

Gendered Power Relations and Household Decision Making in Rural Ghana. A study of  
Zambo in the Lawra District of the Upper West Region of Ghana

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## **Abstract**

Some Western scholarship on African studies have shown that patriarchy is absolute in many African societies and women are mostly the victims of this system. Such patriarchy has created wide gender gaps between men and women, resulting in women being either overlooked, oppressed, or suppressed. The main aim of this research was to examine the nature of gender relations and gendered power dynamics between husbands and wives, and how such power dynamics impact women's household decision-making powers. Drawing on African feminist epistemologies and feminist standpoint theories, this research drew significantly from the experiences and narratives of 10 rural women, who form the most marginalized demographic in Ghana. The study focused on decisions around reproduction and child upbringing, household income generation and distribution, and religious practices. Findings reveal that women bear major economic responsibilities in their families, making them the ultimate decision-makers in almost all aspects of household decision-making. However, they are constrained by many social, economic, and cultural factors that limit their opportunities to gain any economic or social independence. The findings further show that women, in their subordinate positions, are capable of resisting patriarchal power in complex ways despite public declarations of rural African women as powerless. The study recommends that future research should investigate, among other things, the varied ways in which both the state and non-governmental organizations may promote both the social and economic development of women. Further research could highlight the perspectives of men considering the negative views women have of men.

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## **Dedication**

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

A growing body of literature has documented the nature of gendered power dynamics in household decision-making in many parts of the Global South. Such studies generally focus on women's bargaining power in household decision-making and demonstrate that women's power to participate actively in household decisions depends on their economic contribution to the household. The studies establish that, given rural women's precarious economic conditions, they wield marginal power in household decisions in many parts of the Global South (Ahsraf, 2009; Attanasio & Lechene, 2002; Bradshaw, 2013; Himmelweit, Santo, Sevilla, & Sofa, 2013; Kpoor, 2014).

Burgess and Beilstein (1996) blame women's marginalization in most parts of Africa, but especially within households, largely on European colonialism, which they claim had imposed alien patriarchal social structures and thus relegated women to the domestic sphere of reproduction and caregiving. Although Burgess and Beilstein suggest that female subordination in rural African societies is a result of Western colonialism, evidence indicates that female marginalization is a defining feature of most societies, whether in industrialized or in developing countries (Awumbila, 2006; Sikod, 2007). As Sathiparsad, Taylor, and Dlamini (2008) argue, gendered power relations in almost every society have historically privileged men and their interests. However, while women's activism and the resultant legislations have tended to mediate the degree of women's marginalization in the West, especially in the contemporary era (although in western societies women still struggle with pay equality in the labour market as well as unpaid labour in the household), patriarchal dynamics have remained significantly unaltered in

most parts of the Global South. These power dynamics have continued to define the nature of gender relations in these societies, including African countries. Studies suggest that such patriarchal power dynamics are most significantly demonstrated in household decision-making (Porter, 2011).

The household therefore is seen as a locus of competing interests, rights, obligations, and resources, where household members are often involved in uneven bargaining, negotiation, and possibly even conflict (Kandiyoti, 2005). As studies show, the patriarchal power structure in households significantly restricts women's participation in decision-making, especially in crucial economic matters pertaining to agricultural products (Ansoglenang, 2006; Kongolo & Bamgose, 2002; Moyer et al., 2014). The subordinate status of women in household power structures in many parts of the Global South is often so extensive that it sometimes undermines such fundamental individual decisions as the right to hold different religious beliefs or engage in different religious practices from those of husbands (Becker, Fonseca-Becker, & Schenck-Yglesias, 2006; Hindin, 2000; Kabeer, 1997).

This study examines the nature of gender relations and gendered power dynamics in household decision-making in rural Ghana. Ghana is a fitting context for this study given that gender relations in households in Ghana are mostly governed by patriarchal dynamics and husbands often interfere in their wives' life choices in Ghanaian households. The study uses a case example of the rural community of Zambo in the Lawra District of the Upper West Region of Ghana. Specifically, I examine the gendered power relations between husbands and wives and how such power dynamics impact household decisions. The study focuses mainly on decisions around household income generation and distribution, reproduction and child upbringing, and religious practices. I

chose to focus on these aspects of household decision-making because they are crucial to the welfare of individual household members and they often define the daily activities of most rural households in northern Ghana.

Drawing significantly from the experiences and narratives of rural Ghanaian women, this study aims to challenge the hegemonic knowledge of gender relations in Africa, but particularly in Ghana, which often excludes the voice of these marginalized women in the social production of knowledge about their own lives. The work also contributes to African feminist epistemology and the rural sociology of African societies by documenting gendered power relations in a typical rural community in Ghana.

### **Rationale for the Study**

This study is motivated by the dearth of knowledge regarding the processes and effects of patriarchal power dynamics on women in rural Ghana. Building upon studies that indicate patriarchal power dynamics are most significantly demonstrated in the basic social unit of rural communities—that is, the household (Ansoglenang, 2006; Moyer et al., 2014; Porter, 2011)—this study sought to reveal the nature of gendered power relations in a typical Ghanaian community. I focused on a rural community because studies show that rural women are among the most marginalized demographic in Ghana (Angel-Urdinola & Wodon, 2010; Apusigah, 2009; Kongolo & Bamgose, 2002). The study aims to close the lacuna in knowledge on the nature of gendered power relations in rural African households. The results are also expected to serve as major resource materials for government and non-governmental organizations in the design and implementation of programs and policies on rural household in Ghana, which in turn may empower rural Ghanaian women.

## **Research Questions**

My investigation of household decision-making experiences of rural women in Zambo, Ghana is framed by the following specific research questions:

1. Who makes the ultimate decision(s) concerning childbirth and child upbringing, and how are such decisions negotiated?
2. How is family income generated, who is the primary income earner, and who decides how income is distributed within the household?
3. Does every member of the family hold the same religious belief? Can wives maintain their own religious beliefs and practices?

## **Operational Definition of Concepts**

This section presents some definitions of the key concepts used in the study, including gender, rural household, power, and patriarchy.

### **Gender**

According to Davies (1996), the sociological concept of gender is shifting, and there is a move to regard gender as a relation and not an attribute. Gender as a relation affirms it as a social construction that draws attention away from the behaviour of particular men and women towards historically and culturally constructed masculinities and femininities from which subjectivities, identities, and behavioural regularities emerge. African feminist scholars such as Ifi Amadiume (2015) and Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997, 2000, 2011) have questioned the concept of gender as it is articulated in some Western scholarship; they argue that gender in African societies should be nested on the social and cultural understanding of gender roles, in different societies and at different times. Thus, in many African societies, gender as a term is not necessarily linked to

biological differences, and there are some unique cultural practices pertaining to a particular society where a female may take up social roles traditionally meant for a male; however, the adoption of such roles does not necessarily make the female “man-like” (Amadiume, 2015). In this regard, the concept of gender and gender relations as it relates to this study considers some of the social and cultural understandings that underlie the roles played by men and women alike.

### **Rural Households**

Many African households have some unique characteristics and its prevalent structure is relevant to this study. According to Hammel and Laslett (1974), African households may include one or more conjugal family units. In the rural communities, households are commonly separated from one another by rectangular enclosures. Households containing more than one conjugal family unit present a typical example of how research by Western feminist scholars focus on nuclear family arrangements may be less applicable to African situations. Unlike the West where bigamy is a crime, polygynous family relations are not only acceptable in most African societies (especially in the rural areas) but are also legal. As a result, household decision-making may involve a man and more than one wife simultaneously (Ickowitz & Mohanty, 2015).

According to Ghana’s statistical service, for instance, a household may encompass either a person or a group of persons who live together in the same house or compound and share the same housekeeping arrangements (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). Since the purpose of this study is to examine power dynamics between husbands and wives in rural households with respect to decision-making, rural households are

conceptualized as consisting of one or more conjugal family units who live together in the same compound/house and share the same housekeeping arrangements.

### **Power**

Power within the household is unlike any other form of power because within the household, members who act as managers and workers are parents, siblings, and children who share familial relations and love (Kabeer, 1997). The definition of power is contextual; Godwin, Gubin, Fiske, and Yzerbyt (2000), for instance, define power as “the nature of outcome control and outcome dependencies in a social relationship” (p. 228), which recognizes people who control others’ outcomes are relatively powerful whereas people whose outcomes depend on others are relatively powerless. Thus, within a rural household, any person or group of persons who control the behaviour and livelihood of other household members are considered powerful while those household members whose livelihoods depend on a particular household member or members are considered powerless. While Godwin et al. define power on the basis of dependencies, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee (2003) define it as the ability to control resources without any social interference. The wielding of power by one dominant group over another in many rural African societies is culturally constructed in varying forms, which become the defining parameters for resource acquisition and distribution as well as in decision-making processes. For this study, power is conceptually defined as the ability of one or more household members to dominate and have control over decision-making at the expense of other household members.

**Patriarchy**

For the purposes of this study, patriarchy is defined as a cultural construct that sets the parameters of power relations between men and women within a society. It is characterized by male dominance, male rule, and culturally sanctioned male superiority. Also, it perceives the status of females as inferior to males. Discussions in this thesis are couched in this understanding of patriarchy.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses the various theoretical perspectives that have informed the conception of my research problem as well as the entire framework of the study. These include African feminist epistemologies—especially the works of Ifi Amadiume (2015) and Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997, 2000, 2011)—and feminist standpoint epistemology, most notably the perspectives of Dorothy Smith (1999), Sandra Harding (1991, 1993), and Patricia Hill Collins (1991, 1997). These theoretical frameworks are discussed below.

### **African Feminist Epistemologies**

Most African feminist scholars, especially Oyeronke Oyewumi and Ifi Amadiume, share a theoretical position that Western concepts of gender and feminism are not suitable frameworks for understanding gender relations in African societies. While their studies primarily focus on two different African societies, the Oyo-Yoruba and Igbo people of Nnobi, they see the notion of gender in Africa as fundamentally an epistemological one.

Oyewumi (2011) starts from the position that to understand the structures of gender and gender relations in Africa, we must start with Africa. She argues that in order to develop valid theories of gender, all types of experiences from around the world need to be documented. Thus, we need to pay attention to the continuous ways in which gender is made and remade in everyday interactions, and gender should be viewed more as a *process* of gendering rather than something inherent in our social relations. With specific reference to Oyo-Yoruba culture and traditions, Oyewumi (1997) posits that gender in Yoruba society is not solely determined by biology (sex). She explains that the Yoruba categories *Obinrin* and *Okunrin* do not connote female and male categories.

Oyewumi (1997) maintains that these categories are neither binarily opposed nor hierarchical; instead, they are primarily categories of anatomy, suggesting no underlying assumptions about the personalities and psychologies deriving from each. As such, female/male categories are not sexually dimorphic and therefore are not gendered; the only distinction between the two categories pertains to issues of reproduction. According to Oyewumi (1997), Yoruba distinctions were superficial and did not involve the same social hierarchical dimensions assumed in some western-based categorizations of gender, hence gender was simply not inherent in a Yoruba social organization.

Oyewumi (1997) also notes that the Yoruba language is nongendered: pronouns are nongendered, most names are not gender-specific, and the kinship terms of the Yoruba do not encode gender. Oyewumi (1997) reports that the Yoruba instead encode seniority, based on relative age—a reflection that seniority is the most important principle for the social organization of status and hierarchy in Yoruba culture (p. 42). The prevalence of the age categorization in the Yoruba language and culture indicates that relative age is a pivotal principle of social organization. Kinship terms among the Yoruba are also encoded by age relativity. Kinship lines among the Yoruba thus are determined by the relative age and not by gender or sex. In her analysis, Oyewumi (1997) indicates that seniority is just not about civility; it confers some measure of social control and obedience to authority that reinforces the idea of leadership.

Some other aspects of Yoruba social structure, such as the inheritance system, is predicated on the idea that only consanguineal relations could inherit from one another; that is, siblings and children of the deceased are the primary beneficiaries. The fact that

couples could not inherit each other's property makes it necessary for women in Yoruba society to be gainfully employed (Oyewumi, 1997).

With regards to general household division of labour, Oyewumi (1997) points out that such roles are based on age relativity, with the younger people and children expected to clean up after meals. Within the lineage system, an *aya*<sup>1</sup> cooked the meals. The seniority system in the lineage also means that any female who is not an *aya* does not have to cook. Likewise, in a polygamous marriage, the responsibility for providing food for the conjugal partner is passed on to the younger *aya*. Oyewumi (1997) also notes that providing food is different than *cooking* food.

Likewise, heading a household does not connote a single individual who is in charge of all the decisions. Due to the nature of lineage systems being segmented as well as being multi-layered and multigenerational, power is located in a multiplicity of sites, and tied to social role identities that are multiple and shifting for each individual depending on the situation. Power in this sense does not privilege one category at the expense of the other. Each member of the lineage and household experiences and holds power in varying forms and degrees with regards to their hierarchical position in the household, which again is determined by their relative age.

In Yoruba culture and traditions, physical bodies are not always social bodies. According to Oyewumi (1997), within the Yoruba society in the pre-colonial era, social positions of people constantly shifted in relation to those with whom they were interacting; consequently, social identity was relational and not essentialized. Thus, one's biological sex did not translate to a specific gender identity. Even social rankings of

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<sup>1</sup> A member by marriage.

individuals depended first and foremost on seniority, which was usually defined by relative age.

Oyewumi (2000) also emphatically points out that gender identities and power are structured differently in many African societies (specifically among old Oyo Yorubas), and they do not necessarily correspond to Western sex categories. Thus, among the Yorubas, wifehood tends to function more like a role than a deeply rooted identity, and it is usually deployed strategically. Motherhood is rather a cherished and preferred self-identity, gained not only through child-rearing but also in the living arrangements that persisted in old Oyo Yoruba societies, which offered a multiplicity of mothers and fathers. Many mothers were able to share in childcare responsibilities and these enabled mothers of childbearing age to be free and pursue whatever activities they pleased. Notwithstanding, motherhood was the most valued institution in Yorubaland and anything that made a female a more effective mother was promoted even if it impinged on other people and other engagements (Oyewumi, 1997). Thus, being a mother meant that one was capable of providing for one's children materially and as such motherhood was regarded as an impetus to economic activities.

Furthermore, the institution of marriage in an Oyo Yoruba society was essentially a relationship between lineages (Oyewumi, 1997). This relationship conferred paternity rights to the lineage of the groom on children born during the course of the marriage. As such, any child born of the bride, irrespective of the biological father, was regarded as belonging to the legal partner of the bride. Oyewumi (1997) further notes that such arrangements did not confer rights over the bride or her labour to the lineage of the groom—meaning, the single purpose of the bride-wealth, which was paid by the lineage

of the groom, was to confer only sexual and paternity rights and not the rights to the bride's person, her property, or her labour. Such arrangements therefore did not impose any subordination of a female to her conjugal partner. Women within this society could be seen as autonomous since the only reason for marriage was procreation. The right to become a mother thereby superseded all other considerations in a marriage, such as the right to wifehood.

Oyewumi (1997) in her work on the old Oyo Yoruba culture and traditions has documented that the problem of gender in African studies has generally been treated as a woman question; that is, the issue of how much women are oppressed by patriarchy in any given society. Moreover, there has been a failure to acknowledge that some African societies in the precolonial era were matriarchal. In short, the study of Yoruba culture informs us that gender as a category of analysis cannot be invoked in the same manner and to the same degree in different situations across time and space.

Similarly, Amadiume's (2015) study also offers new insight and understanding into the nature of gender and gender relations in an African society by criticizing both anthropology and Western feminism that have only studied and analyzed African societies through Western eyes and concepts. Amadiume further states that her interest has been in explaining the systems and structures within an African society that made it possible for women to exercise power or to be part of the power structure as subjects, not objects.

Amadiume (2015) argues that although gender as a category of analysis works for Western societies and cultures, the same analytical framework could not be applied to other parts of the Global South, especially in most rural societies of Africa. She further

demonstrates how the study of the histories, traditions, and cultures of any African society is important in understanding the gender relations and the central positions of women in that society. She uses the Igbo people of Nnobi community as a case example.

Gender differentiation of roles in most parts of rural Africa are mediated by the flexibility of gender constructions in language and culture. Using Igbo cultures and languages as a case example, Amadiume (2015) demonstrates that there are some neutral terms used in the construction of gender that create a looseness of gender association. As a result, daughters can be conceptualized as males in ritual matters and politically in relation to wives; however, this does not imply that daughters should be seen as “man-like” (Amadiume, 2015, p. 17). Hence, gender construction in these societies does not necessarily stem from biological differences.

According to the origin myth of the Nnobi community, the name Nnobi was derived from “mother”—*Nne Obi*.<sup>2</sup> In the origin story, *Edo*<sup>3</sup> inherits industriousness from her mother, the goddess *Idemili*,<sup>4</sup> thus assigning the female gender a more prominent place both in the myth as well as in indigenous religious and cultural concepts. The name of the town therefore was derived from a woman. In the Nnobi community, female cash crops such as cocoyam, plantain, and cassava compensated for the shortage of yam as a staple food. Cocoyam, according to the Nnobi myth, grew out of a female head. As such it required less specialized knowledge than did the yam. Similarly, cassava, when it was introduced into Igboland, was also considered a female crop because it too required little specialized knowledge, although it demanded a lot of time and hard labour to harvest and

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<sup>2</sup> Mother of Obi.

<sup>3</sup> Daughter of Aho (the hunter from the wild) and Idemili (the supernatural and miraculous woman).

<sup>4</sup> The supernatural goddess from a sacred stream and also is the central religious deity of Nnobi.

process into food. Nnobi, therefore, depended heavily on female labour in agriculture. Women were thus expected to gain prestige and power from their control, successful management of, and effective organization around this subsistence economy.

Amadiume (2015) explains that the notion of “male daughters” was often conferred to daughters of families without male children—daughters who wanted to stay in their father’s compound to regenerate the family lines (p. 32). In such instances, the man will recall his daughter from her marital home to come and remain in his house as a male. This way, the daughter gains the status of a son, and is able to inherit her father’s property. This practice was known as *nhayikwa*,<sup>5</sup> a kind of replacement in Nnobi (and most Igbo) customs.

According to Amadiume (2015), the institution of *igba ohu* was practiced by women who had the *Ekwe*<sup>6</sup> title. A woman who practiced *igba ohu* then became a “female husband,” whereby she bought slaves from other towns in order to claim their services (Amadiume, 2015, p. 46). In the context of Amadiume’s study, *igba ohu* is translated as woman-to-woman marriage; however, the woman who was bought had the status and customary right of a wife, with respect to the woman who bought her, who is referred to as her husband. As such, she might give the wife a male concubine for the wife to bear children in her name. The “female husband” in this instance had the same rights as a man over his wife. The institution of “female husbands” was a practice through which women increased their labour force, wealth, and prestige. The institutions of “male daughters” and “female husbands” within the Nnobi community demonstrate

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<sup>5</sup> Officially placing a daughter in the position of a son, thus making her a male.

<sup>6</sup> A title taken by women and associated with the goddess Idemili.

the peculiarity of a traditional African ideology governing the sexual division of labour and gender relations.

The flexible gender system in Nnobi resulted in both role ambiguity and status ambiguity. Thus, in the political system, there was flexibility in gender classification which allowed certain categories of women to be incorporated into the male category, giving them positions of authority in the power structure. The political administration of Nnobi was embedded in the religious structure with both patriarchal and matriarchal ideologies juxtaposed in the political structure. The community did not have kings in the sense of a centralized system under a monarch and as such, *Ekwe* titled women at each wider level of political organization ruled over women, while *ozo*<sup>7</sup> titled men played the role of “big men” (Amadiume, 2015, p. 55).

Within the Nnobi community, the flexibility of gender construction meant that gender roles were not determined by biology, and so daughters socially could become sons and consequently males. Daughters and women, in general, could be husbands to wives and consequently males in relation to their wives. Women could also have access to economic resources and positions of authority and power. The fact that biological sex did not correspond to ideological gender meant that women could play roles usually monopolized by men, or be classified as “males” in terms of power and authority over others (Amadiume, 2015, p. 185).

Similarly, the institution of woman-to-woman marriage was practiced not only among the Igbos of Nigeria. Chuku (2005) reports that woman-to-woman marriage also was practised among the Bamileke of Cameroon, the Luo of Kenya, as well as the Dinka

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<sup>7</sup> A title taken by Igbo men which introduces them into both ritual and political élites in their various villages or towns.

and Nuer of Sudan. While a woman assumed the social function of a husband to another woman in such cultures, this form of social relationship did not involve sexual relations among the two women. Instead, the female husband contacted a man to fulfil the biological sexual role while she played the social role and fulfilled her economic responsibility for her wife and children. In this regard, the children belonged to the female husband as she paid the bride wealth of their mother. Among these societies, this institution served several functions including compensating barrenness, continuation of lineage, and source of prestige.

Nonetheless, the colonial period stripped off the indigenous institutions of “male daughters” and “female husbands” in Igboland. These institutions were condemned by the churches as “pagan” and anti-Christian. As such, they became either abandoned or reinterpreted to the detriment of women (Amadiume, 2015, p. 123). Consequently, the *Ekwe* title, which was both a social and a political acknowledgement of female economic success, and therefore a reward for female industriousness, was banned and women were deprived of their leadership roles and authorities. Women were also excluded from the colonial political administration in Nnobi and elsewhere in Igboland, causing them to lead mass demonstrations and riots all over Igboland at various times between 1928-1980.

The economic power of women also declined when the colonial government was established. Amadiume (2015) reports that under the influence of the church, colonial rule introduced petty commodity production and a new cash economy that brought about changes both in the traditional methods of production as well as consequent changes in the relations of production. As a result, women lost both some degree of economic independence and their monopoly over the processing and sale of certain food items, as

well as their power to apply economic sanctions in both the domestic and the public sphere. Men, on the other hand, found a new independence in work or trade relations with European businesses. In sum, Nnobi women became constrained, less mobile, and generally poorer while men gained new wealth and became richer (Amadiume, 2015). This suggests that although the effects of colonization in Nnobi and other Igboland communities was detrimental to the indigenous peoples, they were experienced in varying forms and degrees among men and women, with women being the groups affected the most and consequently pushed to a subordinate and marginalized position in relation to their male counterparts.

Amadiume's (2015) study of the Igbo people of the Nnobi community has demonstrated the fluidity of gender in a typical African society, and the very real authority exercised by women in traditional African political systems during the precolonial era. Using her study as an example, we see the tremendous effect of colonization on some indigenous societies and how the West imposed male rule and male supremacy in these societies. Amadiume further acknowledges that the reason women lack authority and power today is because policies initiated by rigid Western categories of gender relegate women to the sphere of domestic tasks and private life, and deem men as the only gender capable of shouldering the burden of public affairs.

Over the decades, some Afrocentric scholars have sought to address the issue of female political and social power in precolonial Africa, with specific reference to certain ethnic communities in Ghana (Akyeampong & Fofack, 2014; Farrar, 1997; Odamtten, 2012). Such scholars have tended to place the discussion within the broader context of matriarchy. They agree with the theory that matriarchy is the most ancient family form

and maintain that it is older in Africa than anywhere else in the world. Among the Akan ethnic group, the queen mother (the *ohemma*<sup>8</sup>) wielded true political power and under certain conditions could assume full control of central authority; thus, she could become the “king”—the *omanhene* (Farrar, 1997). In most cases, the queen mother was regarded as the most powerful person in the state. The matrilineal descent system of the Akans, for example, plays a huge role in their social and political structure. For a woman to qualify as an *ohemma*, she needed to be a senior female of the royal family. Thus, the Akan *ohemma* holds her title based on seniority and not on her filial relationship to a particular male.

Likewise, among the Gas of the east-coastal areas of Ghana, social relations were based in a cognatic ideology rather than a male superiority ideology (Odamttan, 2012). As such, there was the need to not only place man and woman at the centre of Ga existence, but also to ensure a reflection of the gender balance that is needed for Ga existence. Ga political power and authority was also significantly tied to religion. The Gas had a dual-gendered divinity and their spiritual divinity was critical in understanding the significant leadership roles and social and spiritual powers that could be designated to or acquired by a woman in Ga society. Because of the dual-gendered divinity that existed among the Gas, leadership roles were held by men and women equally and did not translate into male superiority and female inferiority. Inheritance and succession among the Gas was within the ancestral clans of all four grandparents of a person of Ga birth (Odamttan, 2012). The Gas believed that although a Ga person’s bloodline comes from

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<sup>8</sup> Literal meaning: female ruler.

his or her patrilineage, the person also carried the blood of all four grandparents and hence could inherit from both sides.

The existence of dual descent system among the Gas and matriarchy among the Akans supports the claim raised by Oyewumi (1997) and Amadiume (2015) that the notion of gender in Africa is an epistemological one and that the way in which gender may be conceived in the West cannot necessarily be applied in doing gender studies in Africa. The examples of these societies further show us the fluidity of gender in some African societies and at the same time demonstrate how women in precolonial Africa wielded real power and authority in their various communities.

### **Feminist Standpoint Theories**

Feminist standpoint approaches were first introduced in the 1970s and 1980s, derived mainly from a Marxist theory deeply rooted in the assumption that knowledge is socially situated and based primarily on the lives of men in dominant races, classes, and cultures (Allen, 1996). Feminist standpoint theory also involves an understanding of the experience and perspective of women as part of a larger social setting (Lenz, 2004). According to Allen (1996), feminist standpoint theory provides an interpretative framework for explaining how the social construction of knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power.

Drawing mainly from the positions and arguments raised by Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, and Sandra Harding, I present the need for a feminist standpoint theory and methodology in highlighting the actual lived experiences of rural women in their daily gender relations. Dorothy Smith (1999), one of the forerunners of this theory, holds that a woman's standpoint is the best place to begin an inquiry into the social as it

relates to the ruling relations, which entail the nested process of knowledge production in which women's epistemologies and lived experiences occupy marginal positions.

Exploring the social from a woman's standpoint is to recognize her in and through her lived experience and her practices as the knower, reader, and thinker (Smith, 1999).

Reporting from a woman's standpoint is not just about her lived experiences and perspectives but also involves a matter of knowing from the woman's relations of ruling—including her position of exclusion or marginalization (Smith, 1990, as cited in Clough, 1993).

Smith (1999) also posits that beginning an inquiry from the standpoint of women proposes a different approach from what she calls "established sociology," the sociology in which she was trained (p. 4). According to Smith, this established sociology entails an inquiry that ordinarily begins from a standpoint situated in a text-mediated discourse or organization. Consequently, it tends to objectify people's experience and explain their behaviour by selectively assembling observations of the world that are ordered discursively. However, a woman's activities, feelings, and experiences place her in an extended social relation, linking her activities to others and in ways beyond her knowing. This way, the standpoint of a woman never leaves the actual making of the knowing subject, located always in a particular spatial and temporal site, a particular configuration of the everyday world (Smith, 1999, p. 5).

Smith (1999) further argues that developing sociology from women's standpoint proposes an inquiry beginning in the local particularities of everyday experience. This would allow for an exploration of how the ruling relations are accomplished as local practices. However, this sociology not only speaks of women but also seeks a method of inquiry

that extends and expands what we can discover from the local settings of our everyday living. This also means reconstructing the method of thinking of this new sociology.

According to Krouse (2000), Smith's goal in advocating for a sociology from women's standpoint is to ensure that actual experiences, especially women's experiences, are the starting point from which to expose the powers that organize consciousness in the ruling relations. In other words, what Smith (1999) claims here is that some standpoints—specifically the social positions of marginalized or oppressed groups—can be the best way to inform social theory (Doucet, 2018).

Similarly, Collins's (1997) standpoint theory highlights “an interpretive framework dedicated to explicating how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power” (p. 375). Collins (1997) further states that the notion of standpoint refers to groups having shared histories based on their shared location in relations of power. Thus, when we ignore the unequal power relations in groups, we simply misread the essence of standpoint theory, its state of being, its continuing salience, and its ability to explain social inequality. There is the need to acknowledge that individuals within the same group do not necessarily have the same experiences or even interpret their experiences in the same way. Thus, it is difficult to move the experiences and thoughts of subordinated groups into the centre of any analysis without first validating those experiences individually (Collins, 1991).

Collins (1997) also points out that gender introduces a different level of intellectual and political issue: thus, intersectionality within standpoint theory. This is because women are distributed across other groups such as race and social class. While all women may share the same proximity to physical space, they occupy fundamentally different locations

in hierarchical power relations. Therefore, developing a theory for women involves confronting a different and more complex set of issues than those facing race theories or class-based theories because women's inequality is structured differently. With her writing mainly focused on Black feminism, Collins (1991) demonstrates that Black feminist thought and Black women's experiences highlight the interlocking nature of race, class, and gendered oppression. Black feminist thought offers an approach to examining other groups' experiences, not as a normative, evaluative model but as a procedural one of how to think of race, class, and gender simultaneously (Collins, 1991, p. 373).

While Smith (1999) focuses on the need to centre the actual and lived experiences of women as the starting point to begin an enquiry into the social, Collins (1991, 1997) also introduces an important factor into the theory: intersectionality, in addressing the unjust systems of power that standpoint theory seeks to dismantle.

Harding's (1993) contribution to standpoint theory suggests that in societies stratified by race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality, the activities of those at the top organize and set limits on how persons can perform their activities and understand themselves and the world around them. The activities of those at the bottom of such social hierarchies, however, can provide starting points for thoughts from which people's relations with each other and the natural world can become visible. The implication here is that standpoint theory advocates using the everyday lives of marginalized peoples, especially women, as a foundation for constructing knowledge and as a basis for criticizing dominant knowledge claims that are based on men's lives (Harding, 1991).

According to Harding (1991), one advantage of informing knowledge from the study of women's lives is that it might enable women and other oppressed groups to

improve the conditions of their lives, because as “strangers” or “outsiders” they can identify patterns that are not easily identifiable by “natives” or “insiders” (see Allen, 1996, p. 259). Thus, when women speak about their views, they could reveal aspects of the social order which may be difficult to see. When women verbalize their lived experiences, knowledge emerges that can have transformative value, particularly when women speak of their struggles. Harding’s approach to standpoint theory and methodology focuses on how knowledge creation from the standpoint of women can act as a form of social resistance, which can offer a perspective that seeks both to understand and change existing practices.

### **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

Ifi Amadiume (2015) and Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997, 2000, 2011) have demonstrated the fluidity of gender and gender relations in some African societies. They also have shown the roles of African women in their traditional societies prior to colonization and how colonization stripped women of their social statuses and roles and relegated them into the domestic sphere significantly subordinate to men. Their studies further pointed out the ethnocentric position of some dominant Western scholarship—a position that assumes a universal subordination of all women at all times in history and in all cultures.

However, Amadiume and Oyewumi acknowledged in their individual studies that although the findings of their works are applicable to many African societies, they were not going to apply them broadly because they did not want to erase a multitude of African cultures by making facile generalizations, a process that results in unnecessary homogenization of gender experiences. Instead, they maintain that their studies were not

designed to make such general claims among African societies and cultures as is the case with African gender studies conducted by some Western scholars. In their studies on the Igbo and Yoruba cultures, Amadiume and Oyewumi have shown that the experiences of African women are heterogeneous and not homogeneous as perceived by colonial Western discourses.

Consequently, Amadiume's and Oyewumi's studies reflect the ideas and arguments of feminist standpoint theory by highlighting the importance of knowledge creation from the standpoint of marginalized and oppressed groups, especially women. By documenting the social positionings of women prior to, during, and after colonization, they demonstrate how foregrounding women's lived experiences and daily realities is crucial in writing stories of African peoples. From the feminist standpoint theorists' perspectives, Smith (1999), Collins (1997) and Harding (1991) argue that the goal of standpoint theory is to explicate the power relations that organize the ruling relations or hierarchical power relations. Collins's contributions specifically focus on the need to consider the various intersections (race, social class, gender) that affect the experiences of marginalized groups, and how these intersections may cause differences in experiences for individuals who find themselves in the same social location in a hierarchical power relation.

By adopting a feminist standpoint perspective, this study not only reports from the actual lived experiences of rural women but also reflects on their social positionings within the household by presenting direct citations from these women exactly in the manner they were told to the researcher.

### **CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW**

A significant number of studies have documented the nature of gendered power relations across the diverse societies of Africa, and particularly in the household. This chapter provides a review of this body of work and covers issues such as gender relations and gender roles in African households, as well as power dynamics and decision-making in rural households.

#### **Gender Relations in Africa**

Examining the nature of gender relations in many African societies is crucial to understanding the structural roles that men and women play in social relations such as household decision-making (Daplah, 2013). Gender functions as an organizing principle in most societies, including rural Ghanaian societies, because of the cultural meanings attached to being a male or female. Such cultural meanings are most visible in the traditional division of labour within households. The underlying characteristics attributed to this gender division of labour determine the nature of power dynamics in households (Ampofo, 2001).

While African women are generally perceived as marginalized in gendered power structures, among certain ethnic communities in Ghana (such as the Efutu, Akans, and Gas), and among some ethnic communities in Malawi, women have autonomous power (Aidoo, 1985; Kathewera-Banda et al., 2011). Specifically, Aidoo (1985) notes that Akan communities are uniquely matrilineal, and confer a high degree of power and privilege on women. For instance, Akan women of Ghana are more advantaged and privileged in property rights, allowing them ownership of lands and the right to engage in their own economic activities such as farming and trading. Also, by their traditional customs, Akan

women can sue (and be sued) as well as initiate divorce on account of a sterile husband. The culture and traditions among the Akans of Ghana confer more privileges on women compared to men. Thus, an Akan woman does not lose her rights and access to land and her children upon divorce. In fact, she is readily accepted back into her matrilineage (Takyi & Gyimah, 2007). Moreover, the strength of the matriclan gives Akan women more bargaining power in relation to their husbands (La Ferrara, 2007). Consequently, Akan women continue to reside in their maternal household even after marriage, which further strengthens their independence and autonomous power in relation to their husbands.

The aforementioned studies show that although patriarchy exists in many rural African societies, it is not a homogenizing ideology that operates in similar ways across Africa as articulated by many Western discourses on gender relations in Africa. Some African societies operate on the basis of matriarchal ideologies, making women in such societies relatively autonomous while giving them certain legal and customary rites that are not accorded to men. As such, the experiences of African women are not homogenous and patriarchy is not a homogenizing characteristic of African societies.

Wrigley-Asante (2008) also reports that although the Ga-Dangmes of Ghana are a patrilineal group and women are culturally subordinate to men in relation to lineage decisions concerning ownership of properties and property distribution, some aspects of their cultural practices—like their residential arrangements—give women autonomy and independence. Thus, among the Ga-Dangmes, women usually live with their female matrilineal relatives even after marriage and the men live among their own patrilineal kins, a practice that gives women ample opportunity to engage in independent economic

activities. This supports earlier arguments by Amadiume (2015) that even in some patriarchal societies of Africa, certain cultural practices accord autonomy and power to women.

Apusigah (2009) similarly observes that in some ethnic groups in northern Ghana, such as the Nanumba and Mwamprushe, women can hold title as chiefs in specific communities and in that capacity wield the same powers as their male counterparts. Thus, they are able to control and mobilize both men and women as well as land and resources.

Similarly, a majority of women in sub-Saharan Africa face severe constraints with regards to their access to either educational, health, and market services, which in turn affects their livelihoods and life chances. Given that sub-Saharan African women's principal means of financial support is through agricultural production in association with trade, lack of access to market services affects their livelihoods and further challenges their life chances (Porter, 2011). Furthermore, the weight of demands made on women in the home, coupled with men associating women's long-distance travel to markets with promiscuity, leads women to become more and more immobile and to have less access to such services around them. These severe constraints can be attributed to strict patriarchal institutions and beliefs that shape social life in these rural areas (Porter, 2011). These patriarchal institutions often include uneven gender divisions of labour and husbands' dominance and control over wives, such as women's labour obligations as head porters for their husbands. Such heavy labour obligations restrict women's marketing mobility and their access to economic resources and decision-making processes.

Despite the various limitations, barriers, and constraints, Kongolo and Bamgose (2002) maintain that women in most rural African households carry out most of the

subsistence and near-subsistence agricultural activities, representing more than 80% of the agricultural labour force. Due to extreme poverty found in most rural areas of Africa, there tends to be a substantial dependence on subsistence agriculture for survival. This places a huge burden on women because they are not only the traditional producers of food for household consumption, but are also the group that does most of the subsistence agricultural activities. This implies that although most rural women in Africa are the backbone of rural communities and also provide household consumption needs (Tschamntke et al., 2012), they are profoundly marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes within the household as well as in the wider community mainly due to their subservient position in the household (Burgess & Beilstein, 1996; Kwami, 2016; Sikod, 2007).

According to Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2009), economic and socio-cultural factors militate against women's participation in both agricultural production and household economies. The different rules, norms, and values that govern gendered divisions of labour and the gendered distribution of resources, responsibilities, agency, and power all contribute to the gender inequality in different societies of Africa, thus exacerbating the marginalization and exclusion of women in decision-making processes in both agriculture and the household (Ogunlela & Mukhtar, 2009).

### **Gender Roles in Africa**

Although there has been a proliferation of research on women and gender in Africa since the 1980s, Ampofo, Beoku-Betts, Njambi, and Osirim (2004) observe that initial scholarship was mainly led by Western feminists who failed to focus on the historical, sociological, and geographical contexts of Africa. Over time, the use of various

forms of historical methods—such as oral history and auto/biographical studies, as well as the scholarship of African feminists—helped redefine conventional understandings of gender and gender relations in African societies. In gender analysis, feminist scholars such as Amadiume (2015) and Oyewumi (1997) have pointed out that in many African societies, the concepts of gender, masculinity, and femininity are fluid and change over time. Thus, there can be more than one gender role associated with biological sex.

The matrilineal descent system among the Akan ethnic group of Ghana grants women autonomous power. The institution of *ohemma*<sup>9</sup> within this ethnic group is a socio-political one which does not go unnoticed as the *ohemma* was, and in some respects still is, the most powerful person within the Akan state (Farrar, 1997). The Akan queen mother is the one who historically was and is principally responsible for the selection of a candidate when the king's office becomes vacant. In some instances, she could assume the position of king (*omanhene*) when no suitable male heirs can be found. According to Boaten (1992), the history behind the nominating role of the *ohemma* originates with Akan cosmogony which maintains that women are the founders of various clans. The culture and tradition of the Akans believe that women are the repositories of wisdom and knowledge, therefore complicated issues were referred to them for their wise counseling. The queen mother's council is also made up of females who were all chosen by her (and none by the king). With regards to the political system of the Akans, every office of the Akan political hierarchy has both female and male counterparts, with the male in a subordinate position to the *ohemma* (Farrar, 1997). This political system extends from the highest level of state down to the village-level organization. Thus, every village head has

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<sup>9</sup> Literally meaning “female ruler.”

his counterpart village-level queen mother. This system also draws down to the household level where the *abusapanin*<sup>10</sup> is co-headed by the senior-most female and male members of the matrilineage (Farrar, 1997). Farrar (1997) further notes that this position is usually held by a senior female member along with her brother.

La Ferrara (2007) reports that the strength of the matrilineal kinship at the household level gives a woman more bargaining power vis-à-vis her husband. Takyi and Gyimah (2007) similarly argue that within a matrilineal household, husbands are considered “outsiders” by the woman’s matriclan (p. 686). As such, this often affects the stability of conjugal relations between a woman and her husband. For instance, a woman continues to reside at her maternal house even after marriage, making her defer more to the preferences and needs of her lineage kin rather than her conjugal relation. Such practices tend to affect the stability and quality of the marital relationship. Likewise, Takyi and Dodoo (2005) also note that gender relations and decision-making in an Akan society are more likely to be egalitarian because the type of lineage practised confers greater levels of independence on women. Thus, within the Akan group, a woman is more likely to be autonomous and make certain major decisions such as initiating a divorce because within this group, conjugal ties have been observed to be weaker and are more often subordinated to the interests of one’s lineage (Takyi & Gyimah, 2007). Also, among the Akan matrilineal system, married couples usually do not pool their resources together for the benefit of the conjugal family unit. Such practice provides women with some level of autonomy over their husbands, thereby undermining husbands’ authority.

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<sup>10</sup> Meaning: head of the family.

Other matrilineal societies within the African context include the Afikpo and Ohafia peoples of the Igbo ethnic group. Typically, these societies recognize two descent groups: the matrilineage and patrilineage. However, the matriclan among the Afikpo are the main property-inheriting and land-owning group in these societies, controlling about 85% of the farmland (Ugwu, 2017, p. 110). Ugwu (2017) further notes that the position of women in these societies as wives and as owners of property in their husbands' farmland are of concern to their matrilineal kin because upon the passing of a woman, her rights and duties on her husband's farm are claimed by her matrilineal kin. In these societies, matrilineal descent had control over agricultural land while patrilineal descent controlled residential patterns. In addition, Chuku (2005) notes that the flexibility of gender roles and identities made it possible for both men and women to excel in these societies. Likewise, relationships between males and females in these societies were guided by seniority relative to either biological age, or by order of marriage into a lineage group or by membership of an association or organization. In this sense, gender can be perceived as a social identity that can be ascribed or achieved through the conceptual roles of male and female (Chuku, 2005).

Precolonial Igbo society was one in which both men and women wielded political power and authority. Social roles and responsibilities were the channels through which power was diffused, and where gender equality was measured in comparative worth (Chuku, 2009). Hence, the Igbo society practised a dual-sex political system where women's organizations acted as parallel authority structures to those of men. Political power was shared between men and women in a complementary manner to promote harmony and the well-being of the society. According to Chuku (2009), one important

female political position in Igbo society was that of the *Omu*.<sup>11</sup> This position was usually taken by a woman of outstanding conduct, character, and ability and who did not derive her status from her relationship to either a monarch or any other man (since precolonial Igbo society practised a dual-sex political system of village republicanism). Although the *Omu* presided over female affairs, Chuku (2009) mentioned that her decisions also affected men in the community.

Another important women's organization that wielded political power and authority in precolonial Igboland was the *Otu Umuada*.<sup>12</sup> This organization acted as a vital force in women's natal lineage and served as a police force over lineage wives—peace mediators within their natal lineage and between their natal and marital lineages. The *Otu Umuada* also served as the supreme court of appeal and acted as the watchdog of the male political arm of government (Chuku, 2009). The existence of such institutions and organizations in precolonial Igbo society meant that women had the opportunity to perform important and diverse political, judicial, and religious roles that complemented those of men. Hence, the roles women played in these instances served as checks and balances within the Igbo socio-political structures. Also, the division of such statuses was mainly based on seniority relative to age and not necessarily tied to biological sex.

However, in the case of Ghana where patriarchal societies dominates, Tolhurst and Nyonator (2006) argue that the delineation of women's and men's responsibilities was evident even in instances where married women are expected to work on their husband's farms, while their husbands retain control over the incomes generated. However, such gender roles now are changing as women are increasingly becoming

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<sup>11</sup> Meaning: mother of the society.

<sup>12</sup> Society of daughters of the lineage who might be married, unmarried, divorced, or widowed.

providers as well as caregivers, but without a corresponding change in men's behaviours in areas traditionally seen to be women's responsibilities, such as caring for children and the sick.

Contrary to the argument raised by Tolhurst and Nyongator (2006), Overå (2007) notes that the economic crisis and structural adjustment programs in Ghana had put large numbers of formal sector employees and civil servants, mostly men, out of work. Constrained economic circumstances have made most households struggle to subsist; hence, the ideal gender model in which men and women perform complementary but different tasks could no longer sustain households. Thus, the socio-cultural boundaries that define what women and men can, should, or ought to do for a living have been and are being renegotiated as more men are now taking up female occupations in the informal economic sector as well as women's work within the household.

According to Warner, Al-Hassan, and Kydd (1997), a central theme in gender scholarship is the recognition that the roles of women and men are socially rather than biologically determined and the identification of gender roles is a necessary but not sufficient basis for conceptualizing the lives of rural peoples of Africa. Also, there is a need to consider other social factors such as seniority and marital status. In other words, the practical approach to the study of gender roles of rural peoples in Africa should not consider biological differences but rather should incorporate other important socially defined differences between individuals such as marital status, parental status, and seniority with respect to age. Such consideration should extend into the formulation of policies and strategies that aim to elevate the rural populace from poverty. Similarly, Awumbila (2006) notes that many antipoverty strategies and policies have failed because

these policies and strategies do not fully address the differences between men and women's needs due to differences in their roles. Antipoverty strategies and policies need to be flexible and consider the diversity surrounding the socially defined roles of males and females in society since the former traditional gender division of labour is currently changing and being renegotiated.

Specifically, Warner et al. (1997) found that marriage among the Dagombas of Ghana is the first of many steps in a woman's passage from junior woman to senior woman. Thus, a married woman differs from an unmarried woman both in residential patterns and in social and economic roles within her compound and in the wider society. Once married, a woman is capable of gaining another status of *full cooking wife*.<sup>13</sup> A cooking wife is much more likely to find additional time to engage in various farm and non-farm activities separate from her household, since she also is granted the right of having days off from cooking. She is also capable of engaging in income earning activities in order to meet her obligations as a senior woman in her compound and household. With reference to the Dagombas of Ghana, it is evident how marital status differentiates women and the various roles they play, first and foremost in their respective households as well as in the wider community.

However, among married women, the ability of a woman to bear children creates a significant difference. This is because it is only when a woman has children of her own that she is able to gain economic independence from her husband or the household head. Full cooking wives not only have the freedom to engage in income earning activities but also have full control of the incomes they make from the activities they engage in.

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<sup>13</sup> A social status married women get only after they have birthed a child or children who have successfully survived infancy.

Among the Dagomba people, we come to understand the importance of marriage and childbearing in determining the social statuses and roles of women.

Consequently, seniority with respect to age further differentiates the economic roles of married women among the Dagombas. Older married women tend to retire from their cooking status and appear to engage fully in individual farming and trading activities. This provides them with the chance to own livestock and food stocks and to contribute both food and income for use in their own or another compound or household (Warner et al., 1997). Although relatively, all women have weaker claims on households' productive resources than their male counterparts, older married women who have retired from their cooking statuses have more opportunities to gain economic independence than junior women both married and unmarried (Pickbourn, 2011). Thus, seniority plays a huge part in determining the social and economic roles of women within the Dagomba community. For these reasons, any attempt to understand the gender roles of the rural African populace needs to be flexible enough to consider a range of factors, rather than attempting to impose a singular gendered understanding onto all rural peoples.

Apusigah (2009) further argues that most members of farm households in northern Ghana play specific and critical roles. The roles they play are, however, based on culturally specified gender divisions of labour, authority structures, and social obligations. Additionally, practical realities such as men seeking jobs elsewhere in non-farm activities have pushed women into taking up men's work on the farm in order to sustain the family and livelihoods. Such circumstances have relegated women into the traditional male role in most households in northern Ghana.

From the highlighted studies, it is evident that gender roles in much of Africa are fluid and are not necessarily associated to one's biological sex since a particular sex may perform more than one gender role. The subsequent section presents a review on rural households in Ghana and in most parts of Africa. It further discusses some dimensions of household decision-making such as economic, reproductive, and religious decisions. It also includes a review of the interplay of power dynamics between husbands and wives.

### **Households, Power Dynamics, and Decision-Making**

Understanding the role of rural households is central to any discussion about gendered power relations in Africa. The structure and nature of most rural households play a considerable role in shaping and influencing the livelihood patterns of its members. Rural household structures also determine the nature of the gender power dynamics within the household. Therefore, the nature and structure of rural Ghanaian households is discussed below.

#### **Rural Ghanaian Households**

Most rural households in the Global South rely directly and indirectly on agriculture and agricultural-related activities to access basic household necessities. Despite their over-reliance on agriculture and its related activities, these households are located in highly volatile environments making household members suffer tremendous variations in incomes, mainly because of factors such as lack of access to resources and market credits, which operate beyond their control (Apusigah, 2009; Dercon & Krishnan, 2000; Sikder & Higgins, 2017). According to Abdulai and CroleRees (2001), rural households in sub-Saharan African societies usually have to cope with both poverty and income variability. While poverty in Ghana has reduced from 51.7% to 24.2% since 1992

(Cooke, Hague, & McKay, 2016, p. 3), the rural population still accounts for 78% of the nation's poor (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014b, p. 10). Poverty among the rural populace in Ghana is associated with high dependence on agricultural activities as a primary income source, barriers that discourage farming households from producing beyond subsistence needs, and the lack of access to output markets (World Food Programme, 2009).

According to Ghana's *2010 Population and Housing Census*, the Upper East region has the highest percentage of agricultural households (83.7%), followed by the Upper West region (77.1%) and the Northern region (75.5%); the proportion of agricultural households are highest in rural areas with 93.7% in the Upper East region, 89.9% in the Northern region, and 88.6% in the Upper West region (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013, p. 288). This implies that most rural households are agriculturally based, and their over-reliance on agriculture has resulted in poverty for these rural households and rural populace, placing a significant amount of burden on rural women (Moyer et al., 2014; Sikod, 2007).

With regards to household structures, Brown (1996) shows that the traditional household structure in most parts of Ghana is based on male-headed units of extended families, consisting of one or several wives and their children and often extended with unmarried or elderly relatives. Thus, within this traditional household structure, there exists a clear division of economic responsibilities, making the division of labour a system based on age and gender. Brown (1996) further notes that, due to the increase in social change brought up by modernization and industrialization, there has been a change in the structure of the household with an emergence of female-headed households formed

either by choice or from necessity. The change in the household structure has, therefore, brought with it a change in the divisions of labour and the sharing of responsibilities within the household.

According to Apusigah (2009), in most rural households in northern Ghana, like in many patriarchal societies, men are the heads of the household; boys are considered as potential heads and, as such, are socialized to become providers and owners of the production system. Women, who are perceived as wives and girls as potential wives, are socialized into subordinate positions who depend on male members of the household for resources and survival. Such arrangements exclude women from major decision-making processes concerning production and distribution. It is also reflected in their farm production such that women are only expected to produce non-staples such as rice, beans, and produce used for soup ingredients. This has made women responsible for the provision of such crops for household consumption. Therefore, any woman who is unable to produce such crops may have to engage in non-farm activities to generate the requisite income for providing such crops for the household (Apusigah, 2009).

### **Women's Economic Decision-Making**

Studies have demonstrated that women's decision-making power in any household is influenced by factors such as income generation and gender ideologies. The amount of money a woman can bring into the household determines her bargaining power and influence to make decisions (Attanasio & Lechene, 2002; Bradshaw, 2013; Warren, 2008). However, while literature shows that women's economic contributions determine their relative power and influence over household decisions, Sen (1990) also argues that most patriarchal norms that hold women responsible for social reproduction

(such as the traditional belief that “a woman’s place is in the kitchen”) also prevent women from bargaining on their own behalf (see also Katz, 1997, p. 33). Such patriarchal norms confine women mainly to the domestic sphere in the household. This is partly as a result of how society perceives women but more often because of a deeply rooted belief that women are not culturally entitled or even capable of making such decisions. This implies that not only does a lack of economic contribution prevent women from gaining bargaining power and influence in making decisions, but patriarchal norms and cultural perceptions also further cause barriers for women to gain any bargaining power and influence in household decision-making. This further limits women’s chances of obtaining such bargaining power.

The introduction of micro-finance projects for women in low-income communities has proven to be a viable means of integrating gender issues, poverty, and efficiency concerns (Mayoux, 2001). Mayoux (2001) argues that micro-finance has strengthened the bargaining power over resources and decision-making of women at the household level and has enabled them to take an active part in productive activities that are changing gender roles. While studies have proven that micro-finance can potentially improve the well-being of rural people by increasing women’s incomes, strengthening women’s control over decision-making and resource allocation, it also tends to increase women’s workload because religion and culture tend to play a huge role in differentiating gender roles and the extent to which men can support women’s household chores (Arku & Arku, 2009). Equally, although women’s economic independence may tend to give them bargaining power in the household allocation of resources and decision-making, this bargaining power may be somewhat limited due to the influence of cultural norms and

perceptions.

Warren (2008) argues that in order to fully understand the factors that influence women's decision-making powers in the household, there is a need to consider other aspects including other resource contributions and cultural factors such as the different gender ideologies that exist in various societies and not only focus on the economic contributions of women to their respective households. Similarly, other studies have also proven that the provision of micro-finance schemes to help strengthen the economic independence of women have often failed, because the monies given to rural women are mostly insufficient to begin any income earning activity (Ansoglenang, 2006; Ganle, Afriyie, & Segbefia, 2015; Mohammed, 2018; Nkrumah, 2010). For instance, Ganle et al. (2015) point out that the impact of any micro-credit program depends on the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which it is implemented. Therefore, women might experience both advantages and disadvantages from accessing credit, depending on their situations and whether they are able to service their debt or not, thus confirming Warren's (2008) argument that economic independence alone does not influence women's decision-making powers in the household, since cultural factors tend to play a huge role in defining the livelihood of rural populace.

Sikod (2007) also found that gender division of labour has an impact on women's decision-making power in many parts of the Global South. Hence, the traditional division of labour which makes women in charge of reproductive labour and roles that are based on providing emotional support and maintenance further prevent women from partaking in other aspects of household decision-making, such as economic decisions. Also, these roles further made women inactive in the household decision-making process. Relevant

to my study, Sikod (2007) shows that there is some play on power dynamics between husbands and wives whereby women can hold some bargaining power with regards to household decision-making.

The gendered division of labour in households, according to Sikod (2007), was the main economic strategy through which households were organized to meet basic family needs for shelter, food, health, procreation, and education. He further notes that the changes in the economy over the years that have transformed women gradually into market activities has enabled them to gain more economic power and consequently the right to participate in decision-making, especially in economic decisions in which their husbands would require some financial support from them. These economic changes stem from the economic crisis that most African countries have been facing since the 1980s. In the agricultural sector, for instance, prices for cash crops collapsed, and this affected the earnings and incomes of mostly men since they were the producers of cash crops. As a result, the burden for making up this shortfall in the household was placed on women. This loss of men's income caused further strain on the duties of rural women who then began to enter into market activities and non-farm activities to gain extra income to support the household.

In the case of Ghana, Brown (1996) states that in traditional Ghanaian society, the man has always been looked up to as the head and sole income earner of the family, and charged with all the responsibilities of making the household decisions. However, there have been some structural transformations in Ghanaian society that have provided women with more freedom to make decisions on their own and assume more economic responsibilities within the household. These structural transformations include some changes in the Ghanaian economy that force husbands to migrate elsewhere and work,

thus making women take up the economic responsibilities in the household.

The Ghanaian society has also seen an increase in female-headed households in which women are responsible for major decisions and at the same time bear economic responsibilities affecting their households (Ardayifio-Schandorf, 1994; Kpoor, 2014). Also, changes in the educational system have given more women access to education and hence increased their participation to the paid labour force. Therefore, Warren's (2008) study has established that women's position in household decision-making is increasingly becoming positively related to their educational, occupational, and financial resources and how these are used in providing for the needs of the household. Ickowitz and Mohanty's (2015) study of decision-making powers of women in polygynous marriages in Ghana found that women in these marriages are less likely to have decision-making powers over their health and large household purchases. However, they had more control over their earnings because it is quite difficult for a man to monitor the earnings and activities of more than one wife.

The literature on women's economic decision-making has established that the economic contribution of women, such as income earning and their contributions in agricultural production, does not fully guarantee a woman full participation in decision-making processes in her household; however, it may give her some leverage to hold decision-making powers in some aspects of the household.

### **Reproductive Decision-Making**

When it comes to decision-making concerning sex and reproduction, most rural women in Africa have less bargaining power than men as compared to their urban counterparts (Bogale, Wondafrash, Tilahun, & Girma, 2011; Dodoo & Tempenis, 2002). This difference is attributed to the low educational attainment and low economic status of

the women in the rural setting compared to those in the urban areas. It is also argued that during marriage, for which husbands pay bride wealth to the families of their wives, the transactions tend to signal that husbands are paying for the services of the women to produce children. This, together with the prevailing gender relations in most rural settings, account for the reduced bargaining power that women have in deciding on their reproductive health (Dodoo & Seal, 1994). However, Ojofeitimi, Orji, and Olanweraju (2007) suggest that in some instances, women can exercise their reproductive rights. Ojofeitimi et al. found that most men in both rural and urban settings would use contraceptives if their wives demanded it. Their research also revealed that men believed that husbands and wives should jointly take decisions about the use of contraception.

In a study conducted in Tanzania, Mosha, Ruben, and Kakoko (2013) found that women in the urban areas were better able to initiate conversations on the use of contraceptives, number of children, and the spacing of the children with their husbands compared to their counterparts in the rural areas. The reasons for this were attributed to the high cost of living associated with living in an urban area and to the availability of information and education on family planning methods in urban areas. For women in rural areas, the lack of communication among the couples was attributed to dictates of patriarchy that result in unequal gender relations on family-planning decisions in the household, and the prevailing cultural stereotypes that only men initiate discussions around family planning since they are the income earners and they pay the bride price when they marry. Thus, place of residence influenced decision-making surrounding reproduction and the number of children a person could have.

In Africa, where lineage networks and ties have proven to have a strong influence on personal and public behaviour of individuals, and with considerable evidence of lineage differences in household organization and family structure in Ghana (Takyi, 2001), Takyi and Dodoo's (2005) study investigated whether lineage type and kinship arrangements influenced women's use of contraceptive in Ghana. Findings from their research revealed that women in matrilineal societies who did not want to have more children were more likely and able to use contraception than their counterparts in patrilineal societies. This is because matrilineal societies often confer greater levels of independence on women, making gender relations and decision-making in such societies more egalitarian than in patrilineal societies. Thus, women in matrilineal societies had much greater control and autonomy over decisions concerning their reproductive health and choices.

Darteh, Doku, and Essia-Donkoh (2014) indicate that in Ghana, certain factors such as age, region of residence, level of education, ethnicity, and socio-economic status influenced women's reproductive decision-making in sexual intercourse and condom use. For the Ghanaian woman, her level of education and her socio-economic status affects her ability to make decisions concerning her reproductive health (Darteh et al., 2014). Although current gender relations and cultural ideologies reduced women's bargaining power over their sexual and reproductive decisions, some factors such as higher levels of education and higher economic status helped women to regain this power to make their own decisions. For women in the rural setting, this lack of education and economic independence further undermines their control over their sexual and reproductive decisions.

### **Women's Decision-Making on Religious Practices**

In Ghana, several scholars report that religion has emerged as a potent social force in both public and private life (Addai, 2000; Gyimah, Takyi, & Addai, 2006; Takyi, 2003; Takyi & Addai, 2002; Yirenkyi, 2000). These scholars determined the crucial roles religion plays in certain aspects of people's lives, such as healthcare delivery and reproductive health practices, politics, sexual behaviour, and education. Takyi's (2003) study, for instance, explored whether a woman's knowledge of HIV/AIDS is associated with her religious affiliation and whether religious affiliation influenced HIV/AIDS preventive attitudes. His study found that a woman's religious affiliation had a significant effect on her knowledge and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Likewise, Gyimah et al. (2006) also sought to examine whether religion influenced the utilization of Maternal Health (MH) services by mothers in Ghana. Findings from their study also indicated that religious beliefs significantly determine a woman's access to and utilization of MH services.

Religion has been the central force of social organization in traditional African societies, such that it has not been possible to differentiate between religious and non-religious aspects of people's lives. In fact, in the WIN-Gallup International (2012) *Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism*, Ghana was found to be the most religious country in the world with 96% of the population being religious. The WIN-Gallup study collected data from 57 countries. In a traditional Ghanaian society, religion permeated all aspects of sexual behaviour, marriage, and even childbearing (Addai, 2000). Thus, in the traditional religion, family formation is strictly controlled by religious beliefs and practices.

The literature reviewed in this section demonstrates the extent to which religion impacts the decision-making processes of rural women. The present study draws from the reviewed works to investigate women's autonomy to engage in religious practices and the extent to which religious beliefs and practices influence their participation in household decision-making.

### **Interplay of Power Dynamics in Decision-Making**

As patriarchal ideology cedes men the headship of families, power is hence conferred on them. However, in a study conducted in rural and urban East Africa, Silberschmidt (2001) argues that specific socio-economic changes in the household place men in more impoverished circumstances than women as power then moves from men to women. The maintenance of the household becomes the responsibility of the wife when there is a change in the socio-economic status of the husband. In the case of rural Malaysia, Kusago and Barham (2001) show that husbands and wives alike acknowledge the dominance of husbands in decision-making on financial matters, yet wives also dominate in the control of individual asset holdings and transfers received from other family members. Both studies by Silberschmidt and by Kusago and Barham are examples showing how power dynamics within rural households are completely different and the levels in which they are manifested varies within and across rural societies and geographical locations. As Sen (1990) proposes, the differences in bargaining power in the household are a function of the range of options available to different household members, the extent to which household members define their self-interest with their personal well-being, and the perceived significance of their contribution to the household. This, Sen claims, will make women sometimes define their interests differently from

what would be expected. Thus, the difference in personal interests of members within a household influences their bargaining power within the household.

Basu (2006) argues that while the dominant literature models the impact of households' power balance on household decision-making, it tends to ignore the opposite relation; that is, the effect of household decisions on the balance of power. Basu further states that this two-way relationship might, in the long run, have implications for female labour supply, child labour, and other aspects of household behaviour. That is, a woman's bargaining power within the household is manifested in the domain of the household that she controls; such domains may include reproduction and child upbringing. The relevance of Basu's study for my current research corresponds to the need to investigate areas within the household that rural Ghanaian women dominate and whether or not they hold the bargaining power in making decisions in those domains.

Hindin (2000) argues that specific social and cultural practices, such as the expectation of women to get married and have children, are essential in explaining their limited power in the marriage. Women who do not work for money or have any economic resources have a higher chance of having no say in household decisions. The implications here would be to investigate whether or not such notions exist within rural Ghanaian communities—specifically, the Zambo community.

In the case of Nigeria, Angel-Urdinola and Wodon (2010) found that men tended to have most of the decision-making power regarding the use of productive assets such as land use, crop sales, and shelter. Women, however, participated more often in decisions concerning expenditures for food, health and education. Drawing upon the Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) survey data from Nigeria in 2003, Angel-Urdinola and

Wodon further established that earnings, however visible, did not necessarily improve women's intra-household decision-making power. One reason for this could be the patriarchal social norms and practices in Nigeria. This, therefore, suggests that resource contributions do not have much significance in the redistribution of power in a socio-cultural context where norms are conservative. The authors therefore advocated for a more detailed analysis before making any specific policy recommendation to improve the position of women in the household. The implication of this study and that of Hindin (2000) demonstrate that education and income contributions alone are not sufficient to determine the bargaining power of women in household decision-making. There is a need to investigate other socio-cultural factors within a particular society and how such factors may also influence a woman's power to household decision making.

### **Methodology**

This section discusses the methods of data collection, a brief background of the study population, sampling technique, methods of analysis, , and some ethical considerations.

#### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected using ethnographic fieldwork, including semi-structured individual interviews. The ethnographic method is significant for this form of research because it privileges the experiential knowledge of rural women in Zambo as actors located in their actual lived experience (Smith, 1999).

The semi-structured interviews provided a focused discussion with the research participants on particular sets of issues while at the same time making provisions for contingent issues not initially identified by the research (Galletta, 2013). The semi-

structured individual interviews were conducted exclusively with married women in the Zambo community. The study focused only on women because of the need to listen to women speak about their everyday lived experiences, and use that as a foundation for understanding their world and also as a basis for criticizing everyday dominant knowledge that is based principally on the experiences of men (Harding, 1991).

The decision to focus exclusively on women was informed also by Spivak's (1988) work on the marginalization of subaltern voices in everyday discourses, including those that affect women's lives. Feminist standpoint epistemologies that focus knowledge creation mainly from the experiences and perspectives of women have somewhat tended to homogenize the voices of women. By aligning subaltern studies with standpoint epistemologies, this study highlights the heterogeneity in the voices of women based on the differences in their experiences and social locations. As Guha has argued, "subaltern could be based on caste, age, gender, office or any other way, including but not limited to class" (Guha, 1982, as cited in Chaturvedi, 2007, p. 9). It also underscores the importance of ensuring that the voices of the most economically marginalized group are heard. To ensure that the respondents' positions remain as authentic as possible and are not lost in translation, I have retained most of their direct statements in the original Dagaara language in which they expressed them, while providing the most accurate English translation in parentheses. This way, their voices are heard by audiences who may comprise not only academics but also government and non-governmental officials who work directly and indirectly with these women.

Although I had planned a focus group discussion with officials of a community organization—the Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development

(CIKOD)—which works with rural women in Zambo, these officials were coordinating projects with rural women in other remote villages at the time of data collection and were thus unavailable for a focus group discussion. Similarly, while CIKOD’s Executive Director recommended that I speak to a women’s group—the Rural Women Farmer’s Association of Ghana (RUWFAG), which CIKOD had partnered with on several community-based projects in Zambo and elsewhere, it was not possible to do so because a focus group discussion with members of this association had not been addressed in this study’s Research Ethics Board application. Instead, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with members of RUWFAG, who thus became some of the respondents for the individual interviews.

### **Study Population**

The target population for this study comprises rural women from the Zambo community in the Lawra District of the Upper West Region of Ghana. This community is located in the north-western area of the Upper West Region (District Planning Coordinating Unit, 2016). The most current population of the community stands at 54,889, with women making up 52% of the population (District Planning Coordinating Unit, 2016). Agriculture is the community’s primary economic activity, employing 78% of the working population who are mostly engaged in subsistence agriculture (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a, p. 17). The Zambo community lacks some crucial socio-economic infrastructure such as schools, adequate water supply systems, and good roads. Members of the community, especially women, have to travel far mostly on foot to go about their daily activities.

Most of the women in this community engage in *pito*<sup>14</sup> brewing, petty trading, and shea butter (a fat derived from the nut of the African shea tree) extraction together with their daily household roles and duties. Women in this community are economically poorer than men because they are less likely to own land (97.5% of women do not own land) or have access to other socio-economic infrastructures (United Nations Development Programme Ghana, 2010, p. 14). The Zambo community is a Dagaara<sup>15</sup>-speaking group of people who live in large patrilineal compounds occupied by extended family households. A basic unit of their social organization is a clan often referred to as *Yir*<sup>16</sup> (Lobnibe, 2008).

Households in this community are therefore made up of more than one conjugal unit living together in the same compound. However, three out of the 10 households I visited were conjugal units that was separate from the main household. The three women confirmed that their husbands had moved them out of his natal household and built a separate household where they live. The remaining seven women lived in conjugal units within their husband's natal household. For these women, it involved living in the same household with their husband's parents and other family members. Such household living arrangements has implications on the kind of relationship a woman can have with her husband.

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<sup>14</sup> A local drink brewed from maize or millet.

<sup>15</sup> Dagaara may sometimes be referred to as Dagara, Dagaaba, or Dagare, which refers to the same people and language. For the purpose of this study, I use the term Dagaara to refer to both the people and the language.

<sup>3</sup> Meaning "household."

### **Sampling Technique**

Participants in this study were selected among women who have been married for at least 5 years, who have children, and who are in a heterosexual relationship. The 5-year benchmark ensured that potential participants had a relatively extended period of marital experience to address some of the questions posed by the study. A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the sample because it helped me to target participants who were most likely to provide the information sought. Such participants' particular experiences in largely patriarchal households provided unique and valuable information on the nature of gendered power dynamics in their respective households (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassin, 2016).

In using a purposive sampling technique, I worked with an official of CIKOD to identify potential women participants in the community. The period of data collection was during the rainy season. Women were mostly found on farmlands working. I selected a sample of 10 women to participate in the study. I chose to interview 10 women because it allowed for a diverse range of responses with which I could work. These women came from different households, which further allowed for an understanding of the nature and structure of individual households in the community and of how each household operates. The issue of language was not a problem as I am proficient in the local language (Dagaara) and was able to conduct the interviews in the local language for the women and subsequently translate their narratives into English.

### **Interview Process**

As stated in the previous section, I worked with an official from CIKOD to

identify some of the study's prospective participants. With advice from my contact from CIKOD, the women participants were selected from four geographical subsections of this community: Zambo Kpee, Zambo Baadi, Zambo Kikila, and Zambo Zoopal. This provided diversity and ensured that women were selected from all over Zambo. The selection process started at Zambo Kikila; however, upon arrival I did not meet women in each of the households I visited because they were all working in the farmlands.

On the next day, I went back to Zambo Kikila, this time earlier in the morning. In each of the households I visited, my contact helped with introductions only and excused herself once the interviews were about to begin. My contact served as a familiar face, which made the women very receptive and willing to conduct the interviews with me. I interviewed three women from Zambo Kikila and each interview was conducted in the compound of their households. The duration of each interview ranged between 40 minutes to an hour, and the interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the women. I selected households that were very distant from each other to prevent the women from knowing that the others had been interviewed.

I had only two interviews conducted on the farms rather than in the household. Both interviews took place at Zambo Kpee. The farms the women worked on were located right beside their household. The women chose to have the conversation with me while they worked because according to them, they had a lot to do and did not wish to take breaks.

Out of the 10 interviews, only one was conducted in English. The woman involved in the latter interview plays an active role in the mobilization of women in the community. She is also a key resource person for CIKOD and has helped them organize women for training and other community projects. Also, she is an active member of

RUWFAG. She was the only person from Zambo Zoopal who was interviewed. My interview with her opened a discussion of some pertinent issues that were not brought up by the other women interviewed. As such, she became my key informant and I have made several references to her experience in my discussion and analysis.

One observation I made was that the women only accepted to speak with me because they were familiar with my contact. Together with my contact, we had assured the women the purpose of the interviews and the reason I was conducting the interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

I recorded and transcribed the interview data and then analyzed the transcriptions using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis followed the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) who specify that thematic analysis involves familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for principal themes among the codes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming themes, and engaging in a thematic analysis of the research findings. I employed this method of analysis because it helped me to highlight the respondents' major arguments and concerns while adopting an African feminist theoretical framework. Also, this method of data analysis ensured that results are both comprehensible to the general public and suitable for informing policy development. The method also helped to enhance the confidentiality of individual responses by nesting and compounding research findings.

After transcribing the interview data, I realised that most of the women's responses were very similar. I grouped all similar responses under each of the research questions. Then, I selected key words from the responses which thus, became the defining words in naming my themes. When naming the themes, I wanted statements that

directly answered my research questions. This way, forming any discussion around the theme will thus answer the overall research questions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since the study involves human participants, it is essential to respect participants' privacy and maintain their confidentiality. I thus obtained clearance for my interviews from my university's Research Ethics Board (REB). Equally, because research in rural communities in Ghana usually requires oral permission from the chiefs and elders, I sought permission from such individuals to enter the community. This is a cultural norm that needed to be respected and followed.

Before starting my interviews, I communicated information regarding the consent process in a clear and concise manner to ensure that participants fully understood the objectives of the study, as well as what was required of them as participants before giving consent. This included a translation of the information on the consent forms into the local (Dagaara) language, which was done verbally. The respondents were also reminded at every stage of the interview process that they were free to withdraw from the study if they so wished, or to refuse to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable.

I respected the respondents' anonymity as well as the confidentiality of the information they provided by not collecting any identifiable data such as respondents' names, extended family or clan name, and address.

### **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has engaged with some of the existing literature in the areas of gender relations, gender roles, rural households, household decision-making, and power dynamics within the household. Gender relations in many rural societies of Africa with

respect to household decision-making are complex and highly heterogeneous based on the differences in histories, cultures, and languages that exist in rural African societies. The chapter also revealed that despite patriarchy being dominant in most rural African societies, some societies practice matriarchy and women in those societies have power and autonomy in their gender relations. Even in some patriarchal societies, certain aspects and practices inherent in the cultures as well as specific socio-economic transformations have given women some leverage and power. The chapter also establishes that rural African women are not a homogenous group who are suffering from universal subordination and marginalization. Rather, rural African women are a highly heterogeneous group whose gender relations and gender roles are highly defined by the cultures and traditions of their respective societies.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DECISION-MAKING CONCERNING CHILDBIRTH AND CHILD UPBRINGING

This chapter discusses the first research question: who makes ultimate decisions concerning childbirth and child upbringing? And how are these decisions negotiated? Data were collected from 10 rural women in Zambo community who were purposively chosen because they were considered as informants who were most likely to provide the information needed. This research question is addressed by discussing three significant issues raised by the majority of the participants. In line with feminist standpoint epistemology, the discussions and analysis of key findings are structured to privilege the experiences of the research participants as experts located in their actual lived realities. The discussions and analyses are conducted mainly from the narratives of the following research participants. Below is the biodata of the participants, each of whom are assigned a pseudonym:

- Abigail: married for over 10 years; has four children. She is the only wife of her husband. She is also a local government employee in the area and a member of RUWFAG. Because of her active role in RUWFAG and the latter's activities with women in this community and in other communities, she was my key informant.
- Esther: married for over 10 years; has six children; housewife. She is the only wife of her husband. She lives with her husband in his parental household. Aside from farming, Esther's husband has no other work.
- Akosua: married for over 20 years; has six children; local *pito* brewer. She is the only wife of her husband. Akosua lives in the same household with her husbands' parents. Aside from being a farmer, Akosua's husband rears livestock.

- Mansa: married for over 10 years; has four children; housewife. She is the second wife of her husband. She lives with her husband and children alone in his natal household. Aside from farming, Mansa's husband has no other work.
- Araba: married for 19 years; has seven children; housewife. She is the only wife of her husband. Araba shares the same household with her mother-in-law. Her husband is a farmer and rears livestock.
- Donkor: married for over 20 years; has six children; housewife. She is the only wife of her husband. Donkor's mother-in-law lives with her and her husband in his natal household. Farming is her husband's only work.
- Yaa: married for over 20 years; has five children; local *pito* brewer. She is the only wife of her husband. Her mother-in-law lives with her in the same household. Yaa's husband works as a mason, aside from being a farmer.
- Abena: married for over 10 years; has four children; housewife. She is the only wife of her husband. In the dry season when there is no work on the farms, her husband engages in seasonal migration.
- Pat: married for over 20 years; has six children; peasant farmer. She is the only wife of her husband. She lives with only her mother-in-law and children. Her husband practises long-term/permanent migration.
- Eunice: married for over 20 years; has four children; housewife. She is the only wife of her husband. Aside from farming, Eunice's husband has no other work.

Within the context of this study I conceptualize rural women as subalterns. This is because these women suffer from double marginalization, by both class and gender: They not only are subordinate to men in this patriarchal society but are also among the poorest

group of people in the region (Amu, 2005; Sarpong, 2006). The notion of subalternity here is used as conceived by a group of South Asian scholars led by Ranajit Guha who conceptualize subalternity to mean “a general attribute of subordination ... that could be based on caste, age, gender, office, including but not limited to class” (Chaturvedi, 2007, p. 9). This conceptualization of subalternity departs from its original meaning by Antonio Gramsci as a phenomenon related solely defined by social class. Gramsci’s use of the subaltern was a substitute for “proletariat” to avoid state authorities who wanted to prevent his political writings from entering the public sphere (Chaturvedi, 2007, p. 9). However, Guha and his associates use this concept expansively to denote a general idea of subordination by class, caste, gender, and age. They adopted this concept of subalternity to accommodate the marginal “politics of the people” and also push against the elitist historiography that fails to consider the contributions made by the people on their own; that is, independently of the elite (Chaturvedi, 2007, p. 9; see also Spivak, 1985). As such, direct quotes of these women’s experiences have been included in the local Dagaara language as a way of amplifying their actual voices. The most approximate translation in English is provided where necessary in parenthesis. This technique is adopted to ensure that the voices of these women are not misrepresented or lost in lexical translation. I have organized data on this research question according to the themes discussed in the following sections.

### **Decisions Concerning Childbirth Are Made Primarily by Women**

According to the women I interviewed, decision-making concerning the number of children a woman would have often was not negotiated with their husbands. Overall, the women indicated that their husbands did not coerce them into having a specific number of children. Generally, the number of children a woman has primarily is based on

her preference and capability to take care of them. Data from this study indicate that my participants' decision around childbirth were based on a number of factors, principal among which were: religious rationality, social status and other social advantages, and economic capability. These factors are discussed below.

### **Religious Rationality**

Some of my respondents explained their decision to have a certain number of children was predicated on a religious perspective; they believed that they reproduced based on the number of children God wanted them to conceive. Some older women, however, did indicate that they only stopped giving birth because they biologically “timed out.” This viewpoint is most succinctly represented by Esther, who attributed the number of children she had to God. According to her:

*Tɔɔ a zaa be la Naahmeney zie, ka Naahmeney wa yeli ka ba seɲɛ la, le na soma la, kyɛ ka onah wa boɔra ka n dɔge biiri poɔ n koɲ baɲ zagere o noɔre. Naagmen la maɲ ko te a biiri.*

[Well it all depends on God, so if God says it is enough for me, then fine but if He still wants me to have more children I cannot challenge him. It is God who gives us the children.] (Esther, married for over 10 years)

Esther further explained to me that she could no longer have children because she is menopausal; otherwise, she would have had more. This was a common position among all my respondents, whose decision to have a certain number of children was informed by religious rationality. Similarly, this idea aligns with Akurugu's (2017) findings which indicate that among the Dagaara people, children are believed to be a gift from God. Hence, any woman who did not have any children or whose children did not survive after childbirth was considered unlucky to have not received such blessings from God. Childbearing was also a way of ensuring that all customary and religious rites are

performed on a person upon their passing. For the men, childbearing was a guarantee that they could become ancestors when they died.

### **Social Status**

Another important factor influencing the women's decision on childbirth was the social status associated with having many children in the Zambo community, along with other associated benefits, such as the need for an old-age social support system.

Among the Dagaara people, there is a general belief that every man and woman must leave a child before departing from the world. Hence, a major reason why the participants were interested in having many children is because childbearing is a way of establishing their identity. That is, among the Dagaara people, a barren woman is considered worthless both within her marital household and community (Akurugu, 2017). For these women, childbearing guaranteed them a place and space for operating in their husbands' households. Securing a place and status within a marital household, family, and consequently within the larger community depended greatly on a woman's ability to reproduce.

In many African societies, marriages are mainly contracted solely for procreation and often face challenges when there are no children. The purpose of marriage, therefore, is fulfilled when the couple (i.e., the woman) bears a child. Childbearing then becomes a source of power and pride, and assures family continuity (Donkor & Sandell, 2009; Dyer, 2007; Dyer, Abrahams, Mokoena, & Spuy, 2004; Tabong & Adongo, 2013). The latter studies suggest there are social stigmas attached to infertility. As such, married couples, especially women, find it extremely important to have as many children as possible to avoid being stigmatized. Specifically, Tabong and Adongo (2013) indicate that among

the people of northern Ghana, reproductive health is only seen to be meaningful when there are opportunities for couples to have the number of children they prefer. The cultural meanings attributed to childbearing among people from these communities explains why my research participants declared that they were not coerced by their husbands to have many children. To avoid being labeled as “worthless,” Dagaara women (including Zambo women) consider childbearing as one of the primary purposes of getting married.

Also, Takyi (2001) argues that childbearing in many African societies, particularly in Ghana, is seen as a major factor in low divorce rates. Specifically, within rural communities, where “a premium is attached to childbearing, and childless women are socially ostracized, it is possible that children may be uniquely important to women as a hedge against the risk of divorce or abandonment” (Takyi, 2001, p. 93). Therefore, childbearing provides security for women from a whole range of social stigmatization associated with divorce. Such social stigmatization sometimes causes women to resort to giving birth to many children, and this is one possible reason for the relatively high birth rates among Zambo women.

During my interview with Esther, she told me that another reason for having many children was because she had lost two children during the first year of their birth (originally, she had given birth to eight children). For Esther and many other participants, giving birth to many children was a way of ensuring that a sufficient number of children would survive, given the challenges of living in an economically neglected part of the country and being unable to access affordable healthcare. Esther’s case shows that the incidence of infant mortality could explain the high birth rates in this rural community.

Quality, affordable, and accessible healthcare is central to human welfare and security, especially in attaining good health and well-being. Unfortunately, access to healthcare has been a challenge for millions of people living in the Global South, including rural Ghana. Several studies have demonstrated that, among other things, transport and distance to health centres have seriously undermined access to healthcare amongst rural populations in Ghana (Atuoye et al., 2015; Buor, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Dinye & Sulemana, 2014). These studies establish that the lack of accessible road networks in most rural areas of Ghana, as well as the absence of regular and suitable transport, make physical access to specialized healthcare (which is not provided in local health facilities) difficult. Specifically, Atuoye et al.'s (2015) study indicates that the lack of adequate health facilities and health personnel in most rural areas of Ghana is another reason for the lack of access to healthcare by rural people, particularly for women. Thus, the lack of infrastructural development and ambulatory services in most rural areas make it more difficult for these rural people to gain access to quality healthcare. Indeed, during my visit to Zambo community, I observed that there were no community health centres in the area; the closest one is the district hospital, several kilometers away.

Other factors that limit rural people's poor access to healthcare include some socio-cultural norms, and poverty (Atuoye et al., 2015; Buor 2004). Buor (2004) highlights the endemic nature of culture and traditions in rural areas in comparison to urban areas. Some of these cultural norms often restrict women's access to healthcare. Also, the low economic standing of women in most rural areas further limits their access to adequate and affordable healthcare. Poverty leads to ill health and ill health perpetuates

poverty (Peters et al., 2008). Considering that women constitute a majority of the rural poor, their access to healthcare is further limited.

In Ghana, the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) introduced in 2003 was to provide a broad range of healthcare services to Ghanaians through district mutual and private health insurance schemes. The primary goal of the NHIS was to increase affordability and utilization of drugs and health services in general, and among the poor and most vulnerable populations in particular (Blanchet, Fink, & Osei-Akoto, 2012). Although several studies have documented the positive effects of the NHIS amongst the rural poor, especially with increased access to healthcare services (Blanchet et al., 2012; Nguyen, Rajkotia, & Wang, 2011; Sekyi & Domanban, 2012), other studies have also questioned the true impact of the NHIS, specifically amongst the poor (Asante & Aikins, 2008; Jehu-Appiah et al., 2011). These studies demonstrate that the NHIS is failing to reach the poor mainly due to low enrollment. As a result of scarcity of public financing as well as the inability of governments to allocate adequate financing to health systems, user fees in particular have been a source of financing for health institutions (Peters et al., 2008). In order to enjoy the benefits of the NHIS, one has to pay a registration fee and maintain annual premium fees—an expense many rural people cannot afford, specifically women. Hence, the economic hardships that rural women face implicates their access to healthcare services and further impedes their use of maternal health services, which often results in a high rate of infant mortality. Such limitations could explain the impetus for women to have more children; that is, to replace dead children.

The issue of infant mortality has gained public attention over the years. Specifically, Buor (2003a, 2003b) and Kanmiki et al. (2014) have highlighted the impact

of a mother's education on the survival of the child. They argue that a woman who has gained some form of formal education was more likely to take advantage of prenatal care and also give birth in a modern health facility than a woman who had no such formal education. Also, Kanmiki et al. found that poor rural mothers were more likely to experience infant deaths than their urban counterparts. This is partly due to their lack of income to access affordable healthcare.

Similarly, Moyer et al. (2014) argue that rather than women deciding to make use of maternal health services by themselves, these decisions are often made by their husbands or senior members of the family, such as their mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, grandmother, or compound head. This is a result of patriarchal ideology, coupled with low levels of female education, high levels of economic marginalization of women, as well as the implications of defining women, traditionally, as submissive, obedient, and subordinate to men. Such notions have further created a social and economic environment where women are most often dependent on men.

Some studies have established a relationship between poor access to healthcare and increased infant mortality (Okwaraji, Cousens, Berhane, Mulholland, & Edmond, 2012; Rutherford, Mulholland, & Hill, 2010). According to Rutherford et al. (2010), about 41-72 percent of newborn deaths occurring in sub-Saharan Africa can be avoided through current healthcare interventions (p. 508) because these deaths are predominantly caused by infectious diseases largely liable to current available preventive measures or treatment. They further argue that access to healthcare is multidimensional and there is a need to investigate additional barriers (e.g., social networks, time availability, and female

autonomy) rather than focusing solely on traditional barriers (i.e., distance to a health centre and financial access).

In order to investigate the impact of access to healthcare on infant mortality, we need to consider both traditional and additional barriers and the extent to which they limit women's access to healthcare. According to UNICEF (2018), sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the region with the highest mortality rate in the world for children under age 5, with 76 deaths per 1,000 live births (p. 8). This high child mortality rate is partly due to the differences in household wealth in these countries. Thus, children from poorer households were more likely to die before their fifth birthday, and mothers' level of education also had a significant influence on their children's survival rates. Hence, the high rate of poverty and unemployment levels amongst rural women has a profound impact on their social access to maternal health services, influencing the rate in infant mortality.

#### **Other Social Benefits/Advantages**

According to my research participants, another reason for having many children was to offer them a guarantee of old-age social support. Such responsibilities are particularly important given that in Ghana, government-sponsored social security benefits for old age are limited and mainly cover a small portion of people who have worked for governmental organizations or in the formal sector. Studies have documented the nature and importance of elderly care in both traditional and contemporary Ghanaian societies (Annor, 2014; Mensa-Bonsu & Dwuona-Hammond, 1996; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2001). Specifically, Mensa-Bonsu and Dwuona-Hammond (1996) highlight that a child has first and foremost the moral obligation to care for aged parents; this obligation is

couched in the adage “the one who cares for you when you are cutting teeth must be cared for by you till all that person’s teeth fall out in old age” (p. 16). Traditionally, the responsibility to provide support for elderly family members and less privileged family members belonged to the entire extended family. However, due to economic difficulties resulting in migration and the weakening of extended family ties, such responsibilities have fallen on individual nuclear family members, especially children of elderly family members (Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2001). As a result, many Ghanaian parents are known to prioritize giving birth for many reasons, including security at old age. Also, Dyer (2007) states that children in many African societies seem to have many important roles in the lives of their parents and community. Among the Dagaara in Zambo who engage in subsistence agricultural farming, having children (especially male children) is a way of ensuring that one has farm labour during old age. Finally, childbirth often also secures conjugal ties in many marriages.

My participants also revealed that female children are equally valued and preferred in this patrilineal society. Considering that this rural community is patrilineal, the expectation is that having a male child is important as it reassures inheritance and continuation of the family lineage. Yet, my conversations with the women revealed that there was no pressure to give birth to a male child over a female child. According to another participant (Mansa), female children are valued more than male children because one is assured of being taken care of by a female child during old age. Mansa explained that her preference for a female child was one reason why she and other women gave birth to many children. Mansa who has four children (all boys) had this to say:

*Tɔɔ ka Naan̄menen̄ da la de biiri bayi bee bata pɔɔ ma, n da naan̄ baree le. Bonso pampana n ba taa nmeŋa tɔre bipɔgelee, lenso ka n da boɔra pɔgelee. Ka maan̄ da nye kaŋa n meŋ na taa la pɔgeyaa.*

[...ok! So, if God had given me an additional two or three children, I will have then stopped. Because right now I do not have any girl child of my own. That is why I had wanted a female child. If I had gotten one I will also have one of my own.] (Mansa, married for over 10 years)

During her interview, I was curious to understand why Mansa insisted on having a female child because earlier on in our conversation, she had explained to me that her husband preferred she stopped giving birth after she had her third child. I gathered that because she had wanted a female child, she insisted and became pregnant again, only to give birth to another male child. During our conversation, I told her that her sons would marry daughters for her and her response was: “*a bii porgbe ma bang ba sere ma menee?*”<sup>17</sup> [In most cultures of northern Ghana, daughters-in-law are regarded as daughters.] In her case, she was concerned about who would take care of her during her old age. Mansa’s situation suggests that some men in this community may prefer a small number of children, but would end up having many if their wives wanted many children. Eunice agrees with this concern that a female child will most likely take care of a parent in old age. According to Eunice, her eldest daughter remits money, which helps in caring for her other children. Both Mansa and Eunice believe that female children are more likely to take up such obligations and care for them in their old age.

In Mansa’s narrative above, we see the existence of unequal power relations between women and their daughters-in-law. Usually this happens where household food items are controlled by daughters-in-law. In such instances, daughters-in-law often deny their mothers-in-law food and access to the household kitchen. This happens when

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<sup>17</sup> The most proximate translation of this statement is: “do daughters-in-law regard their mothers-in-law?”

mothers-in-law do not engage in any productive activity and often times live in the same compounds with their sons (Akurugu, 2017). Therefore, daughters-in-law are charged with the responsibility of taking care of their mothers-in-law. Mansa's fear of being maltreated by any of her daughters-in-law could explain why she was insistent on having a female child of her own. This response confirms Abdul-Korah's (2011) findings indicating that females among the Dagaara people were more likely than men to take up roles and responsibilities that were previously considered exclusively men's. These roles include old age care. According to Abdul-Korah's (2011) findings, all the young women interviewed confirmed that they sent money and gifts to their parents regularly. Traditionally such roles were seen to be men's roles, therefore, placing an emphasis on having male children. Consequently, the Dagaara people tend to value having female children more than having male children. They believe that female children are more likely to take care of their parents in their old age than male children.

### **Economic Capability**

Although the women in my study indicated that they were not pressured by their husbands to have many children, they also acknowledged the difficulties they have caring for their children. The general narratives from the research participants highlights a lack of financial assistance from their husbands in taking care of the children. About 90% of these participants complained about this issue. Many of these women said that because of a lack of financial support, they had to take some measures (i.e., contraceptives) to control child birth. During a conversation with Akosua, an older woman who was menopausal, she explained to me how she bore sole responsibility for both the financial and domestic care of her six children. The difficulties she experienced in raising her

children alone forced her to rely on contraceptives to avoid having more children. This is what she said to me during my conversation with her:

*Fo baŋ ka a wagere na, dɔge-seŋ yeɛ da ba pore seŋ pampana, azuiŋ. Ka foɔ ne fo sereŋ wa laŋ dɔɔ ne pɔge fo maŋ taa la poɔ. Pampana dɔge-seŋ yeɛ naŋ pore, fo na toɔ dɔge la biiri ka ba seŋ. Ka dɔge-seŋ yeɛŋ da Pore a te saŋa na, te da koŋ dɔge biiri yaga seŋ a ŋaa. A dɔge-seŋ yeɛ naŋ wa yire zaa, ka tenee mine dɔge la biyaga baare. Kyɛ n meŋ te kyɔge la a pimbiri, ka le da naane, kaapɔge n naaŋ dɔge la biiri pare a bayoɔbo bama n naŋ taa pampana .*

[You know, around that time, family planning was not as common as it is now. So, when you have sex with your husband, you easily become pregnant. Now that family planning has become very common, you can choose to have a small number of children. If family planning was common during our time, we would not have had these many children. But when family planning became common, some of us had already had a lot of children. But I also took family planning measures. Otherwise, I will probably have more than the six children that I have now.] (Akosua, married for over 20 years)

In Akosua's case, she did not experience any objection from her husband when she turned to contraceptives. However, in the case of another respondent (Abigail), the subject of contraceptives drew disapproval from her husband. Abigail's husband had wanted her to have as many children as possible and therefore was opposed to family planning. Her case exemplifies patriarchal control of men in households. As in many other households in this community, Abigail's husband fails to contribute in any significant way to the caregiving and upbringing of the children. Abigail admitted that she secretly took family planning measures without the knowledge of her husband in order to control childbirth. According to her:

Those days, women used not to have a say but I can say that now we have a say because if my husband say that give birth to 10, I will go to my Lawra market and then branch at the hospital and do my family planning and come. When you are talking it is the pregnancy that is not coming, am I God? ... We will not voice it ... but we know what we are doing. Because I will not put this thing (referring to contraceptive) and you will see. I will do the 3 months injection, injections too don't show and I will come and sit down and tell you that it is the pregnancy that is not coming. It is not my fault. (Abigail, married for over 10 years)

Abigail's narrative reflects a powerful but covert act of resistance to patriarchal domination in decisions that affect women's reproductive health. It highlights the hidden methods that women in this rural community sometimes adopt to challenge and undermine patriarchal power. According to Abigail, this practice of concealing contraceptive use was common among the women in this community. Under the pretext of going to the market, they would sometimes stop by the health centre to receive the contraceptives without their husband's knowledge and interference. Abigail, who was my key informant, explained to me that when the men demand many children, the women no longer challenge them openly but instead adopt covert strategies that preserve their ownership of their reproductive health. This is because challenging the men often times results in battering and other forms of abuse.

Similarly, in a study of Dagaara women within their marriage space, Akurugu (2017) documents that in a highly patriarchal society like Dagaara, where male dominance and unequal gendered power relations characterize gender relationships in households, women are still able to adopt some resistant strategies in challenging or undermining these uneven systems of power. Such strategies include subversive songs and embodied performances during funerals or in farmlands, temporarily escaping to the cities in the southern part of the country in search of menial jobs, sobbing, "pots of urine"<sup>18</sup> and dissimulation (p. 241). According to Akurugu (2017), these strategies were sometimes adopted by Dagaara women in dealing with violence in their marriages and also undermining the institution of widowhood inheritance as practiced by the Dagaara people. My data supports Akurugu's (2017) position that even in a patriarchal society

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<sup>18</sup> A woman keeps a "pot of urine" in her room to use as a defense mechanism. She pours it on any man who attempts to sexually assault her in the night while she sleeps.

where male power and domination is central, it is still possible for women to challenge, undermine, or resist gendered subordination despite the potential risks. Thus, Dagaara women are not necessarily passive victims of patriarchal subordination in every instance, as they have often demonstrated courageous acts of resistance and autonomy.

It is important to note that these findings show, as with other subaltern groups, that overt forms of resistance, such as openly challenging men and talking back at men in public, often have limited effects. However, the forms of resistance exercised by Zambo women and women of Serekpere<sup>19</sup> are unrecognized. They resist by employing internal politics that undermine the unequal systems of power. These findings differ from those of other studies (e.g., Bogale et al., 2011; Dodoo & Seal, 1994; Dodoo & Tempenis, 2002) that fail to acknowledge some of the ways in which rural women, in their subordinate positions, exercise some form of agency and challenge the unequal systems of power that tend to dominate their lives.

Poor communication among married couples in many rural patriarchal societies makes it difficult for women to initiate conversations around reproductive health with their husbands. Mosha et al. (2013) establish that in most rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa, there is a lack of communication among the couples due to the unequal gender relations. It becomes difficult for women to initiate conversations with their husbands concerning the use of family planning methods. Such lack of communication among the couples was evident in Zambo community, as my research participants confirmed that they rarely held conversations with their husbands. The husbands mostly spend their evenings in bars and return home drunk. In this condition, efforts to initiate

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<sup>19</sup> A Dagaara speaking community. Also, the community in which Akurugu (2017) conducted her study.

conversations with them often resulted in insults, and sometimes physical assaults.

With regards to decision-making concerning childbirth, my research data show that women in Zambo community primarily make the ultimate decisions concerning childbirth. Even in situations where their husbands may try to force them into having more children, these women are still capable of exercising agency, and not only challenge the dominant male power and control but also undermine these patriarchal powers. Women are capable of taking this decision independently because they take primary responsibility in the upbringing of the children. It is however important to acknowledge that, although the findings from this rural community may be similar to the experiences of women in other communities within the Upper West Region of Ghana, I will not homogenize their experiences because that will erase the various peculiarities in the different cultures within the region (Amadiume, 2015; Oyewumi, 1997).

My findings from this section correspond with the arguments raised by African feminist scholars Amadiume (2015) and Oyewumi (1997). These scholars argue that the lived experiences of African women are highly heterogeneous. Therefore, in order to understand the extent of oppression that African women face in their societies, one must consider how the culture and traditions of the society define and shape the gender roles of the people, especially women. Thus, not all women are oppressed by patriarchy in the same way and manner. By understanding a particular culture and the extent to which it shapes and forms social life of a group of people, one may be able to understand the varied ways in which patriarchy is manifested amongst that group, and how subordinate groups (women) in varying ways resist and undermine patriarchal power. Hence, a majority of rural African women may be subalterns in their respective communities, but the various cultures and traditions that exist in Africa define and shape their subalternity.

Also, within a single community, the experiences of women may be different because their oppressions are different.

### **Decisions Concerning Child Upbringing Are Made Primarily by Women**

My research findings demonstrate that women make the ultimate decisions concerning child upbringing. They make these decisions by default because their husbands do not assume such responsibilities. Women are also primarily responsible for childcare and the decisions made in that regard. My respondents also confirmed that husbands generally paid no attention to wives' personal welfare. Nonetheless, women are still required to acknowledge their husbands as the ultimate decision-makers concerning child upbringing. This is evident in the narratives below:

*N serɛ ba taa a faɲa na kaa a biiri, azuiɲ, maa la erɛ yelizaa. A banan gba n nan de eɲ sakuuriɲ, o ba soɲna ma. Maa la nan kyene kaara ba. Lenso, ka maan ba wa taa libiri na da ne a ba gama bee magedalii bee gba na yɔɔ a ba sakuu fii, a n serɛ meɲ ba man taa na yɔɔ.*

[My husband doesn't have the strength to take care of the children. So, I am the one doing everything. He does not even help with the ones I sent to school; I am still the one who is taking care of them. So, if I am unable to buy their books or pencils, or even if I cannot pay their school fees, my husband does not also have the money to pay.] (Akosua, married for more than 10 years)

*Ka banan na e yelizaa, maa la man wuli yeli ba nan na e ..., ba saa ba taa ba kanya zaa yeɛ. Bone nan ferɛ o la o peere yeɛ ane lenɛɛ a bie nan kaara a peere zu. A zaa la le o ba taa wagere ko a biiri.*

[I am the one who instructs them to do everything. I decide on what they do ... their father doesn't have time for any one of them. What he is interested in is his sheep and how the child is watching them for him; that's it. He doesn't have time for his children.] (Araba, married for 19 years)

The above narratives from Akosua and Araba were also confirmed by seven other women involved in this study; they are principally responsible for the material needs of their children. For instance, they are responsible for the payment of children's school fees and other childcare expenses, including the provision of food and clothing. Similarly,

children do not usually go to their fathers when they need money and other forms of financial support. Typically, in this patrilineal society where children are said to belong to their father's kin, the customary expectation is that men should be primarily responsible for both financial and domestic upbringing of their children, giving them the ultimate power in decisions concerning their children's upbringing. But, according to the lived narratives of my participants, men in this community do not pay any attention to the upbringing of their children. Consequently, since the women are responsible for the overall care of children, they end up making ultimate decisions such as which school a child attends, what domestic chore each child performs, which church the children would attend, and all secondary issues.

While conducting this fieldwork, I observed that although women were the ones actively involved in childcare and child upbringing and the decisions around it, they still acknowledged their husbands as heads of households. As Donkor rationalized:

*Saakonnoŋ wulee la ka fo maŋ yeli kaa dɔɔ la maŋ ere yelizaa haali gba, ka onaŋ ba ere yeli zaa ..... a zuin le la. Ka a dɔɔŋ iri sidi boŋyeni gba kye ka a pɔge iri sidiri ayi kye aseŋ ka o naŋ yeli ka a dɔɔ la ere yelizaa. A saakonnoŋ la a le. .*

[Well according to tradition, you have to say that the man is the one doing everything even if he is not doing anything...so, that is it. Even if a man brings 1 Cedi<sup>20</sup> and you the woman you bring out 2 Cedi, you still have to say that the man is contributing more. And that is tradition.] (Donkor, married for more than 20 years)

Donkor explained that this has been the traditional practice among married women seeking respectability in the community. Hence a Dagaara married woman is culturally expected to (and often does) to give her household credit for household financial responsibilities. In other words, a wife is culturally expected to “cover” her

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<sup>20</sup> The Cedi is Ghana's currency unit; commonly known as the Ghanaian cedi.

husband, even though in reality women play the primary roles in childcare and make the decisions concerning the upbringing of children. Thus, the lives of Dagaara women are particularly burdened by a patriarchal system that confers privileges on men without demanding responsibilities of them.

During my encounter with Donkor, I was interested in understanding why many women in this community acknowledge their husbands and give credit to them for things the men had no interest in doing. She told me that their mothers did it and taught them the same thing as they were growing up. This means that the patriarchal ruling relations these women have internalized conditions them not to expect much household responsibility from their husbands. Conversely, for the men, they grew up seeing their fathers not taking part in their upbringing. Therefore, it is habitual for them to not be involved in the decision-making processes concerning the upbringing of their children. It is worth noting that such behaviours from men in this community may be different than other men who are from this same community but live in urban areas. The economic hardships and way of life in urban areas may influence the experiences of educated Dagaara men who live in cities, making them take responsibility in the material support of their children. Perhaps further research perhaps should look specifically into why men act and behave this way. Women who have gained some level of education and are gainfully employed are not exempted either. This is the case of Abigail, my key informant, who is also a government worker in the community:

...here excuse me for saying, men don't take care of the women. Even me, who is literate myself [sic], hardly will my husband give me 10 cedi for chop money. He will not give me. He will not give, because they have not been doing it since he was born. (Abigail, married for over 10 years)

Abigail's response in this regard further confirms the responses of Akosua and Araba. In Abigail's case, she was able to fully provide for her children because of her monthly income. According to her, it is easier to ignore her husband and focus on providing the needs of her children. But, for other women in the community who do not have a steady income generating activity, it becomes a huge burden, and their only resort is to sell their labour to people and/or engage in the sale of firewood. Often, for those women, their children were unable to continue their education after completing the primary level (elementary education); they drop out of school and engage in economic activities to support their mothers.

The tendency for Dagaara women to be solely responsible for their children often has a number of negative implications, including little security for their household such as providing food and child labour. Women are expected to do both farm work and household chores while at the same time bearing the responsibility of providing for the health and nutritional needs of their children. Unavailability of funds and support from husbands makes it difficult for women to provide nutritious meals for their children. Their limited access to farmland may place further financial strain on the women. For instance, husbands may refuse to give women pieces of land to farm and produce food ingredients for household consumption, refuse to give wives monetary support, and constrain wives' mobility to access market services (Porter, 2011). Often times, children are malnourished and this may also account for higher death rates among children in many developing countries (Mwangome, Prentice, Plugge, & Nweneka, 2010).

In households with older children,<sup>21</sup> the women confirmed that their older children worked outside of the household to earn some money to help support the family. During the rainy seasons, these children, aside from helping with their household farms, also sell their labour to other people. The children use the money they earn to help pay for their educational expenses. Sometimes, they give the money they make to their mothers who then use it to purchase food for the household. These children work outside of their homes because they understand that their mothers are not able to cover all the household expenses. Children of school age who are forced to work outside their households partly account for the incidence of child labour in Africa. According to Admassie (2000, 2002), children's participation rate in economic activities could be as high as 40 percent.

The high rate of poverty has resulted in child labour becoming an enduring cultural practice in many parts of Africa. In the case of Zambo community, where cultural and social considerations require children to take part in domestic work or in manual work on the fields (such as meal preparations, washing clothes, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, and farm work), child labour unfortunately becomes a part of the lived experiences of many children. Cultural norms in this community (similar in other rural communities across Africa) require women to train their female children in domestic chores so as to make them become "good wives" in the future. Similarly, men are expected to train their male children on how to work on the farms. Hence, the subsistence nature of economic life in many rural communities (including Zambo), and

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<sup>21</sup> Within the context of this study older children are children from 11 years of age. All the women interviewed could not tell the ages of their older children.

traditional and cultural values contribute to the participation of children in economic activities, therefore perpetuating child labour.

The economic contributions of children to their households negatively affects their education. Many of the children in school are expected to undertake domestic and farm work activities together with attending school. Most often these domestic activities hinder their abilities to attend and perform well in school. Although the government of Ghana has attempted to reduce child labour in rural areas by providing Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), the number of children in rural areas who are still not in school is on the rise. Partly due to the socio-economic conditions of rural families, children are rather seen to be more useful in economic activities to help generate income for the survival of the family (Admassie, 2003).

Studies suggest that a major cause of child labour in sub-Saharan Africa is poverty with young boys and girls engaging in economic activities, especially in rural areas, in order to help support their families in many cases are the main income earners of their families (Adamassie, 2002; Bass, 2004; Hilson, 2010). For instance, Hilson (2010) argues that in the case of rural northern Ghana, children sometimes move with their parents to mining areas from family farms, and subsequently engage in mine work in order to fund their education with the hope of escaping poverty. Likewise, Heady (2000) and Chant and Jones (2005) document that children who work as well as go to school oftentimes find themselves less able to learn due to exhaustion, or have insufficient time to complete homework because of the amount of time they spend on activities before and after school, including on weekends. This leads to children suspending their education or dropping out completely. At least five respondents confirmed that their children did work outside the home so they could buy things they like, such as school materials or clothing.

Most often, the amount of work they do is not reflected by what they earn, which makes it hard for them to pay their fees. In almost all the households I visited, there were at least two children (mostly adolescents) who had dropped out of school and have either fled to southern communities to work or have stayed around to work on people's farms. The common response among my participants was that there was no money for them to continue their education, or that due to work the children were unable to perform well academically to stay in school.

### **Women Taking Financial Care of Children: Reversing Gender Roles**

In this section, I discuss some context-specific narratives from the women I interviewed in regards to their experiences in the financial aspect of raising their children. This dimension of child upbringing appeared to be important to the women. While conducting the interviews, I observed the sentimental emotions each participant expressed as they spoke about their financial burdens and the lack of financial support they received from their husbands. For these women, having any form of financial assistance from their husbands would be enough, as the women believed that would decrease their workloads. In this section, I also discuss a reversal of traditional roles between men and women.

My data show that women in this community generally take up roles and responsibilities that are traditionally known to be the responsibilities of men in typical patriarchal societies in Africa. These women were in charge of the financial welfare of their children and of the entire household. There is evidence of role reversal in this community because women seem to pay for almost everything, whereas the men barely contribute to household expenditures. This position was best articulated by Abigail, as she expressed her general perception on the relationship between men and women in the

community:

Generally, when you look at the women in our communities, we are rather the men, and the men are rather the women. Because look at all these things I have mentioned; it is the man who is supposed to pay school fees, not the woman, it is the man that is supposed to feed the family; so, if the woman is now doing that, who then is the man? You see? (Abigail, married for over 10 years)

During our conversation, I asked if some men in the community helped in the financial support of their children. She confirmed that there were some men who contributed and helped their wives. However, this was a very small fraction; Abigail estimates that this was “about 3%” of the men in the community. She was very firm by her assertion as she recounted that every member of the Rural Women Farmers Association of Ghana (RUWFAG) had the same complaints whenever they had their public meetings. Notwithstanding the general claim by Abigail, the case of Yaa appeared to be different. She explained to me during her interview that both she and her husband shared the financial responsibilities for their children, but her husband made the final decisions concerning the upbringing of the children. As she put it:

*Óó, kyɛ ka anaŋ wuli ka a ba saa ba taa libiri kyɛ ka maŋ wa taa, n maŋ de ko o la ka o de bɔ mine poɔ ka anaŋ wa seŋ ka o de ko a bie ka o te yɔɔ a fii. Fo baŋ ka biiri eŋa la ka te zaa be a teŋa zu kyɛ Azuiŋ a ba seŋ ka nemboŋyeni maŋ, dire ba dɔgɛɛ. Te zaa la boɔra a biiri, lenso ka a sanɛŋ wa wa, a seŋ ka te soŋ taa a toɔ kaa ba.*

[Yes, but when it happens that their father does not have the money and if I have the money, I give it to the father for him to also add his to it so it becomes enough for the child to go and pay their fees. You know it is because of children that we are all in this world. We brought them into this world. So, there is no need for one to be suffering and leave the other; we both wanted them so when the cost comes we need to help each other in order to take care of them.] (Yaa, married for over 20 years).

In her case, aside from being farmers, her husband is also a mason, and she is a local *pito* brewer. The difference in her experience to that of the other women interviewed suggests that aside from farming, which is the main occupation and source of

livelihood for the people in the community, both Yaa and her husband were engaged in other forms of livelihood, especially during the dry season as a way of earning some money during that period. For 9 out of the 10 women I interviewed, their husbands did not engage in any economic activity during the dry seasons. However, even in Yaa's case, male domination is evident, as she explained to me that she gave all her income to her husband who then would make the final decisions. Also, as explained earlier, Yaa could be exercising her culturally accepted role of covering her husband by acknowledging him for taking financial responsibility of the upbringing of the children as well as making the ultimate decisions. Perhaps out of concern about being labeled a "willful wife," Yaa claimed that her husband was responsible for and supported her in the upbringing of their children. After all, her traditional role as a wife is to "cover her husband" (see Akurugu, 2017). The concepts of willful wife and wife within the Dagaara language are discussed in detail in the next chapter. The following narrative provides context on the experience of another respondent, Akosua:

*... o yeli ko la o soba ka ka yelizaan wa bebe kyaare a o pɔgeyaa sakuuri yeɛ, ka o gaa te yeli ko a bie ma. Azuiŋ o yeli la o soba ka o gaa die kyɛ leɛ wa ka maan wa babe, a na toɔ yɔɔ meŋ, ana eŋ na be la n zie bonso, ona ba taa libie.*

[... he told the person that if it is anything to do with his daughter's school they should pass the information to her mother. So, he asked the person to go home and come back when I am around, and if I know I can pay, I will pay and if I cannot pay it is up to me because he doesn't have any money.] (Akosua, married for over 20 years)

Akosua also told me how she has never asked her husband for help in taking care of the children because doing so would merely incur insults. She explained how she has had to engage in both the sale of firewood and *pito* brewing in order to raise some money to provide food for the children and also be able to pay their school fees and buy books and other school supplies. Akosua's narrative further highlights the lack of interest by

men in the well-being and welfare of their children. Therefore, the burden is left on the woman to shoulder alone, making her the ultimate decision-maker concerning childbirth and child upbringing. Abigail bemoaned this enormous responsibility on women, saying:

...because our husbands when they get their money, [they go and spend it in a bar]. They go for the meat on the table ... and then get their akpeteshie<sup>22</sup>; help me to die fast [sic]. They will also get that one and top up and then they become fine so when they are coming, they are like people who are tipsy and they can't hear anything or see anything so if the woman wants to talk then you will be accompanied by beatings...[sic]. (Abigail, married for over 10 years)

The sentimental mode of enacting lived experiences is central to this study in many respects as it enables us to understand the forms of subordination these rural women face and their traditional exclusion from the patriarchal power structure in Zambo. During our conversation, Abigail added that men in the community had money, however, their money never is applied to the needs of their families. She explained that during the dry seasons when there is no work on the farms, most men travel to other communities in the south in search for menial jobs. The men mainly worked as labourers on people's farms in order to earn some income. However, upon the men's return, the women do not see any income being brought home; meanwhile their husbands go out to bars every night. Similarly, men made an income from the sale of their farm produce, making them the ultimate decision-makers regarding the disposal of household farm produce. (The topic of farm produce and decisions on the sale of farm produce is discussed further in Chapter 5). Some studies have documented that men also rely on alcohol as a coping mechanism for their helplessness and inadequacy in providing support to their families, again as a result of poverty. However, this only makes them rely even more on alcohol and more incapable of providing any form of financial support

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<sup>22</sup> A local alcoholic beverage distilled from palm wine.

(Luginaah, 2008; Luginaah & Dakubo, 2003). Such behaviours have serious impacts on women who are constantly in poverty and are oftentimes subjected to coerced sex and violence, increasing their risk of HIV and other infectious, sexually transmitted diseases.

The narratives of these women in this section is consistent with existing literature that demonstrates the economic contributions of women alone do not determine women's bargaining power in household decision-making (Attanasio & Lechene, 2002; Himmelweit et al., 2013; Sen, 1990; Warren, 2008). The experiences of these women show that certain cultural factors as well as the existing gender ideology in this rural community tend to influence their participation in household decision-making.

### **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter documented the gendered nature of decision-making concerning childbirth and child upbringing in Zambo community in rural northern Ghana. The aim was to offer a nuanced discussion of the experiences of rural Ghanaian women from their own narratives. The analysis and discussions in this chapter have shown that women in this community tend to make the ultimate decisions concerning childbirth and child upbringing. Moreover, due to the difficulty in taking care of so many children alone, women have resorted to taking independent measures (without consulting their husbands) to control childbirth. Such measures include their access to family planning methods, specifically contraceptives (injectables).

The findings also revealed that women make the ultimate decisions concerning child upbringing. Although men are traditionally expected to be the ultimate decision-makers on child upbringing in a patriarchal society like Zambo, women occupy such positions by default and hence, there is a reverse in traditional roles between men and women. Women culturally acknowledge their husbands as the heads of the household

mainly because they are expected to do so, but it is the woman who actively acts as the head of the household and makes the major decisions concerning the upbringing of children, especially in the financial aspect of upbringing.

The findings also show that even in a patriarchal society where patriarchal ideologies may be expressed in the everyday lives of socially dominant men, it does not necessarily translate that all women are passive victims. Thus, women in their subaltern positions are capable of being active resisters who challenge patriarchal ideologies. This has been the argument of African feminists' theorists Amadiume (2015) and Oyewumi (1997, 2000, 2011) against some Western discourses on gender studies in Africa.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DECISION-MAKING CONCERNING HOUSEHOLD INCOME GENERATION AND DISTRIBUTION

This chapter discusses data gathered around my research questions: How is the family income generated and who is the primary income earner? How is this income distributed within the household and who makes those decisions? It presents a discussion on some culturally defined roles of women and how such roles may influence their subordinate positions. My research question is addressed by discussing three major themes arising from data gathered from the fieldwork: (a) women as the primary income earners and household breadwinners, (b) the need to maintain the *pogminga* status (women's exclusion from land ownership), and (c) decision-making concerning the distribution of household income. These themes overlap because the underlying cultural factors that cause the forms of oppression these women face are embedded in their everyday lives.

### **Women Are the Primary Income Earners and Household Breadwinners**

My interpretation of my data revealed that women in this community are the primary income providers of their households. All the women interviewed reported that primary incomes were used in providing food and other household necessities. These women further explained that they received no financial help from their husbands in providing for the household. Take for instance the narrative of Abena:

*A te lan̄kpeɛbo ɲa pɔɔ, dɔba maɲ soɲna la a ba pɔgeba? Foɔ, hoɔ ... bebiri na zaa fo naɲ wa nyɛ ka o taa libiri a sɔre o, ka o pɔɔɲ wa peɛ o na ko fo la. Kyɛ ka le naane o бага kyebe. A naɲ waa le meɲ, foɔ la na yi te di dɔgeɛ bɔ libiri ka foo wa nyɛ o ka fo de e ne yeli na fo naɲ boɔra.*

[In this community, do men help their wives? You, hmmm ... the day that you find he has money, and you ask him, if he is in a good mood he will give you; if not he won't mind you. So, then you will have to go out and struggle to get

money. When you struggle and get the money, then you can now do what you needed the money for.] (Abena, married for more than 10 years)

During my interview with Abena, she expressed the hardship she goes through to earn money to provide for her children. She informed me that despite being solely responsible for doing household chores, she still had to go out and search for firewood, then carry it to the market to sell, or her children would have no food to eat. In addition to providing food for her household, she was also responsible for tuition and other expenditures for her children's education, clothing, and other needs. And these expenditures are borne alone, from her limited income. In this regard, women are burdened with the dual role of productive labour and domestic work. For instance, another respondent, Akosua, also said: "I am the one who does everything. I am the one who decides that when I get money I should go and buy a goat, or a pig or their food." Akosua further explained that she is the one who made sure that items were available in the house because there was no way her husband would use his money to purchase anything for the house. Both Abena and Akosua's position confirm the general narrative from the women that men do not support their families and households.

By and large, women in this rural community, bear the dual role of both paid and unpaid labour. They remain primarily responsible for the great deal of work that ensures the survival and care of their entire household. Such unpaid work ranges from the care of children, the elderly, and the sick. They also engage in activities such as preparation of food and the fetching of firewood and water. Some of their productive labour include food production and livestock care (Kabeer, 2012). Comparatively, it is worth noting that although the issue of women's unpaid labour in the domestic sphere has gained a lot of attention among feminist scholars in the West (see, for example, Bezanson, 2006;

Bezanson & Luxton, 2006; Doucet, 2001, 2015; Doucet & Merla, 2007), it has yet to generate enough scholarly attention in Ghana, especially in rural areas. Particularly, these activities in many patriarchal societies continue to remain the sole responsibility of women, who bear the constraints of these dual roles without receiving any help from their husbands or any male family member. Generally, females in this part of the world are continually being socialized to regard it as their primary duty, and how well they perform such gendered roles determines whether or not they will be “good wives” or “good mothers.”

My data further indicate that the women generally engaged in a number of paid labour activities, principal among which were non-farm economic activities and micro-credit loans and grants. These factors are discussed below.

### **Non-Farm Economic Activities**

Although women contribute significantly to the subsistence farming, they do not however control or have access to the farm produce and the income made from these goods. These non-farm activities are, therefore, the main income-generating activities of women in this community. Araba’s narrative confirms the argument that women are the primary income earners of households:

*Dagaara kultaa pɔɔ, ka a pɔgeɲ wa zeɲ kyelle ka a dɔɔ ere yeli zaa kora o, o koɲ tɔɲ o. A gaɲ a zaa ka onaɲ ba wa taa yel-eraa zaa naɲ na yi libiri ko o. ka foɔ ba wa gbaale iri bɔ yeli kaɲa ere kyɛ wa zeɲ kyelle ka o ere yeli zaa, o koɲ e. ona yele la ka o ko fo bombie (kamaana ane seɲkaa). Ka onaɲ wa ko fo a ama, o baareɛ o yeɛ, a kyeeɛ na naɲ kyere, be la a foɔ pɔge zie.*

[Well you know marriage amongst the Dagaara, as a woman if you sit down and expect your husband to be providing everything for you, he won’t mind you at all. Especially if he doesn’t have anything profitable doing. If you do not also wake up and find something to do and sit there and expect him to do everything, he will not do anything. His is to just give you the grains (corn and groundnuts). When he gives you that he is done, whatever that is left to be done is up to you, the woman.] (Araba, married for 19 years)

In Araba's case, she explained to me that aside from farming, she is unable to engage in any other activity. She mainly relies on the few food items her husband provides her with, and on help she receives from her natal household. According to her, two of her children have been taken away by her lineal relatives to urban cities in southern Ghana. This has reduced her burden of childcare. Certainly, this is a common practice in the community; children sometimes move away from their parents and live with extended family members to reduce the financial burden on their mothers. Usually, these are relatives who are well to do and reside in bigger cities.

Such sentiments expressed by Araba suggest that women within the Dagaara community have also accepted that their husbands will not contribute their income to the provision of household needs. Some of my participants, including Araba, do not even bother asking for help from their husbands because it may draw insults, battering, or other forms of physical abuse from the men. The situation is even worse for women who live in the same compound with their mothers-in-law. In Araba's case, her mother-in-law often accuses her of wanting to kill Araba's husband whenever Araba attempts to approach her husband for household financial support.

It is important to acknowledge that work in this community is seasonal. That is, during the rainy<sup>23</sup> season, both men and women are present working on their farms to produce food crops. During the dry<sup>24</sup> season, most men migrate to southern communities in search of jobs, mainly to work as labourers on people's farms. During this time, women are left behind to care for their children with little or no support from their

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<sup>23</sup> This is a period of extreme rainfall. In northern Ghana, the rains span only from April to October.

<sup>24</sup> This season is characterized by dry and dusty wind blowing from the months of November to March, and hardly any rain.

husbands. They therefore assume the role of household head. During this season, these practices increase the number of female-headed households within the area, making rural women the backbone of their families in terms of being the breadwinners. It further makes their economic independence vital to the survival of their households (Amu, 2005). However, the most common economic activity these women engage in during the dry season when their husbands are away is the sale of firewood, which earns them very minimal income for the upkeep of their children and the household.

Studies have demonstrated that seasonal migration is often used as an adaptation strategy for rural individuals and households by helping them reduce economic vulnerability and increase livelihood strategies (Rademacher-Schulz, Schraven, & Mahama, 2014). However, the narratives of the women show that it has more negative impacts on their livelihoods because these women do not receive any remittances from their husbands during those periods. There also tends to be a loss of physical labour resulting from the absence of their husbands and older male children, which further increases the amount of work women have to perform in and around the household. The effect of this is that women assume more labour-intensive responsibilities, including those traditionally undertaken by their husbands. This constrains their abilities to take advantage of opportunities that may improve their economic well-being. Hence, I argue that based on these circumstances, women are considered the primary income earners of their households, with the sale of firewood, charcoal, and/or *pito* being their main source of income.

Some of the current literature on migration highlight the importance of migration (Anarfi, Kwankye, Ofusuo-Mensah, & Tiemoko, 2003; Rademacher-Schulz et al., 2014; van der Geest, 2011). Specifically, seasonal migration from northern communities in

Ghana to the south have profound benefits, including a compensation for lack of employment in the area of out-migration during the dry season, reduced pressure on household food and livestock, a reduction in income variability, as well as ensuring food security via remittances received from migrants. A study conducted by van der Geest (2010) highlights the important role of migration on the lives and livelihoods of Dagaara people. Thus, each year, many adult males travel hundreds of kilometres to southern Ghana to work as seasonal farm labourers.

The Dagaara people mainly engage in three types of migration, namely seasonal labour migration, long-term migration, and return migration. All three types of migration have serious implications on the lives and livelihoods of both the migrant and the people who are left behind (van der Geest, 2010). Seasonal labour migration is an activity mostly engaged in by men who travel to southern Ghana to work during the dry season. They mostly work as farm labourers and return with some savings as well as home goods including food and clothes. Some rural households see this form of migration as a survival strategy while others see it as a loss of labour for certain household activities during the dry season (van der Geest, 2010). Long-term migration as practiced by the Dagaara people is one where the migrants do not return back to their home communities. Most often, the only time migrants will return is when they die. For most people who engage in this form of migration, they usually move with their wives and children. According to van der Geest (2010), return migration happens when migrants move back to their home communities after being away for long. Some of the reasons for returned migration include difficulties and economic hardships the migrants face in southern Ghana, old age, and deteriorating health conditions. As a result, many of them return

home with little or no income. In other words, the returned migrants end up not being wealthier than non-migrants.

van der Geest's (2010) study documents both economic and health implications of seasonal migration, which includes a loss in physical labour that tends to increase the amount of work performed by women during the dry season. Another economic implication is the inability of migrants to remit back home. Indeed, my participants confirmed that they do not receive remittances from their husbands. These negative effects of seasonal migration further constrain the lives of women as they are left alone to cater for the entire household. In some cases, the shame of returning home with nothing forces these migrants to stay longer, and may subsequently lead to a permanent migration.

One of my respondents, Pat, had a similar experience. During her interview, she told me that both she and her husband had migrated to a southern community. However, she fell sick and returned home with her children, while her husband refused to return. It has been seven years since she moved back to Zambo and she now lives with two of her children and her mother-in-law. According to Pat, her husband had secured land in the south and farms on his own, but he does not remit any money for food items to her. Her husband's absence had also cost her access to the family land. She only farmed on a small piece of land located directly in front of the household. Due to this, she is unable to provide enough food for her children and her mother-in-law, with all of them surviving on one meal each day. In Pat's experience, we see the extreme negative impact of migration on women.

Some of the negative health implications include experiences of physical weakness by the migrants upon their return, and an increasing spread of HIV/AIDS in the

home communities. Both married and unmarried men who migrate to southern communities for seasonal labour engage in unprotected sexual relations, which increases their risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS and infecting women upon their return. This has major negative implications for the survival of rural households, such as a failure to provide food security for household members; a failure to sponsor the financial responsibilities of children; and a loss of farm labour land, considering the roles women play to sustain their households.

### **Micro-Credit Loans and Grants**

In order for women to be capable of engaging in any income generating activity, there is a need for readily available capital, which they do not have, to help start up such activities. Also, these women are often excluded from accessing loans from financial institutions because they do not own land to use as collateral. As a result, my key informant, Abigail, informed me that the continuous lack of support women (including herself) receive from their husbands motivated members of the Rural Women Farmers Association of Ghana (RUWFAG) to form a *susu*<sup>25</sup> savings program. This is a savings program that grants loans to women without any form of collateral, since they are disadvantaged from accessing loans from financial institutions. According to Abigail, there is a general coffer to which each woman contributes money on a weekly basis. The minimum contribution per person is GHS1.00 (\$0.29 CAD). A treasurer keeps all the money and a secretary records all transactions during the meetings. When a woman needs money urgently, she can come and borrow money and is given a minimum of 3 months to pay back with interest. However, loans are given according to the strength of each

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<sup>25</sup> An informal means of collecting and saving money through a club or a group of people.

person's contribution. Also, at the end of the year, all interests made are calculated and shared among members. The benefits of this savings program were shared by many of my respondents, including Akosua:

*A maŋ yi la a susu libi-biŋni pɔɔ. A gɔbenente yuo la susu gana ko te. Be la ka te lɔɔra a susu eŋne kyɛ paa maŋ leɛ gaa te peŋ libie a te awombo saŋa. Azuiŋ, ba maŋ ko te la a libie a pɔɔ ne libiri na te naŋ na yɔɔ dɔgele a libima zu, kyɛ paa ko te kyuuri ata ka te na de yɔɔ ne a libi-dɔgelaa na. Le paa la ka te ere kpeere. Lenso ka a fere ka n dogera daa koɔra, a na maŋ nye a susu libie te yɔɔ, kyɛ paa wa leɛ gaa te yɔɔ a puoriŋ.*

[We have this susu system. So, we save there and then go back to borrow the money when we need it. They give us the money plus the interest we will have to pay and then, they give us 3 months to pay the interest. So that is what we do to survive. That is why it is important that I brew pito and sell, to get some money and be able to do the susu savings so when I need money urgently, I can go in there and get some money and then pay back later.] (Akosua, married for over 20 years)

Other women involved in this study who also participate in the *susu* savings expressed how it has saved them in crucial times when they needed money urgently. Their only concern was to make sure they made their weekly contributions so they are able to secure loans when needed. Women, therefore, depend primarily on their petty trading and/or on the sale of firewood to meet their weekly contributions. For others, in times of difficulty, they sell some of the farm produce meant for consumption in the house<sup>26</sup> in order to either meet their weekly contributions or pay off their loans.

According to Abigail, one major reason for establishing the *susu* savings program was to encourage more women in the community to develop the interest and engage in more income earning activities. Whether it is petty trading, selling firewood, brewing *pito*, or even working on people's farms, members are required to pay their contributions by the

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<sup>26</sup> The produce they sell is from what their husbands had given them, or from what they harvested from their own separate farming.

end of each week. The primary goal is to ensure that every woman in the community is able to sponsor the needs of their households independently. For the women who are a part of this program, it gave them an assurance that their children's school fees are catered for, and should any of their children need urgent healthcare, that there is a place they can seek financial assistance.

As research demonstrates, community-based micro credits, similar to the one discussed above, have become vital for poverty alleviation in the Global South, but especially among rural women. Some of these micro-credits and other poverty alleviation programs are sometimes promoted in public policies in many countries of the Global South with the help and interventions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Both the government and NGOs have introduced credit programs that target the poor, particularly women, based on the view that they are more likely than men to be credit constrained, have restricted access to the wage labour market, and have an inequitable share of power in household decision-making (Ansoglenang, 2006; Kato & Kratzer, 2013; Narayan, 2005; Pitt, Khandker, & Cartwright, 2006). Empowerment of women has become a global challenge since traditionally women have been marginalized and subjected to male domination and control.

According to Khan and Noreen (2012), women make up about 70% of the world's poor (p. 4514) and specifically about 78% of poor people in Ghana (as cited in Ghana Statistical Service, 2014b, p. 10). Although Cooke et al. (2016, p. 3) indicate that poverty in Ghana has reduced from 51.7% to 24.2% of the population since 1992, a tremendous number of the rural population, specifically rural women, still live in poverty. This is due to their high dependence on agricultural activities as a primary income source, barriers

that discourage farming households from producing beyond subsistence needs, and the lack of access to output markets (World Food Programme, 2009). Within the Dagaara context, women culturally do not have authority compared to their male counterparts, as they do not have control over household productive activities such as farming. Thus, they are marginalized and discriminated against in terms of the allocation and use of farm land. Primarily at the individual household level, women are excluded from playing a role in the decision-making process concerning agricultural production such as what food items to grow, when to harvest produce, determining the price and sale of food items, and how to manage the produce.

Despite these constraints, women are still expected to perform their domestic and childcare duties. They are still responsible for a majority of the household income generation. In order to achieve this, Dagaara women mostly engage in non-farm income earning activities in order to meet their household demands. As a result, various NGOs such as the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD) and governmental institutions have worked with these rural women to provide them with support by introducing credit programs that enable women to gain access to loans and invest in their various income generating activities.

One of the well-known small-scale credit programs established for poor people is the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh. This bank was established with the purpose of providing loans exclusively to the poorest of poor who possess not more than half an acre of land or have assets that do not exceed an acre of land (Dowla, 2006; Wahid, 1994).

The bank operates on the principle of group liability<sup>27</sup> instead of collateral. In the process of operating under such a principle, the bank took up the responsibility of creating social capital. This was because it realized that the transactions it made had to be embedded in a social context. In creating social capital, Grameen Bank specifically created trust, norms, and social networks in order to solve collective action problems. The creation of trust included convincing commercial bankers, the central bank, and the ministry of finance that rural poor people were credit worthy. It also included gaining the trust of the poor people themselves by guaranteeing them that the government had an interest in their welfare and would provide to them, especially poor women, who did not have traditional forms of collateral. The creation of norms included creating transparency in financial transactions and credit discipline with the insistence of timely repayment; the norm that credit is not charity; and the norm of credit discipline—that is, nothing should be given to the poor for free. In other words, Grameen Bank never forgave any loan. The bank also created the norm of group lending, where loans were granted to people in groups of five. The main purpose of this was to use peer pressure to guarantee repayment, since all members were jointly liable for the loan. The creation of social networks included organizing centre meetings where borrowers come together to expand their social and information networks which they used to facilitate economic and non-economic transactions. Borrowers also took advantage of such meetings to share marketing information and best practices regarding farming and livestock rearing.

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<sup>27</sup> This consists of a group of five people. Loans are initially given to two members and based on their repayment performance, two more members will be given loans. The group has a leader who is the last person to receive the loan.

The bank has been successful in uplifting the socio-economic conditions of the rural poor in Bangladesh mainly because of its prime focus on women's participation, employment, productivity, income, housing, and nutritional needs (Wahid, 1994). Understanding the various forms of marginalization that rural women in Bangladesh face, and acknowledging the significant roles they play in their various communities, the bank ensured that a majority of its members and beneficiaries were women (Wahid, 1994). To date, the degree of women's participation in the bank's activities keep rising both absolutely and relatively. The success story of Grameen Bank in the alleviation of poverty in Bangladesh has resulted in widespread attempts to replicate it in many countries, especially within the Global South.

Notwithstanding these institutional supports, some evidence suggests that rural women still remain somewhat poor mainly because they are unable to meet both their strategic and practical gendered needs satisfactorily (Ansoglenang, 2006; Ganle et al., 2015; Mohammed, 2018; Nkrumah, 2010). In Ansoglenang's (2006) study, it was revealed that the women provided financial support to their husbands from the loans they acquired to invest in their income generating activities. Also, the time given to them for repayment was unrealistic, a condition that made it difficult for women to go back again for more loans. Similarly, other studies also highlighted the insufficiency in the amount of funds the women received (Ganle et al., 2015; Mohammed, 2018). The funds given to the women were not enough for them to establish any income earning activity. Hence, the women regarded the funds as *chop money*<sup>28</sup> instead of *business money*.<sup>29</sup> Also, Arku and Arku (2009) stated that micro-credit sometimes tends to increase women's workload

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<sup>28</sup> Money meant for household consumption.

<sup>29</sup> Money used to start up any business or income earning activity.

since micro-finance schemes often times have been influenced by cultural norms because culture tends to play a huge role in differentiating gender roles and the extent to which men can support women's household chores. In order for any micro-credit program to positively impact the lives of women and economically empower them, it should take into consideration the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which it seeks to be implemented. It should also consider the groups of women based on their situations, whether or not they are able to service their debts. This is because the form of patriarchal system that exists within Zambo community is one that tolerates the inability of men to perform their traditional gender roles of breadwinners in their households. Such a patriarchal system further undermines women financially because they tend to be overburdened in providing for all the financial needs of their household, a condition that leaves them incapable of saving any money and taking advantage of opportunities that may provide them with economic independence.

My research participants indicated that their husbands generated income, which was mainly acquired from the sale of farm produce at the end of each farming season, and sometimes from their labour work in southern communities during the dry season. However, these women were often reluctant to demand any money from their husbands because such requests often resulted in domestic violence. The women reported that instead of supporting the households, their husbands commonly used their income to entertain themselves. Most of these men spend their money significantly in alcohol consumption. During my conversations with Abigail, she assured me that both husbands and wives earned money, but it is the wife's income that is distributed within the household. She complained that:

When the money is coming in you will hear of it but you won't see it. The money coming in is coming to individual pockets now, not for the family. If it is entering my husband's pocket then it is for him, he will not even let you know he has money. Unless he gave you the produce to go and sell. If not, he will not let you know that he has money. So, we the women to have decided that when I make my something small (referring to money) [sic], the money is with me. When you tell them that this is what you have gotten, that is where his budget will be coming from. The wicked ones will even search your clothing, and still, go and drink and come and beat you on top if you complain. (Abigail, married for more than 10 years)

All the women interviewed did mention that they had to hide their money from their husbands because the latter would only use the money on alcohol at the expense of providing food, clothing, or even paying children's school fees. Since it was their income that provided for the family, the women needed to secure it well so that they could buy food for the household. The over-reliance on rural women's income for household consumption accounts for why they are the group most affected by poverty. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2014b, p. 10), rural populations account for 78% of the nation's poor, with women being the majority. The United Nations Development Programme Ghana (2010) also reported that women in the Lawra District were a lot poorer than men. Women in the district spend all their incomes on their families, making it difficult for them to save some for their personal use. Consequently, they are the poorest group in the region, and in the nation. This rational decision of the women to ensure that there is money available to cater for the family is best articulated in respondent Eunice's narrative:

*aaa, maa la maɲ di n dɔgɛɛ a bɔ n dare wa koɔre. Hehehe... Dɔgɛɛ ka n di kye nye a libie. Bone n naɲ na toɔ e la ka n de a libie maale ne bondirii ka o di. Ka maɲ ba wa taa bondirii, n maɲ de la ana libie na da ne kamaana ane zeere boma wa maale ne ka o di. Kye a libie eɲ, n ba maɲ de wuli o. ka onaɲ yeli ka n ko o a libie n koɲ ko o [...] fo taa la libie kye koɲ ko ma, ka n yi di dɔgɛɛ bɔ libie a na maɲ wa maale bondirii, ka fo boɔra ka n de ko fo ka fo nyu neɲ daa-kpeene? [...] ka anaɲ wuli ka libie o naɲ na de yɔɔ a biiri fii, n maɲ soɲ o la yɔɔ, kye yeli zaa paa o naɲ boɔra ka o e, see ka o bɔ omeɲa tɔre libie. N na yeli ko o la ka n ba taa. Ka le la o na yi la yeɲe te bɔ libie.*

[...aaa, I am the one who killed myself to get the firewood and sell. Hehehe ... I suffered to get that money. What I can do is use that money to cook food for him to eat. If I don't have food, I use that money to buy corn and other ingredients and cook for him to eat. But as for showing him the money, I don't do that. If he says I should give him the money, I won't give him. ... You have money but you won't give me, I went out and suffered to get some money in order to put food on the table for you, and you expect me to give the money to you to use on alcohol? ... If it is money needed for school fees [for the children], yes I am able to help him out and pay the fees for him. But aside from that and anything else he will have to do it himself. Even if I have the money for it, I will tell him I don't. So, he will have to go out and look for the money.] (Eunice, married for more than 20 years)

The narrative above clearly shows that on a daily basis, women in this community have to engage in strategic decisions in dealing with their husbands. In this narrative, Eunice expresses her anger towards her husband's alcoholic behaviour. Her anger was quite visible as she articulated her frustration about how drunk her husband is every night when he returns home. She claimed that was her main problem with her husband. Neither does she disclose her income to her husband. Her frustration suggested that she also does not adhere to directions from her husband, because according to her, there is nothing significant he could do when he comes home drunk all the time. She struggles all on her own to provide food and other needs for her children. Eunice is a woman who has refused to run to her husband when there is a problem. She takes the lead and deals with the problem. Likewise, some of the women made similar complaints—that one reason why they hid their money from their husbands was because of the latter's alcoholic behaviours. Such rational decisions made by these women serve as another covert way of working around patriarchy in this community.

It is important to highlight that the experiences of women in this community does not reflect that of all rural women in Ghana. In the matrilineal Akan group, women have a high degree of power and privilege (Aidoo, 1985). Thus, an Akan woman does not lose

her rights and access to land and her children upon divorce. In fact, she is readily accepted back into her matrilineage (Takyi & Gyimah, 2007). Moreover, the strength of the matriclan gives Akan women more bargaining power in relation to their husbands as they continue to reside in their maternal household even after marriage, which further strengthens their independence and autonomous power in relation to their husbands (La Ferrara, 2007). In Akan societies, it is tolerable if a man does not take financial responsibilities, especially with regards to children, because children belong to their mothers' lineage, and therefore primary responsibility of children lies with a woman and her kin (specifically, a woman's brother). Gender relations in an Akan society are said to be more egalitarian because the matrilineage system confers greater levels of independence on women (Takyi & Dodoo, 2005; Takyi & Gyimah, 2007). As a result, an Akan woman is more likely to be autonomous and make certain major decisions as conjugal ties have been observed to be weaker and are more often subordinated to the interests of one's lineage (Takyi & Dodoo, 2005; Takyi & Gyimah, 2007). Women within an Akan group end up being ultimate decision-makers in their households because by default the culture and traditions of the Akan people confers such power and privilege on them. This is not the case for a woman in a patriarchal society like Zambo. Here, women only make ultimate decisions in some aspects of the household only by default, because their personal incomes cater for the household demands in those spheres. Yet, they are expected to acknowledge their husbands and remain subordinate to them.

My study participants stated that they made the decisions concerning household purchases and expenditures. Since their money provided for the household needs, they determined the distribution of the income within the household based often on both the

availability and family demands. However, in order to achieve this, they had to hide their money from their husbands, and also take part in the *susu* savings program. Hence, within this rural community, women are considered the primary income earners of their households. Women are also the ultimate decision-makers in the distribution of household income.

### **Maintaining the *Pogminga*<sup>30</sup> Status**

This section discusses the cultural and normative roles that women in this community live by as part of understanding their marginalization. In most patriarchal societies, the kind of subordination women experience is relative to the cultural norms.

Normative notions of how to be a “good mother” and a “good wife” are widespread across Africa and often established by the patriarchal power structure. However, the conceptualizations of such notions vary from society to society, based on the cultural specificities of a particular group of people. Generally, these concepts and notions are meant to check and regulate female behaviour within the individual household level and within the society generally.

The status of *pogminga* (ideal woman) reflects one such cultural value among Dagaara communities; and it is a status which most rural Dagaara women aspire to attain. The *pogminga* status is attained based on how a woman is perceived in her community for her conduct in relation to the way she performs the normatively assigned roles such as working on the farm, selling firewood, brewing *pito*, managing her home, and being respectful to her husband. Behrends (2002) defines this status thus:

A *pogminga* has to be properly married (that is, the bride wealth has been given from the groom’s family to the bride’s father), diligent and committed to her

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<sup>30</sup> Meaning: “ideal woman” or “proper woman.”

work, and quiet in the house and during social gatherings. She is a woman who never shows that she is tired, who cares for the household and her children, helps and respects her husband, receives guests in a friendly manner, and is a pleasure to be with especially for her husband's family, where she lives, but also for her neighborhood. Hard work and no complaints seem to be at the core of the concept. (p. 233)

The definition of *pogminga* here denotes a status that is hard to attain: in order to attain such status, the woman has to live in servitude, although her husband may never admit to it. Basically, within the Dagaara culture, one culturally transitions to womanhood through marriage (Akurugu, 2017). It is only when a female has been “properly married” (thus the bride wealth has been successfully transferred to the female's family) that she could be referred to as a *poge*.<sup>31</sup> Unmarried females, irrespective of age, do not gain this status and are often referred to as *pooya*.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes, this name is preceded by the name of a male figure, usually the female's father. The cultural meaning embedded in the concept of woman amongst the Dagaara people is one who is to “cover up her husband” (expected to shield her husband from public embarrassment and shame). Thus, she becomes the backbone and shield of her husband and family. Perhaps this explains why a 5 out of the 10 women I spoke with said their husbands were the ones taking care of their families: culturally they are expected “to cover their husbands” and not expose them publicly. This point is highlighted by Esther's narrative below:

*Te saakonnoŋ la a le, ka n yeli ko o ka a libie na n nanj da de wuli o na, ka n boora ka n de e ne yele mine. Ona naane de ma be? Azuiŋ a seŋ ka n yeli ko o. N meŋa tɔre naane iri gaa te kpeere a o yiri poɔ, a zuiŋ a ba seŋ ka n soŋele o yeli zaa. A seŋ ka n yeli ko o kye gaa te e a yelibalaa. Onaŋ so ma, ka yeli zaanŋ bebe aseŋ ka n veŋ ka o banj.*

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<sup>31</sup> Wife, though this term literally means to cover.

<sup>32</sup> Means: daughter or sister.

[It's tradition that I tell him that the money I showed him earlier, I am going to use it for this and that. I mean isn't he the one who married me? So, I have to tell him. I didn't come to his house on my own so I don't have to hide anything from him, I need to tell him and then go and do it. He owns me so if there is anything I need to let him know.] (Esther, married for over 20 years)

The above narrative demonstrates that Zambo community is not an exception to such normative notions. The unfolding issues of women giving credit to their husbands for things they did not do, and the obligation of women to see their husbands as heads (or even lords) of the household is in consonance with the normative notion of *pogminga* (this is, "a proper woman"). During the interview process, the varied expressions of these women as they shared their experiences showed that they were not happy with the way things were with their husbands. However, they were not culturally socialized to confront their status of marginality openly. Esther explained to me how unhappy she felt with the way her husband was treating her and the children. Yet, she felt that she had no choice but to stay, because if she made any attempt to leave, she would lose her children and be driven out of her husband's house. When I asked the women whether they needed permission from their husbands before they spent their incomes, some explained to me that they informed their husbands of any expenditure because they wanted to be sure that there is income available if a child needed it. What I found most interesting here is that these women had indicated earlier that their husbands were not involved in the upbringing of their children. They also said that they hid their money from their husbands; so why was there a need for a woman to get permission from her husband before she could spend her personal income? Could this be attributed to fear, that despite hiding their monies they still had to inform their husbands of what they used the monies for? Are these women culturally expected to "cover their husbands" and not expose them

in public. Or probably, they are performing their normative gender roles in the aim of acquiring the social status of *pogminga*.

During the interviews, I asked the women to describe their daily routine and that of their husband. From their descriptions, they had more to do than their husbands within a day. When I asked them why this was so, they all responded that what they do are women's jobs and as a woman, you cannot expect your husband to rear the animals, cook the meals, fetch water, and fetch firewood. According to them, performing all these roles are part of being a woman and a wife. The only thing their husbands did was go to the farm during the rainy season and do nothing during the dry season. Therefore, for any woman to gain this status, she must be actively complacent in the performance of her roles.

As in capitalism, in which several strategies are often adopted by the dominant ruling class to normalize the exploitation of the working class, the social status of *pogminga* could be understood as a patriarchal strategy of normalizing women's subordination and marginalization among the Dagaara people by making women active participants in their own subordination. In working actively towards attaining *pogminga* status, a woman becomes completely displaced and unaware of her marginality. She sees it as normal and necessary for her to comply to the dictates of patriarchy.

Any woman who does not adhere to the principles of this normative status is given the name of *pog gandao*.<sup>33</sup> A woman who is given this status is perceived as one who has lost the normative gender principles of womanhood—one who transcends patriarchal boundaries and thus is dangerous, notorious, disrespectful, and not worthy of

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<sup>33</sup> This name is used to describe a woman who is more than a man. In other words, a “willful woman.”

marriage and societal respect. The purpose of this term is to stigmatize women who act greater than men in their deeds; the name stands for *pog* (“a woman”) and *gandao* (“more than a man”; Akurugu, 2017, p. 203). A *pog gandao* is one who performs her gender roles in ways that deviate from the normative expectations of a womanhood. She does not follow the norms discussed above for a *pogminga*. I argue here that any woman who objects to her subordination is tagged a *pog gandao*. Hence, the purpose of stigmatizing women as *pog gandao* is to shame them into compliance with the disabling structures of patriarchy. It is also used to mask the vulnerability of men to threats by a “willful” woman. Any woman who attempts to go into an activity that may make her successful and famous is stigmatized with the status of *pog gandao*.

For two of my participants, Yaa and Donkor, it was not a matter of hoping to be named a *pogminga*, but rather the fear of being called a *pog gandao* and the stigma attached to it within the larger community that makes them conform and accept the subordinate position in the community. For Abigail, who plays an active role in the mobilization of women in this community for survival, the stigmatizations and shaming associated with *pog gandao* do not get in her way as she continues to focus on the mobilization and building of women’s capacity and empowerment in such a male dominated society, through her involvement with RUWFAG and their collaborative projects with CIKOD. Given the restrictions imposed on women by patriarchal power, women’s fear of being labelled a *pog gandao* and their vulnerability are sometimes mediated by the activities of CIKOD and RUWFAG. Women’s involvement in these organizations have been designed to cushion the disabling effects of patriarchy on their lives. Both CIKOD and RUWFAG have worked together in providing livelihood training

such as processing and marketing strategies to the women. The aim is to help these women add value to their farm produce to earn more income. Beyond these activities, there is very little attempt from the side of the women to openly challenge these patriarchal dominations.

Consequently, I argue in the context of this analysis and discussion, as detailed above, that a *pog gandao* is a social deviant in her community. Her lifestyle challenges the prescribed normative principles of womanhood and, therefore, she performs her gender roles in a way that transgresses the societal norms of the Dagaara people. She becomes simply a non-conformist. The performance of her gender roles challenges and undermines the patriarchal power dynamics within the community because a *pog gandao* submits to no man's authority, and she may even control her husband. A *pog gandao* therefore is perceived as a threat to the status quo of dominant male authority and control. I argue here that, in contrast, a woman who succeeds in attaining the status of a *pogminga* becomes subsumed and victimized by patriarchy. Such a woman becomes socially crippled within her community and gives up her agency to challenge patriarchal domination or take advantage of opportunities to improve her livelihood. The following sub-section discusses the institution of marriage and its meaning as perceived by the Dagaara people as a way of offering an understanding to the subordination of women in this community:

### **Perception of marriage**

The concept of marriage within the Dagaara society has different meanings for men and women. In Dagaara, marriage for a man implies *di poge* (i.e., "pick a wife") while for a woman it implies *kul sere* (i.e., "go to a husband"; Akurugu, 2017, p. 117). These terms already suggest that it is the woman who is expected to go and join a man in

his place of residence. Also, it denotes that the man picks and owns the woman. The cultural understanding of marriage among the Dagaara people further highlights the subordinate position of women in most Dagaara communities, and as such, is another reason why women tend to fear and obey their husbands and also feel that their husbands own them. Clearly, all of my research participants indicated that their husbands owned them because the men married them and brought them to their households.

Marriage, among the Dagaara people, offers a social status. Especially for women, it offers them a legitimate space within which they can operate within their communities (Akurugu, 2017). Unmarried women are viewed unfavourably within the community, and sometimes by their own families. They are considered as occupying an unauthorized space in the community. This suggests another reason why these women may remain in their marital homes despite the harsh treatments and unequal relations. Also, within the Dagaara marriage practices, the payment of bride wealth (including cowry shells and cattle) by the groom's family, coupled with the patrilocal residential patterns practiced, sustains a society dominated by privileged men who get to own women.

Similarly, Forkuor, Kanwetuu, Ganee, and Ndemole (2018) reported that bride wealth may not necessarily be a direct cause of marital abuse, but it makes men intolerant to insubordination by their wives. Although the practice of bride price/wealth historically is believed to have some significance—such as giving the marriage a formal recognition, maintaining social control, stabilizing the partnership, and promoting cohesion between the two families involved (Muthegheki, Crispus, & Abrahams, 2012)—contemporary practices of bride wealth tend to make the whole marriage process a bargaining and

buying of a wife as a commodity in the marriage market, which can result in male domination over women and domestic violence, especially when the woman fails to live up to her “value for money expectation” (Dery, 2015, p. 259). Specifically, findings from Dery’s (2015) study indicated that there is a strong connection between payment of bride wealth and gender inequality, although such connections are complex and not direct. Hence, many men believe that by paying the bride wealth of a woman, they have gained the right to own and command the woman as they please and can sanction her when she fails to adhere to their commands.

Among the Dagaara people, marriage payment (in the form of cowry shells) is considered to be the most important part of the marriage process as it completes and legitimizes the marriage. Also, before the cowry shells are presented to the bride’s family, it is believed that the groom’s kin take a sample of them and offer sacrifices to the ancestors, dedicating the marriage to them and seeking protection for the bride and groom (Akurugu, 2017). Such sacrifices forbid a woman from sleeping with any other man. Upon the death of her husband, she can be inherited by any of her husband’s kinsmen. Indeed, the marriage payment in this regard becomes the source of women’s oppression and enslavement in their husband’s household and in her marital family. This marriage payment further confers customary rights over the bride to the groom and his kinsmen. It portrays a transfer of authority over a woman from her natal family to her marital family. This creates further implications for a woman to exercise her agency as she is required to seek permission from her “owners” before she can do anything. This, perhaps, suggests why my research participants still remain in their marriages and believe that their husbands own them. Consequently, any woman who does not seek permission from her “owner” before making any decision or doing anything is tagged a *pog ganda* as she is

not complying to the normative expectations of a wife.

Women in Zambo (and in other Dagaara communities) have been socialized to regard marriage as the source of social status and authorized space. As such, they strive to preserve their marriage even if it means remaining in an abusive marriage and/or in a relationship that undermines their potential and disregards their hard work. The social stigma is even worse for women who are divorced. A divorced woman is considered to have failed to fulfill her duties as a *poge* (i.e., a properly married wife). Hence, she has failed to cover her husband. The fear of such stigmatizations could explain why most women remain in their marriages, even when their husbands are not supporting them in any way. Husbands, on the other hand, are aware of such cultural expectations and often use it as a weapon to prevent their wives from undermining their power and authority while at the same time using it to maintain the subordinate positions of their wives. The influence of all these cultural practices and expectations of the Dagaara people apparently explains why Dagaara women participate actively in their own marginalization by taking full financial responsibility for their marital households while demanding little obligation from their husbands.

### **Women's Exclusion From Land Ownership**

As noted earlier, agriculture is the primary means of survival for most rural households in Ghana, and across sub-Saharan Africa (Abdulai & CroleRees, 2001; Apusigah, 2009; Dercon & Krishnan, 2000; Sikder & Higgins, 2017). Rural households in Zambo community depend significantly on subsistence agricultural farming. However, these households lack the equipment and capacity to engage in large scale farming, and mostly farm for subsistence. Subsistence agricultural farming serves as the main source of income earning activity for the people. Men in this community usually sell almost of

the foods grown each year, making farm produce their main source of income. Also, women's dependence on agricultural land cannot be overemphasized as they make up approximately 52% of the entire agricultural labour force, 70% of the subsistence agricultural crops production, and 90% of the labour force involved in marketing of farm produce (Sarpong 2006, p. 6).

There are two main modes of land ownership and acquisition in Ghana: traditional land ownership and modern land ownership (Abrakisi, 2018). The modern land ownership is one in which the government of Ghana is allowed to acquire and hold land in the public interest or for public purposes (Sarpong, 2006). Under the 1992 constitution of Ghana, all public lands are vested in the President who controls the land on behalf of and with the interest of the people of Ghana (Abrakisi, 2018). The constitution further places the Lands Commission of Ghana as solely responsible for the appropriation of land in Ghana. Thus, any individual seeking to obtain a piece of land must verify and obtain documentation from the Lands Commission as well as going through the necessary traditional processes. The constitution also recognizes traditional and customary rites and processes in acquiring land.

Within the traditional mode of land ownership, land is generally owned and controlled by clans and families, and traditional and customary practices govern how the land is distributed among the individual members (Abrakisi, 2018). Thus, the type of land tenure system that exists within a particular traditional society is dependent on the type of lineage and descent system practised. Among the Akan group, who are matrilineal and uphold matriarchy, land ownership and access are gained through one's maternal line. Hence, women within Akan communities have greater advantage in owning land, which earns them the ability to engage in their own economic activities (La Ferrara, 2007; Takyi

& Gyimah, 2007). In many patriarchal societies (including Zambo), land ownership and access are gained through the male line. My focus here is on the traditional mode of land ownership and acquisition because this form mostly defines land tenure system in Zambo community.

Among the Dagaara people, land ownership is regarded as communal with individual user rights. Generally, the *tengansob*<sup>34</sup> is the one who gives out land to the patrilineages within his area (van der Geest, 2004). He gives out pieces of land to compound heads (oldest male members of the household) who then distribute it amongst individual family members (male family members). Under this system, women are automatically displaced and have no rights over land due to the customary beliefs. This is because women within a patrilineage have no chances of becoming a family head. According to Abrakisi (2018), women may sometimes have the right to collect firewood and gather fruits from fallow land. However, their main access to and use of land is through a male member: either a father, a brother, or a husband.

The main food items produced in this community include maize, millet, rice, groundnuts, shea nuts, and yams. Women play a significant role in subsistence farming in Ghana, from planting, to weeding, and then harvesting. They also engage in the processing and storage of farm produce. Their roles in agriculture cannot be overemphasized; Amu (2005) for example documents that women produce about 70%-80% of the food consumed in Ghana (p. 30), making them responsible for food security. This shows that they play a considerable role in ensuring food security in many parts of the country. Yet despite the crucial role played by women in agriculture, they are

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<sup>34</sup> This person is a descendant of the first settler. He also performs sacrifices to the land and manages access to the land by the people in his earth shrine area.

traditionally excluded from land ownership, especially in patrilineal societies, and the only way they can gain access is through their husbands. This further limits their capacity to farm independently and earn enough to provide for their families, especially their children. Indeed, Oduro, Baah-Boateng, and Boakye-Yiadom (2011) argue that within the Ghanaian context, men are more likely than women to inherit agricultural land and claim ownership mainly due to their patrilineal kinship. In most rural areas, land is considered to be the most important asset since rural livelihoods revolve around it. Zambo community is no exception.

With specific reference to the Upper West Region, the World Food Programme (2012) states that one of the primary constraints to improved food production in the region includes poor access to land by women. Similarly, the women involved in this study admitted that one of the challenges they face is lack of access to land. The women complained that they have no say in decisions made on farm produce because they do not own the land. During my interviews, these women spoke about gaining access to land only through their husbands. They further explained that their husbands only cleared the land, while they (the women) did most of the work on the farms. Yet, after harvesting, women do not have any control over the farm produce or have any say in decisions concerning the sale of the produce. This is what Abigail had to say:

So, what we are also advocating is that we also farm on our own; so after planting on your farm, I will plant on my own. I will plant yours first because you are the head of the household. I will plant yours first and then plant mine so that I can harvest mine and have the freedom to sell and pay for my child's school fees. Because, even if it is school fees that caused me to dip my hands in his grains, I have still wronged the ancestors. Yes, but if it is yours he has the right to come and fetch it, and he is not offending any ancestors. So that is why we see the need to also farm so that we can support ourselves, not that we are competing with the men, but for support. (Abigail, married for more than 10 years)

According to Abigail, what women wish for is to have their own land from which they can produce crops and have the autonomy to decide on the sale and use of those crops either to earn an income or provide for their families. Also, farming on their own would provide them with something to depend on in order to make their weekly contributions to the *susu* savings program. Akurugu (2017) also revealed that dominant male power within the marriage and the household has implications for decision-making on farm produce because a woman who takes a portion of the farm produce without the permission of her husband attracts “mystical” punishment (the woman has presumably offended the gods and as such needs to be punished by male members of the family). In this instance, patriarchy stands between women and owning land. A major cause of this is the land tenure system that exists in this community.

The land tenure system in this area makes it difficult for women to even have a chance to own a small piece of land. The respondents told me that they usually had to beg their husbands or brothers for a small piece of land. Some also said that a “good” husband will give his wife a piece of his land because he knows that whatever the woman produces will support the entire household. In cases where the husbands do not provide their wives with pieces of land, the women are left with no other choice than to lease land from outsiders. This option usually requires huge sums of money, which these women do not have, further limiting their access to land. According to Abigail, in some cases it is difficult to get someone willing to lease his land to a woman, because of the fear of facing problems with the woman’s husband, such as accusations of infidelity. Amu (2005) argues that the difficulty in acquiring land has a negative impact on women farmers mainly because they derive their livelihoods from the land. Such difficulties

further limit the women's economic gains, and reduce their capacity to meet household needs.

The lack of access to and control over land by these rural women equally affect their entire household, because it diminishes their ability to contribute to food security at the household level. These women are left to strive for household food sufficiency, affordability, and balanced diets as well as income security, a challenge they repeatedly expressed during my interviews. The result of such difficulties is an increase in women combining non-farm activities with agriculture to combat poverty and ensure household food security (Owusu, Abdulai, & Abdul-Rahman, 2011). Some of the non-farm activities the women engage in include agro-processing (such as shea butter extraction) and seasonal migration. Often these activities offer no significant change in their economic situation. However, not many women are capable of engaging in seasonal migration because their absence will be detrimental to their households. Often they rely on agro-processing as well as selling firewood and charcoal, among others.

As Sarpong (2006) demonstrates, the feminization of poverty has been attributed mainly to the unequal access of women to productive resources (including land) and economic opportunities. This partially explains why poverty prevails amongst rural women, especially, among rural women farmers. Women's lack of access to and control over land further diminishes their ability to gain access to credit services. Because they do not have land titles to use as collateral, it is difficult for financial institutions to grant them loans as these institutions cannot rely on their farm produce. The existence of some socio-cultural and political factors such as the traditional patriarchal system, which reinforces gender inequalities in all forms and dimensions, ensures that women are

excluded from the allocation and access to vital resources such as land. This has severe implications on the socio-economic activities of women, perpetuating the feminization of poverty (Brown, 1996). Also, the growing interest in and expansion of cash crops further affects women and their access to farmland because the commercialization and commoditization of such crops has caused men to further seize the small pieces of land that were being used by women for the production of food crops for household consumption (Abrakisi, 2018). As a result, women are forced to purchase food crops in order to feed their families, further causing a strain on their personal income and leading to higher incidence of poverty.

### **Making Decisions Concerning the Distribution of Household Income**

My research findings indicate that decision-making concerning the distribution of household income is twofold. On the one hand, women make the ultimate decisions on the distribution of household income in domains that are fully funded by their personal incomes. The men in turn make the ultimate decisions in areas which they dominate: ownership and access to farmland and the disposal of farm produce. In this regard, my findings complement arguments made by Arku and Arku (2009) that although women's economic independence may tend to give them bargaining power in the household allocation of resources and decision-making, this bargaining power may somewhat be limited due to the influence of cultural norms and perceptions. From the standpoint of rural Zambo women, they have control over certain economic decisions because within those economic spheres, they do not receive any support from their husbands, and therefore the entire burden is placed on their shoulders. However, such bargaining powers

do not extend to other economic spheres such as decisions around farm produce because they do not have control over land.

Women's traditional exclusion from land ownership concomitantly impacts their participation in decision-making within their households. My research participants acknowledged that it was their husbands who determined whether farm produce should be sold, and at what price they should be sold. They only took the farm produce to the market to sell and brought the monies back to their husbands. Sometimes, however, the men go to the market themselves to sell the produce. For instance, Donkor told me this as she recounted her experience:

*fo ban ka o wee poz la ka n de a bonkoore, a le waana meny ona la ko kye n son bore. Te saakonnoy waa kpeeta yaga. Azuiy ka anay wa ta le, asej ka fo de a libie lee te ko o. ka onay wa noy de a libie leere ko fo ka fo de biy o, ana la le, kye fo koy ban te koore a wee boma o nay yeli ka fo te koore a wane a libie a koy wa de wuli o. Fo na bebe ka daare kana ka ba ymaa fo sane fo nay ba eyne fo sere zuiy. A sana na meny fo koy nye a libie yoo. Azuiy a sey ka ka fooy wa yi a daa lee wa, ka fo de o libie ko o.*

[You know it was his land that you harvested the crops from; also he did all the weeding and you only assisted with the planting. Our tradition is very difficult. So, when that happens you have to give his money back to him. If he then decides to give the money back to you to keep for him, that is fine. But then you cannot go and sell the produce after he has instructed you to do so and don't show him the money. If not, one day you will be charged for disrespecting your husband. And at that point too you won't have the money to pay and so it is important for you to give his money to him when you come back from the market.] (Donkor, married for more than 20 years)

The above quote shows how cultural norms further displace women in their communities. Donkor explained how painful it was that after working so hard on her husband's farm, she could not have some of the farm produce or even the money made from it to provide for her children. She also does not want to violate traditional beliefs, which creates a further financial burden. Donkor's quote here confirms Abigail's earlier assertion about the consequences a woman is likely to face if she takes a portion of the

farm produce without the permission of her husband. The findings from these participants highlight the lack of power women wield in the household concerning the allocation and use of farmland and farm produce.

While Donkor's view is common among a number of my participants, one woman, Yaa, had a different experience. In her case, her husband held conversations with her before selling any of the farm produce. But her husband only consulted her because he wanted to make sure that there was enough food to last them for the year. Consequently, such consultations did not necessarily mean that she got to keep the money or have a say in the decisions made concerning the distribution of that money. She is still required to give the money back to her husband who would then decide whether or not to give her some or to keep it all.

My data also revealed that gender patterns of cropping are quite evident within the community, with the common view that men are responsible for cash crops and women are responsible for producing subsistence crops for household consumption (Doss, 2002). Perhaps, this is another reason why women are responsible for ensuring food security at the household level, making them the sole providers of the nutritional needs of the household. Indeed, Padmanabhan (2007) found that among many ethnic groups in northern Ghana, men are obliged to provide starchy staples such as millet, corn, and yams, while women on the other hand are responsible for providing complementary soup ingredients and the preparation of entire meals. Due to this, women end up spending a large sum of their incomes on ingredients for the preparation of meals. Padmanabhan also noted that such dichotomies of female food crops versus male cash crops further exclude women from participating in one of the most lucrative rural income

opportunities—growing cash crops. Abigail explained that women generally grow food crops like rice, groundnuts, and soybeans. Men usually grow corn and millet, which are the main staple foods. She further explained that women were not culturally permitted to plant yams. According to Abigail, cultural beliefs, like the idea that a woman would die if she cultivated yams, limits women's participation in cash crop economy. Even if a woman wants to grow yams, she has to hire male labour, an expense she cannot afford. Basically, what this means is that culturally women are excluded from the production of yams. Doss (2002), however, reported that in reality crops grown in Ghana could not be divided into those grown by men and those grown by women. Although men are generally seen to be involved in cash crop production, women also participate in the production and sale of these crops.

The period of data collection was during the rainy season, and as I walked through farmlands to get to individual households, I observed both men and women working on the corn fields especially, with the women engaged in both weeding and planting of the crops, on pieces of land given to them by their husbands. Also, I had to meet some of the women on the farms to conduct the interviews; they worked on the corn fields. Therefore, in the case of Zambo community, although men dominate in the production of corn and millet, women are also involved in the planting, weeding, and harvesting of the crops. Also, the same crops are of importance to both men and women, who require them to provide food for household consumption. The exclusion of women in the production of cash crops further displaces women from partaking in decision-making concerning farm produce because they are considered to have no form of expertise and/or knowledge in that area. With regards to household decision-making

concerning farmland, its use, and farm produce, women are highly disadvantaged and lack decision-making power. Generally, this is a result of their lack of land ownership. Women's livelihood depends on their husbands because, as Amu (2005) argues, women derive their livelihood from the land.

### **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has engaged with the socio-cultural roles and positioning of women as a way of attempting to understand their subordinate position in the household and within the larger community. For the most part, women are the primary income providers of their household, as they spend all of their primary incomes in providing for their households. However, they are required to acknowledge their husbands as the sole providers of the household because culturally women are expected to shield their husbands from public embarrassment.

The chapter also sheds light on the complex nature of femininity within this rural community in an attempt to understand the subordinate positions of women. Femininity among the Dagaara group of people diverges significantly from Western notions and values attached to femininity. The notions of femininity and how women perform their gender roles is contingent on the act itself and the framework to understand the role. Thus, the acknowledgement of a woman as a *pogminga* or *pog gandao* is dependent on how well she performs her normative roles and on how the larger community judges her performances. Among the Dagaara people (Zambo inclusive), femininity can be understood as forming a continuum ranging from the ideal woman (*pogminga*) through to the non-conformist (*pog gandao*).

I have also demonstrated in this chapter that households in this rural community, like in many rural communities across Ghana, are agricultural, mainly for subsistence. Women constitute a huge part of farming operations in these communities, yet they are constrained by several factors that limit their bargaining power on decisions surrounding the allocation and use of land, and farm produce. Women's lack of access to farmland is considered as one of the main barriers limiting their access to credit facilities, mobility and access to market services, opportunities to fulfill their social and economic independence, or gaining decision-making powers.

Although women may have power and control in some aspects of household economic decision-making, mainly because they dominate in those spheres and spend all their primary incomes within those areas, they are still excluded in other aspects such as land ownership and land usage, which greatly diminishes their economic potential because they depend on the land for their livelihood.

## **CHAPTER SIX: DECISION-MAKING CONCERNING RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

This chapter discusses women's role and position in household decision-making in relation to religious beliefs and practices. The first section of this chapter discusses the various religions practised in this rural community, as well as various ways women exercise their agency on religious matters within the household. The second section discusses children's religious education and who takes primary responsibility in ensuring children's religious education. The ultimate goal of this chapter is to answer the research question: Does every member of the family hold the same religious belief? Are wives free to decide on their own religious beliefs and practices?

### **Christianity and Traditional Religion: Women's Agency**

Religion is a central force of social organization in traditional African societies, such that it is generally difficult to differentiate between religious and non-religious aspects of people's lives (Gyimah et al., 2006; Takyi, 2003). Particularly in Ghana, religion plays a crucial role in several aspects of people's lives including decisions around healthcare and reproductive health practices, politics, education, and marriage and family life. The Ghana Statistical Service's (2012) *Ghana Living Standards Survey* report found that 73% of Ghanaian households were Christian. In Zambo community, Christianity (more specifically, Catholicism) is the dominant form of religion, because the first Christian missions to arrive in northern Ghana were of the Roman Catholic faith; and they arrived in the region in 1906 (Doctor, Phillips, & Sakeah, 2009). However, over recent decades there has been an influx of other Christian denominations in the region, particularly the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, mainly due to the emergence of

religion as a potent social force in private and public life (De Witte, 2003). The Catholic church still remains the most dominant religious group in the region. While most of the people see themselves as Christians, in many rural households, traditional religious beliefs and practices are evident in the day-to-day activities and interactions of individuals. Indeed, each household I visited had an ancestral shrine, where individual household male members performed rituals and offered sacrifices to the family ancestors. Thus, a substantial number of community members practice both African traditional religion and Christianity. Para-Mallam (2010) argues that a conceptual link between culture and religion can be traced such that culture absorbs and translates religious beliefs (specifically traditional religious beliefs). Therefore, the behaviours and life conditions of people are formed by culture. Hence, some traditional religious practices are not regarded as religious but considered to be cultural and part of the way of life of the people.

My research data indicates that within this rural community, women are mostly Christians, and this is reflected in their responses, which were heavily laced with religious rationality. They attributed most of their responses to the fate of God upon their lives. During my conversation with Abigail, she emphasized the importance of religion on the lives of women in the community. As she put it:

That is even helping them now ... because they know that when I go to church I will find a group of women who I can join and if anything, they will support me. Every church now has several women's groups who also do the susu savings in the church where they can easily get loans. (Abigail, married for more than 10 years)

According to Abigail, attending church offers women a space where they could express themselves free from the burdens they face in their households. During church gatherings, the women meet and share their experiences as well as offer words of encouragement to each other. Furthermore, Doctor et al. (2009) document that some

church-based organizations (for instance, the Catholic relief services) now provide microloans to women for establishing businesses. Such support may affect a woman's urge for spiritual liberty and may sometimes lead to their economic autonomy. This was evident in the findings, including the above quote by Abigail. Another reason for the influx of women into Christianity could be attributed to the fact that in traditional belief systems, only men are allowed to perform rituals—a restriction that symbolizes patriarchy and the subordination of women in their families. However, the propagation of Christianity, especially Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, has encouraged women's participation in religious activities and rituals through the establishment of women's groups.

My respondents also indicated that they are not obliged to worship in the same church as their husbands or even hold the same religious beliefs. In fact, about six of them indicated that their husbands do not attend any church at all. Children are also not obliged to attend the same church as their mothers since they all hold a common belief that the most important thing is worshipping one God. Such notions were best articulated by Yaa:

[Well God chooses our churches for us, so wherever they want to attend they can go. But as of now, they all attend Roman, they all take communion and they were all baptized when they were children. So that is where we are all registered. But when they are of age and find themselves elsewhere and they feel that they want to change their church, it is up to them.] (Yaa, married for more than 10 years)

During my interview with Yaa, she also admitted that although she generally claimed her children are free to attend any church they want, she will prefer they remain in the Catholic Church. For her, there is no point in switching places of worship as she believes God is everywhere. However, if her children refuse to listen, then they are free to do whatever they wish. Indeed, this was a general perception of all the women

involved in this study. Nonetheless, when a child or any member of the family for that matter wishes to switch churches or religion, they are able to do so simply because there is no obligation to belong to one religious group and remain there. Specifically, for the women, they are generally free to decide on their religious faiths and practices.

Freedom of religious worship also extends to switching between Christian religious faiths. While the women expressed that they were Catholics, some stated that they used to be of Catholic faith but have recently switched to other Charismatic faiths in the community. The Catholic Church within the area has seen a reduction in the number of its members mainly due to the influx of other Christian denominations over the years. In recent times, a number of faith-healing organizations and Charismatic, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches have emerged and gained popularity because of their messages of healing, salvation, and prosperity that appear to fit the needs of many impoverished populations dissatisfied with their current living conditions (Yirenkyi, 2000). For instance, in the case of Esther, she moved from the Catholic church because she claimed to have found immediate healing from attending a Pentecostal church. According to her, she had never experienced such healing in the many years she had been involved with the Catholic church. Switching churches did not cause her any problem with her husband since she was not obliged to belong to any religious group.

Interestingly, members of each household belonged to different Christian denominations. For most of the households I visited, about 90% of the conjugal units attended the Catholic church, while the remaining attended different churches (mostly Pentecostal churches). The existence of different Christian faiths in a single household demonstrates that household members within this rural community are not obliged to belong to one religion or adhere to the same religious form of worship and practices.

Hence, members in this rural community are free to belong to any religious group although there may be some limitations, mainly as a result of individual preferences. Such limitations may come across when tensions build up between household members due to their different religious views.

Although women are free to belong and participate in any religion and religious worship, they are sometimes required by their husbands to participate in some traditional religious practices. In households where husbands practice traditional religion and wives practice Christianity, there may be conflicts of interest pertaining to what a wife is and is not required to do. During my conversation with Abigail, she explained that sometimes husbands may ask their wives to brew *pito* (the local alcohol beverage), which is used to pour libation to the family ancestors. Some wives may feel hesitant to do so because they believe such practices are contrary to their Christian faiths. According to Abigail, in such instance husbands may end up having conflict with their wives over their religious beliefs and practices. In an attempt to avoid such conflicts, most women will engage in both Christian religious practices and the traditional religious ones. Similarly, Quashigah (1999) reported that during the colonial period, many Africans commonly accepted baptism into Christianity and still held onto traditional religious practices. Clearly, such practices still exist in rural northern Ghana, especially Zambo community, as many households have ancestral rooms where rituals are performed, while at the same time identifying themselves as Christians.

Furthermore, women's fear of marital dissolution could be a reason why some women engage in both religious practices (Takyi, 2001). According to Takyi (2001), the value people place on marriage can be influenced to some extent by the ideological and theological stances of the religious groups to which they belong. Acknowledging the

Catholic Church's position on divorce, and the fact that a majority of the women in this community identify as Catholics, one may deduce the opinion women will have about marriage instability. Consequently, as discussed in earlier chapters about the significant roles marriage has on the lives of women, (such as providing them with a legitimate space of operating in the community), most women will want to preserve this legitimate space by engaging in both traditional and Christian religious practices so as not to create tensions with their husbands and risk the threat of divorce by their husbands.

Because religion is associated with the sacred, dominant groups tend to use it as a functional tool to condone patriarchy. It is understood that the sacredness of religion makes it hard for subordinate groups to challenge it. Perhaps a reason why men do not necessarily exert a limiting force on women with respect to religion in this community is because the religious teachings that women receive uphold and reinforce patriarchal ideologies in varying ways (such as maintaining the differential gender roles alongside the status of women). Likewise, the Church could also be considered as playing a part in consolidating patriarchy. Thus, some Christian religious practices and in fact some Bible passages, teach the importance of wives' submissiveness to their husbands. Most Christian faiths (especially the Catholic Church) teach against divorce, even in most extreme cases of marital breakdown (Takyi, 2001). As a result, women may not necessarily feel oppressed by their husbands with regards to their religious beliefs and practices because religion in itself acts as a functional tool for the manifestation of patriarchal ideologies. Through religion, women may not see their subordination as oppressive and limiting but rather as a religious way of life and obedience to a supreme being.

Takyi (2001) further states that in many patriarchal societies of Africa, religion could be used to reinforce traditional gender roles by providing a non-secular ethos and view about the position of women to men. Thus, Western forms of religion (i.e., Christianity) which promotes a patriarchal theological ideology tend to support the subordinate positions of women to men. This could perhaps be a reason why men in the community do not challenge the religious choices of their wives and grant them the liberty of religious worship. Indeed, such arguments have been raised by Amadiume (2015) who posits that the colonial administration and the Church either abandoned or reinterpreted some traditional religious practices that had been favourable to women. Thus, the Church was used as a tool to further displace women in the political and economic structure of the new colonial administration.

Women's freedom to choose and decide on their own religious practices has implications in all aspects of their lives but particularly with respect to their access to health and maternal health needs. Several studies have demonstrated that women who identify themselves as Christians are more likely to access modern maternal health services such as prenatal care and delivery in an institutional facility (Gyimah et al., 2006; Takyi, 2001, 2003; Yirenkyi, 2000). Also, Doctor et al. (2009) reports on the effect of religion on women and access to modern contraceptives. Women who identify themselves as Catholics are less likely to access modern contraceptives as the Catholic Church bans the practice of modern contraceptives. Furthermore, several studies have documented the relationship between religious affiliation and knowledge about HIV/AIDS and its preventive measures (Takyi, 2003; Trinitapoli, 2009; Trinitapoli & Regnerus, 2006). These studies found that a person's membership and involvement in a

religious group (Christianity and Islam) has a positive influence on the person's knowledge on HIV and such persons are less likely to be involved in extramarital affairs. Particularly for the women involved in this study, their agency in religious beliefs and services may be a likely reason for making decisions concerning the use of contraceptives independently. Irrespective of the Catholic Church's stance on modern contraceptives, these women are more aware of their reproductive health rights perhaps due to the increased prevalence of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the community.

With regards to religious beliefs and practices, my research findings indicate that household members were generally free to hold different religious beliefs or engage in different religious practices, both as Christians and adherents of traditional African religions. Women are typically free to decide their own religious beliefs and practices, although there may be instances where such freedoms are limited. Limitations to this freedom may arise when a husband's traditional religious obligation requires a certain degree of participation by his wife. On such events, the acquiescence of the wives was often motivated by their desire to safeguard their marriage.

### **Decisions Concerning Children's Religious Education**

My data indicate that children's religious education is one of the responsibilities of women in the household. All the women acknowledged that they were the ones responsible for providing religious moral education to their children. Because the men in this community are less inclined to Christianity and participate less in their children's upbringing, they tend to be neither interested nor involved in the religious teachings of their children. For most of the women, they carry their children along when going to

church and also encourage them to engage in children's religious activities. By doing so, these children also gain some religious education from their involvement in the church.

As discussed earlier, children are not necessarily required to hold the same religious denomination as their parents. Thus, the respondents indicated that they will be comfortable if their children decided to belong to any religious denomination other than theirs. Hence, there were some households with children worshipping in different churches than their parents. However, the children and youths in this community mostly engage with the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. According to Smith (2004), young people across sub-Saharan Africa are embracing Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity in rapidly growing numbers, partly due to the messages these churches deliver. They provide systems of meaning that tend to appeal the young and provide some powerful messages surrounding morality and righteousness as a way of helping the youth navigate through a social world filled with ambitions, poverty, and inequality. These churches essentially attribute social inequalities to personal immorality while promising the youth prosperity in life if they live righteous lives. Also, De Witte (2003) reports that most Charismatic churches and leaders give their members some kind of mystical authority which characterizes receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit (such as healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues) which appear to be pleasing and desirable to many, but especially among the youth. This partly explains the influx of Pentecostal evangelism within the area, consequently causing a growing number of Ghanaian youths involved with Pentecostal and Charismatic evangelism (De Witte, 2003).

### **Chapter Conclusion**

Unlike in other sectors of household decision making, my study demonstrate that women in this community are generally free to choose their religious faith. For the most part, women in this community are considered more religious than their husbands. Their autonomy within this domain extends to having the freedom to switch across religious denominations (mainly across the Christian denominations). Thus, there is no obligation for household members to adhere to the same religious belief or group. With regards to children's religious education, women tend to be the ones who take up such roles. They ensure that the children are active and involved in religious activities within the churches and in the community.

However, religion could be considered as a functional tool in many patriarchal societies. Thus, the religious teachings that these women adhere to uphold and maintain male domination over women. Therefore, Christianity helps to normalize the marginalization of the women, perhaps a reason why men in the community offer women the liberty to operate in this domain.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The major thrust of this research was to examine the gendered power dynamics within the household and its impact on decision-making in rural Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to examine the gender relationships between husbands and wives in the household, and how such relations affect women's household decision-making power. The aim of this research has been to offer a nuanced discussion on the crucial roles of rural Ghanaian women and their subordination from their own experiences and narratives. In this final chapter, I present a summary of the key findings from this study, a concluding statement for the entire research, and some recommendations for policy formation and for further research.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

My findings have shown that women in this rural community are the backbone of their households. They are the *real* decision-makers in almost all domains in the household; however, they are excluded from land ownership, which constitutes a major source of work and livelihood in the community. As such, they are further excluded from decision-making concerning the allocation and use of farmland and farm produce.

My research revealed that women are primarily responsible for caregiving of their children. Women in the study area generally acknowledged their husbands were the heads of their households, but in practice the women are the groups who are most active in making decisions concerning the daily welfare and upbringing of their children, therefore making them the ultimate decision-makers in terms of child upbringing.

My findings also indicate that women are generally not coerced by their husbands for decisions concerning childbirth. Decisions concerning the number of children a

woman will have is primarily based on her preference and her capabilities. A number of factors influence such decisions, including religious rationality, social status and other social advantages, and economic capability. These women acknowledge the difficulty in providing care for their children alone, and as such have leaned towards some measures like accessing family planning methods (contraceptives) to help mediate the number of children they have. The most common family planning method used by many women in the study area is the injectable contraceptive taken every 3 months. According to the *Ghana Demographic and Health Survey* report 2008, access to family planning methods in this rural community, like in many other rural communities in Ghana, has increased over the years among the rural populace, and both women and men have become more aware of contraceptives and their use (GSS, GHS, ICF Macro, 2008). Most often, these contraceptives are available for free, especially in the rural sectors. The findings from this section have demonstrated that even in a highly patriarchal society in which women are generally perceived to be oppressed and marginalized, they still hold agency and can actively resist and undermine these same dictates of patriarchy.

On examining decision-making processes related to household income generation and distribution, the findings show that women have power and control in some aspects of household economic decision-making, mainly because they dominate in those spheres and spend all their primary incomes within those areas. They thus become the ultimate decision-makers in the areas they dominate, while the men similarly make the ultimate decisions in areas which they dominate: ownership and access to farmland and the disposal of farm produce. A key finding from this section was that women are required to acknowledge their husbands as the sole providers for the household. Such a finding engaged an understanding of the socio-cultural meaning of “womanhood” and “wife”

among the Dagaara speaking people. *Woman* among the Dagaara people connotes “cover”—women are expected to cover their husbands and not expose them, especially in public. Also, the findings in this section highlighted the cultural understanding of femininity as a continuum ranging from the so-called ideal woman (*pogminga*) to the non-conformist (*pog ganda*). Among the Dagaara people, how a woman performs her gender roles is relative to the act itself and the evaluators of the act. By performing one’s gender roles, a woman could attain the status of either a *pogminga* or a *pog ganda* based on how she is judged in her larger community.

Households in this rural community, like in many rural households in Africa, are agricultural with subsistence farming being the main focus (Abdulai & CroleRees, 2001; Apusigah, 2009; Dercon & Krishnan, 2000; Sikder & Higgins, 2017). Women therefore constitute a huge part of the subsistence farming, making them responsible for food security, especially within the household level (Amu, 2005). Despite their crucial roles in the agricultural process, they are faced with limited access to farmland and the only way they can gain access is through their husbands. From the findings, it is evident that this is due to the land tenure system in the area that is based on socio-cultural beliefs and perceptions, especially about women. Yet, these same socio-cultural beliefs expect women to be the main income earners of their households. In order to satisfy these demands, these women have gone into non-farm income generating activities with all the attendant problems, because they find it difficult to mobilize the start-up capital. Due to this, the Rural Women Farmers Association of Ghana (RUWFAG) formed the *susu* savings program that offers collateral-free loans (from a member-generated common coffer) to its members.

With regard to decision-making concerning religious beliefs and practices, the findings indicate that women are generally free to express their religious beliefs and practices; especially if it does not conflict with the traditional belief systems of the community. A majority of the study's participants revealed that they were free to worship wherever they wanted, with or without the consent of their husbands. Also, household members are free to belong to any religious group or denomination. Christianity, specifically Catholicism, appeared to be the dominant religious group in the community and its environs. The women also indicated that they were mostly in charge of children's religious education, although children usually received such education from their involvement and participation in church activities.

The findings and discussions from the latter section indicate that religion may be used as a means to further oppress women in this community since religious teachings have the tendency to uphold and maintain patriarchal power and male domination over women. The study therefore concludes that this could be a reason why women are free to operate and exercise autonomy in this domain because religion tends to maintain the status quo as these women become unaware of their oppressive situations.

### **Conclusions of the Study**

This study has examined the gendered power dynamics between husbands and wives and how such power relations affect women's household decision-making powers. My arguments are premised on the fact that household decision-making in this rural community is complex, such that women are seen to be dominant in certain aspects of household decision-making mainly because of their contributions in those areas. However, their dominance in such areas does not guarantee them full bargaining power in

all aspects of household decisions. Thus, the cultural expectations of women in this community further displace them in marginal positions to their male counterparts.

In rural northern Ghana (Zambo community), patriarchy exists. In this patriarchal society, women predominantly occupy marginal positions compared to their husbands. Despite the crucial roles played by women both within and outside of their households, they still hold subordinate positions in the household and consequently in the wider community. However, it is important to acknowledge that the roles occupied by women in this community and how they perform their genders are significantly defined by socio-cultural beliefs and perceptions of femininity. Thus, to fully understand the subalternity of these rural women, we need to have a more nuanced discussion that acknowledges the unique cultural backgrounds of rural women and how their backgrounds mediate other factors to cause their subalternity.

Women in this community are not all oppressed by patriarchy in the same manner nor to the same extent. Similarly, they are capable of challenging, undermining, and/or resisting patriarchy in complex ways in which male power and domination is central. It also is important to note that any overt forms of resistance these women exercise are unacceptable in their communities and therefore are of limited use. These women therefore tend to exercise some covert methods of resistance that undermine the unequal systems of power within the community.

Finally, in using feminist standpoint epistemologies as a theoretical framework, this research has provided a nuanced discussion of the experiences of the women involved in this study. It is important to note that while feminist standpoint epistemologies have remained an enduring framework for women, it tends to homogenize

the experiences of all women as having one common perspective who yield the same marginal or disadvantaged positions. In recent years, this framework has since expanded to include and address issues around gender, race, class, social locations among others (see for example Collins, 1991, 1997, 2000; Harnois, 2010). Thus, the arguments of African feminists epistemologies, Amadiume (2015) and Oyewumi (1997, 2000, 2011), has been for an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and daily realities of African women as crucial in writing the stories of African peoples. Both feminist standpoint theories and the African feminist epistemologies as theoretical frameworks for this study have highlighted the importance of knowledge creation from the perspectives of rural African women.

### **Recommendations**

The question of gender relations in Africa has become a central focus in the study of rural development. Understanding the gender relations of any African society helps in informing policies towards women's social and economic development in relation to rural development. The findings of this study have reaffirmed Oyewumi's (2011) argument that in order to understand the structures of gender and gender relations in Africa, we must start with Africa. Hence, the following recommendations are made for both future studies and for policy development.

One way the state may intervene in women's economic development is to invest in the *susu* savings program, which is already in effect among some women's groups in the community. The *susu* program appears to be effective in helping women acquire loans to pay off their children's school fees and start up any livelihood-related activity. This savings program has been set up in a way that does not require any form of

collateral from the women. Also, non-governmental organizations with a vested interest in this community can work with these women to establish practical ways of expanding this program so it becomes accessible to other women in nearby remote villages as well.

The state could promote social and economic development of women in this community by investing in women's access to markets and market services. During my visit to the community, one observation made is the poor condition of the road network from the main district to the village area. Poor road conditions make travelling quite challenging, hence making it difficult for buses and other vehicles to commute to this area. Women therefore have to walk for several hours to get to the nearest market. This limitation affects both women's mobility and their ability to engage in trading and marketing their income-generating goods and services.

During the interview process, one respondent commented on some training activities she and other women have received from the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD) on how to process and market their local produce so it can compete with the foreign products on the market. The government can collaborate with either CIKOD or other non-governmental organizations working in the community (and other rural communities) to provide more of such training to women, which would allow them not only to produce but also sell their products and make enough income for their households.

Both the government and non-governmental organizations could support women in the production of so-called "women crops"; women may be supported by receiving training on proper ways of storing and processing the crops they grow. For instance, one respondent who is a member of the Rural Women Farmers Association of Ghana

(RUWFAG) commented on some training she and other women have received from CIKOD on production, processing, and marketing of crops, which has now become a livelihood activity for most of them. The goal is to help rural women develop their skills in whatever livelihood activity they know within their own capacity.

The research participants confirmed that one of the biggest challenges they face is their lack of access to farmlands in the area. Government officials working in this community could collaborate with some of the traditional leaders and community leaders concerning the importance of land to both women and the entire household. There is the need to make traditional elders understand the benefits of land to women and how women's access to land greatly benefits the entire household. This way, some traditional customs that work to the detriment of women may be renegotiated so women can have some agency to operate and ensure food security and other benefits for their households.

Future research may investigate in detail some of the traditional customs that exist in order to come up with ways in which such customs may be reconsidered to recognize and include the needs of women. This calls for an in-depth ethnographic study that focuses on the unique cultural characteristics of the people and how their daily lives are shaped and reshaped. Such research will further highlight the complex and heterogeneous nature of the African populace.

Finally, future research may also investigate the behaviours of men in this community and how the patriarchal system condones and tolerates men's inability to support their wives financially in the care and upbringing of their children and maintenance of their households. Such further studies could also investigate the varied ways in which men may be involved, and how they can be involved in promoting both

the social and economic development of women. One way of ensuring this could be by highlighting men's perspectives considering the negative views my research participants have on men. Thus, further studies could investigate the various roles of men, including their roles in the domestic sphere.

Comparatively, within a Western perspective, Doucet (2001) notes that “domestic responsibility encompasses feelings and activities that are deeply rooted in social relationships of interdependence that change over time” (p. 345). As such, there has been increased interest in domestic labour amongst feminist scholars as well as significant changes in the gender divisions of labour in many households in the West, including Canada and the United States (Doucet, 2001, 2015). These changes have come about because of an increase in men taking part in the domestic unpaid work in many households. Specifically, within Canada, there has been an increase in stay-at-home fathers as a way of coordinating between paid and unpaid work. Some of the reasons for more and more men becoming stay-at-home fathers include an increasing number of women in the paid labour force with financially rewarding employment, making them the main breadwinners of their families; difficulty in combining paid work and childcare; and the general ideal of gender equality (Doucet & Merla, 2007). With more men engaging in domestic unpaid work, a domain traditionally known to be women's only, there has been increased awareness of the need to value unpaid work. However, in conducting such a study, there is the need for a careful consideration of the socio-cultural context in which the study takes place. This is to avoid the imposition of some Western-based categorizations and methodologies that may not necessarily be applicable in societies of the Global South.

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## Appendix A

### Research Ethics Clearance Certificate



Brock University

Research Ethics Office Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035 Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

### Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

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DATE: June 4, 2018

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: EZEONU, Ifeanyi - Sociology

FILE: 17-379 - EZEONU

TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project STUDENT: Anella Bieteru  
SUPERVISOR: Ifeanyi Ezeonu

TITLE: Gendered Power Relations and Household Decision Making in Rural Ghana. A Study of  
Zambo in the Lawra District of the Upper West Region of Ghana.

#### ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW

Expiry Date: 6/1/2019

The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 6/4/2018 to 6/1/2019.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 6/1/2019. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

1. a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
2. b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
3. c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
4. d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved: 

Ann-Marie DiBiase, Chair  
Social Science Research Ethics Board

**Note:** Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.

## Appendix B

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS (Simplified, as to be communicated directly to the women)

Hello,

My name is Anella Bieteru. I am from Lawra District and I am a Master's student at Brock University in Canada. I am here to conduct a research. My research concerns your relations with your husband and whether or not you take part in making decisions in your household. I expect that the results of this study will help the government to improve the life of women in this community. I will, therefore, like invite you to consider participating in this research.

If you decide to take part in this research, I will ask you questions around;

1. The number of children you have and also how your children are taken care of.
2. I will also ask about your job and household activities as well as that of your husband; and who provides for the household financially
3. Finally, I will ask you about your religious beliefs and practices

During the interview, please do not feel pressured to answer any question and please be free to say that you do not want to answer any particular question.

The interview should take about two hours of your time. I have arranged a place at the Community Center for us to meet and have this interview. However, if you want to have this interview in a different place which is private, please let me know and I will be happy to meet you. The time for this interview will be at your convenience.

Please note that, there is no payment or compensation involved in participating in this interview.

I want you to know that, there may be some benefits for you if you choose to participate in this research. Most important is that the results of this research can help organizations like CIKOD and even the government in finding ways to help improve your livelihood. I also plan to submit a summary of the research findings to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection together with an official letter explaining why it is important for policy makers to act on my findings. I will also work with CIKOD to identify how to use my findings to the greatest benefits of Zambo rural women. I will particularly encourage them to integrate the findings of the research project into their works with the rural women.

There may be some risks involved in taking part in this research. For those of you who are in abusive relationships, you may feel embarrassed or upset when I ask questions about your relationship with your husband. Please note that I have spoken to the "father" and the traditional religious leader (depending on your religious faith) and they are willing to meet with you should you feel such stress. Also please remember that you have a right to stop talking when something about the interview upsets you. **If you are currently in an abusive marriage, I suggest strongly that you carefully consider (for both**

**emotional and other reasons) whether there might be a risk to your participation in this interview.**

There is another risk you might face, which is that if any information we share in this meeting leaks out, people may gossip about it. But you don't have to worry about this because I will assign you a fake name so that no one can identify you and whatever information you share with me. I will keep it locked in a safe metal padlock box so that no one except myself can have access to it.

To help me remember all that we discuss during the interview, I will like to record our conversation, but I will destroy it as soon as I am done writing down the interview. If you do not want to be recorded, please let me know and I will not record our conversation. In that case, I will write down everything you tell me in this conversation. The written interviews will be stored safely in the office of my supervisor in Canada and also password secured on my computer. These will be destroyed one year after I finish the research.

Only me (Principal Student Investigator), my supervisor (Principal Investigator) and two other researchers who are helping me with this research will have access to the information you give me. I will do everything in my power to ensure that no else have access to your information.

And please remember that your participation is voluntary; that is, you are free to choose whether or not to participate in the research. Please note that you can freely choose to stop the interview at any point and not continue again. If you decide so, I will destroy all the information you have already given me and it will not be used in the research.

If you are interested in the outcome of the research, let me know and I will inform the officials of CIKOD to get in touch with you with the feedback. However, if you choose to do this by yourself, you can get in touch with CIKOD on (024 464 3773). I will send them feedback on the results of the research which should be made available to you. This feedback should be available by June, next year.

If you need any further information, you can contact me on my Ghanaian number (020 180 9070) or on CIKOD contact number (024 464 3773).

By continuing with this interview, I am implying that you have agreed to participate in this research.

## Appendix C

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

**GUIDING QUESTIONS:** (Please answer only questions that you feel comfortable with. You should not feel pressured to answer all the questions).

#### **Understanding the nature of the household**

1. How long have you been married?
2. Are you the only wife of your husband? If no, how many wives does your husband have?
3. Do you live with your husband and children alone or you live in a household with extended family members? And did you have a say in where and how you want to live? (Probe)

#### **Questions surrounding childbirth and child upbringing**

4. How many children do you have? What are their ages?
5. What is the gender of your children?
6. Are these the number of children you wanted to have? If not, why did you end up with this number of children? (Probe)
7. Who in your household is primarily responsible for child care?
8. Are your children of school age? Are they in school? If yes, at what grade?
9. Who decides which school they should attend? Who pays their school fees?
10. Will your children be attending tertiary institution? If yes, who made this decision (you or your husband) and who will be funding them?
11. What are the responsibilities (roles and duties) of your children in the household? Who decides on what they should do and why?
12. Is any of them working outside the home (such as street hawking to help subsidize household income) If yes, what work do they do?

#### **Questions surrounding family income and primary income earner**

13. What do you do for a living? What does your husband do for a living?
14. Can you describe your daily routine to me including your activities within and outside the household?
15. Can you describe your husband's daily routine to me including his activities within and outside the household?
16. Who takes financial care of the household (for example, who pays for food, shelter and clothing)
17. Are you happy with your work and with the distribution of roles between you and your husband in the household? Why? Do you sometimes wish you could live a different life? If yes, can you explain to me what that ideal life will be?
18. Is your family also engaged in farming? Who participates (husband, children and yourself) in these farming activities and what are their roles? Do you farm on large scale or for subsistence?

19. How is the decision about farm produce made? If you usually sell these produce, who makes that decision?
20. Do you have access to your own form of income? If yes, what is the nature of the income? If not, how do you take care of your personal needs?
21. If you have access to your own income, do you normally seek permission from your husband before spending it?
22. How are decisions about household expenditure arrived at? Who funds most of this expenditure?
23. Who do the children go to often when they need money? Why?

**Questions surrounding religious beliefs and practices**

24. Are you a Christian, Muslim, or Traditional worshipper?
25. Is your current religious belief the same as the one before you got married? If not, why has it changed? (Probe)
26. Does everyone in the household (especially your children) have the same religious belief/practice? Is this religious orientation voluntarily chosen? If yes, why is this so and if not, what are the religious beliefs of other household members? (Probe)
27. How are decisions around your children's religious education made? Who makes such ultimate decisions? (Probe)