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THE MALE PROTAGONISTS IN THE "COMMODITIZATION"
OF ASPECTS OF FEMALE LIFE CYCLE IN GHANA

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the broad range of studies in the areas of demography, sociology and social anthropology fertility has been treated as an almost exclusively female attribute. Yet one of the very few studies which examine male roles in fertility has argued that in Sierra Leone, amongst the Creoles, males are the ones who determine fertility levels (Steady, 1978). Coitus interrupts and the condom, two male methods of birth control, together with abortion in the event of failure, have been known to be mainly responsible for the demographic transition in Europe, Japan and North America (IPPF, 1981). Indeed, male methods were reckoned to account for one-third of the estimated 250 million people of the world who were using contraceptives about a decade and a half ago (Stokes, 1980).

Reviewing studies on the influence of status on the conjugal relationship between males and females, Ware (1981, p.133) remarks that 'most studies of husband - wife interaction are concerned with a situation in which there is agreement between spouses; surprisingly little is known about cases in which there is conflict of interest. We do not know what happens when the wife wants more children and the husband does not, nor do we know how common such cases are'.

While the rounds of World Fertility Surveys followed by Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) have furthered our understanding of fertility in sub-Saharan Africa in general, the situation is a bit confusing in the case of Ghana. In the mid-eighties, Cochrane and Farid (1986) cited Ghana as the best evidence of decline for any sub-Saharan country, using data from the Ghana Fertility Survey of 1980 to support a claim of 'crisis-led fertility decline'. A few years later, the Report of the Ghana DHS of 1988 noted that 'Overall, the data suggests that, even if a short term fertility decline occurred in Ghana during the mid to late seventies, the decline has not continued into the eighties' (Ghana, 1989:23). For this and similar situations elsewhere, the interest has now changed substantially from an emphasis on the proximate determinants of fertility, to the study of the more "ultimate" determinants that account for the survival of high fertility and of the socio-economic and ideational changes that will eventually lead to sustained fertility decline (van de Walle and Foster, 1990).

Along with the shift in research emphasis is a change in the atmosphere of the debate. Etienne van de Walle and Foster (1990) assert that the prospect of demographic transition must be evaluated in terms other than economic progress and mortality decline. Their assertion was based on the 'evidence of changes in the African family and the position of women within the family, the slowing down of

social and economic progress and the introduction of structural adjustment programmes to deal with economic stagnation' (van de Walle and Foster, 1990, p. 2). It is necessary to consider how women are relating to men in the changing situation and whether or not there is a similar change in the relative demand for children between the sexes.

The existing evidence suggests that traditionally, both sexes in both the patrilineal and matrilineal societies place high value on children as a means of perpetuating a man's lineage and also as security in old age (Rattray, 1927; Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, 1950; Azu, 1974). Barrenness is considered more or less a taboo and barren women are given little attention or no prestige and are regarded with contempt and malicious pity, and at best commiseration. Among the Ashanti, "a barren woman is looked upon with pity not unmixed with scorn. She feels an outcast" (Gaisie, 1969, p.45). The stigma attached to childlessness is not limited to women alone. Rattray (1927, p. 66) notes; 'Childless married couples are subject to derision, the man is called by the vulgar "Wax penis" (Kote Krawa). Not so very many years ago the childless man or woman after death had great thorns called Pammewuo (literally, link me with death) driven into the soles of the feet. At the same time the corpse was addressed with these words, 'Wanwo ba, mma saa bio' (You have not begotten (or borne) a child, do not return again like that).

Apart from social and religious values attached to children, they are also looked upon as an economic asset. Towards this end they are introduced to their parents' trade very early in life. When children mature, they become the social security for their parents in old age. In the absence of social security schemes which cover everybody, the aged depend upon their children or nephews and neices for their livelihood. The Ashanti, for example, say that 'sons are the support of their fathers'. The other ethnic groups have similar views about the responsibility of children towards their parents. It appears that from normative expectations and for economic reasons both men and women have demand for children. But it seems that men have a bigger stake in children than females. Who then owns the children?

WHO OWNS THE CHILDREN?

Among the Ashanti, a matrilineal group, all the children of the marriage are the mother's clan's. But in spite of this all important fact the father has some claim upon them because of the great affective as well as jural weight attached to the recognition of paternity. Even when a marriage was dissolved for any cause, the male children often remained with the father and the girls were expected to visit him from time to time. Naming of a child is done by the man. He generally chooses a name for his child from among those of his forebears on either side of his parentage, but he is not bound to do so. Ashanti say that

a man wants children so that he can pass on the names of his forebears. In fact, Ashanti believe that a child cannot thrive if its father's sunsum (spirit) is alienated from it; that its destiny and disposition are fixed by the kra (soul) which is transmitted by the father.

Strangely, an Ashanti father has no legal authority over his children. He cannot even compel them to live with him or, if he has divorced their mother, claim their custody as a right. In fact, there is a traditional, and well understood, division of labour at home, with the children, among other things, as the woman's main preserve. Caldwell (1968) adds that most matters and such family concerns as the cleanliness of the children and their clothes is decided by the wife. According to the Ashanti, children should grow up in their father's house but Radcliffe-Brown and Forde (1950) observed that not more than 50 per cent of pre-adolescent children are found living with their fathers at a given time. Nevertheless, they add that it is regarded as the duty and the pride of a father to bring up his children, that is, to feed, clothe and educate them, and, later, to set them up in life. The moral and civic training of the children, in particular, is the responsibility of the father, and this gives him the right to punish them if necessary.

Thus, in effect, the Ashanti man has no hold over his children except through their love for him and their conscience. A father wins his children's affection by caring for them. They cannot inherit his property, but he can and often does provide for them by making them gifts of property, land, or money during his life time or on his death bed (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, 1950). A father should provide his son a wife and no respectable girl can marry without her parents' approval. In recognition of the parents' labours in nurturing her and of their concern for her well-being, special gifts are due to them from the bridegroom on her marriage.

The payment of bridewealth or dowry is just one of the economic transactions and other symbolic tokens from a man to a woman that characterizes the long and often winding process of marriage in Ghana. Such payments offer the man the opportunity to prove that he is financially solid and, therefore, will be able to take care of his wife. Even in courtship, called mpena relationship, the man must exhibit his financial capabilities by giving gifts occasionally to the girlfriend and sometimes to her parents. These events can best be seen as "conjugal testing", wherein the partners and their families build mutual confidence in each other by taking incremental steps towards a union' (Bledsoe, 1994, p. 5). It must be emphasized that a man's capability to cater for a wife is a major consideration in the testing process. This idea is summed up in a common vow every Akan bridegroom is expected to accede to during the matrimonial ceremony which goes like "Now she (the bride) is your wife. From today, all her misfortunes are your responsibility. But every fortune she makes must be brought home" (i.e. her maternal home). Thus to the woman

conjugal relationship has important economic considerations to it.

But almost two decades ago, Oppong (1977) drew attention to changes in conjugal power and resources in certain sections of the Ghanaian society. She attributed the change to the tendency towards the disintegration of lineage systems and that of the blurring of the sexual division of labour and the increase of conjugal relationships variously labelled as "companionate", "joint" and "egalitarian" among the educated elite. She stressed that:-

'There is evidence of inability to effectively fulfil parental duties and responsibilities among some people at the lower socio-economic levels (who constitute the majority in Ghana), due to lack of resources in money, material goods and time and also indications of unwillingness among certain individuals, even when resources are available, to invest them fully in parenthood, either leaving the total burden to the coparent, often the mother or by passing the child onto a foster parent, who may or may not take an interest in the welfare of the child' (Oppong, 1977, p.8).

It has been demonstrated for many populations that when wives are working and earning outside the home, their power position is enhanced (Lupri, 1969). Women from Southern Ghana have for long provided an example of wives whose domestic power is enhanced by their important roles as economic producers (Oppong, 1970 p.677). Indeed their traditionally independent position, in comparison with that of women in other parts of Africa and elsewhere, has frequently been commented upon, even with surprise (Caldwell, 1968:69). In recent times, the shift away from traditional subsistence economy to one of wage and salaried labour is increasingly making it difficult for women to maintain their independence either within or outside marriage. The problem has been compounded by the ever deepening economic crisis Ghana has been going through since the mid seventies. Without the necessary education and skills that will enable them to compete for the few available jobs, the majority of Ghanaian women are self employed in the informal sector. To get the capital to set up and sustain their businesses, some women have resulted to what Fayorsey (1994) has termed as the "commoditization" of aspects of their life course.

'COMMODITIZATION' AS A CONCEPT

'Commoditization' is a process which is akin to buying and selling (Hart 1982:38-48; Fayorsey 1993:170). It comes from the word 'commodity'. A commodity is an object of economic value (Appadurai 1992:3). The term 'commodity' has been variously defined and conceived of in several terms, but according to Hart, it simply denotes

'something useful that may be bought and sold.... Whatever buying is, we can now know that where it is absent, there are no commodities....all commodities have both use values and exchange value, the essence of the commodity is reciprocity' (Hart 1982:39).

In the patterns of marriage and the rituals leading to and accompanying childbirth one discerns a process which can be likened to 'buying' and 'selling' in the market place. Fayorsey (1994) has termed this process the 'commoditization of the Life Cycle'. This phrase defines a process which is akin to the evolution of commodities and commodity exchange. The 'commoditization of childbirth' is based on trading with social relations. It is not trade on the open market.

The word commoditization is not new in anthropological discourse, and in fact it has been used by Hart (1982) to explain 'a process which involves the transformation of gifts into commodities where such transformation has been absent' (Hart, 1982:39). Kopytoff in Appadurai (1992:64-91) stresses the cultural biography of things and sees commoditization as a process.

The organization of informal social activities and relationships along the formal trade procedures is a new and interesting phenomenon which is further explored in this paper. This concept of 'commoditization' is abstracted from the exchange of things to the exchange of persons, norms, values and services. From this abstraction several forms of the process have been conceived termed commoditization of sexuality and commoditization of marriage, among others (Fayorsey 1994, p.1).

The theoretical linkages of exchange theory to practical issues of custom and Ghanaian values was first assembled through empirical studies of various Ghanaian cultures by Fayorsey (1993).

POVERTY AND FEMALE STRATEGIES TOWARDS AUTONOMY

The majority of Ghanaian women (90%) are working, but most of them are engaged in informal productive economic activities such as petty trading and farming and have to shoulder the burdens of the social costs of adjustments. More and more Ghanaian women are taking sole responsibilities of their households. There has been an increase in female headed households from 29% in 1987 to 32% in 1993 (NCWD, 1994). Ghanaian women especially the Ga, the Fante and the Ashanti, in spite of the constraints imposed on them by the general Ghanaian economic crisis and its attendant high costs of living, have adopted a number of strategies to cope with their situation. These strategies liberate them from the control of their men and ensures their economic survival within the exigencies of daily life. Some strategies adopted by urban Ghanaian women, notably among the Ga, are examined below.

The first strategy is the strong alliances against men and the mutual help given and received between matrilineal relations within matricomplexes. A matricomplex is defined as an economically based corporate kin group of matrilineally related females, such as a woman, her mother, sisters, and their children (own or fostered). It is a set of matrikin relations with a material base that enables women to dominate other women, men and children. This group has essentially evolved from a former patrilineal structure in which men dominated women. Due to the separation of spouses in Central Accra female matrikin relations reside together, whilst their husbands live elsewhere. The residence of urban Ga women together enable them to engage in economic ventures. Thus, in Central Accra matrikin relations have formed economic productive units engaged in the preparation mainly of food for sale. Central Accra being strategically situated in the Accra metropolis enables women to have access to adjacent markets for their wares. Women in Central Accra have together formed strong corporate alliances. As a result of these alliances, coupled with the pressure on existing accommodation, Ga men have had to move out of the area. Men still living within the vicinity are those who hold traditional political offices or those whose occupations, such as fishing and fish mongering, demand that they should reside in Central Accra. Also men who are incapable of renting their own accommodation elsewhere scramble with women and children for the cheap or sometimes rent free family rooms in wekushiaa or family compounds. These latter group of men are often referred to as yakaqbemei or "the hopeless men" because they rely on the very people they are expected to provide for. Often women in matricomplexes level insults against such "hopelessmen" and it has become almost impossible for Ga men without sound financial backing to remain in family compounds with their female kin. Whether such a drive has occurred consciously or not, Central Accra is now currently predominantly inhabited by women who form 72% of the adult population. Women and children together form 88% of the household population of the area. Residing together, Urban Ga women have managed to turn their economic misfortunes into assets. The most valuable resource is their children, who have become an essential source of capital.

Other affiliations which may not be necessarily kin based are also important. Most adult Ga women belong to any one or more of a cult, a church, an association, or a cooperative. Friendship associations play very significant roles especially with the granting of loans and general help to their members. In 1991 about 25 per cent of the 216 urban women surveyed in Central Accra belonged to twelve different women's associations and clubs which are locally collectively known as Yeli ke buamo kpei (mutual help societies). These mutual help societies often rallied to the help of individual members especially during occasions which demanded some form of donation like

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outdoorings, funerals and various other traditional rituals.

Women's strategies are especially clear within the contexts of the manipulation of traditional rituals associated with pregnancy and marriage. It may seem paradoxical to state that one of the strategies of Ga women towards autonomy is to marry. It is indeed paradoxical if one defines autonomy as being 'free from the control of men'. Marriage in its traditional Ga conception does not free women from men's control.

Ga women in their bid to survive formed strong matrikin alliances and commoditized the traditional institution of marriage and its associated rituals. Children have become an essential source of capital for the urban Ga. These children may be likened to commodities, which are a result of many transformations of a purchased good into a product for sale. This involves several processes, but at this stage this study limits itself to three. Firstly, the process of buying, then processing, and then reselling.

If children are 'commodities', how do Ga women go about buying them?

Pregnancy and the 'commoditization of female sexuality'

A woman's role as a mother is very important in Ghanaian world view. This role begins with the onset of the first pregnancy. Among the Ga in Central Accra, promiscuity is rife, and adolescent pregnancy abounds. Women, therefore, start the motherhood role at very early ages. Pregnancy is an important occasion for the paternal role to be displayed.

In Central Accra, pregnant girls are often forced to name the man who impregnated them, in order to ensure that they assume full responsibility for the pregnancy. Generally 'a man who makes an un-betrothed girl pregnant is said to have been caught stealing, amole dzulo'. (Azu 1974:33). A delegation is often sent by the girl's parents to inquire about the pregnancy from the man's parents. The man is questioned by his parents or relations. If he accepts responsibility for the pregnancy, another delegation including his parents or elders of his matrilineal and patrilineal families is sent to the girl's relations with some money and a bottle of gin to plead pardon and accept responsibility of the pregnancy. Thereafter, the pregnancy of the girl becomes an occasion when various demands, especially regular cash contributions are made on the prospective father of the child. The man is also required to clothe, feed and 'maintain the pregnancy'. Esa ni nui le ale musuile - 'It is necessary for the man to nurture the pregnancy'.

Nurturing the pregnancy implies taking responsibility for not only the unborn child in terms of paying hospital bills, but also meeting the needs of the pregnant girl as well. Another aspect of nurturing which the Ga of Central Accra believe to be necessary is to have "regular sex with

the pregnant woman to allow the baby to grow and to widen the birth canal so that parturition would be easy". A man who refuses such responsibility is said to be very wicked. The members of the matricomplex, especially, bring a lot of pressure to bear on the man to provide sustenance not only for the pregnant girl but also for members of the matricomplex. The girl's mother and her sisters pay several visits to the man in the course of the girl's pregnancy with one demand or the other involving the care of the pregnant girl. A man who impregnates a woman is expected to make regular remittances in cash and kind. A man who is capable of meeting such obligations is often a favourite of the group; a subsequent marriage to the young girl is very likely to succeed as long as such obligations are met. A man becomes a favourite of all members of the girls matricomplex if he is generous. Even in the absence of the girl, he will be welcomed with a bottle of beer and some food.

Such expectations and demands are tolerated by the men only until the child is born, and 'outdoored', or initiated into the man's patrilineage. Many unmarried fathers cease to make contributions once the child is 'outdoored'. The honour of being a father is enough for the Ga man who would usually boast of the number of children he has even if he does not know what they eat.

Some men do not even acknowledge responsibility for the pregnancy. When this happens, whether the baby becomes a liability or an asset depends on the strength of the mother's matricomplex. It is evident, however, that right from conception, the baby may become an economic asset to its mother and her matricomplex if the demands made on the prospective father are met. A baby may become a liability to the matricomplex if the expected responsibilities from the man are not met. This would mean the bearing of hospital costs in addition to feeding and clothing of the young mother.

Several strategies are adopted by the combined efforts of women within a matricomplex and, therefore, the unborn baby hardly ever becomes a liability. These women ensure that maximum profit is made out of any given pregnancy and, therefore, if the man does not meet his obligations towards the pregnancy the girl is restricted from having anything to do with him. In this case, he is branded a yakaqdomo - 'hopeless man' and the young girl may be pushed on to another man before the pregnancy is far enough advanced to be visible. Informants, men but not women (perhaps because of the slur it may cast on their reputation) lamented over the fact that this has resulted in claims being made by more than one man to the paternity of some children. It became evident also that some matricomplexes intentionally make claims for financial support for the same pregnancy from different men. This can continue until the baby is born. There is then usually a fight among 'prospective fathers' for the same child. Babies are 'commoditized' right from the womb among the Ga of Central Accra. It is notable that the role expected of a father to be in terms

of taking responsibility for his baby and its mother are all acknowledged and treasured Ghanaian customs. Although natural enough, the manipulation of the customs for economic gain in the face of poverty is what is of concern to the present authors.

'Commoditization' during pregnancy may not be apparent to a casual observer, but subsequent 'commoditization' after birth, especially with the naming and 'outdooing' ceremony is openly discussed by almost all Ga men and women in Central Accra. The idea of 'commoditization of childbirth' was actually suggested by these Ga men and women who saw the lavish current 'outdooing ceremony' as a form of 'trade' and the prime factor for explaining the fertility of urban Ga women.

In spite of the success story of some of these strategies, there are other women for whom this initial pregnancy becomes a financial burden. Such women may not always get help from members of the matricomplex because of the lack of money. This is especially so in cases where the matricomplex is not engaged in a common economic venture. When the putative father refuses to take responsibility for the child, and the girl's parents cannot help because of their own financial difficulties, the girl shoulders her own responsibility.

The trend now in Ghana is for young girls to move out at night to sell their sexuality. In Accra, the most popular spot is 'CIRCLE'. Girls in Central Accra, often confessed having to go to 'CIRCLE' to make ends meet. Circle is a busy night spot for all illicit dealings at night and prostitution is one such dealing.

Prostitution in Ghana has assumed international dimension for sometime now. Cote d'Ivoire has been the most important destination for Ghanaian women over the years. A 1975 Cote d'Ivoire census gave a sex ratio of 76 males to 100 females among Ghanaian immigrants in the country which was even lower in Abidjan, the country's capital (52 males to 100 females). A survey by Anarfi (1990) revealed that over 75% of 1,456 Ghanaian women interviewed were in prostitution. These women came from all over Ghana with majority of them being Akan speaking.

Economic considerations dominated the women's reasons for migrating to Cote d'Ivoire. It is possible that most of them knew they were going into prostitution even before they left Ghana. Asked to give her reasons for migrating, one young woman stated that 'In Ghana men were using me for free. So what is wrong if I come here to do it (i.e. engage in sexual intercourse) for money?' While we have previously observed that women in lover (mpena) relationships in Ghana normally receive some reward from the men concerned, it should also be clear that the giving of such a return is hardly obligatory and is not always forthcoming particularly in this time of economic hardships. Here again we see how women are manipulating a normal traditional practice for economic gain.

The Abidjan survey observed that the use of contraceptives was not a common practice among the Ghanaian

women. As a result most of the prostitutes often got pregnant. One thing that is reprobated and considered shameful to a woman and her maternal kin is failure to determine paternity of a child. While the child is fully legitimate, as far as his status in his matrilineal lineage is concerned, he carries a stigma which may be thrown at his head in later life in a quarrel. To avoid this every woman who got pregnant endeavoured to get a man to accept responsibility for the pregnancy. These could be either of two categories of men. The first are Ghanaian male migrants who act as pimps for the prostitutes who may refer to these men as "husbands". Apart from the protection which the pimps "husbands" offer to the women against physical attacks which are rampant in Abidjan, it appears it is from them that the prostitute "wives" get real sexual satisfaction since the hallmark of their trade is impersonal relationship with their clients.

Somehow some of the prostitutes manage to get some of their clients to accept responsibility of their pregnancies. These other men are often non-Ghanaians, either Ivoriens or nationals from countries like Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria. Such moves by the Ghanaian women could be seen purely as 'strategic attempts by individuals to shape their familial obligations and sources of support by social means' (Bledsoe, 1994, p.6). The support is very crucial for the prostitute because after a certain stage of the pregnancy and soon after birth they cannot operate and certainly require other sources of financial support.

In conjugal terms, the relationship between the prostitutes and both categories of men mentioned above is, to say the least, tenuous. This has been the basis of a controversy over the one to take custody of the children born by prostitutes. Cultural conflict is responsible for the problem, that is, where the parties involved are from different lineage systems. Three case studies may be used to illustrate the case of the relationship between the pimp "husbands" and their "children".

CASE 1:

Kwasi Papa an Ashanti, had one child with a Ghanaian prostitute he regarded as his "wife". He had no fixed employment and spent the day drinking. He exhibited signs of someone addicted to drugs like marijuana. He had made a pet out of his six year old son who followed him wherever he went. He had the habit of allowing the innocent boy to partake in the beer he drank. There were even fears that he was giving the boy some marijuana too. This allegation was given credence by the fact that the little boy also often appeared drugged. Like all the pimp "husbands" Kwasi Papa stayed away from home much often so as to give his prostitute "wife" the chance to receive clients. He depended completely on his "wife" for sustenance. His relationship with the son, therefore, has been occasioned by the kind of arrangement he has with the boy's mother.

CASE 2:

Idrisu was from the Northern part of Ghana where they practice the patrilineal system. He had a daughter with a prostitute who was from another patrilineal group in the south-eastern part of Ghana. Idrisu had taken full custody of the daughter who had been taken back to stay with his parents in Ghana. The woman's only complaint was that she missed her daughter and would have loved to see how she was developing physically. She felt that Idrisu had the right to take custody of the child.

CASE 3:

Boateng, an Akyem man (another Akan speaking group in the Eastern region of Ghana), was a University Graduate who was not in any gainful employment at the time of the survey in 1987. He was the head of one of the Ghanaian communities in Abidjan. He had two prostitute 'wives' with whom he had a child each. He was staying separate from both 'wives' and appeared not to have any effective responsibility for the 'children'. He smoked and drank and lived off the charity of the wives.

The three case studies illustrate the case of children of Ghanaian prostitutes and Ghanaian male migrants in Abidjan. It must be emphasised that children are a great problem to their prostitute mothers. There is a problem as to what to do with them when there is a visitor. Many, therefore, take them home in Ghana where they are fostered to their mothers and other relatives. With the Ghanaian "fathers" this arrangement is without any difficulty. It is with the non-Ghanaian 'fathers' that the prostitutes have a problem.

It was learnt that in the past Ghanaian women asked leave of their children's fathers to visit home with them and left them there. It has been mentioned already that most of the Ghanaian women are from matrilineal areas and by custom they have a hold on their children. But even women from the patrilineal areas would want to take their children home to show that at least they have proved their fertility, knowing full well that among their matrikins the children will not be illegitimate. On the other hand, the fathers of these children are mostly patrilineal and see the children as theirs. What they do these days is to take their children at very tender age and foster them to relatives far away from their mothers. The following case study illustrates the cultural conflict between Ghanaian matrilineal mothers and non-Ghanaian patrilineal fathers over the custody of their children.

CASE 4

Akosua, an Akan speaking Ghanaian woman co-habited with a Moshi (from Burkina Faso) immigrant in Abidjan and had an issue with him. The relationship broke up somewhere along the line and the girl got herself attached to a Ghanaian

man in the pimp "husband" - prostitute "wife" relationship. The Moshi man took full custody of the child as a result. To get the child back and possibly run away with it to Ghana, the Ghanaian man, the new "husband", agreed to allow the woman to return to the Moshi man, hoping that with her presence, the latter would bring the child back from hiding to the mother. This arrangement proved futile as the Moshi man refused to bring the child back to the biological mother although he had resumed full role of a husband. Not satisfied, the woman went to the Ghana Embassy for assistance. There was no easy approach to the issue. To the Akan woman the child was hers. But to the Moshi man it was his as a woman does not own a child. That meant not even the presence of the woman back in his house could compell him to bring the child back to the house.

The commoditization of the rituals associated with childbirth: The urban Ga newly emergent outdoor ceremony

The 'commoditization of childbirth' is illustrated with evidence from the Ga of Central Accra. The extension of 'commoditization' into kinship and ritual performances is illustrated in the naming and outdoor ceremonies below.

On the eighth day after the birth of a child, it is taken over to its father's wekushia or family house for the naming ceremony. A delegation of elders of the maternal line, that is both male and female relations of the baby's mother accompany the baby to its father's wekushia where the naming ritual is performed. On arrival at the father's wekushia, the baby is given to a renowned personality or elder of the family. This elder must have an admirable reputation because it is believed that the baby takes on the character of the person who names it. Thus a baby girl is named by a woman and baby boy by a man.

The naming ritual is performed outside, within the compound of the wekushia. All the assembly of relatives go out for this purpose. Sometimes they may already be seated outside with the maternal relations on one side and the paternal relations on the opposite side. The sitting arrangement usually separates males from females on both sides. This is a characteristic of the gender division which permeates all aspects of the Ga social structure. The baby's clothes are removed and the elder lifts the naked child towards the sky and welcomes him to earth. Some sort of welcome address follows this act. Whilst being put on the ground, the baby will be told to work hard and eat corn. Schnapps is used to pour libation, calling the child's name and blessing it. A variety of addresses may be used for example: 'Ke oba ba hishi' literally 'If you have come, come and stay'.

The elder then places the baby on the bare ground and its name on earth is spoken, for example, - 'Naa'. Naa is picked and then the elder dips his/her finger into corn-wine or nkne-daa and puts it into the baby's mouth three times with various injunctions. For example:

"Naa, ona, onako, onu onuko, moko sane jee osane"
 Literally, 'Naa you have seen, you have not seen, you have heard, you have not heard. Somebody's business is not your business.' After this more advice is spoken by two elders from the mother's and from the father's kin. She is admonished to behave well in the world.

After the baby has been named, it is dressed up and given to its mother to be fed. Various presentations are referred to as jwelemonii, which means 'congratulations gifts' and this comes to show appreciation toward's the woman's safe delivery. It begins with a donation by the person who names the child. This amount may range from anything between a c1,000 to c100,000 depending on the financial power of the person. This is often followed by a presentation by the head of the baby's patrilineage if he is not the one who conducted the ritual. A presentation by the baby's father's 'mothers' (classificatory grandmothers and grandfathers) then follows. The baby's mother's fathers and mothers also make their offerings. This is followed by a presentation by the father of the child and subsequently by the father's and mother's brothers, sisters, and other relations. All the donations pass through the hands of a linguist or ostame who loudly announces the donation to the assembled company; there is clapping and a congregational 'thank you.'

It is interesting to note that generational age takes precedence over gender in these presentations. Meanwhile a man and a woman will be delegated to take the naming drink, usually a bottle of schnapps and offer drinks to all assembled.

All children born to Ga fathers must be accepted into a patrilineage, and the naming ritual indicates such an acceptance. Thereafter, the patrilineage becomes responsible for all major decisions concerning an individual's life such as birth, marriage, sickness, death and property inheritance. The Ga believe that up till the eight day after the birth of a child, it is still partially in the world of the spirit and may decide to return. The eighth day signified the baby's complete departure from the world of the spirit to the world of the living. It must, therefore, be welcomed home. The naming ritual is, therefore, performed at dawn, a transition from night to day and from the unknown to known. The naming ritual is therefore performed before the early morning star 'chochobi' vanishes from the sky at around 5.00 a.m. Thus, the naming ceremony is usually attended by very close relations even though it is not restricted to them. Friends may attend, but most often friends join in later on in the morning after the main ritual has been performed.

As rightly noted by Meyer Fortes (1970:4) "In the African institution of bride price, the passage of goods and valuables from the bridegroom's side to the brides side is a constant, that is essential feature, but the valuables used and the amounts passed vary widely even in one society." In the same way, the naming ceremony just described may be said to be the constant or essential and

intrinsic aspect of Ga social structure. The presentations have followed the same pattern over time. The actual amounts compared to Field's account (1940) or Azu's (1974), have changed. A new development from this traditional naming ceremony has now emerged. The newly emerged outdoor ceremony described below is not an intrinsic part of the naming ceremony. It has its foundations in the principles of gift exchange which is now being exploited by women to enhance their own well-being.

The urban Ga newly emergent outdoor ceremony

The naming ritual referred to with the local name Kpojeiemo or Gbeiwo, is the main ritual. However in addition, there has emerged a second ceremony. In Central Accra the fashionable newly emerged ceremony is referred to as 'outdooring' using the English equivalent. Many different ethnic groups in Ghana also have the outdoor ceremony. It is an occasion to show the newly born baby to friends and work associates. The form it takes, however, varies from one ethnic group to the other.

Currently after the close family relations have named the child, the ceremony continues with a party or usually as is now often the case, another date is set for the outdoor party. A Saturday or Sunday about a month or two after the child has been born is fixed and intensive preparations are made towards the occasion. It is in this second naming, or outdoor ceremony, that childbearing is being 'commoditized'. Sometimes the function is repeated a third time. It is significant that the same child could be outdoored on three separate occasions. One would begin to ask if this is to give the child three different names. Perhaps one could say that the child is being inducted into three separate spheres of social life. That is an acceptance into the father's lineage, into the mother's lineage, and into the matrilineal kin group of its mother. This fact is apparent because the child is first of all named by the father, showed publicly to his mother's matrilineal relation and friends, and again publicly outdoored for the benefit of his mother's mother's friends and trading associates. Two outdoorings may be acceptable given the fact of separate residences of husbands and wives, but why a third? The issue at stake is not as simplistic as it looks. The baby has become a commodity which has to be "traded" in the guise of traditional naming rituals.

The assertion that the Ga outdoor ceremony is different and newly emergent is based on the fact that the traditional gift exchange system evident at most naming ceremonies in Ghana have moved beyond a simple stage of reciprocity into the sphere of commodity exchange (see Hart, 1982:38-49; Gregory, 1982; and Kopytoff in Appadurai, 1992:64-91). This, unlike the traditional naming ceremony which is the responsibility of the couple and the child's father's relations, is often organized by the child's mother and her matrilineal relations. It is notable that women have

become the organizers of the newly emergent outdoor ceremony. It was explained that men do not organize this new type of outdoor ceremony because they do not often belong to trade associations and women's organizations who usually help to make them a success.

The characteristic feature of this second type of newly emergent 'outdoor' is that it is organised on a business like-basis. It is the responsibility of matrilinear relations to invite their friends and business associates to the ceremony of their female kin. Invitations are sent out either by word of mouth or through invitation cards about a fortnight before the function. The members of one's matricomplex, church and associations are expected to attend and donate lavishly.

The mother or mother's mother's important business associates are invited, and where they are unable to attend, they send in their donation through a delegate. It is the mother of the baby and her matrilinear relation who decide who should be invited. The father of the baby may bring in his friends if he is responsible enough and can ensure that his friends are not daa toloi or 'drunkards'. The notable absence of men of no importance from these ceremonies indicates that the women organising the ceremony are careful about the category of men to invite. The few important men who are able to attend the function are given a seat at the high table and served well. The unimportant men and women who are incapable of donating money hung on the fringes and scramble for food with the non-entities.

On the day of the function several food items are prepared by the concerted efforts of matrilinearly related females and their friends who rally to help. The food is provided by the leader or organizer of the function. Friends and relatives sometimes donate food items.

The ceremony begins with an announcement by an eloquent woman designated by the leader, that the mother's 'mother' is overjoyed at the birth of her grand son/daughter and wants to congratulate her daughter for her safe delivery by donating an amount of say c20,000, a bucket, baby dresses and so forth. This initial presentation is followed by presentations from other donors. Each time a donation is given, the donor is served with food and drink. The sort of drink and food varies with the amount of the donation. It is significant to note the shift that has occurred in mode of presentation and serving of drinks and food to invitees. This is unlike the former naming ceremony where all invitees were served with corn drink and the Gin used for naming the child. The question is, why should the Ga of Central Accra now give drinks and food varying in quality and sophistication in relation to the amount of donation presented?

There is a great show and display of new dresses and cloth. The jala yeloi market associates of the women in the matricomplex come dressed identically, usually in white cloth with either blue or red designs. They donate lavishly, especially if the outdoor is for the daughter, or sister of a big time trader whose matricomplex members

frequently attend other people's outdoorings. There is carefully monitored reciprocity, and often very keen competition among peers. If, for example, one donates cl,000 at your outdooring, you should donate more than that at that person's outdooring.

On the whole women have found "outdooring" a thriving and lucrative business. The danger, however, is that a large number of young girls are being tempted by its attractions, and consequently getting pregnant with the hope of having an 'outdooring'. It must be added, however, that not all women who organize an outdooring make some profit. The outdooring ceremony, like trade, is an art that has to be learned. One has to weigh one's probable income against expenditure and act accordingly. A woman who has mastered the 'art' would want to have it more often than one who had previously lost. The ceremony and its new trends continue to be popular because some women gain from it. These women, therefore, become the prototypes to be followed.

There are some variations in the outdooring ceremony described above depending on one's religion, membership of an association or 'matricomplex'. All of these outdooring ceremonies, however, usually take consideration of the profits to be accrued. Essentially, it is those women who belong to an association or women's organisation that benefit from the elaborate outdoorings. This is because the association members would always contribute large sums of money for their group members. Such associations and the women within them gain public recognition by the amount of money that they are able to contribute to the 'commoditized functions' such as 'outdooring' and funerals. Their credibility in terms of group purchases and of public recognition is also enhanced. Thus outdoorings should be seen as an aspect of economic activity, particularly as a source of trading capital.

MEN'S PERCEPTIONS AND REACTIONS

Although it has been alluded to that some men are aware of the manipulations of some traditional rituals by women for economic gains, this has so far remained anecdotal. An attempt was therefore made to have an idea of what men's perceptions to such manipulations are and what their reactions would be if they should become victims in a survey of 300 long distance truck drivers. Majority (64%) of the men felt that it was possible for women to manipulate men for economic gains under various circumstances. Most of them felt that women can do that "When they have sex with the man" (22%). Others felt that women can manipulate men by enticing them through conversation, cooking and washing for them, and having a child for them (19%). Still others felt that women can do that by pretending to be pregnant or sick (12%).

The survey seems to support previous observations of the crumbling of high fertility supports, and hence desires, in Ghana nearly two decades ago (Caldwell, 1968a,

Opong, 1978). A very large majority (82%) said it is not always their intention to have a baby with any woman they have sex with. However, a much reduced majority (59%) said they do not entertain any fears about the possibility of their sexual act with a woman resulting in a baby. Only about 44 per cent of these (26% of the total) directly attributed their nonchalant attitude to the desire for children. The rest said they were not afraid because they either don't have sex with other women apart from their wives (23%) or they use condom (17%). In fact, about 47 per cent of those who said they were afraid (16% of the total) stated categorically that they "Do not want any more children". As a further proof of the men's desire not to have children with any woman, majority (56%) of them stated that they would either have nothing to do with a woman they do not want to have a baby with or use the condom if they have to. It appears men are responding to the harsh economic conditions in the country. There is evidence to indicate that economic considerations are an important factor in determining family size. The costs of keeping a child in school exert pressure on the parental generation to keep family size small (Caldwell, 1968; Opong, 1974a).

The perceived reactions of the men to the manipulation of women for economic gains were interesting. Nearly half of them said they would stop seeing a woman if they realized that she wanted to have a baby for monetary gains. Others felt strongly about it and said they would feel cheated (20%). In the commoditization of child birth described above men appear to be passive players and feel trapped when they realize the mischief. Just as it has been described for Ga men above, majority of the men (56%) stated that they would accept and love the resultant child. As some of them said, "The child is my own blood."

However, the men's reactions about relationships with prostitutes were not very favourable. Nearly 56 per cent said they would not accept it if a prostitute they had ever slept with should impregnate them in a pregnancy. Only 36 per cent said they would accept the resultant child. Like elsewhere in the world, prostitution is highly stigmatized in Ghana. For that reason, men who go to prostitutes keep it a secret. So strong is the stigma that in the survey for this paper a quarter of the respondents refused to answer the question on prostitutes because it was about prostitutes. In fact, nearly 6 out of 10 of the men said they wouldn't care if the prostitute would want to take the resultant baby away from them. The main reason given was that the child belongs to the mother. Others added that they couldn't take such a child home as it would be an embarrassment.

Discussion and Recommendations

Although there is evidence of fertility decline in Ghana (Ghana, 1995), the level is still high and we cannot be fully certain whether the trend will remain sustained

and irreversible. The high level fertility in Ghana, like elsewhere in Africa, is said to reflect a high demand for children. There is also the view that men are domineering and are generally passive about fertility issues. As a result, not only are fertility studies disproportionately centred on women, policies are also predominantly female-specific. The recipe that has been suggested to arrest the situation include a strong dose of policies that will empower women such as improvement in female education, enhancement of women's legal rights and making family planning services available to more women.

This paper seems to suggest that sections of Ghanaian women have achieved a certain measure of autonomy. However, instead of using their autonomy to reduce their fertility, they are rather using it to perpetuate the high fertility levels. The main driving force behind the women's action is poverty which is further fuelled by harsh economic conditions and austere economic policies embodied in structural adjustment programmes.

Poverty is compelling women to either remain subservient to men or to indulge in certain rituals which directly have a bearing on their fertility. In the manipulation of the otherwise acceptable traditional rituals, men are completely left out in the scheme of things. However, there is anecdotal evidence that they are aware of the manipulations by women. Given the much talked about domineering posture of African men, why are they not reacting to these activities of women? It appears that they are compelled to fall in line because the issues involved are in accordance with culturally accepted norms and mores. In spite of that, Ghanaian men do not appear to fancy the idea of being manipulated by women for financial gains and will kick against it if they become aware of it. But in the event where such relationship results in pregnancy, the resultant child is still very much welcome for cultural and normative reasons.

We still need to empower women through improved education and enhancement of their legal rights. But these will not make any meaningful impact if they are not linked with their economic emancipation. In a situation where children have become the means for creating links to men's resource networks and those of other groups formed specifically for such purpose, the family planning message will continue to make marginal impact. In that regard, women's economic rights should be improved so as to open for them several alternatives to children as sources of working capital and old age security.

To ensure that children are not seen merely as means to economic ends, policies must be put in place that raise the costs of children relative to their benefits. Men, for example, should be compelled by legislation to shoulder completely the upkeep of their children whether or not they come in wedlock.

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