
Embodiment and Ethnic Identity: the role of Queen Mothers in Asante and Ewe Communities

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Queen Mothers in
Ashanti region, July 2022

Queen Mothers - decentralized, indigenous, traditional authorities

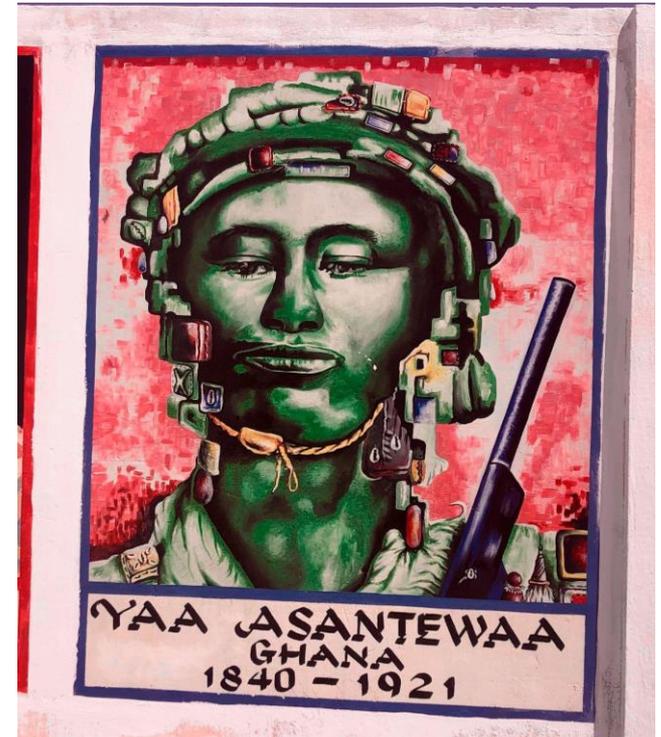
- Primarily associated with Akan ethnic groups in Ghana, but also present among Ewe
 - Supposedly arose as an institution when males were away from villages in times of war
 - Traditional authorities imbued with respect, power, and political responsibilities
 - In Asante tribes, they trace authority through queen mothers matrilineally
 - Queen mothers have an integral role in the social, political, and economic structures of traditional societies.
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Yaa Asantewaa and Decolonial ethnic identity among the Asante

Legendary Queen Mother of the Asante kingdom who rallied the men and lead them to battle against the British to protect the Golden Stool

1884-1900: last war between British and Asante Kingdom. Yaa Asantewaa successfully protected the Golden Stool from British troops.

“Asante Kingdom is still alive because of her”
- Justice Brobbey, Kumasi



Ancestral Wall of Portraits, Promprom, Ghana

Colonization and the erosion of Queen Mother's traditional authority

- British failed to understand the political import of Queen Mothers in indigenous traditional political systems
 - Actively weakened and/or destroyed women's bases of power
 - In establishing a colonial republic, British attempted to override traditional, diffuse systems of authority such as chieftancy
 - Interpreted indigenous systems of authority through Western ideological frameworks of patriarchy and racism
 - Even post-colonization, the Chieftancy Act of 1971 excluded Queen Mothers from Formal District Assemblies
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An aside about gender, sex, and sexuality...



A female Asafo member

- It is an understatement to merely assert that the British misrecognized the traditional gender roles in indigenous African cultures. As has been argued by Oyeronke Oyewumi, Serena Dankwa and others, the British fundamentally failed to comprehend an ideology of gender, sex and sexuality entirely 'Other' to their binary model
 - In so doing, they not only elided the import of the Queen Mother and the traditional African cosmologies, but also simultaneously imposed a Christian, heterosexist, patriarchal ideology attempting to erase gender/sex diversities(e.g. the *agojie* of Dahomey in modern-day Benin, the *supi supi* in Ghana, or *Esu Elegba*, Yoruba god-ess)
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**Queen mothers as
preservers and
reproducers of
traditional knowledge
and ethnic identity**

Queen Mothers in Action:
Akoefe Ladies Association at the
Akoefe Village Durbar, July,
2022



The Chief and Queen Mother “are like tigerants, if one tries to cross an obstacle, it won’t pass, but if they cross together, they will succeed” - chief of Brawire palace, Axim

- Queen Mother as right hand woman to the chief
 - Preserver of culture, traditional wisdom, language
 - “Mother to all” = she addresses family issues, health concerns, employment issues, and conflict in the community
 - Importantly she selects the next chief
 - She is in the first position to say “no” or mediate a serious issue before it gets to the chief.
 - She is the chief’s primary consultant in affairs of the community
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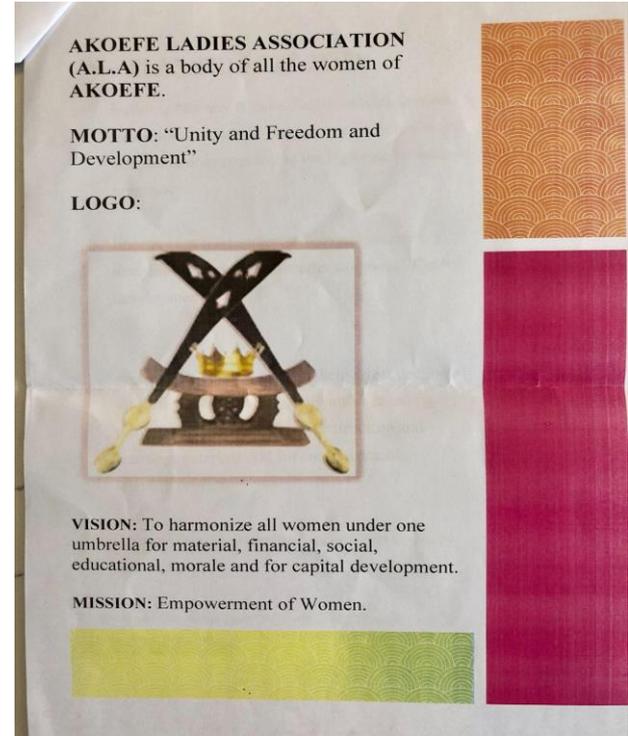
Bisa Abrewa, or, “ask grandmother”

Queen Mother Organizations across traditional areas

Akoefe Ladies Association

Vision: “to harmonize all women under one umbrella for material, financial, social, educational, morale and for capital development”

Mission: Empowerment of Women



Traditional Chiefs and Queen Mothers continue to supercede formal authorities in post-colonial Ghana



Akoefe

<https://sway.office.com/ZAXMjDvZBt2HN26f?ref=Link>
