

# ABIBISEM

JOURNAL OF AFRICAN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

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

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**VOL. 4, 2011**

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*ABIBISEM: Journal of African Culture & Civilization* (based in the Department of History, University of Cape Coast, Ghana) is a multidisciplinary journal committed to publishing well-researched general or technical articles in any of the fields pertaining to African history, African Philosophy, African culture and civilization, African relationship with the wider world, etc. The language of presentation is English.

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Each manuscript should be accompanied by an abstract of not more than 150 words.

All works consulted should be listed serially at the end of each article under the headline REFERENCES. Notes commenting or explaining points made in the text should appear after the main text, not at the bottom of the page. Such notes should be double-spaced.

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The editor expects precision in presentation. Prospective contributors should therefore avoid unnecessary flowery language; write in simple easy-to-comprehend style. All articles should be sent as e-mail attachment to: The Editor, *ABIBISEM: Journal of African Culture & Civilization*, Department of History, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Email: [journalabibisem@gmail.com](mailto:journalabibisem@gmail.com)

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## EDITORIAL

*ABIBISEM* is a multi-disciplinary academic journal based in the Department of History, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. It is dedicated to promoting critical and in-depth research in all fields relating to the study of African culture and civilisation, in relation to global context. The journal is, therefore, unique in fielding articles from a broad range of subjects in various academic disciplines. Students, researchers and the general reading public will, thus, find the journal very useful.

In this volume, six interesting articles and a book review have been selected for inclusion after a rigorous and painstaking editorial scrutiny. The collections have lived up to the billing of the journal as original works either looking at old subjects in new ways or breaking entirely new grounds. It is, therefore, with great delight that I commend the journal to the intellectual world. I will like to end this editorial by placing on record our indebtedness to our numerous reviewers from far and near.

The articles in *ABIBISEM* do not represent the views of its editors or the Department of History, University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

**Dr. K. Adu Boahen**

*Head of Department and Editor*

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# **Pivotal Catalyst: The Seven Years' War and Anglo-French Scramble for West Africa up to 1900**

**David AWORAWO**

**Key Words: Seven Years' War, Scramble, Colonial Collision, Africa**

## **Abstract**

*The Seven Years' War which was fought between Britain and France mainly as a result of struggle for territory in North America had immense impacts on West Africa. This article explores the place of West Africa in the Seven Years' War and the impact of the war on the sub-region from 1763 to the end of the nineteenth century. Although West Africa was not a major theater of conflict during the war, it, nevertheless, featured in the strategic calculations of Britain and France, partly because of its geographical location along the Atlantic coast and its importance as a gateway, in addition to the region's immense economic potentials. The defeat of France and loss of territory after the war made her to focus more attention on West Africa. It is concluded that the Seven Years' War set the tone for the scramble for Africa by European powers in the nineteenth century.*

## **Introduction**

Britain and France controlled the vastest territories in Africa during the period of European colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of the nearly fifty countries that became independent between the late 1950s and mid-1970s, more than three-quarters were former colonies of Britain and France. Informal trade with coastal African societies which went on for one and a half centuries began to gradually give way to the establishment of settlements from the early seventeenth century (Kanya-Forster, 1969: 22-39; Brooks, 2003: 253-254). From the early 1530s, the French and English intensely challenged Portuguese domination of contact and trade with Africans along the Atlantic coast from Senegal to Benin and Warri. This was especially so of the French, and by 1553, they had forced the Portuguese to recognise them as a force to reckon with in the West African trade (Blake, 1977: 136-137).

The French were also at the forefront of this early effort to plant colonies in West Africa. France established a colony in Saint Louis in Senegal in 1637, and the surrounding islands of Gorée, Rufisque and Joal shortly thereafter (Oloruntimehin, 1974:352-353; July, 1968: 68-68, 234-236). The French spread their control of territories where they sought to gain economic advantage in the decades that followed. At the same time, French traders became increasingly desirous of establishing direct contact with interior people to cut off middlemen. This brought intense opposition from the African middlemen and set the stage for conflict during the early period of French colonial enterprise in West Africa. Owing to climatic factors and other hazards,

the European traders and adventurers who came to West Africa from the fifteenth century up to the mid-nineteenth century were generally limited to the coastal areas. This made the European traders to rely on African middlemen for supplies from the interior. The French were among the first group of Europeans who attempted to alter this pattern by directly establishing contact with the interior and from the early efforts in the sixteenth century the French spread their colonial domination around the Senegal River area and beyond (July, 1970:162-163). Other European powers were to follow the French example in the decades that followed.

The pattern of the acquisition of territory in Africa and elsewhere, and indeed the nature of interaction between the people of West Africa and the Europeans, came to be affected by the Seven Years' War between Britain and France (1756-1763) (Kanya-Forstner, 1969: 23; Oloruntimehin, 1972: 246-282; Newbury, 1961: 49-76). The war broke out mainly because of disagreements over colonial acquisition in India and North America, specifically the Ohio Valley area, the waterways of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Quebec. Real and imagined fears over being disadvantaged in settlement patterns and territorial claims pitched Britain and France against each other and the result was the Seven Years' War. One source notes that by the mid-eighteenth century, colonial conflicts had become merged "in a struggle which stretched from Bombay to the Mississippi" (Smellie, 1962: 58). At the outbreak of the war in 1756, attention was diverted to the prosecution of the war in North America. At the end of the war in 1763, Britain and France had to do stock-taking and sketch the way forward in the colonial enterprise. As it turned out, the war came to affect attitude toward the acquisition of territories in Africa in general and West Africa in particular.

To begin with, France lost St. Louis in Senegal to Britain in 1758 in the course of the Seven Years' War and by the Treaty of Paris that concluded the war in 1763. Britain obtained the French colonies in the Senegal area (Oloruntimehin, 1974:153; Kanya-Forstner, 1969: 23). This was a serious blow to French interest in West Africa since the acquired colonies served as the base for French activities in the sub-region. The loss of Senegal did not only negatively affect French economic interests in West Africa, but it also led to the loss of strategic advantage in making inroads into other territories beyond West Africa. All these made France more aggressive in its attitude towards colonial acquisition after the Seven Years' War as it strove to replace what she had lost. Although the lost colonies of France in the Senegal area were restored to her in 1783, the French colonial authorities continued their aggressive colonial acquisition in West Africa especially in the course of the nineteenth century.

### **Issues at Stake in the Seven Years' War**

There were numerous issues at stake in the Seven Years' War but colonial acquisition and overseas territorial control which brought enormous economic benefits were undoubtedly the most important. Britain and France



engaged each other in India with each supporting rival Indian princes. Led by Robert Clive, the British succeeded in outwitting the French and the latter left India entirely for the British. Nearly the same pattern played itself out in North America. The British colonial authorities were concerned about the situation in the waterways of the Gulf of St. Lawrence guarded by a fortress and forts which protected French traders and Quebec (Roberts, 2002:721-723). They were also disturbed by the movement of French colonists to the unsettled Ohio River Valley from the Great Lakes and their forts on the Mississippi. The area between the Appalachians to the Mississippi River was increasingly being occupied by the French from early eighteenth century. There was the fear of a Mississippi valley enclosed by French forts and surrounding the British thirteen colonies. Britain expressed concern, with good reasons, that by linking the upper reaches of the Gulf of St. Lawrence with the Mississippi in the territory south of the Great Lakes, the English colonies would be encircled and their westward advance would be hampered (Ogg, 1964:80-81). The British were, therefore, vehemently opposed to the French advance and it was a major issue in the Seven Years' War. It is for this reason that the Seven Years' War is also called the Great War for Empire.

Britain and France considered the Seven Years' War as a conflict that would determine the future of their respective colonial enterprises. And considering the interlocking relationship between the possession of colonies and economic development as well as national prestige, the war was regarded as a fundamental one with the possibility of a 'bitter end' outcome. The fact was that both Britain and France derived enormous economic benefits from their respective colonies and neither of them lost sight of the economic benefits of the territories under contention both in India and North America. At the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in the second half of the eighteenth century, the colonial possessions of France were already very vast, surpassed only by those of Spain. However, France was not ready to give up any part of its colonies as they were important to its overall development. One source notes that: "From these sources (the colonies) France derived great wealth in the eighteenth century, as attested by the many new and imposing buildings in Marseilles, Nantes and Bordeaux" (Ogg, 1964:82). George Clark explains the process thus: "The growth of trade is obviously linked with the rise of industry. The capital accumulated in trade expansion, for instance, helped to launch the new productive processes which were soon to be dramatically important. On the other hand an increase in the production of textiles was a stimulus to the search for new markets" (Clark, 1960: 26).

Economic issues featured prominently in the Seven Years' War. Indeed, it could be said that it was mainly for economic and strategic considerations that the war spread to parts of West Africa. An English merchant, Thomas Cunnings, developed an elaborate plan to acquire French trading posts in Africa in the 1750s. Desirous of expanding trade, the Pitt government in England supported the Cunnings plan, and it was one of the reasons for the military invasion of the

Senegalese coast in 1758 (Marshall, 1962:291; Clark, 1960:26). The British government sent a small squadron with a tiny force of marines under the command of Captain Henry Marsh and Major Mason in March 1758. The small force quickly captured Fort Louis which enabled them to control the mouth of the Senegal river. Although the British squadron failed in its attempt to conquer Gorée, another small force under the command of Commodore Keppel succeeded in taking Gorée at the end of 1758. Dorothy Marshall describes the effects of the capture of Gorée thus:

This was a valuable acquisition; it increased the area from which supplies of slaves could be drawn, it provided gold dust and ivory, and it gave Britain a monopoly of the gum arabic used in the manufacture of silk and therefore vital to France. The harbour, better known by its modern name of Dakar, was a useful base for a power aiming for control of the sea.

The Seven Years' War was, therefore, a struggle for colonial acquisition and the promotion of the economic well-being of the two states in conflict. Apart from economic considerations, there was also the strategic dimension. As already noted, the fear of encirclement of the thirteen colonies of Britain by the French in North America was a major *casus belli* in the Seven Years' War. It remained a major issue throughout the war and after (US Army, 1988:107-109; Lee, 1969:1-16). The issues at stake in the Seven Years' War were, therefore, diverse.

### **Importance of West Africa to the Colonising Powers**

West Africa was of utmost importance to the colonising powers from the early period of European expansion. The economic and strategic value was recognised early, and it influenced interest in the region. The west coast of Africa served as a gateway to central and southern Africa and indeed southern Asia through what used to be called the Cape of Good Hope. For the French, Dakar constituted the bridge between Gibraltar and Gabon. It was also in that area that trade in the Sudan and the Nile valley was coordinated. Depending on developments elsewhere, especially the closure of the all-important route of the Suez Canal, the West coast became an important route to the Far East and Madagascar (Akinyeye, 2003:30). West Africa also had the potential of a commercial highway from Europe to Equatorial Africa, the Antilles, Panama and South America.

The strategic importance of the West coast of Africa to the colonising powers could be appreciated from the report of the Royal Commission of Enquiry headed by Lord Camarvon in the aftermath of the Russian war scare of 1878/1879. The Commission, which was set up to assess the sufficiency or otherwise of the defence of the important seaports of British colonial possessions, identified the Cape route as a veritable alternative to the Suez

route to India in case of a disruption or threat. It was stated that in periods of emergency, reinforcements to and from India and Australia would be through the Cape route. However, West Africa was crucial to the Cape route. Any disruption to the West coast of Africa made utilisation of the Cape route impossible. Moreover, West Africa, being equidistant between Europe and the Cape, provided numerous advantages. The Royal Navy was, accordingly, mandated to protect the route. This entailed the establishment of coaling stations since the naval steamships of the time depended on coal for power. It was for this reason that the British established a coaling station in Sierra-Leone in the late 1880s. The strategic importance of West Africa had been recognised since the seventeenth century, but it was the rivalry and scramble of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that compelled some of the colonising powers to take concrete action in line with the recognition (Flint, 1965:372-373). Again, Britain and France were ahead of the rest in maximising the strategic advantage of West Africa.

To a large extent, the actions taken by either Britain or France to secure West Africa and exploit its economic and strategic potentials were a response or reaction of one to the other. The establishment of a coaling station in Sierra-Leone by Britain in the late 1880s elicited frantic reaction from France. Serious steps began to be taken, and in the late 1890s, the French established a coaling station and military base in Senegal. The French thought of West Africa as an area where it could secure massive economic and strategic advantages. It was felt that a military base in West Africa would not only make possible a location for coal and ammunition storage, but also enhance the operations of the flotilla of the French navy. An important aspect of British and French military activities in West Africa from the eighteenth century was that neither of them wanted to be left in a disadvantaged position (Akinyeye, 2003:30-31). For instance, the recommendation for the establishment of a military base in Sierra-Leone stated that troops should be positioned in such a way that French military landing would be resisted, as if only the French constituted military threat to British interests in West Africa.

Perhaps there were good reasons for British preoccupation with French threat in their security calculations in West Africa from the 1760s onwards. In reality, apart from occasional attacks by the Dutch and conflict with local inhabitants of some areas where the British operated, the French constituted the major and persistent threat to British interest in West Africa. In 1794, the French attacked the Sierra Leone Colony, an action that was difficult to understand and rationalise by the British (Goerge, 1968: 28-35). A similar situation played out in the River Gambia between 1817 and 1824. In 1814, the Treaty of Paris had given the French the right to settle in Albreda. The same treaty gave the British the right to trade for guns in Portendic. However, in 1817 the French governor of Senegal sent a big *argus* to the area, thereby creating fear as few were certain of the motive. One source states that: "In fact in 1824, when ... soldiers (under British command) took their boat from the Island of Albreda to obtain water, the

French Resident threatened to arrest them for espionage” (Gray, 1966: 399-401). Such was the level of suspicion that characterised Anglo-French operations in West Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The same pattern of conflict took place between British and French colonial officials in other parts of Africa. Conflicts also took place between the British and other colonial powers like Germany as well as between France and Germany. For instance, one archival source states that in the mid-nineteenth century “a triangular contest was waged between the Germans, the British and the French over who should exercise greater control in the Cameroons” (National Archives, Ibadan). However, Anglo-French conflicts were by far the most prominent. One of such conflicts took place at Fashoda in Sudan in 1898 where French Captain Jean-Baptiste Marchand was obliged to withdraw before British General H.H. Kitchener on 1 April 1898 (July, 1970:477). The withdrawal in Fashoda confirmed French fears that the British posed some of the greatest obstacles to their colonial enterprise in Africa. Britain was undoubtedly the main target of the establishment of the Senegal military base. Recognising the importance of West Africa to the colonial enterprise, France was desirous of minimising its security vulnerability and one way of achieving this was the establishment of the military base. It was not until the signing of the Anglo-French *Entente* of 1904 that the intense rivalry began to abate. Even then, the economic and strategic importance of West Africa continued to be recognised, and this was reflected in colonial policy (Thomson, 1966:512-513).

### **Anglo-French Rivalry in West Africa after the Seven Years' War**

Long before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, Britain and France had worked to gain advantage in their commercial activities in Africa, especially on the west coast which was of immense economic and strategic importance. The defeat of France and the advantage gained by Britain after 1763 increased the apprehension of France in the colonial enterprise (Bowle, 1974: 142-144). Accordingly, rivalry with Britain also intensified. As J.M. Roberts noted: “The Peace of Paris, which ended the Seven Years' War ... is a convenient marker of a new world order which had already replaced that dominated by Spain and Portugal. It registered the ascendancy of Great Britain in the rivalry with France overseas, which had preoccupied her for nearly three-quarters of a century. The duel was not over, and Frenchmen could still be hopeful that they would recover lost ground” (Roberts, 1999:342). The recovery of lost ground was not to be limited to the Americas. West Africa occupied a great deal of attention in the contest that followed.

The slave trade grew in importance in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and it occupied the attention of almost all the colonial powers (Curtin, 1969:35-40, 85-86; Rawley, 1981:99-100). The organisation of the trade did not require territorial acquisition by the colonial powers as such since African middlemen brought slaves from the interior for sale along the coast. However, the trade was not smoothly organised in such a way that traders

of any nationality could freely purchase slaves from any location. The exercise of influence by a European power over a territory gave immense advantage to the slave dealers of that country in the procurement and export of slaves from that territory. One source explains that: "Because of the peculiar nature of the slave trade, European governments believed they needed to garrison fortified settlements and warehouses along the coast of West Africa. These forts provided a safe haven where their nationals received and stored slaves provided by African rulers and slave dealers. And the forts also protected them from attack by hostile European powers" (Rogozinski, 2000:126). West Africa was bound to be of immense interest to the colonial powers since it provided a large chunk of all the slaves procured from Africa and taken to the Americas.

The importance of the slave trade to the European colonial powers made many of them to be directly involved in the trade. For instance, it was English leader, Charles II, who chartered the Royal African Company in 1660, and the French West African Company was established by Colbert in 1664. In addition, several European states established forts to facilitate the slave trade in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Ryder, 1965:226-230). The ownership of the forts changed hands either through forceful seizure or by legitimate acquisition as the European powers struggled for a share of the slave trade. According to one scholar:

Except for the Spanish, all the colonial powers encouraged and were directly involved in the Atlantic slave trade. Until the 1680s, the Dutch West Indian Company dominated Atlantic commerce, including the slave trade. The British and French then destroyed Dutch commercial power during the Second (1665-1667) and Third (1672-1678) Dutch Wars. Great Britain thenceforth flourished as the supreme slaving nation in the Atlantic world. Between 1690 and 1807, British traders exported some 2,500,000 to the Caribbean and Spanish America. Envyng British success, the French government tried to foster participation by its own nationals. But French entry into the slave trade was slow and ineffective. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, French slavers exported from Africa only half as many slaves as British traders (Rogozinski, 2000:126).

The importance of the slave trade meant that West Africa was regarded as extremely valuable by the European colonising powers.

The Royal Africa Company established by the British government had a monopoly of the British participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As already stated, the slave trade was the most important commercial activity in economic relations between Africa and Europe at the time and the Royal Africa Company aggressively pursued the importation of slaves into the Americas

(Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1965:35; Rogozinski, 2000:89). The Portuguese, Dutch and French also took active part in the slave trade but it was the British that became dominant and took the lion share of the trade by the late seventeenth century. British participation in the slave trade was further given a boost by the provisions of the Treaty of Utrecht which resulted from the Spanish Succession in 1713. The Utrecht treaty granted Britain a contract known as the *Asiento* which conferred on Britain the right to supply Spanish settlements with slaves for the next thirty years. Britain also secured the right to send an annual ship to trade with Spanish America as well as Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Hudson's Bay in North America (Black, 1990:224). This gave a massive advantage to Britain in the colonial enterprise. It is noteworthy that the *Asiento* was previously held by France and its loss to Britain had put France at a disadvantaged position economically. All these were to raise the stakes four decades later in the Seven Years' War. France was determined not to be further limited in the quest for colonial expansion even as Britain was desirous of stretching its advantage. As already noted, the spread of violent conflict to West Africa during the Seven Years' War was part of the overall design.

The political leaders of Britain and France as well as other European states engaged in trade with West Africa felt some obligation to protect their companies and create the condition for them to thrive in their trans-Atlantic trade. After all, the profits made went back to the respective countries which contributed to national prosperity. It is for this reason that these European states, notably Britain and France, made efforts to establish special relationships with the leaders of different states in West Africa where they exercised influence. Furthermore, the traditional trade in other products other than human cargo continued in the eighteenth century even when the slave trade was dominant (Flint, 1966:110-111). The French, for instance, continued their trade in gum arabic along the Senegal river area in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The British also continued their trade in gold, especially in the Gold Coast area, during the period. These two European states along with others like Denmark and Holland traded in other products such as ivory, beeswax, and hides and skin. More than the slave trade, European colonising powers needed to establish settlements to successfully carry out this trade. When, in June 1828, the French authorities sent the Duranton Mission to explore the commercial potentials of the Upper Senegal area, the mission was expected to ascertain the economic possibilities of the area and "... à devancer les Anglais dans la pénétration du Soudan" (Oloruntimehin, 1974:354-355). This objective was aggressively pursued by Duranton and this pitched him, not only against the British, but also the indigenous people in whose local politics he got involved. These developments were a precursor to the establishment of formal colonial rule later in the nineteenth century (Oloruntimehin, 1974:355).

The abolition of the slave trade by Denmark in 1792, Britain in 1807 and many other European states in the next two decades changed the nature of

territorial acquisition and control in West Africa. Henceforth, West Africa was to be developed to produce and supply the raw material needs of European states and also serve as markets for finished products. Emphasis, accordingly, shifted to the development of 'legitimate' commerce and the focus was on the production of primary products. An important development at this time was that there was no systematic framework for the actualisation of the project of legitimate commerce in the first half of the nineteenth century. There were thus many twists and turns in the approach adopted by Britain and France in West Africa. On a number of occasions it was traders that influenced the course of action and in others it was the European officials on the ground (National Archives, London, 1853; Dike, 1956:1-13). However, one issue that remained constant was the maintenance of a firm grip on the territories where they had established themselves during the era of the slave trade and attempts to secure new ones as the circumstances demanded and the opportunity existed. Attempts were made to establish plantation agriculture in some parts of West Africa as a part of the new economic structure and this translated to the maintenance of a firmer grip on the controlled territories by each of the European powers (National Archives, Ibadan).

For the French and English, different steps were taken to consolidate their positions and project their interest in post-slave trade economic dispensation in West Africa. In 1818, the French began the project of translating their settlement in Senegal to a model agricultural area to produce raw materials for their factories. France dispatched a group of agricultural experts and machinery to establish the scheme in 1818. The level of French troops on the ground was also increased to provide effective security. When Governor Roger arrived in Senegal in 1821, he had the objective of developing the settlement as a place for the production of primary products. He established a botanical garden and he sought to transform the St. Louis settlement to a place for plantation agriculture (Flint, 1965:367). These efforts yielded only modest success, but the French colonialists were undaunted. They combined their search for agricultural products to secure raw materials with the expansion of trade in the traditional products with African communities. The French increasingly pushed to the interior through the Senegal River up to the Sudan and a system of trade routes was established across the upper Niger in the process. These efforts led to the expansion of trade in the vast territory.

The preoccupation of France in the area around Senegal and Mali was the promotion of trade and commerce as well as the establishment of plantations to secure agricultural products. This led to attempts to establish colonies which ultimately resulted in violent clashes with local rulers. In spite of the conflict between French colonial officials and local African rulers, French explorers continued to be active in the interior of Africa. Bouet-Willamez, an energetic French naval officer, penetrated the interior and secured the Ivory Coast stretching to Mauritania in the north for France in the late 1830s and early 1840s. He also moved south to Equatorial Africa where the

area of modern Gabon was secured. A significant aspect of the activities of Bouet-Willametz was that he signed treaties of protection with local African leaders in these vast territories thereby making it possible for the French to assert their claim. Formal colonial rule was established in these areas in the 1880s and it formed the basis for French claim at the Berlin Conference ((July, 1970:312-313).

In the meantime, attention continued to be paid to the gateway territory of Senegal where France had established its longest presence in West Africa. The French increasingly pushed into the interior as they detested the activities of African middlemen and the tolls and taxes levied by African rulers. French colonial design in the Senegal area was pursued with tremendous energy following the appointment of Faidherbe as governor in 1854. Under Faidherbe, France established a firm grip on the Senegal area and penetrated eastwards and southwards, securing Guinea as well as the north and south of the Gambia river in the process. Faidherbe formed the French African army of Senegal with which he embarked on campaigns as he pushed into the interior (Flint, 1965:372). This inevitably brought the French to clash with Al Hajj Umar, leader of the powerful Tukolor empire which was dominant in the Sudan area at the time. To avoid a major war, both sides had to partition the Senegalese interior in 1860 with Al Hajj Umar holding sway to the east. It was not only African rulers that the French had to contend with in their expansion in the interior and along the coast of West Africa. The expansion of the French to Guinea and their activities north and south of the Gambia River alarmed the British who sensed a threat to their influence in Sierra Leone and Gambia. This was the precursor to the onset of the scramble in the 1860s.

Up to the 1860s, the conduct of profitable trade was still the main objective of the British and French in West Africa. Political leaders in London and Paris were skeptical of the possibility of the gains of colonial administration being adequate to cover the costs. In spite of this, intervention in the political activities of the indigenous people was considered desirable for the expansion of trade. There was no hesitation about intervention which most of the time involved military action. In 1851, for instance, John Beecroft, who had been appointed Her Majesty's Consul to the Bights of Benin and Biafra in 1849, attacked Lagos and installed Akintoye, who was regarded as more pliant, to the throne. His rival, Kosoko, was described as a committed slave trader and his activities were regarded as a hindrance to "legitimate" commerce (Oliver and Atmore, 1996:63-64; Dike, 1956:1-13). In 1861, a decade after the Beecroft-led invasion, the British declared Lagos a Crown Colony. Partly in response to the British action, the French in turn declared Porto Novo and Cotonou protectorates in 1863 and 1868 respectively both of which later became the French colony of Dahomey. Effective administration was not established in these acquired territories in the 1860s. The Asante, a powerful kingdom in the north of the Gold Coast area, twice invaded the coastal area in 1863, where the British had exercised authority for decades, causing much damage. This led to



the inauguration of the Select Committee on West Africa which reported in 1865 that colonial acquisition should be discouraged while attention should be concentrated on the expansion of trade. The French too had their domestic problems and France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 halted for some time its colonial ambition in Africa. The domestic condition in the major colonial powers of Europe, therefore, made the competition for territories less intense in the 1870s than the previous two (Flint, 1965:374-376). The decade was characterised by attempts to promote commercial expansion without increased territorial acquisition.

A change of policy toward West Africa and Africa generally by the European colonial powers took place in 1879 which altered not only the pattern of territorial acquisition but set the tone for the partition of West Africa. The establishment of formal colonial rule also began for some and expanded for others which continued with unpunctuated regularity until the decolonisation of the early 1960s. However, there were few policies designed by the European powers toward Africa that endured for a long time, and the result was that by 1879 territorial acquisition and control became the norm once again. The fact was that the most important determinant of the policies of European powers toward Africa during this period was national interest. This led to frequent adjustment of policy in accordance with what was perceived as promoting the greatness of the state. The activities of some states also influenced the actions of other states as none of the great powers wanted to be left behind in the race for colonial acquisition in Africa (Ward, 1966: 310:314). This led to conflicts of interest by the European colonial powers in different parts of Africa.

France it was that blazed the trail in the establishment of political control in West Africa again after a lull of about a decade. Having resolved domestic political problems that accompanied defeat in the war with Prussia in 1870 with the Republicans establishing a fairly stable government, France turned to Africa to make up for some of its losses in the war since it was clear that the recovery of the territories, if ever they were going to be recovered, was to be sometime in the distant future. The French began to build the first West African railway from Dakar to St. Louis in 1879 which set them on collision course with several local communities and created panic among other European colonising powers who were disturbed about what the ultimate intentions of the French were (Flint, 1965:377). The aim of the French was to maintain a firm hold on its Senegal settlement and control the routes inland to Bamako. At the same time, French traders were moving westwards down the lower Niger where British traders had been active. A French company appeared on the lower Niger in 1880 and another came calling in 1881. This was an area where British firms had dominated. Indeed, George Goldie had brought British firms trading around the Niger together in 1879 to form the United African Company (Oliver and Atmore, 1996:101). Increased French activity in the area, therefore, naturally alarmed the British. Britain's response was to maintain a stronger hold on the area around the lower Niger. It gave more support to its

trading firms in the area and pursued the signing of treaties of protection with local chiefs more vigorously. Eventually in 1885, Britain granted a royal charter to the United African Company to administer the lower Niger area and the conglomerate was renamed Royal Niger Company (Webster and Boehen, 1980:149).

It was also in the late 1870s that the French government sent the explorer Savognan de Brazza to acquire the north bank of the Congo. In 1879 and in 1880, de Brazza founded Brazzaville after extensive travel in Equatorial Africa. In addition, France annexed Tunis in 1881 causing even greater panic among other European colonial powers. At this time, none of the European colonial powers was left in doubt about France's imperial designs. Their response to French colonial ambitions was swift. The British were worried that France might use its base in Gabon to make incursions into the Cameroons and then into the Oil Rivers in the Niger Delta where, as already noted, French traders were becoming increasingly active. Dahomey was declared a colony in 1892 and Ivory Coast in 1893. It also strengthened its hold on the interior of the Senegal area up to Futa Djallon in the north (Flint, 1965:397-380). Britain hastened its own establishment of formal colonies in the late 1880s and throughout the 1890s partly in response to French colonial activities.

The European scramble for territorial control in Africa increased progressively in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Berlin Conference, which was held in late 1884 and early 1885 to resolve disagreements arising from conflicting territorial claims, set new guidelines for future territorial acquisitions. The Berlin meeting helped to reduce tension among the European colonial powers. However, disagreements continued to be recorded and in a number of instances conflicts nearly degenerated into war. One of the most explosive cases was the clash between British General Horatio Kitchener and Jean-Baptiste Marchand at Fashoda in Sudan in July 1898 to which a cursory reference was earlier made (Thomson, 1966:512-513). Only the display of a good sense by the two military personnel and the foreign ministers of the two countries helped to stave off the outbreak of war. By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly the whole of Africa had been partitioned among the colonising powers of Europe. It took another half a century before European colonial rule came to an end.

## **Conclusion**

The above analysis reveals that the Seven Years' War had a profound influence on West Africa, even though it was a war between European states fought mainly in North America. Britain and France fought for supremacy in colonial acquisition which was central to their economic development and West Africa had as much to offer as North America in this regard. In addition, the position of parts of West Africa as a gateway which offered immense strategic value made the region even more attractive to the colonial powers. This necessarily made the Seven Years' War to spread to West Africa especially

territories that held great economic advantage and strategic value such as the Senegal area. Britain utilised the war in North America as a pretext to stretch its interest in West Africa and the result was the clash with France in the Senegal area from 1758. The struggle for colonial possession in West Africa which had gone on for some time before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in the mid-eighteenth century, therefore, became more wide-ranging during and after the war. Developments during the Seven Years' War revealed even more the economic and strategic importance of West Africa and this made the struggle for colonies in the region even more intense after the war. This pattern remained unchanged almost throughout the rest of the eighteenth century and it eventually led to the establishment of formal colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century which continued until the decolonisation of the early 1960s.

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# The Perception of Students on Abortion: A Survey of Senior High Schools in the Sunyani Municipality of Ghana

Paul APPIAH-SEKYERE

## **Abstract**

*This study sought to find out the perceptions of the students in Senior High schools in the Sunyani Municipality in Ghana on abortion. The study employed the descriptive survey research design. With the simple random sampling procedure, 364 students were selected from a total of 6,824 to participate in the study. The study found out that the students perceived abortion to be morally unacceptable. A significant majority of the students disagreed with arguments that are in favour of abortion. The majority of the students can be described as anti-abortionists. What influenced their perceptions and how they will react, when they find themselves in an unwanted pregnancy situation, are not known. The study also found out that there was no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female students on abortion. In relation to the findings, the study recommended that issues on abortion, and others related to human sexuality, should be taught in Senior High Schools. This will put the students in a better position to make right ethical decisions on abortion.*

## **Introduction**

The issue of morality, especially among the Ghanaian youth today, has become a matter of great concern to most Ghanaians. The reported incidents of rape, prostitution, paedophilia, homosexuality, teenage pregnancy and abortion in our societies have led to a wake-up call for people to assist in reducing, if not eradicating, these social problems. This is because they threaten the future of the nation. Among these moral issues stated above, "there is probably no more controversial issue in bioethics today, or one that touches so many lives, as abortion. An estimated 43 percent of American women will have an abortion by age forty-five" (Boss, 1999: 108). Abortion is a social problem in many countries the world over, including America, and the Ghanaian case is, therefore, no exception. In other words, the problem of abortion is not peculiar to Ghana alone. In Ghana, it is estimated that there are "17 induced abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age" (Ahiadeke, 2001: 5).

The issue of abortion is of critical interest to ethicists, and for that matter, scholars because it involves human life. Unsafe abortion is probably one of the key contributors to maternal mortality in Ghana. Despite the liberalisation of the abortion law in Ghana in 1985, many abortions continue to be induced illegally under unhygienic conditions by providers who are either untrained or inadequately trained to do them (Turpin, Danso & Odoi, n. d). This paper examines students' perceptions on abortion with a focus on the direct-induced type of abortion. Within the context of this paper, the word abortion is used specifically to mean direct-induced abortion.

The following questions then arise. Does one have a moral right to terminate the life of an innocent embryo because of one's own perceptions on abortion? Is one morally obliged to save the life of a foetus no matter how threatening the situation can be? People have tried to answer these and similar questions by taking different positions. Whether people may be classified as pro-abortionists or anti-abortionists, the fact remains that abortion is being practised among the youth in Ghana. According to the "unadjusted data from the Maternal Health Survey Project, the abortion rates were 19 abortions per 100 pregnancies and 27 abortions per 100 live births; the abortion rate was 17 induced abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age" (Ahiadeke, 2001: 5).

It is, however, difficult to get up-to-date data on abortion. This is because, generally, the various ethnic groups in Ghana frown on abortion. This could be one of the reasons why people are unwilling to come forward even to seek proper medical care. Furthermore, this could contribute to the difficulty of the interested agencies in providing reliable and up-to-date information on the actual state of the problem. This presents a challenge to this paper in studying how the Senior High School students in the Sunyani Municipality perceive abortion.

Since the effects of abortion on males might differ from those of females, it is probable that the perceptions of male and female students on abortion might also differ. This study, therefore, endeavours to find out whether differences exist between the perceptions of male and female students on abortion or not using Senior High Schools in the Sunyani Municipality.

In selecting the study area, the researcher considered several places but the lot fell on Sunyani, the capital of a region that contains "the central point of the landmass of Ghana" (<http://www.ghanadistricts.com/region/?r=10>). The Brong Ahafo Region has a territorial size of 39,557 square kilometres. It is the second largest region in the country, sharing boundaries with the Northern Region to the north, the Volta and Eastern Regions to the south-east, Ashanti and Western Regions to the south, and Cote d'Ivoire to the west (<http://www.ghanadistricts.com/region/?r=10>).

According to Buah (1998), there was a Bono Kingdom and the first remembered king is King Asaman, who is credited with leading his Akan people from what may be the present-day Burkina Faso, or even further north, to Bonoland. It was as a result of later migrations that led to the Asante, Fante, Denkyira and other Akans settling in their present locations. In fact, Nana Akumfi Ameyaw III traces his ancestry to King Akumfi Ameyaw I (1328-63), under whose reign the Brong Kingdom with its capital at Bono Manso grew to become the most powerful kingdom of its time. Oral tradition has it that nearly all the different groups of the Akan trace their origins to Bono (Buah, 1998). In fact, the Akan form the largest ethnic group (49.1%) in Ghana (<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/general/statistics.php>).

The Brong Ahafo Region was created on 4th April, 1959 (by the Brong Ahafo Region Act No. 18 of 1959). It is estimated that more than 97% of the

people in the Brong Ahafo Region are Ghanaians, with 94% being Ghanaian by birth. The proportion of Ghanaians by birth in the districts ranges from 91% to 97%, with Sunyani, the capital, having the highest, that is, 96% (<http://www.ghanadistricts.com/region/?r=10>). In the light of the above, the selection of Sunyani is considered suitable by the researcher for a study of this nature that examines the perceptions of the Ghanaian youth, in this case, the students in Senior High Schools in the Sunyani Municipality, on abortion.

### **Research Question and Hypothesis**

1. What are the perceptions of Senior High School students in the Sunyani Municipality on abortion?
2.  $H_0$ : There is no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female students in the Senior High Schools on abortion.

### **Review of Related Literature**

It is noteworthy that the controversy on abortion even begins right from its definition. Thus, there are several definitions of abortion. According to Glenn and Merz (2009), abortion is the termination of a pregnancy before birth, resulting in the death of the foetus. These people did not include in their definition the intention behind such acts or the processes that will lead to them. This could have thrown more light on it for a critical assessment. Chandrasekhar (1974: 21) also defines abortion as “a physiological process of evacuating a pregnant uterus”. The one who is conducting the act goes through physical, chemical and clinical processes solely aimed at terminating the life of the foetus. This indicates a deliberate or intentional expulsion of the foetus with the consequence of terminating its life. Whichever way one defines abortion, critical moral questions arise when the method of conducting it is a direct-induced one.

As regards the spontaneous type of abortion (commonly known in ordinary parlance as miscarriage), there is no culpability because it is not an intentional act and so it could be classified as a non-deliberate accidental act. In a similar development, in therapeutic abortion, the prime intention is to cure the pregnant woman of a malady. The unintended death of the foetus is not a deliberate but an unavoidable accidental side effect of the therapy. Hence, therapeutic abortion is not blameable.

### **The Abortion Debate**

There are people who think that direct-induced abortion is ethically wrong. Others think it is right. Even though some countries have come to terms on the moral permissibility or otherwise of direct-induced abortion, by enacting laws on it, the fact remains that the abortion debate continues. The following are some of the respective arguments that have been propounded by pro-abortionists and anti-abortionists.



According to the pro-choice, the foetus is not yet a human person but a conglomeration of human blood cells. Warren (cited in Boss, 1999) argues that at no stage does the foetus meet the criteria of personhood. A foetus does not become a person until sometime after birth, when the infant becomes a 'socially responsive member of a human community'" (Boss, 1999: 116). She further suggests that the traits which are most central to the concept of personhood or humanity in the moral sense include consciousness, reasoning, self-motivated activity, the capacity to communicate, the presence of self-concepts, and self awareness (Mappes & Zembaty, 1997). If the foetus is not yet a human being, then it follows that it does not have human rights. Granted that this is the case, then, the expulsion of the foetus is just like throwing out any unwanted thing. Noonan (cited in Boss, 1999) disagrees with this view arguing that there is no distinction between biological humanhood and personhood. According to him, human beings have moral value simply because they have a human genotype no matter what their age or stage of development is. Are we to grant moral right to life to the foetus right from conception? At what stage does it meet the criteria of personhood? Do we have universally accepted criteria for the classification of persons and non-persons? The difficulty in answering these questions and the like, compound the abortion controversy.

It is perceived that the foetus is an appendage and so it could be removed from the mother's body if the mother so desires. The pregnant woman has the moral right to allow the foetus to be 'a tenant in her house (womb) or to eject it'. Does a human being have the right over his or her body so much so that the said right overrides another human being's rights even to the extent that the former can destroy the latter's life? Why can we not grant equal rights here? If leaving the foetus untouched does not threaten the life of the host, is it reasonable to take the foetus's life due to one's selfish gains? In fact, considering the fragile condition of the foetus, one can argue that the foetus' right to life is stronger and overrides the mother's right to decide what happens in her body. It could be argued further that, granted that the foetus is a human being with human rights, when the right of the foetus interferes with that of the mother, though the mother is the host of the foetus, the one with the greatest possibility of survival must be considered. According to Lowen (2011), "...women who demand complete control of their body, should include preventing the risk of unwanted pregnancy through the responsible use of contraception or, if that is not possible, through abstinence" (<http://womensissues.about.com/od/reproductiverights/Abortion.Argumen.htm>). This argument by Lowen (2011) is laudable; yet, it departs from the main issue, abortion, to the side issue of prevention of pregnancy. The question then arises: what happens to those who are prevented from using contraceptives, as is the case of rape victims?

In another development, the pro-abortionists argue that every human being needs love but a child needs more love than an adult. If a woman is pregnant and feels that the pregnancy is unwanted then this implies that the baby is not going to be loved by the mother and therefore the foetus can be destroyed.

In which of these instances can women show love? Is it the termination of the embryo's life or giving birth to it? Is it not more reasonable to show one percent (1%) of love by allowing it to live than showing ninety nine percent (99%) of "love" by terminating its life? Is it not possible that a mother, who is unloving towards her child in the beginning, may later change her mind to love it?

The pro-choicers further argue that population explosion or over-population has its own consequences such as unemployment, and pressure on the existing infrastructure. Consequently, abortion, which is a sure way of preventing over-population, should be allowed. According to Murdoch (1980),

Poor countries have very high population growth rates, and each extra person is an additional burden on the economy, so population growth causes poverty. Populations are expanding in a finite world and therefore we are in danger of depleting resources and destroying our life support systems (pp. 7-8).

From the above extract, it is clear that over-population affects the standard of living of people. In response to this argument, however, one can raise the following question: if humans have taken time to study and discover that over-population has negative effects on people, why can humans not have a similar time to research into the effects of abortion? For example, to mention just a few, one can talk of haemorrhage, perforation of the uterus, death, sterility and infections as some of the effects of abortion. Besides, does a person have a moral right to kill foetuses that are potential human beings for other human beings to enjoy the world? If we think that over-population is causing problems, why can we not kill any group of humans, for example criminals, instead of the foetus?

The debate on when the human body is ensouled is an ongoing one. There are two basic theories of ensoulment, namely, immediate ensoulment and late ensoulment theories (Marie, 2007). As the terms connote, the first theory suggests that the foetus is ensouled right from conception while the second theory says the foetus is ensouled at a later period after conception. Granted that the foetus is ensouled right at the time conception takes place then abortion will be morally impermissible. If it is true that the foetus is ensouled lately during pregnancy, then abortion is permissible before the body is ensouled. Have we come to terms with the exact time the foetus is ensouled? Is it ethically right to kill a human being when one is not sure about his humanness? What is the morally acceptable decision to make when one is in doubt? Is it morally right for me to bury my sick father when I am not certain that he is dead? Will society allow me to do such a burial? In the context of uncertainty, does morality not demand that I suspend action and undergo more verification exercises?

According to Mappes and Zembaty (1997), "there are other instances in which having a child or having another child, will be an unbearable financial burden" (p. 1). Pro-abortionists argue that a teenager, for example, in a Junior High School who becomes pregnant and does not have the needed funds to cater for the baby should have the right to abortion. This is because; if she keeps the pregnancy, she might end up dropping out of school. Furthermore, the teenager may be physiologically not matured enough to carry a baby to term. In this case, some people argue that abortion should be permitted.

On the issue of teenage pregnancy, one needs to note that the teenager has full knowledge of her status as a teenager and must be responsible for her actions as she can take precautions against pregnancy. If she does not take precautions, she must be held responsible and not the innocent foetus. In this context, we could raise the following question: "is it ethically right to destroy an innocent foetus because of the mistake of another person, namely, the teenager"? In fact, financial assistance could be sought from government agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and philanthropists to help the teenager and the foetus. If teenagers are not made to face the consequences associated with getting pregnant prematurely, abortion and its related effects will rather be on the increase.

In hard cases like rape or incest where the victim becomes pregnant, pro-choicers argue that abortion should be allowed to protect the integrity of the parties involved. The trauma that the child will give to the rape victim is enough to justify abortion in this instance. In the Ghanaian cultural context, for example, it is a taboo to have sex with one's blood relations. Anti-abortionists argue that the rapist is the one who has committed the crime and deserves punishment. The innocent foetus has not committed any crime so to punish the foetus is morally unjust. In a similar perspective, those who are involved in the pregnancy that has been caused by an incestuous relationship should be held responsible for their actions and not the innocent foetus.

In another perspective, the abortion debate concerns the nature of man, the existence of a soul and the beginning of human personhood. In some countries, laws have been enacted on abortion legalising it while others prohibit it and allow abortion for therapeutic reasons. What does the Constitution of Ghana say about abortion? In Ghana, abortion is permitted on the grounds of saving the life of a woman, preserving physical and mental health in cases such as rape, incest and foetal deformation. Abortion is not permitted for economic, social and personal reasons. In the case where it is permitted it must be performed by a registered physician with the consent of the pregnant woman. It must also be performed in a government hospital or a private hospital or a clinic registered under the Private or Maternity Homes Act of 1958 (No. 9) or in a place approved for the purpose. Homes Act ([www.un.org/esa/population/abortion/doc/ghana.doc](http://www.un.org/esa/population/abortion/doc/ghana.doc)).

According to Boss (1998), one of the main types of moral theories that underlies a persons' moral decision is ethical relativism. She posits that,

“Ethical relativists believe that because there is disagreement among people on moral questions, there are no universal moral principles. Instead, ethical relativists hold that ethical values are created by, or are relative to, the people who hold the beliefs” (Boss, 1998: 29). In fact, one's moral theory may underpin one's position on abortion and each position has its respective setbacks.

### **Methodology**

The research design that was employed for this study was the descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design involves the collection of data in order to test a hypothesis or answer research questions concerning the current status of the subject under investigation (Gay, 1992). This design has been chosen because it offers the researcher the opportunity to conduct a comprehensive appraisal of the perceptions of students on abortion. Amedahe (2002) also maintains that in descriptive research, accurate description of activities, objects, processes and persons is objective. In order to have an objective analysis of the perceptions of students, the researcher saw this design as very suitable.

The population of the study was all students in Senior High Schools in the Sunyani Municipality totalling 6,824. There are six Senior High Schools in the Sunyani Municipality. “Samples are expected to be representative. Actually, samples are expected to be chosen by means of sound methodological principles” (Sarantakos, 1997: 140). Out of the 6,824 students, 364 of them were selected for the study. In determining the sample size for the study, the table for determining sample size from a given population as suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and cited by Sarantakos (1997: 163) was used. This was to increase the representativeness of the sample for onward generalisation. The students who were selected for the study were chosen using the simple random sampling procedure. The sample units were selected by the use of the table of random numbers. “This type of sampling, gives all units of the target population an equal chance of being selected” (Sarantakos, 1997: 141).

According to Gay (1992), all research studies involve data collection. The data of the study was collected using questionnaires. The instrument composed of two parts with the first part on gender and age of respondents. The second part was a three point Likert scale that dealt with arguments on abortion. The research instrument that was used to gather the data was subjected to validity and reliability test. The instrument was given to an expert to ascertain how it meets the validity expectations, namely, face and content. The suggestions, as given by the expert, were used to effect the necessary changes. A pilot test was conducted whereby the questionnaire was administered in some selected schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. The data was analysed and a Cronbach's alpha of .78 was obtained. The research instrument was deemed reliable because according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2000), “For research purposes a useful rule of thumb is that reliability should be at 0.70 and preferably higher” (p. 17).

The data collected was analysed through the computation of frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations. In fact, the type of statistics that was employed was the descriptive statistics.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

This study looked at the perceptions of Senior High School students on abortion. The data on the characteristics of respondents was analysed through the computation of frequencies and percentages whilst those of the main data were analysed with means, standard deviations and independent T test as the statistical tools. In fact, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data.

### **Results and Discussions**

The abortion debate is still ongoing. It is very necessary to assess the perceptions of the respondents. Adolescents can be said to be vulnerable in terms of sexually-related problems like abortion. This section presents the interpretations, discussions and findings that were made from the survey. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the students that were sampled for the study.

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of Sampled Students**

Variable	Subscale	No	%
Gender	Male	163	44.8
	Female	201	55.2
Age	10 – 15 years	7	1.9
	16 – 20 years	348	95.6
	21 – 25 years	9	2.5

Table 1 shows that 44.8% of the respondents were males whilst 55.2% were females. Thus the females form the majority. It can also be noted that only 1.9% of the students fell within the ages of 10 – 15 years; while 95.6% were between 16 – 20 years old and 2.5% fell within 21 – 25 years. Thus, a greater number of the respondents were at the adolescent age. The adolescent age which is characterised by a lot of bodily changes puts them at a very vulnerable position in terms of sexually-related challenges. It is in this wise that their perceptions on abortion are needed to inform parents, guardians, heads of schools, policy makers and stakeholders that are responsible for the development of these adolescents.

Table 2 deals with the responses that the students gave to the respective arguments for or against abortion.

**Table 2**  
**Students' Responses to Arguments on Abortion.**

Arguments	Mean	SD
The foetus in the woman's womb is a human being so abortion should be prohibited.	1.16	.46
If the foetus is a human being, then it has a human right to live.	1.09	.37
Abortion should be permitted because a woman has the right to decide what happens to her body.	1.97	.44
The woman's right overrides that of the foetus so abortion should be allowed.	2.01	.39
Abortion should be permitted because a woman will hate a baby from an unwanted pregnancy.	1.91	.54

Table 2 continued

Abortion should be allowed because it can prevent over-population	1.90	.47
It is right to kill the foetus for others to enjoy the world.	2.01	.23
It is right to have abortion within the first three months because at this time, the foetus is without a soul.	1.98	.55
Instead of allowing unwanted pregnancy to prevent me from completing my school, I will commit abortion.	1.87	.49
In a rape case that results in pregnancy, abortion should be allowed	1.79	.49
In case of incest (sexual affair with a close blood relative) that results in pregnancy, abortion should be allowed.	1.85	.61

Mean of Means = 1.60

Mean of Standard Deviation = 0.47

Scale: 1 = Agree 2 = Disagree 3 = Uncertain.

**Research Question**

What are the perceptions of SHS students in the Sunyani Municipality on abortion?

This study sought to investigate the perceptions of 364 Senior High School students in the Sunyani Municipality on the moral acceptability or otherwise of abortion. A cursory survey of some arguments for and against abortion gave the following results.

Initially, concerning the argument for abortion that states that the foetus in the woman's womb is a human being so abortion should be prohibited, 1.16 mean and .46 standard deviation were achieved. Running the mean to the nearest whole number, it falls on the scale 1 (Agree). The majority of the students, therefore, agreed to these statements. This corresponds with John Noonan's view that there is no distinction between biological humanhood and personhood due to the fact that they have the human genotype no matter what their age or stage of development is (Boss, 1999). The support for the argument that abortion should be prohibited because the foetus is a human being was a unanimous one because the item had a low standard deviation of .46 as compared to the mean of standard deviation of .47. The students also supported vehemently the view that the foetus is a human being and so it has a human right to live. This item recorded a mean of 1.09 and a standard deviation of .37. These values indicate clearly that most of the students agreed to this argument. The respondents generally agreed to the arguments that were against abortion.

The majority of the respondents disagreed with the arguments that were posed in favour of abortion. The mean of means of 1.60, when run to the nearest whole number, fell on 2 (Disagree) indicating that, to a large extent, the students were anti-abortionists. The following individual items support the assertion that most of the students were anti-abortionists.

With respect to the item, 'abortion should be permitted because a woman has the right to decide what happens to her body,' 1.97 (mean) and .44 (standard deviation) were attained. This means that the majority of the respondents objected to the statement. The position that the woman's right overrides that of the foetus and so abortion should be allowed was also opposed to, by the respondents. This is because a mean of 2.01 and standard deviation of .39 was obtained for this item. The mean in this case, falls on the scale 2 (Disagree) which shows that the students unanimously disagreed with the statement. The .39 standard deviation that was registered also depicts the students' strong opposition to the respective argument. This stance agrees with Lowen (2011) who posited that "For women who demand complete control of their body, they should include preventing the risk of unwanted pregnancy through the responsible use of contraception or, if that is not possible, through abstinence" (<http://womensissues.about.com/od/reproductiverights/Abortion.Argument.htm>).

With reference to the item 'abortion should be permitted because a woman will hate a baby from an unwanted pregnancy,' it was clear that the respondents were against that position. A mean of 1.91 and a standard deviation of .54 were achieved. Similarly, the students opposed the view that abortion should be allowed because it is a sure way of preventing overpopulation. With this item, 1.90 (mean) and .47 (standard deviation) were obtained. Though, it is true, according to Murdoch (1980), that population growth causes poverty, it is, however, not morally right to kill the foetus to satisfy other people's whims or aspirations. After all, there are other ways such as abstinence and the use of

contraceptives in checking overpopulation. As to the rightness or wrongness of killing the foetus for other people to enjoy the world, the respondents said that it is not right to do that. Here, a mean of 2.01 and a standard deviation of .23 were achieved. It is worth noting that this item had the lowest standard deviation indicating that the degree of opposition of this assertion was very high.

The time the foetus is ensouled cannot be given with certainty. When the students were asked to indicate their opinion on the argument that: it is right to have abortion within the first three months because, at this time, the foetus is without a soul, 1.98 mean and a standard deviation of .55 were obtained. This means that a greater proportion of the students were against abortion even within the first trimester.

With respect to the statement, instead of allowing unwanted pregnancy to prevent them from continuing their schooling, they will commit abortion, a majority of the students disagreed with it. A mean of 1.87 and a standard deviation of .49 were achieved. Though, the students disagreed, the measure of spread is higher than the mean of standard deviation showing that their responses varied.

In a rape case that results in pregnancy, abortion should be allowed. In response to this argument, the respondents strongly opposed it. This item recorded a mean of 1.79 and a standard deviation of .64. The mean in this instance is approximately 2 (Disagree) showing that the respondents objected to it. Similarly, in the case of incest that results in pregnancy, the respondents disagreed that abortion should be allowed. In line with this, 1.85 (mean) and .61 (standard deviation) were obtained. It follows that, in difficult cases such as rape and incest that result in pregnancy, the majority of the respondents disagreed with the position that abortion should be allowed.

### The Null Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference in the views of male and female students in the Senior High Schools on abortion. This is demonstrated in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Independent Sample t-Test**

Gender	M	SD	t	df	P
Male	19.7	2.0	1.128	362	.260
Female	19.4	2.7			

From Table 3, the differences in mean indicate that the males seem to have a different perceptions about abortion as compared to the females. The standard deviation also indicated that the male students were more consistent in terms of their perceptions on abortion than the females. The independent sample t- test indicates, however, that the perceptions of the male students (M=19.7, SD=2.0) and those of the female students (M=19, SD=2.7) are not significantly different



statistically ( $t=1.128$ ,  $df=362$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The aforementioned null hypothesis is, therefore, accepted.

### **Conclusions**

From the foregoing analysis and discussions, the study concluded that the Senior High School students in the Sunyani Municipality perceive abortion as morally unacceptable. However, it is not known how they will react to abortion issues when they find themselves in the actual situation. Probably, a further research would unearth their attitudes towards abortion and that may be similar to or different from their perceptions. One acute limitation is that data on students who have committed abortion are very hard to get. What they have indicated in this study might be different from how they have been reacting practically to abortion issues.

In another perspective, what has influenced their perceptions that abortion is morally wrong is not known at this juncture. It might be from a religious point of view. Most probably, the majority of them may be believers in God. They may be followers of African Indigenous Religion or Christianity or Islam since all these three religions in Ghana frown upon abortion. It could also be from the societal point of view. This is because those who engage in abortion are looked down upon and branded as spoilt girls and boys in the Ghanaian society. There might be other factors that could have influenced the students to perceive abortion as ethically unacceptable. Nevertheless, this study has endeavoured to examine the perceptions of students in the Senior High Schools on abortion, using the Sunyani Municipality as a case study.

### **Recommendations**

Finally, the study offers the following recommendations:

1. The curriculum for the Senior High Schools should include the treatment of human sexuality.
2. Abortion and its related issues could form part of the subject matter studied in the Senior High Schools.
3. Policy-makers and other stakeholders should work together to come up with measures that can prevent the media from disseminating unbridled sex-related information to the vulnerable members of the society especially teenagers.
4. Religious groups could include sex education in their religious formation programmes for the youth.
5. Parents should be encouraged to fulfil their parental roles and responsibilities, as well as offer guidance to their children especially the teenagers on issues related to human sexuality.
6. Senior High Schools should have permanent counsellors available to the students.

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# From The Horse's Own Mouth: Gender Perception in Some Akan and Ewe Proverbs

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## Abstract

*Issues about women have engaged the attention of many scholars over the years, especially in recent times. These issues span much of marginalisation of women in national affairs, male dominance over women, sexual harassment and recently in Ghana domestic violence against women and children among others. Most of these have been analysed from various dimensions. The sociologists, the psychologists and the humanists have all touched on an aspect or other of womanhood however trite it may seem. This paper is a contribution to the discussion on women. It invites the reader to look at the issue of women in two ethnic communities in Ghana – Akan and Ewe from the literary point of view, specifically from the proverbs that these communities have themselves formulated and been using about women. One cannot deny the fact that creative writers, both males and females have portrayed women from a point of view that has close relations with societal determinants. The sexuality of the Ghanaian woman in general and those in the two communities studied has been expressed in their proverbs. The analysis of the proverbs has some relations with the findings of some researchers concerning the old perceptions about the woman as a weakling who depends on the male for sustenance and her total wellbeing.*

## Introduction

Language as a communicative means expresses people's ideas and thoughts and can be realised in different forms and through the different institutions of a people. Through language, persons of a community communicate and share their innermost thoughts and feelings in a particular way. Oyewumi (1997) agrees that language is pre-eminently a social institution and as such it constitutes and is constituted by culture. Indeed according to Asante (2002:1), *only those who possess that culture can fully understand such expressions*. Corroborating Oyewumi and Asante, Agyekum (1996:15), in discussing the importance of taboos as a system that expresses the world view of the Akan, asserts that *there is a closely-knit interrelationship between language and culture*.

One of the cultural elements from which one can realise the essence of language in expressing the world sense of a community is through its oral tradition. According to the Malian philosopher, Amadou Hampate Ba (cited in Oyewumi, *op.cit.* 38), *“oral tradition is a great school of life, all aspects of which are covered and affected by it. It may sound chaotic to those who do not penetrate its secret...”* One of such oral traditions is the proverb which leads to the *secret* of its users. Various paremiologists have looked at proverbs from different perspectives. Some have looked at their aesthetic importance; for

example, Asante (ibid: 2) argues that *proverbs serve as salt, seasoning the speeches of the Twi speaking people*. To this aesthetic aspect of proverbs, Achebe (1958:5) has also observed that, *proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten*.

Others also emphasise the importance of proverbs from the functional point of view. For example, as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century the English philosopher and statesman, Francis Bacon quoted by Appiah 2000:1 in discussing the importance of proverbs in the life of a nation, held that, "the genius, wit and spirit of a nation are discovered by their proverbs". Proverbs thus express attributes that a society cherishes or condemns. Issues on valour, power, wealth etc, are all embedded in the proverbs of a people.

Boadi (1998:21) remarks that, "proverbs provide a storehouse of native wisdom and philosophy and a code of behaviour..." Dzobo (1973:12) also in his preface to a collection of Ewe proverbs asserts that "the Ewe language and culture at their depth are made up of proverbs whose proper understanding leads to the soul of the Ewe." To understand the concept of a common man among the Akan, one source of data that Danquah (nd) used, was by reading into Akan literature embodied in 3,679 Akan proverbs. His findings were that, "never in the proverbs did I come across a single maxim that referred to a common man". Proverbs are therefore not just added extra; they are at the core of a people's knowledge and understanding of life. One will agree that, the experience of nations is caught and summarised in their proverbs and sayings. Indeed, we use proverb in all spheres of life to drive home a point, to recap a position, or to support a viewpoint.

It is important to note that proverbs can reach their audience through verbal and non-verbal means. Each of these channels, be it linguistic, artifact, clothing and so forth is significant to the proverb users in their construct about life in general. Thus, proverbs are taken as *truths* which a people may use to regulate their attitudes and behaviour as far as their relationship with one another is concerned. This paper seeks to study what proverbs express about gender roles in the Akan and Ewe communities of Ghana.

### **The Study Area**

The study covers the Akan and Ewe of Ghana. Ethnographically, Akan refers to the group of people who live in most of the coastal and forest areas of Ghana and the Ivory Coast. According to Abakah (2003) these people share similar cultural traits which serve to differentiate them from other ethnic groups. However, Stewart (1971) classifies the languages spoken by all the Akan people dichotomously as Bia and Akan. About 44 percent of the Ghanaian population speaks Akan as their mother tongue, in the Brong Ahafo and Ashanti Regions as well as in parts at Western, Central and Eastern Regions. Orthographically, Akan has three main dialects – Akuapem, Asante and Fante which are mutually intelligible (Abakah ibid: 6-7; Dolphyne 1988: xi-xii). The Ewe of Ghana refers to the Anlo and Tongu in the South-eastern part

of Ghana, as well as the northwestern Eweland (Agbodeka 1997: i). The main traditional economic activities include farming, fishing and animal husbandry. The Ewe people refer to the Ewe language as Ewegbe, which is classifiable trichotomously as Anlo, Tongu and Eweme.

### Discourse on Gender

Many scholars including Oyewumi (1977), Dolphyne (1991), Opoku-Agyemang (1999) and Odotei (1999) have contributed to the discourse on gender. From the economic and sociological dimensions, Odotei (1999) looked at gender and traditional authority in the fishing industry of selected areas in Ghana. Forms of authority and power as exhibited in the whole enterprise of marine fishing were her concern. Her research shows that even though males form councils that may seem to be the highest authority in the fishing business/enterprise, women wield a lot of power in the economic field. On the whole, there are active complementary gender specific roles even though the roles played by women are rather on the quiet. She also noted that seniority in the enterprise is based on lineage in the kin group and not necessarily on anatomical differences.

Opoku-Agyemang (1999) noted that the folktale in a given culture is a "body of growing narratives that reflect the dynamism and testament of society". In her work, the institution and roles like marriage, parenthood, work, self-worth and authority are looked at through the lens of the folktale. She notes that the nature of the genre as responding to versions to suit a particular context provides the opportunity for new elements to respond to new demands in the society. For example, she cites the famous Ananse tale in which the stories of the sky-God became Ananse stories as they are written by a woman, (J. Osafoa Dankyi) and a man (S.Y. Manu) to make interesting revelations about the influence of gender and ideology on the final product. In this story, the sky-God will give his stories to anyone who can produce dwarfs, a cobra and honets. In Jane Osafoa Dankyi's version, Ananse who is a contestant, goes home, consults his wife and the two of them plan how best to procure those difficult and dangerous creatures of items. Ananse keeps informing his wife of his progress and she drops pieces of advice. Dankyi may be trying to project the idea of *two heads are better than one*. Man and woman must complement each other. In S. Y Manu's revision of the tale, no woman is mentioned in the tale until, Ananse is able to all on his own accomplish the feat and come home to boast to his family about his prowess. Is it an issue of misogyny? Opoku-Agyemang concludes that the folktale must be seen to be *nonsexual*. Gender role is not about the dominance of one category over the other; rather, it is complementary.

But to Oyewumi (1977), the Western world has been so genderised that there is a kind of essentialisation of social identity. In Oyewumi's book, *Invention of Women* (1977), she rejects the use of western theories to analyse African subjects or themes. Thus, "the promotion in African Studies of concepts and theories derived from the western mode of thought at best makes it difficult

to understand African realities... it hampers our ability to build knowledge about African societies." One of such is the emphasis on the body as a basis for categorisation. For example, essentialisation has led to genderisation of professions leading to phrases like woman pilot, female teacher, woman president, as if the roles were different.

Oyewumi (ibid) also argues that most of the western theories use the body as the bedrock or basis on which social order is built. For example, the nose size, colour, the shape of the head, its size invites a gaze of differentiation. Race is built on what she refers to as *body-logic*. She therefore advocates a cultural logic and asks on what basis are western conceptual categories exportable or transferable to other cultures that have a different cultural logic? Differing cultures construct their social categories differently (p. 11). The use of European paradigms to assess the world sense of Africans to her is a disservice to Africa. Models therefore must be culture-specific. Since apprehension of reality involves more than perception, therefore, difference and hierarchy in society must not be biologically determined. The world must be conceived of as a whole in which all things are linked together. To affirm her belief in *cultural logic instead of bio-logic*, Oyewumi (ibid) discussed relevant Yoruba institutions with the view of showing how these institutions explicate the primary principles of social organisation based on seniority defined by relative age. Thus, to her as it is in other African societies, gender is socially constructed in Yoruba; differences *between* anatomical male and female are to be located in social practices and not in biological facts. Physical bodies are therefore not social bodies. One remark worth considering from her work is that a thorough analysis of the language of a people for example, is thus essential to the construction of knowledge about the people and also the people's construct about life. The linguistic divergences and their implications for knowledge production are important. Since gender as an analytic category is now at the heart of contemporary discourse, language analysis can contribute to this discourse.

Oyewumi's view on language is vital to this study since it underscores the essence of proverbs in the life of a people. The proverb is an important communicative means that expounds the *world-sense* of the Akan and Ewe. It leads to the philosophy of these people. The proverb is language that permeates their thoughts and determines their relationship with others.


### **Capturing Women in Proverbs**

Borkor (2004), among other things, discusses certain peculiarities of African proverbs and notes that African proverbs have a socio-cultural pattern of patriarchy and Male Chauvinism and that "the attributes verging on power and accomplishments are reserved for men." Another important element that he finds interesting is that African proverbs are *gendered* – giving little respect to women. Women are assigned negative traits in the following proverbs:

- A woman without a man is like a field without seed (and he asked inter alia why not a man?).
- A bad son gives a bad name to his mother (Ivory Coast)
- Mothers-in-law are hard of hearing (Democratic Republic of Congo).
- When a woman is hungry she says: roast something for the children that they may eat (Akan)
- If you marry a woman at a pub, you will divorce her at a pub. (Ewe)
- In trying to understand why men are not portrayed as such and also the source of these gender specific proverbs, Borkor (ibid) postulates that one could trace the origin of these female proverbs to male originators. He is also of the view that the male originators sought to belittle their female counterparts and this should not be surprising because in the traditional African society, the male has always been on top of thing. This mindset is exposed by the gendering that is evident in these proverbs. Though the focus of this paper is on women, it is interesting to note that there are also proverbs in the two speech communities that depict men in bad light as well. For example, there is in Akan, *Ɔbarima nyɛ sumii na yɛde yen ti ato no so* - the man can never be a pillow for us to rest our heads on; in Ewe, *ʼutsu fe tame menye azi woakle akpɔ eme o* – a man is not a nut that you can crack to see its contents. These two are all pointing to the fact that, one cannot predict how trustworthy or reliable a man can be.

Interestingly, Ibrahim Habeeb discusses how women have become the center of proverbs that mostly portray them as evil. He acknowledges that there are a few proverbs though, that portray them as angels. To him 'proverbial injustice prevails in most languages, [this confirms] that the proverbs and sayings were coined by men and male dominated societies and

experiences." Some proverbs that tell the bias against women, he gives as follows:

- The devil is dead when there is a woman.
  - An ass would climb a ladder if you find wisdom in women.
  - English
  - Women are the root of all evil.
  - A widow is an easily ridden-low wall - German
  - A woman is like a scorpion. She is not smiling when she shows her teeth.
  - Arabic
  - Women are deficient in mind and faith.
- 

He discovers from his data that there is a disproportionate share of bad sayings on women because 'civilisation has really been a man's civilisation, for

the major part... men coined most of these proverbs." He concludes with the question: "Can we make a conscious effort to correct the imbalance?"

Some form of assessment must be made about Borkor (ibid) and Habeeb's findings. Both have made very interesting analyses of proverbs as they affect the status of women. However, we are not sure whether these analyses have been pitched in context. This is because proverbs are better understood in context. Yankah (1989:153) puts it right that, *Ebe dee ennyina faako, etu-* "a proverb flies, it does not stay at one place." Another area of concern is the fact that the highlight has been on the negative proverbs about female and not the positive ones that they profess are also available. In fact neither Borkor nor Habeeb mentioned a single positive female proverb that could be the starting point of correcting the imbalance that Habeeb is worried about. It is possible that in the same cultures or languages there may be some proverbs that are both complementary and positive.

Finally, their conclusion that these proverbs about female have been formulated by males sounds plausible because an Akan proverb says, *obiara nso dae nkɔ nea yerekum no* which literally means *Nobody dreams to where they are killing him/her*.

In a work by Thiselton-Dyer (1906), *Folk-Lore of Women*, chapter one *Woman's Characteristics*, discusses the complexity of woman that makes her kind ... a miracle of Divine contradictions (Michelet quoted by Thiselton-Dyer) as expressed in the lore of a people especially proverbs and sayings. He finds out that these proverbs and sayings are both positive and negative. Some of the positive attributes of women discussed are that:

1. Universally it is acknowledged that the woman is indispensable to man's happiness and well-being as illustrated in the German saying *man without a woman is head without body...*
2. The woman is the most intelligent as demonstrated in the following proverbs.
  - a) A woman's intelligence is four times that of man, her assiduity six times... (Burmese)
  - b) Women are instructed by nature, the learning of men is taught by books or
  - c) Nature is woman's teacher, and she learns more sense than man, the pedant, gleans from books.
3. Woman is also said to be, *equal to emergency* as expressed in German saying as follows. *Though an elephant and a tiger come, [a woman] will leap over them.*

Some of the negative characteristics of women are captured under the following topics and expresses in corresponding proverbs or sayings.



1. Woman is tricky  
Proverb: *They will kill their husbands and burn themselves (oriental)*
2. Woman is brainless (as expressed in these Russian sayings)
  - *A woman's hair is long, but her sense is short*
  - *A dog is wiser than a woman, he does not bark at his master.*
3. Woman is also considered to be frail, proud, unfaithful and that correction is good for her.

Proverb: *Melons require the sun, and mangoes want the sun; women need a strong hand...*

A close look at these proverbs and sayings shows the dominance of the negative characteristics over the positive of women. These may go to support the suggestion made by Habeeb and Borkor that the proverbs have been formulated by men. Another important comment that is worth making is that, a chunk of the proverbs or sayings are of European origin and have only been given hypothetical explanations.

It is significant to note that Thiselton-Dyer has at least mentioned something positive about women as well. If there are negative ones, why not, that makes women real human beings. Are we sure men do not have these same characteristics?

Another work that is close to the above is the one by John Mbiti. In his work on *Women in African Traditional Religion* (1988), Mbiti explores the perceptions of women that are expressed in the following three areas of African lore – mythology, proverbs and prayers. Mbiti (1988) notes that, proverbs say so much about African women – positive and negative.

Like Thiselton-Dyer, Mbiti notes that women are extremely valuable in the sight of society; thus, a woman's worth is expressed in the example below. *It is better to be married to an old lady, than to remain unmarried* (East Africa). This notwithstanding woman is also regarded with a lot of prejudices. For example, woman cannot be trusted with secrets, she can ruin a man, and she is generally dangerous. So to *marry a woman is to put a snake in one's handbag* or *following a woman is like footprints in water*, it will soon vanish. Mbiti like Thiselton-Dyer has shown the dynamic nature of woman by pointing out both the negative and positive aspects of her.

Yisa (1997) has looked at proverbs that compare women to animals, food, plants, property and trouble. His work has revealed that proverbs de-personify or dehumanize women emphasizing *the intensity of their cumulative misogyny*. He argues therefore that proverbs should not be regarded as *wisdom* and *truth* since misogyny may not be wisdom and sexism, truth. A few of the proverbs he has used to show the dehumanisation of women are:

1. A woman is like a guitar; in order to warm up you have to strum/stroke her.

2. Women in state affairs are like monkeys in glass houses.
3. A woman, a dog, a walnut tree, the more you beat them the better they be.
4. The person who marries a beauty marries trouble, because she claims to be related to everybody.

Yisa also concludes like the others that, that which constitutes the female has suffered quite possibly the worst universal ideological abuse ever to be perpetrated on an abstract category.

From the exploration of extant literary works it is evident that proverbs about women have received a great deal of discussion. Additionally, all the analyses have emphasised the point that women have been mistreated. In the following section we briefly study the concept of the woman through the lenses of the Akan and Ewe communities in Ghana.

### Women among the Akan and Ewe

Both the Akan and the Ewe believe that the woman is the essence of life. Thus, the Akan refer to the earth as *Asaase Yaa* – earth, a female Thursday-born, while the Ewe call it *mianɔ* – our mother, and even the Akan matriliney confirms this pride of place of the woman. In this context the implication is that, from the broad Ghanaian view, life emanates from and is supported by the earth. For our sustenance we need mother earth.

Among the Ewe of Ghana a woman is referred to as *Nyɔnu* which is a compound word derived from two root morphemes *nyo* and *nu* that is *the one that makes things good*. That is to say, woman is at the centre of goodness. This is encapsulated in the Ewe proverb: *Nyɔnu yenɔa megbe wonyona*, meaning, it is when a woman supports that there is success. Besides the above, the woman among the Ewe is also considered the creator or source of life. It is a woman that creates human beings among the Ewe and *not a man*. *Ɔman wɔ ɔbea yam* (*Nation is in the woman's stomach*) is an Akan adage which confirms this fact.

### Proverb Interpretation

The study of African proverbs dates back to 19th century (Yankah 1989). Most of these scholars however have been interested in the collection and documentation of proverbs rather than their detail analysis. The best most could do was to translate these proverbs from the specific African languages into a European language. Scholars like Asare (1995), Dzobo (1997) and Appiah et al (2000) have gone a step forward to interpret or analyse these compilations using hypothetical situations. All of the scholars have acknowledged the fact that there is difficulty in explaining a proverb due to the number of different contexts within which a single proverb may be used. Appiah (ibid: 5) summarises the issue as follows: “it is impossible to explain all the uses [of a proverb], even if one is aware of them; it is the occasions that brings a proverb to mind ...”. Junod and Jacques (1936) also had this to say

about the meaning of proverbs ...*a proverb may have an apparent meaning which is quite obvious, ... it may at the same time have in actual use, a completely different intention* (cited in Yankah op cit: 36). All these underscore the need for context analysis of proverbs.

Thus, according to Yankah (1989:30-31) proverbs must have a linguistic or discourse context which implies that the actual words before and after the proverbs usage are important in the interpretive process of a particular proverb. This process may seem to give a kind of *free-for-all feature* to the proverb. Yankah again cautions that to minimise the possible abuse of context in proverb interpretation, one must consider the attitudes and utterances which must coincide with the intended meaning of the proverb and also a comment on the lore of the people is necessary.

Another analytical or interpretive process of a proverb that has been used by Penfield (1983) in her study of proverb among the Igbo involves:

1. Interpretation of observed overt behaviour in which proverbs were used.
2. Recall of past interactional settings in which proverbs were utilised.
3. Interpretations of recalled past or hypothetical interactional settings in which proverbs were used.
4. Provision of information regarding various aspects of the way of life of the people
5. Participant observation

One must acknowledge the limitations of the above model which includes forgetfulness that affects the reconstruction of the past vividly.

However, from the discussion so far, it is obvious that the ideal model for interpreting a proverb is from its context. This paper uses both the hypothetical and recall of past interactional settings as well as some real life situations for the analysis of some collected female proverbs from both the Akan and Ewe speech communities. However, the detailed analysis focuses on proverbs used in context. A summary of the situation will be given without mentioning the real participants.

### Ewe

1. Nyɔnu mekpɔa tɔ wosine o.  
(Don't go and fish in a river when a woman tells you to do so).
2. Nyɔnu kpɔ ga medoa agblɔvu o.  
(A wealthy woman cannot institute a war-drum).
3. Nyɔnu medɔɔ ɔutsu dudu o.  
(A woman does not urinate man's urinating).
4. Nyɔnu fle tu ɔutsu ye dane.  
(A woman buys a *gun*, a man fires it).
5. Nyɔnu gblede mebī a o.

- (Palm fruits on the farm of a woman do not ripe)
6. Nyɔnu medoa adudɔ vuvua dɔ o.  
(A woman does not urinate and shake her genital organ).
  7. Nyɔnu mɛfiɛ fi o, hotɛli wowɔna.  
(A woman does not steal, she prostitutes).
  8. Nyɔnu metsɔɔ tu de abɔ o, etɛɛ nye akpledatsi.  
(A woman does not carry a gun on her shoulders, hers is the *laddle-that cooks-akple*).
  9. Nyɔnu goka wɔnye.  
(A woman is a gourd plant).
  10. Nyɔnu manyomanyo, nyo wu ɖutsu manyomanyo.  
(A useless woman is better than a useless man).
  11. Nyɔnu dzetugbe medea atsu deka o.  
(A beautiful woman does not marry one husband).
  12. Nyɔnu dze wosiaa, mesia du o.  
(A woman dries salt, not gun-powder).
  13. Nyɔnu medua fia le ɖutsuwo de o.  
(A woman does not rule where there are men).
  14. Nyɔnu abolo kpaku wɔnye, de wofoɛ hafi wovuna.  
(A woman is like *abolokpaku* container you need to beat it for it to open).
  15. Nyɔnu koklo wɔnye, ne du vodudɔ nu.  
(A woman is a fowl, she wipes her mouth after eating).
  16. Nyɔnu mevɔna na nyagadzi o.  
(A woman does not fear the red loin cloth).
  17. Nyɔnu sudui bɔbɔe wɔnye na `utsu.  
(A woman is a soft pillow to a man).
  18. Nyɔnu xle akpe, mehua alafa o.  
(A woman who counts thousands, respects not the hundred).
  19. Nyɔnu yenɔa megbe wɔnyona.  
(It is when a woman is at the back, that things work out well).

#### Akan

20. Akokɔ nansoa nkum ne ba.  
(The claws of the hen do not kill its chicks).
21. Abofra dwonsɔ gu ne na so a, ontwa ntwene.  
(If a baby urinates on the laps of the mother she does not amputate either of the legs and casts it away).
22. ɔbea te sɛ borɔde, n'ase mpa mma.  
(A woman is like a plantain plant, which sprouts all the time).
23. ɔbea ye oguan a, ɔbarima na yetɔn no.  
(Even if a woman becomes useless it is a man who is sold).
24. ɔbea te sɛ ohurii, ɔnom mogya, na ɔmma mogya.

(The woman is like the tsetsefly, she drinks blood but she doesn't give blood).

25.  $\text{\textcircled{O}bea nya ne ho a, \text{\textcircled{O}dan \text{\textcircled{O}barima.}$   
(When the woman becomes wealthy, she still depends on the man).
26.  $\text{\textcircled{O}bea nyansafo na \text{\textcircled{O}se "mehw\text{\textcircled{e}} de\text{\textcircled{e}} abusua b\text{\textcircled{e}}ka".}$   
(It is the wise woman who says "I look forward to what my matriclan will say).
27.  $\text{\textcircled{O}bea animuonyam ne aware.}$   
(A woman's glory is in marriage)
28.  $\text{Mmea nyae su a, na y\text{\textcircled{e}}n ne akunafo.}$   
(Widows are excluded when women are to abstain from weeping).
29.  $\text{\textcircled{O}bea ne barima hyia a, \text{\textcircled{O}bea de \text{\textcircled{O}bea na \text{\textcircled{O}barima nso de \text{\textcircled{O}barima.}$   
(When a woman and a man meet, the woman is called a woman and the man a man).
30.  $\text{\textcircled{O}barima hwe \text{\textcircled{O}barima, na \text{\textcircled{O}bea hwe \text{\textcircled{O}bea.}$   
(A man trains a man, and a woman trains a woman).
31.  $\text{\textcircled{O}barima b\text{\textcircled{e}}ko a, \text{\textcircled{e}}w\text{\textcircled{a}} ne tirim; \text{\textcircled{O}bea b\text{\textcircled{e}}ko a \text{\textcircled{e}}w\text{\textcircled{a}} n'ano.}$   
(If a man is going to fight, it is in his head; if a woman is going to fight it is on her lips.)

While proverbs numbered 20 to 23 in Twi and 9, 12 & 19 in Ewe talk positively about women, 24-27 in Twi and 13, 15 & 18 in Ewe talk negatively about women.

Again, most of the proverbs seem to show anatomical differences, for example proverbs numbered 29 & 30 in Twi and 3 & 6 in Ewe: complementarity of roles for example number 1 in Ewe and 30 in Twi but they can be used in contexts that exhibit power relation and categorisation, as the following analysis will indicate.

### Some of the Ewe proverbs in context (Translations)

#### Situation A:

Dispute settlement between settler farmers and their landowners:  
During the proceedings the following ensued:

Male Settler: You are becoming too discriminatory. We are tired. We are also kings where we come from ....

Female Host: But you are not kings here; you are only settlers and we have every right over you. You better stop the "pomposity".

Male Settler: Look here! What right do you have to talk to me this way? Is it your beauty, wealth or what? You have no authority over me; you are only a woman.

Female Host: I laugh at you. I'm a woman but I can look after you, your children and your whole family. If you insult me, I will insult you.

Male Settler: Be careful! You are only a woman. *Nyɔnu kpɔ ga medoa agblɔvu o* – Even if a woman has money, she cannot institute a war drum (agblɔvu)...

A little after the encounter, the researcher asked the male settler whether he was angry because of the insults or because they came from a woman. He said to me: *Mebe nyɔnu ko wɔnye... mekpɔ mɔ o*, meaning, I say she is only a woman... she has no right.

In this context, this proverb clearly shows some sort of categorisation that is based on *body-logic* or *bio-logic*. The woman is beautiful, has money and, therefore, may wield some power but that does not permit her to be rude to an anatomical male. *Agblɔvu* among the Ewe symbolises power and valour. Its institution demands rituals that used to include human blood. The *Agblɔvu*, therefore, was instituted by males who *physically* went to war and brought back Prisoners of War or human heads. For this feat their names are extolled on the drum. In addition to its institution, traditionally, a woman would not ordinarily be allowed to handle the war drum *agblɔvu*. In short, it is a man that brings honour that is derived from his physical strength, to both his family and the community as a whole and thus, should not be spoken to with disrespect. It does not matter the strength or valour of the man in the episode. His biological status is enough to merit respect from a woman.

The *agblɔvu* metaphorically suggests the power that the male has acquired through the use of his physical or spiritual strength.

Is it possible that the woman can use her financial resource to purchase the drum, especially in this era when we are fighting other wars?

### Situation B:

Marriage arbitration: The following was the advice that an uncle gave the niece. “You see, a woman is a woman. You cannot marry yourself. You complain you do this and that and your husband does virtually nothing. You see, you cannot marry yourself; that is why our elders say *Nyɔnu fle tu tse, ɖutsue dane* (that is, if a woman buys a gun, it is a man that fires it). No matter what you do, it is a man that must marry you”.

Again this smacks of some kind of absolute power to a male. The woman may have all it takes to make her recognizable in the society but her worth and dignity is derived from a man. *Gun* among the Ewe connotes power and maturity. The woman in this proverb must ride on the back of the man for recognition. She can have the wherewithal to buy the gun and that is where her power ends; its real functions whether for protection or economic purposes depend on how the man uses it. A woman is thus powerless so it may seem,

unless a man supports her. Essentially it is a man that buys a *gun* but if (contrary to expectation) a woman should acquire one, it must be the man who will use it.

As has been suggested earlier on, these proverbs, by the nature of the genre can assume some other interpretations. For example, is it possible to see them as complementary? At least the woman has the economic power that is very important as far as the purchasing is concerned; the man, having the know-how uses the gun to good purpose.

### Situation C:

A quarrel between two women: Insults which bordered on infidelity and bastardization were traded.

Female A – If you are a woman go on and I will tell you where you come from.

Female B – Go on, tell me and I shall also tell you and everybody where those children of yours come from: hotelitɔ” (a whore).

Female Passerby – Look here! Stop the disgrace. *Miava gba afe* – You'll break up the home. *Nyɔnu mesia du o lo, edze wosiaa*, a woman does not dry the gunpowder, she dries salt.

### Explanation

Indeed the insults from the two women could inflame serious trouble and create cracks in the fabric of the society because issues of fidelity and geneology are delicate among the Ewe and other communities in Ghana. Metaphorically, a woman whom we have referred to as the essence of life should not be interested in creating trouble. Salt seasons, it preserves; it is medicinal, it brings taste to blandness. In contrast, gun powder connotes destruction. Here it is being suggested that it is men who are interested in the wanton destruction of life not women. For a mother does not hit the stomach of her child – *Vɛnɔ mefoa vi fe dɔme o*. Gun powder and salt are quite similar in texture but they function differently. The piece of advice discernible from this proverb is that like the salt, the woman, upon whom a society is built, must preserve life, home and family.

### Situation D: At a funeral

It was a chat among a group of people concerning the rash behaviour of some women which has led to some kind of trouble in the family. To support the idea that women are impatient one of the members used this proverb. *Nyɔnu gblede meɓta o* that is the palm fruit on a woman's farm does not ripe.

The cultivation of palm trees takes time. It needs a lot of care and patience. A woman, in this situation it is believed, does not or cannot wait for that long period. She will be in a hurry to harvest the fruits. There are reasons for

this; one of these is that she needs the palm fruits for the home. In her desire to serve the family she may be rash. In short a woman can be erratic. Closely related to the above is the proverb *Nyɔnu mekpɔ tɔ wosiee o* – if woman tells you there is fish in some part of river, do not take her seriously. She might have seen a mirage or a log. She is not critical and may cry wolf where there may be none. The following proverbs were hypothetically tested.

1. *Nyɔnu metsɔɔ tu de abɔ o, etɛe nye akpleɔatsi.* A woman does not carry a gun, hers is the ladle. To arrive at the possible interpretations of the above proverb various members of the Ewe community including my students offered their views. What seems to cut across is the idea of complementarity. The woman must use the ladle to prepare food to feed and sustain life, the man with the gun can also use it to protect life. On the other hand, the *akpleɔatsi* is as dangerous as the gun to life another proverb hypothetically tested is:
2. *Nyɔnu aboloɔpakue, de wofonɛ hafi wovuna.* A woman is a gourd receptacle that carries *abolo*, you need to hit it for it to open.

One can interpret this in the way Thilselton-Dyer looks at the proverb – *A woman is like a guitar, in order to warm up you have to strum/stroke her.* This sounds negatively harsh. However, another interpretation that was offered which looks more positive is the one that derives purely from the metaphoric thrust. The receptacle that is made from the gourd is delicate, it keeps the *abolo* warm. The owner of the gourd-receptacle needs it for survival and so cannot hit it hard otherwise it will be shattered. One needs to take absolute care of it; handle it gingerly. Generally the lid of the receptacle may prove difficult to open as it fits snugly; but, it does not call for its break. Life in general needs the woman so she must be protected. She may prove a little *stubborn* to deal with but that only calls for gentle handling almost caressing so as to derive the best out of her.

### Some of the Akan proverbs in context (Translations)

**Situation E:** Researcher eavesdrops and joins two women who were returning from a funeral and were expressing their views on what they saw.

Two women AB and CA left a funeral premises where they had gone to express their condolences to the bereaved family and were chatting on their way back home. AB was trying to draw the attention of her colleague CA to an observation she made at the funeral grounds. According to her she saw that, with the exception of the widow who she did not see weeping and showing any sense of sadness or loss, the faces of most of the deceased's relatives looked sad and some even had swollen eyes indicating that they must have been weeping all along.



The addressee CA was not surprised at all about what the speaker AB was saying. Rather, she started to tell AB about a 'Will' she heard the deceased had left, bequeathing greater part of his property to the wife. She continued that the said Will requests that the wife should not shed any tear for him after his death, because all the services she needed to render for him, she did when he was alive and was with her. CA expressed her surprise at such a Will and the fact that the widow would want to go by the letter of the said Will, and so will not show any sense of loss to a loving husband.

The researcher who was then following the interactions and was eavesdropping begged her intrusion and called their attention to the Akan concept of the Will testament especially when it is one made by a deceased. Quickly AB stopped the researcher from continuing any further explanation and said, '*Madam, mate nea woreka no, nanso mpanin se: mmea nnyae su a na yenne akunafɔ*' (*Madam I have heard what you are saying but according to the wisdom of our forefathers, widows are excluded when women are to abstain from weeping or when women are to stop weeping we do not mean widows are included*). To her, the behaviour the widow put up was shocking and unacceptable and CA was trying to refer the researcher and AB to prerogative traditional role of the Akan woman. Here, when it comes to funeral and dirging the culture frowns on men who behave like women by expressing their sorrow via weeping publicly hence, the Akan say *ɔbarima nsu'* - (*Man does not cry*). Rather, a funeral ground is one of the few public domains that is solely for women to perform to show the depth of their affection for deceased relatives. A woman who does not weep or wail openly to show her feelings about the death of a relative is considered a bad woman.

#### **Situation F:**

Conversation between two elderly friends, TA and AK. TA complains about his wife's queer behavior.

TA visited AK one evening to tell him what his (TA) wife had done to him the previous day. According to TA he did not provide his wife with housekeeping-money because he did not have any money on him that day. But luckily, one of his farm labourers had brought them a piece of venison from the village. So he knew that at least the wife was going to prepare a delicious soup with the venison. However, when he started eating the food, he realized that his wife had used only pepper, water and the venison to prepare the soup. When he called the wife and asked why that type of soup, she told him that what he provided her with was what she used to prepare the soup.

AK who was so surprised about what the friend's wife did, could only remark that, '*m'akora ka kyereɛ me da bi se: ɔbea te sɛ ohurie ɔnom mogya na ɔmma mogya*' (*my father told me one day, that a woman is like a tsetsefly she sucks blood but she does not give blood*). Here, the woman is being likened to a parasite – the tsetsefly which is one of the most deadly flies. It is known that the tsetsefly is a carrier of the sleeping sickness disease, it will suck the blood of an

infected person and transmit it to any other being its sucks afterwards. The woman here, it is held, is always feeding on men till they get them exhausted. Thus women are always on the receiving end and hardly the other way round.

### Situation G

An observational remark by MP about four small girls between two-and half and three-and half years and a boy also of about two years. Researcher overheard MP behind her house where the children were playing.

MP was passing behind the researcher's house and saw four little girls and a boy playing in the house. He slowed down to watch them. Then he saw that the youngest girl among them who plays the "house help role" was trying to carry the boy at her back. Unfortunately, she could not execute the skills well so the boy fell down and started crying. All the other girls stopped whatever they were doing and came around to reprimand the 'house help' whilst the 'mother' took the boy and coaxed him to stop crying. She sat him on her lap and started feeding him on the chin with some of the 'sand food' they had prepared. The other two girls who played "siblings" started singing lullaby to their 'brother'. Very soon the boy dozed off and they put him to bed. The old man who was so impressed about the children's drama, remarked '*Mpanyin kae a wɔmma sɛ ɔbea mma.*' (*Our forefathers were right to say that, really the female is not a loss*).

MP appreciates the fact that maternal role of the female begins right from the infancy. The attention and nurturing skills put her in the centre of human caring, child upbringing and home building. The presence of the female is an assurance of hope and survival.

### Situation H

A chat between two elderly women MA and NA who were returning home after visiting a young lady returnee.

The researcher accompanied her aunt, MA to welcome a young lady of three children who after staying away from the village for so many years made a maiden home-coming visit. When we got to the lady's house my aunt introduced herself to her. The lady was so happy to see my aunt because according to her, her father who brought her up used to mention my aunt's name to her. She called her three kids to come and greet their 'grandma'. After spending some time, we left the house and on our way home we met an elderly woman friend of my aunt NA who wanted to know where we were returning from. Then my aunt told her where we went and how happy she was to see the lady we visited and the fact that now that she had started having children there was the hope that her family once again was going to sprout.

Then suddenly NA cut my aunt short and said '*na mpanyin ka sɛ; ɔbea te sɛ borɔde, n'ase mpa mma' no na wote ase sɛn?*' – but how do you understand the elders when they say, 'the the woman is like the plantain plant which sprouts all the time. Here, NA uses the imagery of the plantain plant and its ready

sprouting ability to draw attention to what a woman is like. The idea of sprouting shows the capabilities of a woman even in worst situations; she can never be pushed down. She will also sprout just like it is difficult to totally destroy the plantain plant. The impression is that once there is a woman, the likelihood of producing children to build a home is highly probable. Also the presence of the women signifies the perpetuation of a family.

## Conclusion

The paper has discussed some proverbs of the Akan and Ewe people of Ghana in an attempt to arrive at what these proverbs communicate about the status of females. From the analysis, it is evident that women in most cases are categorized on the basis of what Oyewumi refers to as *body-logic* or *bio-logic*. Even though the importance of the woman as the essence of life is embedded in her role as a peace maker she is not recognized by what she can accomplish but the emphasis is on her physical beauty. Most of the proverbs that have been contextually analysed project women as less powerful and they must depend on males for recognition and support. Only a few of the proverbs that have been collected show positive aspects of women and the need for complementarity.

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# Islam, Politics and Development: Negotiating the Future of Dagbon in Ghana

Mustapha ABDUL-HAMID

## **Abstract**

*Dagbon is the territory that is inhabited by the Dagomba people. The Dagomba are part of the Mole-Dagbani speaking people, having descended from a common ancestor with the Mossi, Mamprusis and Nanumba. Dagbon is in the Northern Region of Ghana, lying between latitudes nine and ten and has an area of 9,611 square miles. Dagbon is the largest of the ethnic kingdoms in Northern Ghana. Communal violence erupted in the capital of the Dagomba people on March 25, 2002. This continued for three days, resulting in the death of their king, Ya Na Yakubu Andani on March 27, 2002. The remote cause of this three-day war was a long-standing dispute, relating to the succession to the Dagbon skin. The Dagbon crisis has become a complex web of power play among family members, political manipulation or interference and the politics of justice. But these did not begin in 2002. They have their historical antecedents. Since 1953, nearly all governments have intervened in this dispute in one way or another. But this political involvement has only deepened the rift and accentuated the disagreements. This paper posits that, there can be no political solution to the Dagbon crisis. Since the Dagomba people are predominantly Muslims—and have a huge developmental deficit, this paper advocates a combination of Islamic, traditional and development-based solutions.*

## **Background**

The founding of the Dagbon state was borne out of conflict and disagreements. According to the historical accounts, the Dagomba are descended from Na Gbewaa. After the death of Na Gbewaa and subsequently his first son, a struggle ensued between three of his sons as to who should succeed their father's throne. Eventually, they split and founded separate states. Tohugu, founded the Mamprugu kingdom, while Sitobu, the next eldest founded the Dagbon kingdom. The youngest, Ngmantambo founded the Nanumba kingdom.<sup>1</sup> There are disagreements as to the exact date of the founding of the Dagbon kingdom. However, all the accounts would point to a date between 1300-1400 C.E.

Even after the founding of the Dagbon state, the process of accession to the skin has had more than its fair share of dispute and sometimes brutal conflict. For example, after the death of Na Zokuli (1609-1627), there was a struggle between two of his sons to occupy the skin after him. In the end the dispute was submitted to oracle arbitration. The oracles chose Na Gungobli (1627-1677). After the death of Na Gungobli, dispute revisited as to which of his sons would succeed him. This time, they agreed to submit to the arbitration

of the king of the Mamprusis. As has been pointed out, the founder of the Mamprusi state was the elder brother of Sitobu, the founder of the Dagbon state. The Dagomba, therefore, consider the Mamprusis as their brothers. It is on this basis that they agreed to submit to the arbitration of the king of Mamprugu. The then king of the Mamprusis, Na Atabia chose the youngest of the claimants to the skin at that time, Na Zangina (1648-1677), to be their king. It was Na Zangina who was to introduce Islam to Dagbon. Even after Na Zangina, conflict continued to characterise the accession to the skin, which has endured to this day.

Indeed power can and does engender conflict. And in the case of succession to the Dagbon skin, it has been characterised by conflict for centuries. It is this conflict that resulted in the communal violence in Yendi between March 25 and 27, 2002. This paper is a historical survey of this centuries old conflict. The paper particularly details the involvement of governments, from Kwame Nkrumah (1954-1966) to J.E.A Mills (2009 to date). The aim of the paper is to point out the futility of these political involvements and to suggest alternative ways by which permanent peace can be restored to the Dagbon state.

### **Islam, Politics and Development**

Islam, since its introduction into Dagbon, in 1700 through the conversion of Na Zangina,<sup>2</sup> has exerted great influence on the Dagomba people. Dagomba customs and traditions show considerable Islamic influences. Even the most important festival of the Dagomba people, *Damba*, is celebrated to commemorate or coincide with Prophet Muhammad's birthday. As far back as 1820, Joseph Dupuis, the British Consul to Kumasi, on the testimony of Yendi traders, classified Dagbon among "governments which are either purely Moslem (sic) or countries where the Koranic (sic) law had been received and serves for the civil code of the believer and infidel."<sup>3</sup> Dagomba customs and traditions are inextricably interwoven with Islamic ones. Naming, marriage and funeral ceremonies all bear considerable Islamic influences.

Indeed, to this day, the Dagomba themselves, hardly refer to one of their own as *chefira*, a corruption of the Arabic word, *kafir*, which means unbeliever. Thus the Dagomba distinguish three levels of commitment to Islam. First, *afanema*, that is those who have literacy in Islam and Arabic and therefore preside over birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies. Secondly, there are those who say the Muslim ritual prayer, called *jing puhriba*, meaning "those who pray." Lastly, *Dagbang dabba* that is, those who are nominal Muslims and who also actively participate in traditional rituals. The 2000 Population and Housing Census of Ghana also put the Muslim population of Dagbon at 79%.<sup>4</sup> Since we cannot divorce a people from their religion, any objective analysis of the Dagbon situation, and any search for a solution to the Dagbon crisis, must involve their religion. That religion is Islam.

According to C.R Gaba, "religion for the African, is a twenty-four hour-a day affair."<sup>5</sup> And according to Mbiti, "... there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion ..."<sup>6</sup> Scott Appleby also has this to say about the role of religion in people's lives.

Indeed, literally millions of people structure their daily routines around the spiritual practices enjoined by a religious tradition, and they often do so quite 'publicly'. Dress, eating habits, gender relations, negotiations of time, space, and social calendar-all unfold beneath a sacred canopy. Around much of the world, politics and civil society are suffused with religion.<sup>7</sup>

It is on the basis of this, that I postulate that Islam should be factored into the search for a solution to the Dagbon crisis. Perhaps what makes this proposition even pertinent is the fact that "humans interact with the supernatural in order to cope with life's crisis."<sup>8</sup> Dagbon is in crisis. So, religion and for that matter Islam, becomes an important part of finding a solution to this crisis.

Politics (as defined by the chieftaincy institution) was the basis of the crisis. Aristotle avers that "all humans are by nature political."<sup>9</sup> Neil Omerod also states that "all human activities have a political dimension."<sup>10</sup> Besides, as I have stated from the beginning of this paper, the Dagbon succession dispute has seen the political involvement of all governments from the first republic to date. Indeed in the run-up to the 2008 Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Ghana, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) made the Dagbon crisis a major part of its electoral campaign. It accused the then ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) government of complicity in the killing of the Dagbon king, and promised to "set up a new and truly non-partisan professionally competent and independent Presidential Commission to re-open investigations into the murder of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II and his elders in March 2002."<sup>11</sup>

This politicisation of a purely traditional dispute between brothers has been largely responsible for the perpetuation of the conflict. The NDC since coming into office in January 2009 has repudiated its manifesto promise of setting up a Presidential Commission to re-open investigations into the events of 25-27 March, 2002. Instead, in July 2010, the NDC government arrested and put 15 members of the Abudu royal family before a High Court. On March 29 2011, all 15 were set free for lack of evidence. This sparked off violence in the northern regional capital, Tamale, where offices of the ruling NDC were burnt by rampaging Andani youth. They accused the NDC of deceiving them to vote for it in the hope that it would apprehend the killers of the Ya Na when it was voted to power. The government appealed the decision of the High Court. But whether the appeal would succeed or not, remained to be decided.

Development is the goal of every human society, even though states would differ from one another in terms of the ingredients of development and the benchmarks of development. In fact, Na Zangina converted to Islam because he perceived Muslim clerics as having the power to induce development for the Dagbon state. According to Ivor Wilks, the cleric who converted Na Zangina to Islam made Dagbon prosperous with the aid of the Qur'an. Na Zangina is reported to have uttered the following prayer at his conversion: "I pray to God to build my kingdom as compact as clay... I pray to God to allow travelers in this area to have safe journeys to their destinations". Ivor Wilks writes that following this prayer which was performed in the nature of the Muslim ritual prayer of *Salat*, 'the roads opened and many traveled by them ....'<sup>12</sup>

Contrary to the expectations of Na Zangina, the conflict that has bedeviled the Dagbon state has retarded development in the state. Indeed the development situation in Dagbon is dire. Some 240 children die in the Savelugu-Nanton District out of 1,000 live births. This far exceeds the national average of 100 to 1,000 live births. 227 die in Yendi out of 1,000 live births and 208 die in Tolon- Kumbungu. In Tamale, 50.8% of the population has never been to school. In Gushegu-Karaga, 84.3% of the population has never been to school. In Zabzugu, 79.6% are unlettered, while in Yendi, 73.7% have never stepped into a classroom. In Savelugu, 74.5% have had no formal education, and in Tolon 79.9% have also never been to school.<sup>13</sup> Over 72% of the people of Dagbon list their occupation as farming,<sup>14</sup> but there is virtually no serious agricultural activity going on in Dagbon. This is what has led to the massive migration of the youth to the south to become labour hands on cocoa farms and head porters. This paper suggests that addressing these developmental challenges would help in reducing the incidents of violent conflict in the area.

### **History of the conflict**

As has been stated already, succession to the Dagbon skin has always engendered conflict. However, the root of the current crisis can be traced to 1948 which was after the death of Mahama I (1938-1948), who was a member of the Andani family. He was succeeded by Mahama II (1948-1953), an Abudu. After Mahama II's death, the first born son of Mahama I, called Mahama Andani, sought to succeed Mahama II. But, in March 1954, the British intervened and gave the kingship to Abdulai III, who was an Abudu and a regent of Mahama II.

Indeed, it was the policy of the British colonial government, through its indirect rule policy to remove chiefs that they considered not pliable. Lieutenant Colonel Sir Matthew Nathan, British colonial Governor to the Gold Coast from 1900-1904 is reported to have told an assembly of chiefs in Kumasi that "...I will allow no one to sit on a stool if I know him to be disloyal, and I will remove anyone from his stool who behaves badly to government."<sup>15</sup>



Mahama Andani was then enskinned as chief of Mion.<sup>16</sup> Mion, Savelugu and Karaga are the gate skins from which a person can ascend to the Yendi skin. The succession of Abdulai III generated dissatisfaction within the Andani royal family. Thus by the rotational principle, the Andani royal family had been short changed. The dissatisfaction that this generated was to endure for a long time. Indeed, it still lingers to this day and was a remote factor in the events of March 25-27, 2002.

Abdulai III was enskinned as Ya Na in 1953. The year 1954 was an election year. The Northern People's Party (NPP) had been formed a year earlier and was the strongest political force in the Northern Territories. The Dagomba elite, with sympathies for the different sides of the chieftaincy divide, took advantage to exploit the political authority for their respective sides. Prominent among these elite were J.H Allasani, a Ministerial Secretary in Nkrumah's office and Yakubu Tali, Tolon Na an activist and founding member of the Northern People's Party. Ya Na Abdulai III was a supporter of the Northern People's Party which commanded the allegiance of the majority of chiefs in the Northern Territories. J.H Allasani in particular made the deskinning of Na Abdulai III a part of his political agenda, arguing that his aim was "a desire to see justice done and tradition respected."<sup>17</sup>

By tradition he meant a respect for the rotational system of succession. Ladouceur further states that J.H Allasani spearheaded a major campaign to have the Ya Na deskinned shortly after independence. He is reported to have stated openly at a rally in the Yendi market that the Ya Na would be deskinned.<sup>18</sup> The charges against the Ya Na were that he was blind in one eye and it was against Dagbon custom to have a deformed person as Ya Na; that he had six toes on his foot; that he had not been properly installed; that he had not held one of the three skins from which a Ya Na could be elected and finally, that he was ruling despotically.<sup>19</sup> Allasani and others made noise enough to engender a certain demand for the deskinning of the Ya Na. Paradoxically at a conference of Dagomba chiefs, held in 1930, it was agreed that "the holder of a chieftainship cannot be deprived of his office except by death."<sup>20</sup>

In the end the government of the Convention People's Party (CPP) set up a commission to look into the affair. The commission was under the chairmanship of S.D Opoku-Afari. The report of the commission was never made public. But J.H Allasani who was a member of Nkrumah's cabinet had this to say about what took place in cabinet regarding the contents of the Opoku-Afari report.

The Minister responsible brought the report to cabinet. And after introducing it by saying that the Commissioner had found the Abdulai family guilty and given his verdict to the effect that the installed person should step down, he said, 'But I suggest that the verdict be reversed. For if it is carried, our party will suffer a severe setback in the whole of the

north.' When he concluded, the Prime Minister, without allowing any other to speak, said, 'Yes I agree with the Minister. I declare the verdict reversed. And I take responsibility for it upon myself.'<sup>21</sup>

The Ya Na was grateful for this and even though up until that point he was anti-CPP, he converted to the CPP, and urged his ally, Yakubu Tali, to cross from the opposition to the CPP side in parliament, which the Tolon Na did. But this did not end the matter. The Andani family continued to protest to the government in order that the right thing be done. That prodding eventually led to a meeting in Accra between Nkrumah and Dagomba chiefs in order to find an amicable settlement. That settlement or the attempt thereof was what gave birth to a legislative instrument, which has come to be known as L.I 59 of 1960. The highlights of L.I 59 were that, if the sitting Ya Na, Abdulai III died, the chief of Mion, Mahama Andani, was to become Ya Na. But if Mahama Andani died before the Ya Na, then the next chief of Mion who should be an Andani was to become Ya Na. Also that, in the event that Mahama Andani died before becoming Ya Na, his sons, could still ascend the Yendi skin. Finally, that since the Abudus had ascended the skin twice in succession, the Andanis were to also ascend the skin twice in succession.<sup>22</sup> With L.I 59, the matter was settled, or so it seemed.

Then the coup of 24 February 1966 occurred. Once again, the issue was revived. Significantly, both the Abudus and the Andanis had friends in high places. The Abudus had B.A Yakubu, a member of the National Liberation Council (NLC), while the Andanis had Ibrahim Mahama who had just finished his law training and was appointed to various positions in the NLC government, including that of Commissioner for Information. With the overthrow of the CPP, the Abudus again petitioned for the repeal of L.I 59. On the 14th of September 1967, Ya Na Abdulai III died and his son Mahamadu Abdulai who was then 19 years old and attending Tamale Secondary School became regent and immediately put forth his candidature. The chief of Mion, Mahama Andani, who was then an old man, also put forth his candidature.

In a series of strange decisions, L.I 59 was repealed, then restored, then repealed and restored again. Meanwhile both the Abudus and the Andanis were moving to install their respective candidates. The funeral of Ya Na Abdulai III was performed on 7th November 1968. The following day, both sides declared their candidates as duly elected. Mion Lana Andani was selected by the original selection committee of four and supported by the Savelugu Chief and the Karaga Chief. Gbon Lana Mahamadu on the other hand was selected by the seven divisional chiefs. Before 1948, four traditional authorities selected a Ya Na. These were Kuga Na, Zohe Na, Tugrinam and Gagbindana. These are the people that I refer to as the original selection committee. Then in 1948, the British authorities added seven divisional chiefs to the selection team, which made it 11. These were Gushie Na, Sunson Na, Tolon Na, Nanton Na,

Kumbung Na, Karaga Na and Mion Lana. The District Security Committee suspended the installation ceremony to avert trouble. Finally, on 21st November 1968, Mahama Andani was installed as Ya Na Andani III with the support of the District and Regional Administrations, the army and the police.<sup>23</sup>

The Abudus protested and the government set up yet another commission to look into the matter. This commission was called the Mate Kole Commission. While the Commission's work was in progress, the government thought it necessary to recognise Andani III as Ya Na. It was during the Commission's sitting that Ya Na Andani III died on 14 March 1969. His son, Yakubu Andani, became regent. Not long after, the NLC announced a plan to return the country to civilian rule. The Progress Party (PP) of Prof. K.A Busia won the election. Before the election results were announced, the NLC announced that it had accepted the Mate Kole Commission's report. The Mate Kole Commission stated among other things, that "the alleged enskinment of Mahama Andani was repugnant to Dagomba custom and that therefore Mahamadu Abdulai was properly selected and directs that the ceremony of installation as Ya Na should be performed on Mahamadu Abdulai as soon as possible."<sup>24</sup>

The protests which greeted the release of the Mate Kole Commission led to the shooting of the protesters by security forces. Twenty-three people died and several others injured.<sup>25</sup> After the inauguration of the Busia government, the Mate Kole Commission Report, which had already been accepted by the previous regime, was implemented. Subsequently, Ya Na Mahamadu Abdulai was appointed to the Council of State, basically putting the seal to any opportunity of meaningful protestation against his kingship. But had it?

Then came 13th January 1972 and the government of Prof. Busia was overthrown. The Andani family again saw in this an opportunity to state their case once more. And they did. In response, the new government again set up a committee to take another look at the affair. This was called the Ollenu Committee.<sup>26</sup> The Ollenu Committee declared that the installation of Mahamadu Abdulai was not in accord with Dagbon custom and was therefore null and void. It also asserted that the late Ya Na Andani III was properly elected Ya Na and directed that his funeral be performed as such. The government then invited Ya Na Mahamadu Abdulai to Accra, prevented him from returning to Yendi and ordered the removal of his wives from the palace to pave the way for the performance of the funeral of the late Ya Na Andani III.

After the performance of the funeral of the late Ya Na Andani III, his son and regent, Yakubu Andani, was installed the Ya Na. Later on Mahamadu Abdulai was allowed to return to Yendi, but was cautioned to be of 'good behaviour' and not to do anything to disturb the reign of Yakubu Andani II. After the overthrow of the Acheampong regime and subsequently, the election of President Hilla Limann as President, there was a lull in hostilities regarding the Yendi skin affair. This remained so until the coming into power of the

Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). On coming into office, the PNDC enacted the Yendi Skin Affairs Amendment Law, 1985, PNDC Law 124.<sup>27</sup>

This law declared that any of the parties who felt aggrieved by the ruling of the Ollenu Committee could seek redress in a court of law. The Abudu family then proceeded to the Appeal Court, seeking to set aside the decision of the Ollenu Committee. They got judgment in their favour, basically restoring the right of Mahamadu Abdulai as Ya Na. The Andani family appealed the decision of the Appeal Court at the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court, in 1986, overturned the decision of the Appeal Court, but added that henceforth, the rotational system be scrupulously observed. That henceforth, only sons of former Ya Nas shall ascend to the skins of Savelugu, Karaga and Mion; that since deskinment is unknown to Dagbon custom, all persons who have ever occupied the Yendi skin shall without regard to how they ceased to be Ya-Na, be regarded as former Ya Nas. Consequently, that their sons shall qualify for appointment to the gate skins of Karaga, Savelugu and Mion; finally, that to give effect to the rotational system, all three skins should not be occupied by one family.<sup>28</sup>

Now, for the first time in Dagbon history, there was a living former Ya Na. However, less than two years after the Supreme Court ruling, Mahamadu Abdulai died. The performance of his funeral or the lack thereof, was perhaps the lead remote cause of the events of March 25-27, sixteen years after the Supreme Court ruling.

So this far, I have tried to trace the long history of struggle for succession as far as the Yendi skin is concerned. I have done this, principally to drive home the point that politicians, political parties and governments have not been able to find a permanent solution to the Yendi skin affair and will probably never be able to do so. This is because no matter how well-meaning a government's intervention is, it will leave one side of the divide bruised. So they sit and lick their wounds and wait for a more 'friendly' government. And the cycle continues. Indeed none of the sides has ever perceived any government as an independent arbiter.

These decades of haggling over succession in Dagbon, built up frustration on both sides of the chieftaincy divide. The Andani family had always been frustrated by the fact that twice in succession, they were denied the occupation of the skin in favour of Abudu candidates. The Abudus on the other hand, have since 1988, been frustrated by their inability to perform the funeral of the late Ya Na Mahamadu Abdulai. The government White Paper that was issued on the report of the Wuaku Commission had this to say; "that the remote cause of the disturbances in Yendi is the longstanding chieftaincy dispute between the Andani and the Abudu Gates, including the non-observance of the funeral of the late Mahamadu Abdulai IV."<sup>29</sup>

Well before 2002, therefore, Dagbon was virtually sitting on a powder keg, which was waiting to explode. Explode it did between March 25-27, 2002.

This is explained by sociologists in what is known as the frustration-aggression theory. According to this theory, if there is a difference between what people feel they deserve and what they actually get, in other words, 'expected need satisfaction' and actual need satisfaction, aggression results. According to Ted Robert Gurr's relative deprivation thesis, the greater the discrepancy between what is sought and what seems attainable, the greater would be the chances that anger and violence would result.<sup>30</sup> The frustration on both sides of the divide was what resulted in the aggression of March 25-27, 2002, which claimed the lives of 29 people, including that of the Ya Na.

### **President Kufuor**

The President of Ghana at the time of the communal violence in Yendi was John Agyekum Kufuor. Among other things, he set up a commission of enquiry to,

make a full, faithful and impartial inquiry into the circumstances of and establish the facts leading to the events and the resultant deaths and injuries in Yendi in the Dagbon Traditional Area of the Northern Region between 2th and 27th March, 2002; to identify those responsible for the events and the resultant deaths and injuries of persons and to recommend appropriate sanctions or actions against any person found to have caused, been responsible for or been involved in the violence and the resultant deaths and injuries; to inquire into any matter which the commission considers incidental or reasonably related to the events and the resultant deaths and injuries; and to submit within one month, its report to the President, giving reasons for its findings and recommendations.<sup>31</sup>

The Wuaku Commission found out that due to the frustration that both sides had been facing regarding one unfulfilled need or the other, they had been stock-piling arms to attack each other, if the opportunity arose. The opportunity arose in March 2002 when disagreements over the celebration of the fire festival (*bugum*) led to an outbreak of war. The Wuaku Commission went on to recommend two people for prosecution for the killing of the Ya Na. They were prosecuted but the court ruled that there was not enough evidence to convict them.

In addition to the judicial process, President Kufuor set up a committee of eminent chiefs, made up of the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the king of the Mamprusis, Na Mahamadu Gamni, and the king of the Gonjas, Yagbonwura Bawah Doshie. Their mandate was to reconcile the two royal families and to broker a permanent solution. While the committee of eminent chiefs was carrying out its mandate, the party of President Kufuor lost the 2008 election.

## **President Evans Atta Mills**

As has been stated already, the Yendi affair was a major part of the NDC's campaign in 2008. On coming into power, the concentration of the NDC turned towards arraigning alleged killers of the Ya Na before a criminal court, even abandoning the idea of the commission of inquiry which they promised in their manifesto. They also showed little or no interest in any simultaneous pursuit of reconciliation. The arbitration effort of the Asantehene and the two eminent chiefs suffered in the process. Indeed, hitherto, it had been the staunch position of President Mills that there was no point in seeking reconciliation between these brothers, if the one whose trigger caused the death of the Ya Na was not found. Even after 15 people were set free on March 29, 2011, the President continued to make the point that reconciliation was not possible until the alleged killer of the Ya Na was found.<sup>32</sup>

In fact the President was so incensed by the release of the 15 suspects that he declared that finding the killers of the Ya Na was more important than building roads or bridges or even protecting the independence and sanctity of the judiciary.<sup>33</sup> This opened the flood gates for an attack on the judiciary, including 10 members of parliament, representing the NDC in the Northern Region, calling the judge's ruling "jaundiced."<sup>34</sup>

However, the President got a change of mind and on April 10, 2011, he asked the Vice President, John Mahama to persuade Otumfuo Osei Tutu II to revive the reconciliation talks that had been abandoned. Hopefully, that process would resume and once again, offer the people of Dagbon an opportunity to restore peace to their broken state.

## **The way forward**

I envisage four ways by which the Dagbon crisis could be resolved. There are the traditional methods of resolving conflicts, one of which is already embodied in the work of the three eminent chiefs. The pursuit of restorative justice is another path to peace; Islam, the religion of the majority of the Dagomba people, must have some value and finally, pursuing a comprehensive development plan for Dagbon.

Since the Dagbon people had some time ago in history submitted themselves to arbitration by the king of Mamprugu, it is hoped they will cooperate with the work of the eminent chiefs to ensure that lasting peace is restored to Dagbon. Before the work of the eminent chiefs stalled, a road map had been agreed upon, but which suffered a hitch. While the Abudu family insists on performing the funeral of their late king, Mahamadu Abdulai in the Gbewaa Palace, which is the customary way of performing the funerals of Ya Nas, the Andanis are opposed to any such move. They contend that since he did not die in the palace, his funeral should be performed where he died. Unless a compromise is reached on this matter, it will be difficult to make progress as far as the search for lasting peace in Dagbon is concerned.

It is also my contention that the Dagbon constitution of 1930 should be revised. The process of revising the constitution would itself provide an opportunity for sober reflection and reconciliation. In 1930, all Dagbon chiefs came together to formulate a constitution for the Dagbon state. That constitution has been so badly mutilated that it is hardly even referred to by Dagombas today. There is an urgent need for a new set of codified rules of succession that would be respected by all. In so doing, regents should be debarred from ascending to skins immediately following their fathers.

In fact the root of the crisis lies in the accession of Abdulai III to the skin as a regent immediately after his father and subsequently, the accession of Mahamadu Abdulai also as regent after the death of his father Abdulai III. The Dagomba would do well to emulate the examples of Mamprugu and Gonja where regents do not become chiefs immediately following their fathers. That is what accounts for the peace in these areas where successions to skins are concerned.

Secondly, the government's insistence on retributive justice for the Ya Na would in my view only accentuate the conflict and open new wounds. Retributive justice is to do unto others as they have done unto you in equal measure for the sake of it. It is akin to the Mosaic concept of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Stripped to its barest, retributive justice actually means vengeance. Rather, the government should seek restorative justice for the people of Dagbon. Restorative justice takes into consideration the needs of both victim and perpetrator in finding peace and reconciliation. Besides, seeking justice exclusively for the Ya Na is itself against the main ingredients of justice. Many people died in Yendi between March 25-27 when the communal violence took place. All the people who died that day in Yendi have mothers, fathers and perhaps wives and children. So what will be justice for these people? For example a certain woman went to the Wuaku Commission to testify about how her son Deeba, was recruited by Ibrahim Mahama (a prominent Andani royal and key player in the Yendi chieftaincy affairs) to go and be a warrior for the Ya Na. Her son died in the hostilities. And all Ibrahim Mahama did was to give her a bag of rice and a piece of cloth. Her appearance at the Wuaku Commission showed that she was not satisfied. She wanted justice for her son too. So what do we envisage will be justice for her?

John Rawlings states that justice envisages a situation where "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others."<sup>35</sup> So justice envisages a situation where we would be seeking to restore the right of every family whose member lost his life on that day. That is what justice is, irrespective of whether it is restorative or retributive.

The stability and growth of Ghana's Fourth Republic, which has become the model of emulation for most of Africa, have been achieved largely through the principles of restorative justice and development in freedom. The Fourth Republic is so far the most stable period in Ghana's political history and

has brought about the longest enduring period of social and economic growth. It came after a long period of human right violations. But, the nation was determined to turn a new leaf; this required some painful but necessary compromises. This the nation did mainly through the indemnity clauses that insulate the perpetrators of human rights abuses from harm. On coming into office, the government of President Kufuor set up the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) which took into account, the needs of the abused. This completed the process of restorative justice and has allowed Ghana to put the painful past behind it. The government should pursue a similar measure for Dagbon and abandon the retributive methods of seeking justice, especially considering that the Ya Na died in battle. Indeed forgiveness can be the most dignified and enhanced form of justice, but that can only be possible if the Dagomba people are constructive and dedicated to focusing their minds and emotions on actions that serve their collective interest.

Regardless of the government's best efforts, there can be no guarantee that the alleged killers of the Ya Na can ever be found having regard to the circumstances of his death. However, with sincere commitment from all sides, especially between the Abudus and Andanis, they can guarantee genuine reconciliation which is necessary for moving Dagbon forward. It is important to state that the Dagbon state was fully on the march for nearly 300 years before Osei Tutu I put the Asante state together. For it to be reduced to such rubble is a sad commentary on all the actors in this affair.

The pursuit of development for Dagbon should be a major part of the search for peace in the area. Northern Ghana generally and Dagbon in particular has always faced a development deficit. It was in recognition of this that the northern elite founded the Northern People's Party in 1953. The aim of forming the Northern People's Party was to among other things, "fight for accelerated developments in all fields for the northern territories."<sup>6</sup> The reality is that Dagbon cannot give hope to its teeming youth to win the respect of others if it does not make the socio-economic development of the area central to its survival.

Young men and women busy acquiring skills in school, earning money, creating wealth, moving up in their professions and owning property, would have little time or no tolerance for conflicts and violence. Government must therefore tackle the development deficit in Dagbon with urgency. Indeed the New Patriotic Party proposed a Northern Development Authority (NDA) to accelerate the pace of development in the North generally. In the words of its Presidential Candidate in the 2008 elections, "we have an emergency as a nation regarding the development of the North... the difference that exists today between the North and the South is not a gap, it is a chasm. It is a blight on the honour of our nation that must shame and then spur us all to action."<sup>7</sup> A chasm it is. Mfantshipim School in Cape Coast was founded in 1876. Tamale Secondary School, the first secondary school to have been established in the North was founded in 1951. The North therefore has a deficit of 75 years to erase if not more, considering other indicators of development.



The government of the NDC on coming into office also set up the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) to tackle the development challenges of the North and the savannah areas of the country generally. Hopefully, this will help to engage the energies of the youth and turn their attention away from violence and destruction.

## Islam

Finally, whatever value is in Islam must be exploited for restoring peace to Dagbon. When I wrote my M.Phil thesis in 2003, I dedicated it “to the people of Dagbon, that hopefully, they will make the Qur’an their arbiter.” For a people who profess Islam as their religion and for a people who have a court Imam in every chief’s palace, the value in Islam must count for something. The *Ulama* in Dagbon ought to stand up and be counted as true heirs of the Prophet Muhammad. When the Aws and the Khazraj (two clans in Madina) were feuding, it took the intervention of the Prophet Muhammad to make peace between them. Subsequently, he drew up what has come to be known as the Madinan Charter that ensured peaceful co-existence amongst the inhabitants of Madina.<sup>18</sup>

Umar ibn Khattab, the second caliph of Islam was stabbed to death. While dying, he prayed the Muslim community never to revenge his death by killing the one who stabbed him to death, Abu Lulu’a. Can the Dagomba people emulate this great example of Umar? Even so, I find it puzzling that people who profess Islam as their religion would draw swords against one another. Let the Dagomba people be reminded, of Qur’an 4:92-93. It states, “never should a believer kill a believer; but (if it so happens) by mistake, (compensation is due): If one (so) kills a believer, it is ordained that he should free a believing slave, and pay compensation to the deceased’s family, unless they remit it freely. If the deceased belonged to a people at war with you, and he was a believer, the freeing of a believing slave (is enough). If he belonged to a people with whom ye have treaty of mutual alliance, compensation should be paid to his family, and a believing slave be freed. For those who find this beyond their means, (is prescribed) a fast for two months running: by way of repentance to Allah, for Allah has all knowledge and all wisdom. If a man kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide therein (for ever): And the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him, and a dreadful penalty is prepared for him.”

Amr Abdallah, a lecturer at the University of San Jose, conducted his doctoral research on conflict. As part of this, he visited Rwanda and Burundi in 1999. He found that the Muslim areas of Kigali and Bujumbura served as the safe havens for people during the genocide. The Muslims explained to him that because they were Muslims, they should not and could not fight each other or fight others, because of ethnic differences: Islam they said, prohibited that.<sup>19</sup>

We may be determined to seek vengeance for whatever wrongs that we perceive must have been done to us. But whatever vengeance we seek, will it be enough to assuage the hurt that we suffered? Or would we be able to seek equal

vengeance for whatever wrong we perceive must have been done to us? Again the Qur'an points the way. "The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: for Allah loves not those who do wrong." (Q: 42:40).

Dagomba youth cannot carry into the future, the baggage of their ancestors and forebears. They are Muslims, at least the majority of them. In Islam, there is no concept of original sin by which the fathers eat the sour grapes and set the children's teeth on edge. The youth cannot spend time feuding or feeding on politicians' ego. Let the Dagomba people seek justice by all means. At the same time, let them seek peace and reconciliation.

## Conclusion

The Dagbon chieftaincy crisis has been raging for a long time now. It threatens to continue for a long time to come if the parties to the conflict and state actors do not work at ending it. So far, political solutions have failed to end this decades old conflict. Alternative measures of dispute resolution must be pursued. These include traditional and Islamic modes of conflict resolution. In addition to these, the development deficit in Dagbon ought to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The Dagomba people themselves ought to do a lot of soul searching, compromise and sacrifice. It is only when the Abudu and Andani royal families themselves make a genuine commitment to ending this decades old conflict, would there be a solution. In spite of the present obstacles however, there is hope for peace, reconciliation, and an ultimate restoration of the dignity of the Dagbon state.

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# **Christian Missions and Socio-Cultural Change: Baptists and the Polygamy Question among the Yoruba People of Southwestern Nigeria, 1850-2001**

**S. Ademola AJAYI**

## **Abstract**

*The traditional Yoruba society in the south-western part of Nigeria is essentially polygamous. Even though oral traditions of the people indicate that in the earliest times, the Yoruba cherished monogamy, by the time of the advent of the Christian Missions in general, and Baptist Mission in particular, the social custom of polygamy had been well-rooted in the people's cultural life.*

*The impression is often carried that the Baptist denomination in Nigeria is less strict on certain Christian religious observances such as the prohibition of polygamy when compared with some of its counterpart Protestant Churches. The evidence at our disposal reveals that this is an erroneous impression. Even though polygamists do attend Baptist Churches, as is the case in many other Christian churches, the Baptists did try to insist on monogamy, yet polygamy remained a very hard nut to crack. At any rate, the insistence of the Mission on maintaining its stand on monogamy was to effect a chink in the armour of Baptist expansion and growth in the Yoruba country.*

## **Introduction**

Christian Missionary activities began in Yorubaland, Nigeria, in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The Baptists in particular arrived in the Yoruba country in 1850 to commence missionary work among a people with whom religion had held sway and had, in fact, permeated all aspects of their daily lives. "In all things, they are religious", says Professor Bolaji Idowu, in analysing the keynote of the life of the Yoruba people which, according to him, "is their religion."<sup>2</sup> The people's religious beliefs in the course of time became part of their social customs and regulated their actions by promise of reward or threat of punishment. One of the important traditional Yoruba customs which resulted from their religious beliefs and which was an embodiment of their patterns of culture was the polygamous system of marriage. It influenced the overall cultural pattern of the people and successfully served the time before the introduction of Christianity. Besides, it did pose a great challenge to Baptist missionary work, as it did to Christian missionary enterprise in general, as shall be demonstrated presently.

## **Polygamy in the Traditional Yoruba Society**

Polygamy has been defined as the "custom of having more than one wife at the same time".<sup>3</sup> By the time the Baptist missionaries arrived in Yorubaland, this social custom had been well rooted in the Yoruba cultural life. Oral tradition, however, indicates that in the earliest times, the Yoruba cherished

monogamy.<sup>4</sup> It so held that even *Obatala*,<sup>5</sup> one of the major divinities in the Yoruba pantheon, had *Yemoo* as his only wife. He thus sanctions monogamy since this ensures an uncomplicated, untroubled and undisturbed life. As a matter of fact, *Obatala* demands high morality since he is pure ritually and ethically. And as a peculiar principle, white is his overall symbol: white cloth, white chalk and white beads. And so the lives of worshippers must be clean and pure like water fetched from a brook early in the morning. It is as a result of this that *Orisa-nla* enforces monogamy on his priests because a polygamist, in dealing with several wives, cannot but stumble in word or in deed.<sup>6</sup> That apart, *Ifa* (the divination god of the Yoruba people) analyses the virtues of monogamy and the problems of polygamy. The Yoruba *Ifa* has an *Odu* recital that lends credence to this. According to that *Ifa* verse or *Odu* recital:

<p><i>Okan soso poro lobinrin</i> It is one and only one wife that  <i>dun mo lowo oko;</i>  <i>Bi won ba di meji,</i>  <i>Won a dojowu;</i>  <i>Bi won ba di meta,</i>  <i>Won a deta ntule;</i>  <i>Bi won ba di merin</i>  <i>Won a diwo lorin mi</i>  <i>ni mo rin o</i>  .....  .....  <i>Bi won ba di mewaa,</i>  <i>Won a di ile lokoo wa jokoo</i>    <i>Ni won n wa oko wa wa.</i><sup>7</sup></p>	<p>brings pleasure to any man;  When there are two wives,  They become rivals;  When they increase to three,  They destroy the home;  When they become four  They laugh one another to scorn  .....  .....  When they increase to ten,  They will say when their husband  Stays at home,  Women come in to visit him.</p>
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That a Yoruba *Ifa* poem analyses the virtues of monogamy is interesting indeed. This is more so against a background of the fact that the traditional Yoruba society is essentially polygamous. However, as Professor Wande Abimbola has rightly demonstrated, this poem is not a condemnation of polygamy *per se*, but rather an analysis of the problems involved in it, such as rivalry, fighting, wickedness and witchcraft.<sup>8</sup> Polygamy, it is stressed, creates a favourable atmosphere for these marital problems which, though not absent in a monogamous family situation, are nonetheless, comparatively minimal.

As a matter of fact, it was socio-economic exigencies that forced the Yoruba into polygamy. The traditional economy of the Yoruba was purely agricultural. In the pre-1850 era, labour hardly attracted wages. Polygamy was thus an avenue to provide the much-needed labour force to till the ground and maximise production. In addition to this, in the absence of insurance facilities and governmental care, children rendered many invaluable services to their parents at old age.

Furthermore, the acquisition of wives and children enhanced the status of the man as this was a way of measuring a man's wealth and social prestige in the society. Besides, since children were of prime social significance, a husband could take a second wife if the first seemed infertile or if she delayed in producing male ones in whom the Yoruba attached greater premium.

Biologically too, polygamy provided for the sexual needs of the husband when one of his wives was nursing a baby. Since weaning often took two to three years and there was no knowledge of modern family planning methods, polygamy reduced the chances of unfaithfulness and prostitution. Complementing the above explanation is the view expressed by Professor Emmanuel Ayandele that in indigenous societies, polygamy was used as a check on sexual misbehaviour and as a way of dispensing social justice to women by providing husbands for all women.<sup>9</sup>

Besides, Islam encouraged polygamy. Thus, those who had been converted to Islam before the arrival of the Baptist Mission practised polygamy. For, Islamic tenets allow a Muslim who is economically viable to marry up to four wives provided he would be able to dispense justice among them equally.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, few Yoruba men, as their counterparts in many other parts of Africa, out of sheer promiscuity and being emotionally incapable of bridling their insatiable lust for women, were liable to polygamy. Yet the fact remains that among the banes of polygamous marriage, as earlier stated above, are destructive tendencies like jealousy, envy, cut-throat rivalry that infest wives and children of such homes.<sup>11</sup>

Be that as it may, it is pertinent to stress that by the time of the advent of Baptist mission work in particular and Christian Missionary activities in general, the social custom of polygamy had been well-rooted in the socio-cultural life of the Yoruba.

### **Baptist Mission and the Polygamy Question**

The erroneous impression is often carried that the Baptist Church is less strict on certain Christian religious observances such as the prohibition of polygamy when compared with some of its counterpart Protestant churches. For instance, in 1935, a Sudan Interior Mission (S.I.M) group in Igbaja, in the present day Kwara State of Nigeria, seceded to form a Baptist Church. This action, it is suggested, was a result of the seceders' dislike and opposition to the S.I.M teaching on monogamy.<sup>12</sup> The analogy or inference one can draw from this is that Baptist condoned polygamy. This impression is false, misleading and unfair to the Baptist cause. It could be true that polygamists attended Baptist Churches all over Yorubaland (including Igbaja) during the period in question (as many still do today). This is indisputable and as a matter of fact, such is not peculiar to the Baptist Mission alone. Polygamists are found in Methodist, Anglican, C.A.C., Roman Catholic, and even Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), or S.I.M. Churches. But then, is it not possible to keep one's family life hidden in a church even as a polygamist? Yet the fact remains

that the Baptist does not encourage polygamy. In fact, a one-time President of the Nigerian Baptist Convention succinctly described Baptist teaching as 'showing progressive stages in determining church membership'.<sup>13</sup> In March 1915, the Yoruba Baptist Association during its Second Annual Session in Lagos took and upheld the stand that the Association recognised monogamy as the ideal state of family life. This was again re-affirmed at the 22nd Annual Session of the Nigerian Baptist Convention held at Ogbomosho in April 1935 with minor modifications. There it was resolved that, "No known polygamists should be allowed to hold any office in the churches or act in capacity as a lay preacher. ... The question of polygamy should be handled, but with sympathy and love".<sup>14</sup> This was further restated and adopted at the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Convention held at Ibadan in April 1937, when it was further ruled that a known polygamist should not be allowed to participate in baptism or the Lord's Supper.<sup>15</sup> This position was so maintained until quite recently. As a matter of fact, the Baptist Constitution and Bye-Laws is itself quite explicit on this seemingly controversial issue:

*Recognising monogamy as the ideal state of family life according to the New Testament, this Convention places on record its adherence thereto. No known polygamist shall be allowed membership in our churches, to hold any office in the church, to act as a lay preacher, or to participate in the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>16</sup>*

No one disputes the fact, however, that polygamists may attend Baptist Church services just as they do in many of the churches under the other Christian denominations. This might have given rise to the erroneous impression of laxity on polygamy in the Baptist Church. That apart, one is not denying that some Baptist members did, as some still do, oppose or abhor the prohibition of polygamy.<sup>17</sup> Such opposition is a different issue entirely and such is to be expected or bound to happen in any religious organisation or gathering entailing a large gathering of people from the African setting. The belief of such opponents of the prohibition of polygamists is that salvation or the gospel of Christ is for all people; that the Bible did not state anywhere in the Old or New Testament that polygamists must not be members of the church. What, as they contend, the Bible says, is that they should not be ordained into leadership positions in the church. At any rate, one's contention here is that Nigerian Baptists are no less strict on the issue of polygamy.

### **The Dilemma of the Early Missionaries on the Polygamy Issue**

The early missionaries brought great influence to bear on polygamy, against which a massive campaign was launched. That campaign, of course, received the blessing of the rising generation of educated elite in the growing Baptist fold. For, despite their great zeal and yearnings towards domesticating



Christianity and propagating the African personality, the educated elites opposed and even condemned the practice of polygamy. Foremost among such leaders was Mojola Agbebi who saw monogamy as the ideal, which also made for happiness and blessing.<sup>18</sup>

It would appear, however, that some of the Baptist missionaries while upholding monogamy, tolerated polygamy to a certain degree. While accommodating those who had contracted polygamy before their conversion, there was initially no form of discipline of the magnitude of excommunication for those who flouted the monogamous regulation other than disallowing them from holding any office in the church, to act as lay preachers, or to participate in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both categories were nonetheless allowed church membership. This laxity could be excused on one ground; that some polygamists had their marital lives hidden. In any case, even known polygamists were at the onset, not compelled to undertake marital 'restitution' of forsaking all other wives except the first. Thomas Jefferson Bowen's own stand on this is quite revealing: "It is true I have never baptized a polygamist, but I have never ventured to cause a divorce".<sup>19</sup> This is an epitome of the dilemma of the professional missionaries as they were confronted with the question of whether or not the marriage customs associated with polygamy were consistent with membership in the Christian community, especially in an African setting.

### **Effects of the Polygamy Stand**

It has been claimed that if only the early Southern Baptist missionaries who came to Nigeria had permitted polygamists to join the church, there would have been many more converts than there were during the formative stages of Christian missionary enterprise.<sup>20</sup> There is an extent to which this claim is valid. All along, this was a very knotty problem which the Mission had to contend with. In the words of Mojola Agbebi - one of the leaders of the Native Baptists, "... the pendulum of West African Christianity oscillated between monogamy and polygamy",<sup>21</sup> describing it as "... the great question of Africa's evangelisation".<sup>22</sup> As Thomas Jefferson Bowen, the pioneer Baptist Missionary to Nigeria himself confessed, "polygamy, interwoven as it is with the whole fabric of society, is one of the greatest difficulties with which the Gospel has to contend".<sup>23</sup>

As time went on, the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention had to take an officially firm stand. Many Baptist missionaries thus came into conflict with the traditional society over the marriage system especially the question of polygamy. In the same vein, many converts were to find themselves in difficulties over this doctrine of 'one man one wife', because of the missionary teaching that marriage was an affair between two individuals. There was the interesting case of an informant who, as a student at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso in the 1940s, listened to his missionary teacher who taught that polygamists should divorce all their wives

except one. The student-Pastor himself, a product of the second wife of a polygamous marriage and then a Pastor-in-training inquired whether the Lord commanded him to go home and tell his father to put away his mother and her children including himself. The missionary-teacher hesitated and finally could not answer 'Yes', for he could not find the text to authorize so unqualified a reply.<sup>24</sup>

In any case, polygamy remained one of the hardest nuts to crack. Though the rules of the Baptist Mission do not allow known polygamists to enjoy full church membership, polygamy still prevailed among the Yoruba converts. It seems, therefore, that if anything, the missionaries' insistence on monogamy was for many, a big hurdle and led to confusion in social relationship among a people to whom marriage was a matter which deeply involved two families.

Up to the twentieth century, this vexing question remained unsolved. This, in the opinion of an informant, was because 'polygamy is part and parcel of our communal life'.<sup>25</sup> In all the various communities in Yorubaland where the Baptists established, marriage was never optional. Unless the adult was physically or mentally handicapped, he or she was expected to enter into marriage and so perpetuate the lineage. Since procreation was an essential part of marriage, a man could marry another wife if the first was barren or in the hope of having a son who might inherit him and perpetuate the lineage. In all cases, he knew he was fulfilling his social and religious obligation. That was why it was difficult to abolish polygamy.

This problem itself, as earlier indicated above, generated much anxiety and concern in the minds of the missionaries to such an extent that they had to write the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist convention in USA, regarding solution to the following knotty questions:

1. Should we require polygamists who have become such while still heathen to give up all their wives but one upon their entrance into church membership?
2. What wife should be retained, if all others are to be dismissed?
3. Should the wives who have been put away be taught to remain unmarried, or to marry another man?
4. Should the wives who have been put away be received for baptism and church membership?
5. If so, should they be allowed to re-marry again?<sup>26</sup>

Whatever reasons the missionaries had to have asked those questions, the instruction of the Foreign Mission Board was sharp and quick: "Polygamous marriage should be dissolved if the results were not likely to be harmful to the parties concerned. Otherwise, it might be regarded as necessary evil during the period of transition".<sup>27</sup> The instruction went on to say, however, that after a man had become a Christian he should not be allowed to marry a second or third wife. If he did he must be regarded as having committed adultery.

This stand of the Foreign Mission Board was re-echoed in 1938 by its then Executive Secretary, Dr. Charles E. Maddry, when he visited the Nigerian field. A meeting was convened with the American Baptist Mission, and a representative group of Pastors and members of Baptist Churches from all districts of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in the country at which the polygamy issue featured prominently in Dr. Maddry's proposals and recommendations.<sup>28</sup> In that recommendation, the Nigerian Baptist Convention was urged to adapt the new Constitution and Bye-laws of the Convention,<sup>29</sup> and to purge the membership roles at once, excluding from church membership all those who believed in and practised polygamy and in case such polygamists grouped together as a church, no Baptist Pastor must lead such a group.

As time went on, some of the ardent converts had to put away all their extra wives except the one who was considered to be the 'lawful wife' and had consented to be married in the Christian way. In Igosun, in present-day Oyun Local Government Area of Kwara State, there was one such case in the late 1930s when a convert, Pa Samuel Akintola, divorced his second wife, Deborah Ige, leaving only the first.<sup>30</sup> The odium that these set of converts incurred from their own as well as the other wives' families, let alone the confusion that arose with regard to the care of the children, could well be imagined. Of more significance was the fact that divorce on the principle of monogamy was introduced into the Yoruba country for the first time. The general confusion that this generated has not ended. When converts learned in the church that polygamy 'was contrary to the law of God' such a general fermentation was stirred up in the depths of society that husbands yielding to the requirements of a Christian life began to cleave to one wife, and the wives in like manner insisted upon divorce from their polygamist husband. Confusion could not have been made more profound. In such enforced separation, it was the women and children who suffered most. Adrian Hastings' picture of such a situation is very revealing:

*To end a polygamous marriage in the name of Christ who said nothing explicitly to condemn it, at the expense of effecting a divorce which Christ explicitly forbade, is to pay too high a price to achieve a theoretical conformity with one part of the Christian marriage pattern.<sup>31</sup>*

Trying to separate polygamists in the name of converting them thus had the effect of creating further and greater evils.

### **Implications on Baptist Expansion**

The insistence of the Mission on maintaining its stand on this order had certain implications and produced some effects on Baptist expansion and growth in Yorubaland. In the Baptist church, the first and one of the most prominent membership requirements is Baptism (by immersion). Any member

who becomes a polygamist regardless of being earlier baptised loses such membership. By implication, no polygamist whatever his charisma or spiritual acumen, can hold any office in the church since he is not a recognised member of that church. Similarly, he cannot vote on any decision. In terms of church growth, this position affected the Mission greatly because many members who could have used their talented gifts for the growth of the churches in particular and the Mission as a body were deprived of that privilege.<sup>32</sup> Thus, no sooner after the 1938 pronouncement, for instance, than a large membership of the Baptist body were lost from the denomination. In Shaki, many members there had to pull out of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. They formed their own independent church – the United African Baptist Church – with its Headquarters at Shaki.<sup>33</sup> At about this same time in Iree, in today's Boripe Local Government of Osun State, some others seceded and joined the African Church in that town.<sup>34</sup>

Given a situation in a Church especially in villages where all those capable of leading the congregation were polygamists as the case was in Alaari-Illaro in the Egbado South from the establishment of Baptist work in the town in 1932 to the Nigerianization years,<sup>35</sup> the effects of the stand on polygamy were devastating. Apart from retarding church growth, it reduced the population of Baptists drastically.

Moreover, the maintenance of the stand on polygamy had the effect that a considerable population of the society could not be reached by the Baptist influence. They included the Obas, Chiefs and the affluent men in the community. As such classes of people were essentially polygamists, Baptist influence could not reach them. Some of those people, as Professor J. F. Ade Ajayi has rightly demonstrated with respect to Christian Missions as a whole,<sup>36</sup> were later converted to Islam which allowed in polygamists. The Muslims, acting on the advantage offered by the Christian missionary stand, first converted the ruling classes through whom they made the people progressively Muslims.

### **Some Recurring Issues and Recent Developments**

It is significant to note that the polygamy question and the status of polygamists in the church remained a recurring issue during the Nigerianization era when the mantle of leadership fell on Nigerians. It has remained controversial ever since. Some Nigerian Christians, including a number of Baptists, in their clamour for polygamists to be granted the privilege of baptism, as long as they openly confess Christ as their Lord and Saviour, often hinge their argument on the fact that monogamy is alien to African culture, while it is emphasised that polygamy is part of African family life. One could admit that polygamy has become an integral part of African family life; yet, it would be an erroneous impression and a misleading generalization to state that monogamy is alien to African culture. As earlier indicated, oral traditions of the Yoruba people, among whom the Southern Baptists from North

America first worked for about a century, indicate that in the earliest times, the Yoruba actually cherished monogamy. It was socio-economic exigencies that later compelled them into polygamy, which in the course of time became part and parcel of their culture.

As earlier indicated, the social custom of polygamy successfully served the time in the pre-missionary days. Yet, the fact remains that among the banes of polygamous marriage, as stated elsewhere above, are disruptive tendencies like jealousy, envy, cut-throat rivalry that infest wives and children of such homes.<sup>37</sup>

At any rate, the polygamy question later became an issue that affected the work of the Baptists in particular and Christian Missions in general, in the Nigerian cultural setting. It was in the heat of this lingering controversy that the Ministerial Board of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, at its meeting of 22 July, 1999, set up a committee to re-study the polygamy issue and make recommendations on what should be the stand of the Convention on the matter. Going by the committee's findings, contained in the NBC's Book of Reports of 2001, each of the following would fall under the Convention's understanding of a polygamist:

1. *A man who is married to more than one wife at the same time;*
2. *A man who is divorced or separated from the first wife and married to another while his first wife is alive;*
3. *A woman who is separated or divorced from her husband and married to another while the first husband is still alive;*
4. *A woman who is married to a man who is already married and the wife is still alive.<sup>38</sup>*

The said document goes on to point out that: "... the word polygamy here is used for both male and females. Polyandry is usually used for females who are married to more than one man".<sup>39</sup>

It is significant to note the status of polygamists on the eve of the setting up of a committee to review the then status quo. Before 2001, they [polygamists] were not accepted into full membership of the local church. They were denied baptism and participation in the Lord's Supper. Besides, they were referred to as "friends" of the church which implied persons attending the church regularly but without membership privileges. Moreover, they were not elected into church leadership positions.<sup>40</sup>

After an in-depth review of memoranda, literature and interviews throughout the nooks and crannies of the country, and among the various stakeholders, some of the findings were that: the then stance of the NBC had helped to keep polygamy in check, and that the status quo should be maintained; any change in the existing stance of the NBC in favour of accepting polygamists

into church membership would amount to encouraging polygamy and a moral pollution of the church; .... failure to accept polygamists into church membership had greatly hindered the spread of the Gospel in a country which generally accepted polygamy as a cultural preference. Moreover, certain informants were of the view that the then stance of the NBC was not based on biblical teaching but rather on the negative attitudes of the early missionaries who insisted on western cultural preference.<sup>41</sup> Members of the said committee came up with the following observations:

1. *For lack of knowledge of the local culture, the attitude of the early missionaries to Nigerians was generally towards monogamy;*
2. *Polygamy is sometimes necessitated by the Nigerian cultural leaning towards having male children;*
3. *Islam which permits polygamy is prevalent in Nigeria;*
4. *Polygamy has existed in almost all societies of the world at different times;*
5. *Today, the European and North American societies have significantly shifted towards monogamy as a cultural preference;*
6. *There is no direct Biblical teaching on polygamy. Any theological treatment of the subject has been purely from a cultural background.*
7. *Paul's injunction to the church leaders [Bishops and Deacons] in the Book of First Timothy Chapter Three to be monogamous was an attempt to make Christianity respectable in the Greco-Roman society which preferred monogamy;*
8. *The prohibition of polygamists from leadership positions is an indication that polygamists were accepted into church membership in the New Testament times;*
9. *The only New Testament requirement for baptism and church membership are repentance from sin and beliefs in Jesus Christ;*
10. *Enormous problems are associated with the insistence on monogamy as a prerequisite for church membership in a culture which accepts polygamy as legitimate form of marriage;*
11. *The practice of the church must take seriously the injunction of Jesus Christ that those who believe should be baptized. The question that every Nigerian Baptist should answer is, can a polygamist believe? If the answer is "Yes", then the polygamist has met the*

*Lord's requirements for baptism and the church is given no room to create a contrary alternative.<sup>42</sup>*

The NBC committee thereafter made the following recommendations for consideration and possible adoption by the Convention:

- 1. The need of newly-evangelised persons for the ordinances should take priority over marital status. Therefore, no person (including polygamists) who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, should be denied baptism; church membership, and participation in the Lord's Supper.*
- 2. Polygamists should be evangelised and accepted as they are, with the hope that the Gospel, like a leaven, will effect a general change in the culture, towards the Christian ideals. Therefore, those who are not yet polygamists should be forbidden from becoming polygamists;*
- 3. No member of the Baptist church who is a polygamist should hold a church office or position;*
- 4. Any office holder who becomes a polygamist should be relieved of such office with immediate effect without fear or favour;*
- 5. The church should think of other methods of upholding monogamy as the ideal without disobeying the express command of the Lord to baptize those who believe. For an example, pastors and church leaders should be encouraged to hold frequent marriage seminars and workshops to uphold the ideal of Christian marriage.<sup>43</sup>*

The above recommendations, after careful deliberations, were adopted by the NBC. The majority stand is that a polygamist who has repented of his sins and confessed Christ as Lord and Saviour could be baptized and allowed the privilege of participating in taking the Lord's Supper, if he so desires, even though he cannot lead nor hold a church office. One must add here, however, that though the controversy over the polygamy question has mellowed down, it has not died completely.

## Conclusion

The Baptist Mission began its activities in Yorubaland nearly one and a half centuries ago. During this period, the Mission brought great influence to bear on some of the social customs of the Yoruba, the most salient of which was on polygamy against which a massive campaign was launched. The campaign, of course, received the blessing of the rising generation of educated elites in the Mission, in spite of the latter's great zeal and yearnings towards domesticating Christianity and propagating the African personality. Prominent among such elites was Mojola Agbebi who saw monogamy as the ideal which also made for happiness and blessings.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps, most early Baptist Missionaries like their counterparts in other Christian Missions never gave a second thought to the Africanness in Polygamy and its seemingly inherent advantages such as avoiding the singleness for potential wives. Similarly, the problems inherent in monogamy in the peculiar African circumstances such as having one wife but many mistresses seemed to have been lost sight of.

In any case, even known polygamists were not in all cases compelled to undertake marital 'restitution' of forsaking all other wives except the first. Revd Thomas Jefferson Bowen, the pioneer Baptist missionary's own stand on this, earlier cited elsewhere above, is revealing: "It is true I have never baptized a polygamist, but I have never ventured to cause a divorce".<sup>45</sup> This is an epitome of the dilemma of some of the professional missionaries as they were confronted with the question of whether or not the marriage customs associated with polygamy were consistent with membership in the Christian church.

Be that as it may, the marital trend among the Yoruba today, as the case is with many African peoples, is fast tilting towards monogamy. Several factors, other than the influence of the church or Mission are adding an impetus to this trend. The emancipation as well as the increasing education of women play a substantial role. In this era of campaign for liberation of women, there is an aggressive emphasis on the intimacy of marriage union which monogamy can better provide.

Besides the above, societal values and outlook have changed in favour of monogamy. Gone were the days when a man's affluence was measured in terms of the size of his harem. Modern science has also added a new fillip to the present drift from polygamy to monogamy. In modern times, fairly reliable methods of family planning are at the ready disposal of spouses. This allows for the satisfaction of sexual needs of the marriage while sticking to the one-man-one-woman ideology.

Economic factors also play a very crucial role in the current monogamic drive. Polygamy today is very expensive and economically suicidal. The days are over when a harem of wives plus a wagon of children were economic assets to the family. As they now constitute awful economic liabilities especially to the man, the option has been to cut ones 'marital coat' according to one's 'economic cloth'.



In the light of all the above, it might be apt to conclude that many Yoruba (and indeed Nigerians) now embrace monogamy in spite of, and not necessarily because of the church pronouncement on this.

### Notes and References

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2. E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief*: London: Longman, 1962) p. 5.
3. A.S. Hornby et al, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, (Oxford University Press, 1974) p. 645.
4. Pa Faniran Idowu, an Ifa Priest and herbalist, Ile Babaegbe, Isale-Ofa, Iragbiji. Oral information, April 1989.
5. He is also called *Oosa-nla* or *Orisa-nla*.
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13. Minutes of the 59<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, 1972. See the Presidential address by the Revd E. O. Akingbala, p. 18
14. *Ibid.* Minutes.
15. *Ibid.*
16. See the Constitution and Bye-Laws of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, Article III Sub-session (6). The Constitution was first drawn in 1914, though periodically revised from time to time as the need arose. The latest revision was approved at Port-Harcourt, River State on April 30, 1987.
17. A cross-session of informants interviewed on this subject, some of whom are officials of the Nigerian Baptist Convention but who will prefer anonymity here, did not see any thing wrong in admitting polygamists who had become such before conversion, into full Church

- Membership. Their argument was that this has nothing to do with their salvation as Christ Himself never mentioned such. Interestingly too, when this same issue came up at the 1990 Annual Baptist Ministers' Conference held at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbomoso from 10-14 September, 1990, it was observed that delegates to that Conference were sharply divided. The Nigerian Baptist Convention itself has over the years, set up Committees to make appropriate recommendations on the controversial issue.
18. D.B. Vincent (Mojola Agbebi), Lecture on "Does the Introduction of European Custom and Marriage into this country promote Spiritual Growth of the Church?" in *Africa and the Gospel*, (Africana Library, University of Ibadan), p.8.
  19. T.J. Bowen, Correspondence to the Editor of the *Christian Index*, published in the June 16, 1858 edition of the *Christian Index*; See also, Bowen Papers, Vol II, (available at the NBTS, Ogbomoso Library) p. 396.
  20. Interview with Deacon J. K. Osatoba, First Baptist Church, Ekinrin Adde via Kabba, August 28 1990.
  21. The Debate on "The European Marriage Custom" held on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, 1888 at the Breadfruit School room, Lagos, at the call of "The Young Men's Christian Association" in Mojola Agbebi, *Africa and the Gospel* (A Collection of Agbebi sermons, lectures and debates copies available at the Africans Section, Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan) See p. 18.
  22. *Ibid.*
  23. E. A. Ayandele (ed). *T. J. Bowen Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856* (London: Frank Cass, 1968) p. 342. The Book was first published in 1857.
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35. Pa Emmanuel Akanbi (76), First Baptist Church, Alaari-Ilaro Egbado South. Oral evidence, Nov. 1, 1990.
36. J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, p. 103.
37. S.W.F. Aylward, *African Culture and the Christian Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1976) p. 174.
38. See, Nigerian Baptist Convention, *Book of Reports for the 88<sup>th</sup> Annual Session*, April 21-26, 2001, p.218.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
44. D. B. Vincent (Mojola Agbebi), Lecture on "Does the introduction of European Custom and marriage into this country promote spiritual growth of the church?" "In *African and the Gospel*, (Africana Library, University of Ibadan), p. 18.
45. T. J. Bowen, correspondence to the Editor of the *Christian Index* published in the June 16, 1858 edition of the *Christian Index*. See also Bowen Papers Vol. II, p. 396 (copies available in the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Library Ogbomosho).

# Freedom of Speech and the Discourse of Flaming in Ghana: Evidence from Radio Panel Discussions

Wincharles COKER

## *Abstract*

*Following the liberalisation of the airwaves in Ghana in the mid-1990s, the right to freedom of speech has been guaranteed although not without abuses. This freedom is evident in the activities of radio networks that urge listeners to participate in radio panel discussions (RPDs) through making interactive telephone calls or by posting text messages. In this paper, I explore the discourse of flaming on the panel discussions of Joy FM and Peace FM, two popular private radio stations. Grounded in Herring's (2004) computer-mediated discourse analysis, the study shows that listeners of RPDs use SMS to deprecate other selves. The study also reveals that flaming is precipitated by such technological affordances of mobile telephony as anonymity, pseudonymy and facelessness. The analysis further shows that social dissatisfactions were more frequent on RPDs than political complaints. Based on these findings, the study recommends that media houses educate the public on the face-threatening potential of the SMS technology, given that derisive messages undermine the social, cultural and national cohesion.*

**Keywords:** discourse, flaming, radio panel discussion, SMS

## **Introduction**

Following the liberalisation of the airwaves in Ghana in the mid-1990s, the right to freedom of speech has been guaranteed. This sense of democratic awareness has well been expressed by the media, prominent among which are the radio networks (McLuhan, 1964; Karikari, 1994). It is, therefore, not surprising that there are now over a hundred private commercial radio services despite a freeze in frequency assignments that lasted from 1999 until 2001 (Ghana Broadcasting Study, 2005). In recent times, many radio stations encourage Ghanaians to participate in panel discussions by posting text messages. Yankah (2004) has observed that a number of these messages are gradually being 'Ghanaianised' because they are occasionally interspersed with Ghanaian expressions and interjections. Regrettably, there has arisen a high incidence of flaming and abusive discourse in the messages posted by the Ghanaian listening public. Yankah (1998) and Akyea and Aziaku (2009) have noted that the use of mobile telecommunication has wrought a negative impact on the cultural values of Ghanaians despite its communicative usefulness.

However, research on the discourse of flaming via texting in the electronic media in Ghana is rare though "as people become more aware of the communicative potential of texting, the range of specialised uses grows" (Crystal, 2008: 117). Besides, Yankah's (1998; 2004) attempts at exposing this

phenomenon are anecdotal, although they expose the reader to an emerging culture of flaming in Ghana's electronic media. This paper, therefore, explores the discourse of flaming in text messages posted to media panel discussions, using two popular radio stations in Ghana. In what follows, I first sketch a brief vignette of works on flaming in order to show how similar to and different from other studies the present work is. The theoretical framework next receives attention followed by the methodology adopted. The analysis and discussion of data is presented, and summarised by way of key findings. Given the findings, some recommendations are finally made.

In computer-mediated communication (CMC), the term *flaming* is usually associated with the e-mail. Flaming first appeared in print in *The Hackers Dictionary* where it was defined as "to speak rapidly or incessantly on an uninteresting topic or with a patently ridiculous attitude" (Steele, 1983: 63). Although it is widely known that flaming is negative in tone, scholars do not agree on what actually constitutes a flame (Kayani, 1998; Aiken & Waller, 2000).

One common view of flaming relates to verbal attacks and aggressive communication. Among scholars who hold this position are Parks and Floyd (1998), Landry (2000) and O'Sullivan and Flanagan (2003). For instance, Landry (2000) refers to the phenomenon as "uninhibited and aggressive communication" (p. 139). According to Parks and Floyd (1996), flaming is a "verbal aggression, blunt disclosure, and non conforming behaviour" (p. 81). Clearly, a common thread that runs through these definitions is that persons flame other selves in order to offend and threaten the faces of others (Aiken & Waller, 2000). Sometimes also, people flame institutions or organisations (Reinig & Mejias, 2004).

Others hold that flaming refers to mere unfriendliness and sarcasm. Baym (2006) identifies sarcasm, flyting and uneasy humour as examples of flaming in the new media. According to Baruch (2005), most people mention intimidation and insults to be the most common form of negativity in e-mail. Thompsen (1994) and Kayani (1998) see flaming in terms of hostile attitudes displayed via e-mail communication that are regarded as insulting, hostile and offensive.

It has also been observed that certain visual and typographical features of some messages can be seen as flames. The use of capital letters throughout a message, for example, in some contexts may be used to exteriorise the emotion of anger (Extejt, 1998). As Cleary and Freeman (2005) intimate, "Some construe large bold font in uppercase as aggressive" (p. 63). Another visual aspect of e-mail is the use of emoticons meant to mimic emotional or facial cues not present in text-only communication. Such acronyms as LOL! (Laughing out loud!) and J/K (just kidding), though often Eurocentric, are sometimes used to wrought a feeling of discomfort on the receiver of the message.

Clearly, flaming can be caused by lack of social cues. Landry (2000) contends that the depersonalisation of the other and the lack of social cues such

as facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures found in face-to-face communication create misunderstandings between communicators thereby leading to a hostile behaviour. For example, although SMS generally allows for the reformulation of thought (Hollingshead & Contractor, 2006), texters can present a message without thinking about the consequences. In their study of e-mail and organizational dispute management, Friedman and Currall (2003) contend that e-mail is inherently more "asocial" than other forms of communication, because "e-mails are typically received and written while the writer is in isolation, staring at a computer screen—perhaps for hours at a time, so that awareness of the humanness of the counterpart may be diminished" (p. 132).

In Ghana, Yankah (1998) has argued that Ghanaians also use abrasive language in the media, especially in the electronic media. He maintains that as communication becomes more faceless, the indigenous norms of restrained discourse are bound to slacken, and taken over by greater openness and candour, where affront is inevitable. This development, Yankah (1998) regrettably observes, deepens the communication crisis because faceless communication on radio-phone in programmes, for example, yields emotionally charged contributions which are sometimes interpreted as discourtesy to authority (*See also* Agyekum, 2004). On the strength of existing literature, this work sets to examine the nature of flaming and the motivations that account for it on the panel discussions of *Joy FM* and *Peace FM*. Given the focus of this work, I draw on Herring's (2004) computer-mediated discourse analytic framework as the basis for the analysis and discussion of the data.

### **Methodology**

In this section I discuss the research design, research setting, data collection procedure and sampling method as well as present how issues of ethics were resolved.

### *Research Design*

First coined in 1995 by Herring although earliest studies date back to the mid-1980s (Murray, 1985), computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) is a tool-kit for analysing electronic and online discourse as a way to understand the effects of the new medium. This inquiry is done by focusing on the technical and situational properties of specific computer-mediated modes of communication such as weblog, e-mail and SMS. Such examples of technical features as size of the message buffer and synchronicity and situational characteristics as purpose, tone and scene act in tandem to provide an accurate description of the nature of CMDs (Herring, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2006).

Two key assumptions underpin research in CMDA. The first is that discourse exhibits recurrent patterns. This is because the basic goal of this approach is to identify patterns in discourse that are present but may not be

obvious to the casual observer or to the discourse participants themselves. Patterns in discourse may be produced consciously or unconsciously. Second, it is assumed that discourse involves speaker choices. These choices are not conditioned by only purely linguistic considerations but also social and cognitive factors (Herring, 2004). It follows then that through a study of CMDA, the researcher can provide insights into both linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena.

A major justification for using CMDA in the present study is that CMDA analyses naturally occurring data, though this may raise ethical concerns. Its data collection procedure is highly reliable though it is not elicited experimentally in response to any prompt (Thurlow, 2003; Herring, 2007). Moreover, unlike spoken discourse, text messages do not require longhand transcription and so can be easily collected. I was, therefore, not influenced by the physical presence of participants as is usually the case with other data collection instruments such as the interview and participant observation (Baron, 2005; Herring, 2007).

Also, CMDA heavily dwells on content analysis as a basic tool for analysis. Content analysis is a very useful method for revealing a person's or group's conscious or unconscious beliefs, attitudes, values and ideas. As Herring (2004: 22) asserts:

In fact, it is possible to conduct a perfectly responsible CMDA analysis without drawing on any more specific paradigms than language-focused content analysis.... This approach is well suited to analysing new and as yet relatively undescribed forms of CMC, in that it allows the researcher to remain open to the possibility of discovering novel phenomena, rather than making the assumption in advance that certain categories of phenomena will be found.

Thus, a major advantage for doing content analysis is that it is unobtrusive; a researcher can observe a phenomenon without being observed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000), and so avoids the dilemma of the observer's paradox.

### *Research Setting*

The study was conducted at *Joy FM* and *Peace FM*, two private radio stations situated in Accra, the capital of Ghana radio was selected over above other media because "by far the most people friendly medium for democratic practice is the radio" (Yankah, 2004:5). These networks were selected for three major reasons. The foremost is that both *Joy FM* and *Peace FM* broadcast informative morning panel discussions, namely 'Joy Super morning Show' and 'Kokrokoo Morning Show' respectively. These morning shows include the newspaper review, and therefore urge the listening public to air their views on interpersonal, social and national issues either through an interactive phone-in-segment or texting. Clearly, they act as "a bridge between the private, family sphere and the more impersonal, public domain of work" (Jones & Jones, 1999: 28). It is for this reason that both 'Joy Super' and 'Kokrokoo' Morning Shows

### *Ethical Considerations*

In resolving the ethical snag associated with the study, generic or first names of texters were used. This attempt aimed at avoiding the use of the names of texters without seeking their consent because the researcher could hardly get in touch with them. It was important to do so because “whatever the specific nature of their work, researchers must consider the effects of the research on participants, and act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 56).

### **Results and Discussion**

The results of the study clearly show that flaming occurred in the data in the form of deprecations expressed through attacks, name-calling and face-threatening complaints. It is important to stress that the examples cited in the analysis are left unedited generally to reflect the natural discourses of the posters.

#### *Deprecations*

The analysis reveals texters often flamed by deprecating other selves and/or organisations on the panel discussions of *Joy FM* and *Peace FM*. Deprecations were usually expressed through such discourse functions as attacks, insults and name-calling. Others appeared as flyting and maledictions. The analysis reveals that such behaviours usually arise in a virtual community such as text messaging largely because texters enjoy a degree of distance, anonymity or pseudonymity. The data elucidate an earlier observation by Yankah (1998) that Ghanaians use abrasive language in the media, especially in the electronic media due to the technological growth of mobile telecommunication. Yankah's (1998: 40) concluding remarks on the subject is worth quoting:

As communication becomes more faceless, the indigenous norms of restrained discourse are bound to slacken, taken over by greater openness and candour where affront is inevitable. But this also deepens the communication crisis; for faceless communication on radio-phone in programmes, has yielded its fair share of emotionally charged contributions, which have sometimes been interpreted as discourtesy to authority.

From the citation above, one becomes convinced that texters threaten the faces of their addressees and are discourteous to them because they are aware of the distance and anonymity the medium provides. Landry (2000) and Baym (2006) describe the negative use of language in the new media as uninhibited and aggressive behaviours. These include flyting, sarcasm and humour. The following examples attest to this:



*Text 1*

*Sammy-madina) we're sick & tired of Rawlings's Mafia & tactics aftrall what? If he want to move into his bedroom house... (Kokrokoo Morning Show)*

In Text 1, Sammy, the texter, expresses in strong terms his disgust at the perceived monopoly and control of state affairs by former president Jerry John Rawlings. For the texter, it would have been better if JJ, as he is affectionately known, remained silent. Certainly, the cliché “sick and tired” will not be appropriate in this context, given that it is impolitic for a reference for an ex-president. The text is, therefore, a kind of imprecation on a leading political figure in Ghana. This motivation stems from the knowledge that social accountability on the airwaves is low so that texters can seldom be held answerable for their use of irreverent language (Friedman & Currall, 2003).

*Name-calling and Insults*

As can be appreciated, the use of flaming to condemn others in Ghana is usually influenced by a politically motivated ideology. For this reason, texters sent messages to directly or verbally abuse political figures and/or the party a said figure is believed to be associated with. Goshgarian (2004) intimates that name-calling is the foremost tool in propagandist politics. In my view, discourses of propaganda are frequently accompanied by distortions of facts and by appeals to the passions and prejudices of the public.

Goshgarian (2004) adds that the primary objective of propaganda is to persuade the audience to believe the propositions of the speaker or writer. For instance, in deprecating other people of influence in the Ghanaian society texters exploited the discourse function of name-calling in order “to make us form a judgement without examining the evidence on which it should be based” (Goshgarian, 2004: 157). The author further adds that propagandists appeal to people's hate and fear by giving bad names to those individuals, groups, policies, practices, ideas and beliefs which they would have the masses to condemn and reject. This, they achieve by sometimes using foul language. Tracy (2008) refers to the use of innocuous language as face-attack because “it is intentionally rude, disrespectful and insulting” towards its target (p. 171).

From the data, name-calling was normally directed at the two leading political parties in Ghana namely the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the National Patriotic Party (NPP). Consider the text below:

*Text 2*

*KOJO SOME NPP MPS ARE BEHAVING LIKE FOOTBALLERS ON THE BENCH. THEIR ONLY PRAYER IS THAT A PLAYER IS INJURED SO THEY COULD BE SUBSTITUTED TO SHOW THEIR SKILLS. MARTINS, KSI (Joy Super Morning Show)*

The text above explicitly demonstrates the insult and invective the sender of the message uses to paint black his opponents on other the political divide. It is possible that the writer of the message is a member of the NDC, and therefore aims at expressing his or her derision for the leading opposition party, the NPP. Note that the message is rendered entirely in block letters and thus expresses the intent of the anonymous texter to emphasise his or her convictions about the NPP. This point confirms the view of Extejt (1998) that the use of capital letters throughout a message, for example, in some contexts may be used to exteriorise the emotion of anger. Also, it lends weight to Cleary and Freeman's (2005) assertion that large bold font in uppercase are aggressive.

### *Abusive Complaints*

Available evidence also shows that texters made abusive complaints on Joy Super Morning Show and Kokrokoo Morning Show. It is generally known that people make complaints in order to express their dissatisfaction about someone or something that may not be necessarily present at the scene (D'Amico-Reisner, 1985; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987; Boxer, 1993). A complaint may therefore be direct or indirect. The data show that people sent text messages on RPDs often in the form of indirect complaints. Despite the indirectness of complaints on RPDs, most complaints were face-threatening. They appeared as direct confrontations with the objects of complaint. Generally speaking, some complaints expressed social dissatisfactions and while others contained political dissatisfactions. And though social concerns are to a large extent be concerns of politicians, I refer to political dissatisfactions as complaints relatable to party politics.

Social dissatisfactions were more frequent in the data. As users of radio, texters expressed their dissatisfactions on social concerns whenever the opportunity presented itself on panel discussions as part of their contributions to the programmes. Social dissatisfactions using text messages dealt with education, health and sanitation, business and finance. Others include science and agriculture. Here is an example of a social complaint:

#### *Text 3*

*Pls Kwame, what is ECG doing about this constant power interruptions? It's so frustrating. Is Ghana now becoming like Nigeria hmmm! Tk ofankor. (Kokrokoo Morning Show)*

Here, the anonymous complainer is expressing his dissatisfaction about the constant power interruptions by the Electricity Company of Ghana to the host of 'Kokrokoo Morning Show', Kwame Sefa Kayi. This gratification is conveyed by the linguistic forms such as "What is ECG doing about this constant power innterruptions?", "it's so frustrating" and "hmmm". Together, these linguistic resources enable the texter to express his or her utmost disappointment in Electricity Company of Ghana's (ECG) poor management of

electricity in Ghana. In this case, the texter is seen to be threatening the face of the management and staff of ECG as he points to their perceived inefficiency.

Political discontents in the data were critical of the performance of governments and their parties. The messages usually evinced the vituperation of senders towards their objects of complaint. One important thing to note here is that texters are very much aware of the anonymity the technology of radio and texting afford them. As a result, they found it easy to express their views freely and even in the most offensive way. This development is in line with earlier claims by Boxer (1993) and Baym (2006) that distance and often anonymity can result in the use of abusive and face-threatening language. Below are some typical examples of political complaints:

*Text 4*

*If four Politicians can deceive us by turning their campaign pledges into nightmare, whom then do we trust for our economic development? The nation deserves a better deal from the NDC. Kabiesi sek, di” (Kokrokoo Morning Show)*

In Text 4, the anonymous writer thinks that the NDC government has deceived all Ghanaians by not fulfilling their campaign promises. Although this conviction is produced from the texter's personal assessment of the incumbent government, the texter assumes that all Ghanaians agree with him or her on this score. Thus by making this complaint, the texter expects the government to be more responsible in the management of the nation's economy. Notice that he does not mince words in expressing this dissatisfaction. The use of such verbs as “deceive” and nouns like “nightmares”, according to the poster, express the ademocratic nature of politicians because they leave no room for the accused to defend his image. Besides, the rhetorical question “whom (*sic*) then do we trust for our economic development?” underscores his disdain of Ghanaian politicians, as though there are no honest ones in the country.

Texters also attacked public institutions and corporate organisations. This was often conveyed through requests and inquiries that sought to let the addressees do a task on behalf of the senders of the texts. A close analysis of the data, however, reveals that the some of the requests and inquiries were harsh in tone. Here is an example:

*Text 5*

*I want to know why we have not consulted Antoa Nyama on the fire outbreaks? Paa Nii, Adenta” (Kokrokoo Morning Show)*

In this text, the writer would like to know why Ghanaians did not consult with Antoa Nyama, a deity in the Ashanti region of Ghana who is believed to be very powerful. The writer implies that only a divine force can

intervene in the lives of Ghanaians, given that they themselves are not capable of managing their own affairs. The message demonstrates that Paa Nii believes that Ghanaians lack the technical know-how to minimise the effect of fire outbreaks in Ghana. The text is, therefore, an affront on the management and staff of Ghana Fire Service.

## Conclusion

Using *Joy FM* and *Peace FM* as a case study, the paper has demonstrated that texters flame other selves on radio panel discussions in Ghana. A key finding of the study concerns the use of SMS to malign others on panel discussions, using deprecations, name-calling, insults and abusive complaints. The study also reveals that flaming in radio panel discussion is precipitated by such technological affordances of mobile telephony as anonymity, pseudonymity and facelessness.

These findings have two major implications. First, it presents discourse analysts and communication scholars with the means to extend the study of computer-mediated communication into mass communication. As a result of the emergence of new technology, that is CMC, traditional frameworks of communication are fast becoming obsolete. The need to include CMC and CMDA in mainstream communication studies is, therefore, crucial. Given that "the media are consequential in social life" (Altheide, 1996: 6), an analysis of electronic discourses such as text messages will help linguists and communication students to appreciate the nature of the public discourse of texters of SMS on radio panel discussions.

Finally, it is important that both radio and television networks censor the content of text messages that are read on the airwaves in order to maintain sanity of expression of thought. Though the media in Ghana, as in most countries, guarantee freedom of expression (Yankah, 1998; Ghana Broadcasting Study, 2005), it remains a challenge to media practitioners to sift uncomplimentary text messages that they receive on their shows. Text messages in the form of invectives need not be entertained on the airwaves in Ghana as part of the social responsibility and accountability of the media to the public. Such derisive text messages have the potential of undermining the social, cultural and national cohesion of the nation. Besides, the youth could pick up wrong behaviours from these anti-nationalist and often propagandist discourses (Goshgarian, 2004; Yankah, 2004).

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