition in society. As underlined in the central argument of the paper, these women were interested in the welfare of Muslim women and community development and pushed for a prominent role for women in the society beyond the stereotypical, Victorian-era, idea of a woman's place in the home.

FOMWAG received external assistance from Nigeria at its formation. On May 2, 1993, the five women mentioned above were invited to meet the Director of the Centre for the Distribution of Islamic Books in Nigeria. Rufai Muhyeeden informed them that the Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Nigerian (FOMWAN) was concerned about the lack of representation of Ghanaian women at Muslim women's conferences and, therefore, the Federation would help a sister organization in Ghana stand on its feet and become active and engaging in Islamic circles.<sup>12</sup> FOMWAN had been formed in Nigeria in 1985 to "promote Islam and interpretations of it designed to improve women's status" and it took the lead in "both politicizing Muslim women and at the same time fashioning an agenda acceptable to those who wished to speak out as Muslim women on national issues."<sup>13</sup> It also spoke out strongly in favour of women's rights in the workplace and argued for "the need for more women scholars to be involved in the interpretation of the law and the hadith."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Samwini, "The Muslim Resurgence," 137-138

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>13</sup> Dunbar, "Muslim Women in African History," 407.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 407-408. For analyses of Muslim Women's Organizations in Nigeria see, for example, Bilkisu Yusuf, "Hausa-Fulani Women: The State of the Struggle," in Catherine Coles and Beverly Mack, *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

FOMWAN's hand of friendship and support to what became its fledgling counterpart in Ghana was great news for the five highly educated Muslim women who saw the need to form the nucleus of an association that would represent Muslim women's interest in Ghana. Samwini asserts that the aims of FOMWAG, as per its constitution, included, the propagation of Islam, raising awareness about the need for education among Muslims, promoting unity among Muslim women in Ghana and raising the social status of the Muslim community in Ghana.<sup>15</sup>

FOMWAG branches were opened in Kumasi and other regional capitals of Ghana by the founders. Hajia Yasmine Appeadu, the current President of FOMWAG in Kumasi, notes that the Ashanti Regional Branch of FOMWAG was formed in September 1994. She added that it was started by the following pioneer members: Muhammad Adako, Sheik Nazir, Mallam Seidu, Abua Mallama as President, Hajia Halimah Mamprusi as Vice-President, Hajia Neene, Hajia Ramat Sunni, Hajia Adi Sa Bomba, and Hajia Suwabah.<sup>16</sup> The founders of FOMWAG in Kumasi, unlike their counterparts at the national level in Accra, did not focus their attention largely on literate and highly educated Muslim women but welcomed both literate and illiterate women. And although it was a women's association, another distinction is that males were allowed to stand for executive positions in the organization from the onset in order to give it a solid foundation before it was finally handed over to the women.<sup>17</sup>

The Kumasi FOMWAG shares the same aims with the other regional branches in Ghana. Appeadu stressed that other Muslim associations in Kumasi are active members of FOMWAG-Kumasi: These included the Jihad Central Mosque Women's Association of Tijanniyas, the Islamic Mission Secretariat

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<sup>15</sup> Samwini, "The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana."

<sup>16</sup> Hajia Yasmine Appeadu, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi on November 22, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



Women's Association of Ghana, the Ghana Muslim Mission, the *Ayigya Ahlus Sunna* Women Association, the *Saamadaniyya* Muslim Women's Association, the *Nisai Muminat* Women's Association, the Oforikrom *Watannia* Women's Association, the Aboabo *Wattania* Women's Association, the Yussifiyya Muslim Women's Association, *Sakafyya* Muslim Women's Association, the *Faliniyya* Muslim Women's Association, the Kwadaso *Shabab Nasur* Women's Association, the Suame Islamic League Women's Association and the Husseiniyya Women's Association.<sup>18</sup> The Kumasi branch of FOMWAG generated its funding from international organisations, local well-to-do Muslims in Kumasi as well as monthly membership dues of thirty pesewas (Gh 0. 30) per member.

### **Tijaniyya Muslim Women's Association**

According to Seidu Ustaz Ahmed, the executive secretary to the Council of Ulema and the office of the regional Chief Imam, Kumasi, the main body of the Tijaniyya Muslim Association was set up in 1952.<sup>19</sup> The leader was Baba Makaranta (our informant could not provide his actual name but remembered the popular name by which he was known) who was then residing in Kumasi. The Kumasi branch was established in 1975 and it was headed by the following five eminent clerics: Sheikh Baba Al Waiz, Imam Muhammad, Baba Chiroma, Alhaji Haruna Muhammad, Alhassan Nasurudin and Imam Gariba Abubakar.<sup>20</sup>

Ustaz Ahmed further notes that in the initial stages the association was not very active because many Muslims did not deem it necessary to join any such associations but this gradually changed over time as people began to see what the Association was doing in the lives of members and in the communities where it worked.<sup>21</sup> The leaders finally spelled out the aims of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Seidu Ustaz Ahmed, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi on November 11, 2013 and on January 7, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the Association in 1987, as among others, to foster brotherhood/sisterhood, inculcate the virtues of Islam as well as the *tariqa* (path) into Muslim women and sending the message of the *tariqa* through preaching, seminars and helping the needy. Finally, it aimed to assist women to be conscious of the religion. After spelling out clearly the aims of the association, many women, both young and old, were brought on board.<sup>22</sup>

Jaharatu Mumuni, a member of the Tijaniyya Women's Association, known also as Jihad Central Mosque Women's Association of the Tijaniyyas, maintains that the Association established an Islamic Senior High School at Effiduase Asokore in the Asante region in 2010. The establishment of the school has made the people in the community aware of the importance of Women's education.<sup>23</sup> As a result, majority of the Muslim females who were at home have been enrolled in school. Mumuni further states that the education of women has resulted in the production of female elites in their communities, especially, Aboabo and Asawase, who are now serving as role models in the Islamic community.<sup>24</sup> Due to the establishment of the Islamic Senior High School, many Muslim women have pared down their extravagant life styles and are spending money on the education of their children, particularly, girls.<sup>25</sup>

The late Sandaliya Dadalwaiz, a former Vice-President of the Association at the time the researcher was gathering data, also pointed out that the Association has brought women together as one people who have a common cause to champion. The women meet to study the Qur'an, preach at naming ceremonies, and organize seminars for women at the mosque or at the community center. The organization of the seminars has

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Jaharatu Mumuni, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi on January 8, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Jaharatu Mumuni, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi, January 8, 2019.

helped the women to gain more insight into the Quran as well as gaining recognition from their male counterparts. This has contributed to increasing the women's self-confidence as well as conscientizing them about their religion and finding solutions to social issues and problems they face in society. It has also helped to reduce social tensions due to "streetism."<sup>26</sup>

The Tijaniyya Women's Association also provides support to the poor and needy in Kumasi. The members pay the hospital bills of the sick who cannot pay their bills, enroll brilliant but needy pupils in their school as well as in other Islamic schools in Kumasi and also assist orphans in their communities in Asokore and Aboabo. This has drastically reduced the number of needy and poor children in their communities and, by extension, the whole of Kumasi, who would have gone wayward.<sup>27</sup>

#### ***Ahlus Sunna-Waal Jamaa'l* Women's Association**

According to Aisha Futa, a member of the *Ahlus Sunna-Waal Jamaa'l* Women's Association, the Association acquired a big plot of land at Borban, a suburb of Kumasi near Asokore Mampong, in 2009 and established an English and Arabic basic school.<sup>28</sup> The children in the area attend the school for the study of English as well as Arabic. This has helped to increase the literacy rate in English in Asante. While the Ghana Education Service stipulates that children in primary one to primary four should be taught in the local language, this school rather uses English and Arabic as the medium of instruction and it is this that has accounted for the high literacy in English.<sup>29</sup> The school has trained many people who have contributed immensely towards the development of Kumasi. The acquisition of the Arabic language has increased and improved the religious knowledge

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<sup>26</sup> Sandaliya Dadalwaiz, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi, January 8, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Bilqees Yakubu, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi, January 8, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Aisha Futa, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi on January 4, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

of those who had access to instruction in Arabic in the sense that the Arabic language is foundational to the Islamic religion and, as a result, they have a better understanding of the Qur'an. This has helped them to gain greater insight into the religion.<sup>30</sup>

Safia Tanko, a member of the *Sunna-Waal Jamaa'l* Women's Association noted that the Muslim women also built a Mosque in 2009 to serve as a place of worship as well as a place of dissemination of information for the Muslim community. The building of this mosque has contributed immensely to the lives of Muslims in the area generally and to the development of Kumasi in the sense that the preaching and religious activities have had a great impact on the lives of Muslims in Kumasi. A better understanding of the Qur'an and the tenets of Islam have improved the religious lives of Muslims.<sup>31</sup> As well, due to education, many of these Muslims now have good jobs and, as a result, can take care of their families and engage in community development activities such as communal labour and payment of taxes.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, Tanko stated that the community members used to engage in conflicts as well as violent practices before the construction of the mosque in 2009. However, due to the construction of the mosque and the programmes carried out by the Association, such as its preaching activities, some aspects of the chaotic lives of the members have been curbed or modified. This has helped members in Kumasi to live together in peaceful co-existence as well as making an impact on the spiritual lives of members, their families and friends.<sup>33</sup>

In 2004, the association built a clinic on the land which was acquired at Borban. Although this clinic is very small, it provides the services of a chip compound and medical services

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Safia Tanko, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi, January 4, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

to members in the community who do not have access to a hospital.<sup>34</sup> Recently, the clinic has started providing anti-natal and child care services to the indigenes. This clinic is making a major contribution to the health life of the people of Kumasi such as safe delivery and the provision of maternal care to women in Asante.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

From the mid-twentieth century onwards, Muslim women found ways to engage in democratic arenas of public engagement through various organizations that became vehicles for negotiated space in society. Kumasi Muslim women came out of their confinement to organize through various associations such as the *Lajna Immaila*, the *Al Ansariya* Islamic Society, the Federation of Muslim Women's Association (Kumasi Branch), the Tijaniyya Women's Association and the *Ahlus Sunna-Waal Jamaa'l* Women's Association. These Muslim women's groups pushed for the empowerment of women through the study of the Quran as well as through other literacy programs and skills training so that women could establish businesses like batik making, soap making, dress making and hair-dressing, among others. Some of these Muslim Women's groups have built schools and clinics to assist with the education of the young ones and the health needs of the members of their communities. They have sponsored people to study at the university level both locally as well as in places like Saudi Arabia and some of the graduates are back in the community playing meaningful roles. Finally, in hands-on activities like communal work the women are making a visible show of practical contributions to their communities in the Kumasi metropolis.

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<sup>34</sup> Memuna Yusuf, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Kumasi in January 7, 2019

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

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