

FEMALE POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY: A  
STUDY OF THE WURICHE IN THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL  
SYSTEM OF THE GONJA IN GHANA

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BY

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THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL  
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FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE  
IN SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION



**Candidate's Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the work of my own efforts supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis approved by the University for Development Studies. Except for portions taken from other sources and which have been duly acknowledged, no part of this work has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere.

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**Supervisors' Declaration**

We declare that this thesis was under our supervision and was supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis approved by the University for Development Studies.

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This study set out to examine the political authority and role of the Wuriche (female chief) in a predominantly male dominated environment. The purpose was to provide empirical information, which is lacking, on the status and role of the female chief in the patriarchal Gonja society and the challenges she faces thereof. The study used ethnographic methods such as interviews, observation and focus group discussions and archival review to gather data. The study contacted chiefs and key informants for interviewing using purposive and snowball sampling techniques.

Based on social contract theory and the theories of power and authority, the study established that the political authority of the Wuriche is institutionalised and exercised in relation to men within the Gonja political system. The Wuriche plays executive and ceremonial roles including mobilising, dispute resolution, giving counsel to the male chief and serving as the traditional mother of her society. The functions of the wuriche are underpinned by the principles of power, authority and legitimacy. As a result of social transformation, the role of the wuriche has been changing and she has to adapt to emerging challenges. It was established that, the Wuriche carries out her role amidst several socio-cultural barriers which impede her influence in society.

The study concludes that, even though the Gonja society reserves reverence and preference for male authority, the Wuriche is accorded some authority which she exercises in relation to the male chief.



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**DEDICATION**

To the memory of my late father, Mr. Dawda Kazaari Sikpari.

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**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

CHRAJ	Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice
DCE	District Chief Executive
GAD	Gender and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMA	Ghana Meteorological Agency
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
ILGS	Institute of Local Government Studies
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
QMAG	Queen Mothers Association of Ghana
UN	United Nations
USD	United States Dollar
WAD	Women and Development
WID	Women in Development



INTRODUCTION

**1.0 Background to the Study**

This study is on the Wuriche and the traditional political system of the Gonja in northern Ghana. Wuriche is the title given to the female chief in the traditional political system of the Gonja. She is appointed by a male chief within a particular jurisdiction of influence and she is expected to perform functions which complement the functions of the male chief.

The research is an attempt to contribute to the general discourse on women in positions of authority. The role of the Wuriche is considered by examining the dynamics of patriarchal relations and sex roles within authority cycles in the Gonja political system of Ghana. The role of women in positions of authority is considered within the context of traditional and sociological explanations of gender roles at the global scale (Nketiah, 2010). The authority and role of the Wuriche in the Gonja social organisation can be explained in relation to the traditional and sociological principle of patriarchy.

The literature on women in positions of authority tends to focus on women in management and formal government positions of authority. Writings on women in traditional positions of authority, however, exist and these include the works of Busia (1968) on the Queen Mother among the Akan in Ghana.

In traditional African societies, the traditional authority structure prescribes how the authority and role of the female leader are extended to the



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male subordinates. The wuriche as a female leader in the authority system of the Gonja is expected to exercise her authority and role in relation to men under a patriarchal order. In exercising this authority, the Wuriche is confronted with the challenge of patriarchy posed by her immediate society whereby maleness is presumed to be superior to femaleness. Under the circumstance, men are seen to be natural leaders and women followers. The authority and role of women in positions of authority, therefore, tend to be circumscribed by social-cultural barriers imposed by patriarchal tendencies in society.

Political authority in African society revolves around the traditional political system. Generalisations about the traditional political systems in Africa are, however, difficult to make because the continent is not one homogenous cultural entity. The traditional political systems in Africa as well as the cultures that underpin their existence are rooted in diverse contexts which form the basis for which descriptions or classifications can be made (Sesay, 2014).

In their study of African political systems, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940), sought to classify African traditional political systems into two broad categories. One group, they suggest consists of societies which have tendencies towards centralised authority, administrative machinery and judicial institutions and in short, a government and they refer to them as “centralised states”. The other group comprises societies which have very limited degree of centralised authority, administrative machinery and institutionalised judiciary, which they refer to as “non-centralised states”.



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In a similar description, Arhin (2002) classifies African traditional political systems into two broad forms; societies with obvious rulers and societies without obvious rulers. This classification is akin to what Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) described in their categorisation as centralised and non-centralised states respectively. Lewis (1966) in his work “The Origins of African Kingdoms” also makes a distinction between “primary” or “pristine” and “secondary” or “derived” states. Primary states he argues arise “without the stimulus of other pre-existing states” such as ancient Egypt that developed along the Nile valley. The secondary states developed in response to stimuli from previously established kingdoms or states such as the kingdoms of early sub-Saharan African states. These previously established states included ancient Mali, Songhai and Ghana empires. After the collapse of these empires came the rise of comparatively smaller kingdoms including the Yoruba state in Nigeria, the Mande state of modern Mali and the Akan state in modern Ghana.

Sesay (2014), however, identifies three main traditional political systems in Africa. They are the widely dispersed empires and chiefdoms, the centralised medium–size kingdoms and the large centralised kingdoms and empires. The classification here puts much emphasis on the size of the jurisdiction of the king and Sesay suggests that power within the state in all these political systems revolves around the principle of patriarchy where political authority is vested in the male leader (King or chief). Closely related to the categorisation by Sesay, is the classification by Shumway (2015), who makes a distinction between three main categories of African traditional political systems “conventionally known as “bands”, “tribes” and “kingdoms”.





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The bands are widely dispersed, stateless and acephalous societies. The tribes, as described by Shumway, are larger and more settled than bands, but they still lack any overall form of centralised political authority. In the third type of indigenous political structure identified, Shumway notes that, in the kingdom or state, political authority is centred on the office of a king and sometimes a queen, who is chosen from a royal clan and given sacred attributes by his or her subjects.

In the categorisation of African traditional societies, what is clear is that, there is some form of sovereign authority in some political systems while in some there is no sovereign authority. The divergence between the two systems can be seen on the point that one has been able to develop a hierarchical state structure beyond the confines of the village or even the ethnic group while the other clings on to clannish political order with territorial coverage conterminous to the confines of the village.

The means of social control in both systems revolve around what Lentz (2003) refers to as “dynamics of clanship”. Their norms and values consist of well and long-established rules of conduct usually enforced by heads of various segments of the society. Examples of societies without hierarchical state structure include the political systems of the Sukuma of Tanzania, the Kikuyu of Kenya and the Nuer of Southern Sudan. These political systems exhibit the existence of well-defined norms despite the lack of a centralised system headed by a sovereign and that there is direct and pronounced participation of members of clans and segments in decision making assuring a visible democratic process.



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The near centralised states, such as the Asante in Ghana, Yoruba of Nigeria, Buganda of Uganda and the Zulu of South Africa, as Fortes and Evans-Pritchard suggest, have a more structured and sophisticated political system. These states have a centralised authority vested in the king with sub-structures and divisions headed by low rank officers who exercise authority in a decentralised manner on behalf of the King.

These classifications are helpful in providing understanding about the fact that there are different political formations in Africa. In that regard, the various perspectives on the types of political systems in Africa, therefore, provide significant insight for our understanding of the nature and organisation of most African traditional political systems.

Irrespective of the type of political system, leadership in most traditional African societies is characterised by a lack of what Okonjo refers to as “gender parallelism” due to the patriarchal nature of societies (Sudarkasa, 1987; Okonjo, 1976). This is when both men and women in the society have separate activities; each having specific but different roles that complement each other. The concentration of functions has more often than not been directed towards the authority and role of males.

In patriarchal societies where males are considered superior to females, political authority is also wielded by the male segment of the society with little or no room for female involvement. The patriarchal order defines the normative order in the society as well. This permeates the social and cultural system to the extent that females without question define their roles and positions according to the dictates of patriarchal values.



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In Ghana, the Gonja ethnic group has a state structure with social and governance arrangements that are hierarchical. According to Goody and Goody (1967), the Gonja are originally Mandingo or Mandinka from Mande country in the Mali Empire, who migrated and moved southwards to cross the Black Volta into their present settlement in Northern Ghana. According to Braimah, Tomlinson, & Amankwatia, (1997), with their leader Naba'a who reigned from 1552 to about 1582, they engaged in wars of conquest with the people they came into contact with in the area above the middle belt and across the south of the northern part of present-day Ghana. By 1675, their leader Sumaila Ndewura Jakpa founded the Ngbanya kingdom of the Gonja and the capital was established in Yagbun. The Gonja then established a paramount ruler, called the Yagbunwura who administered the kingdom. Every Prince of the Ndewura Jakpa's line may aspire to the Paramount chiefship of Yagbun, but he must first be content with a junior skin in his division (Braimah et al, 1997).

There are five divisions of Ndewura Jakpa and his sons' lineage from which eligible chiefs can ascend to the throne of Yagbunwura. These are Wasipe, Kpembe, Bole, Tuluwe and Kusawgu divisions. Sub-divisions also qualify to occupy vacant skins of the various divisions. For example, the Kpembe skin can only be occupied by the chieftains of Kanyase, Singbing and Leppo. There are various families that are also eligible to occupy vacant skins of the Sub-divisional Chieftains. The Denkeripebi and the Labopebi families are eligible to occupy the vacant skin of Buipe. The precondition for the occupancy of any vacant skin in Gonjaland is for the person to be from the



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lineage of Ndewura Jakpa and his sons. Inheritance of a vacant skin is therefore patrilineal and in a circulating system of succession where children inherit from fathers and brothers.

The Gonja society is organised along patriarchal lines where males are considered as natural leaders and women are to subordinate to them. In addition, the people are predominantly Islamic in terms of religion and that has greatly influenced their belief systems in areas such as inheritance and marriage. Inheritance is through the paternal line and authority is vested in the male members of society. Marital arrangement is patrilocal where a man marries a woman and the woman must leave her parents' home to join the husband and his parents and that becomes her new home. All economic resources including land, animals and economic trees are owned by men in the Gonja society. A woman may cultivate a parcel of land but cannot claim ownership over the land.

Furthermore, the Gonja society is characterised by the principle of gerontocracy. Here, adults prevail over the younger members and children of the society. In addition, like most societies in northern Ghana, there is the phenomenon of sexual division of labour. This sexual division of labour prescribes roles for females and different set of roles for men and this is prevalent among the Gonja communities.

With the introduction of formal education, the first group of people considered was the male children. The few girls that were put in school easily dropped out due to inadequate attention (Braimah,1997). For instance, if a girl child and a boy child passed from the same family to go to the next stage of



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education, depending on available resources, the family would prefer to only take care of the fees and needs of the male child. The family would even encourage the girl child to get married and stop ‘wasting her time’ in case there is not enough resources to take care of her in school. Over time, this created space for some men to take up leadership roles and contrived the space for the Wuriche.

Within this patriarchal arrangement, space has been provided for some women especially the sisters of Jakpa’s lineage to wield political authority as chiefs (Buwuriche). There are a number of Buwuriche (female Chiefs) across the various divisions of the Gonja state. The Buwuriche are appointed by the Yagbunwura, the divisional chiefs and elders or sub-chiefs depending on the area of jurisdiction for which the vacancy for the position of the Wuriche (Female chief) exists. Yagbun, which is the head skin, for example has the position of the Mankumawuriche who is appointed by the Yagbunwura in case of an existing vacancy and the Burwuriche in the Wasipe division is appointed by the Wasipewura.

The Wuriche is a sister or daughter to the appointing chief but sometimes she needs not be related to the chief, though she must be a member of the Royal family and her father need not hold, nor have held, the office of a chief. The sons of Buwuriche are also qualified to occupy some skins in their respective lineage. In the Bole division for example, the sons of Buwuriche are entitled to the Serikpe, Kulmasa, Maluwe and Kpankpansiri chiefships.

Notwithstanding the apparent patriarchal order, female leadership is an important component of the authority structure in the Gonja political system.



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From the beginnings of the Gonja Kingdom, the leader and founder of the Gonja State, Ndewura Jakpa, also installed his sister as the Mankumawuriche (female chief of Mankuma) and the Daboyawuriche/Buruguwuriche (female chief of Daboya). From then every division in Gonja appoints and installs female chiefs for their divisions and the various communities under their jurisdiction. The Gonja political system comprises the offices of chiefs (Ewura), female chiefs (Buwuriche), council of elders and the overall king (Yagbunwura) who administer the day-to-day activities of the Gonja state.

Like the Asante state of southern Ghana, the institution of the female traditional leader is well rooted among the Gonja. The Queen mother or Ohemaa however, finds herself in a matrilineal society and an environment where there was early start of secular education. As a result, the office of the Queen mother has gained more recognition and has also been well researched into and discussed in writings about the Asante political system (Cleveland, 2015; Fayorsey, 2006; Stoeltje, 2003; Busia, 1968; Goody & Goody, 1967; Rattray, 1932). However, the concept of the Wuriche has only been mentioned in footnotes by various researchers writing about the Gonja political system including Goody (1966) in 'Succession to high office' where he mentions the "Wuriche" as a female chief in Gonja and wrote virtually nothing on her. Also, Braimah et al. (1997) in 'History and traditions of the Gonja' wrote one paragraph on the appointment of Buwuriche and their role in preparing food during festivals and who are also to be consulted on custom by chiefs and elders.



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These footnote accounts on female political leaders in Gonja by researchers, point to an obvious lack of visibility of the Wuriche in the political and social structure of the Gonja. Attributable to the patriarchal order of the Gonja society, the authority and role of the Wuriche has therefore, been beclouded over the years by men in contemporary social and political discourse in Ghana. The Wuriche is expected to play various roles and exercise her authority in a male-dominated society where masculinity is so much revered and projected. The functions of the Wuriche include the traditional roles of mobilising women for communal labour, giving advice to the male chief and settlement of disputes.

Following transitions from a self-protected system to colonisation and independent formal government, the Wuriche assumed some changing roles in her society. As argued by proponents of modernisation theory, as society progresses, the actors take on changing but specialised roles. According to Webster (1990), modernisation theory makes a distinction between tradition and modernity. The people of a traditional society he suggests, perform limited tasks which are ascribed to them. By characterisation, social cohesion in a traditional society is based on a single common lifestyle and believes that prevail within and between settlements (Weber, 1958).

Modernity is in contrast with traditional society. Webster (1990) argues that as society develops, social differentiation occurs as specialised institutions are formed to deal with needs of society and the actors within the system continue to adjust to new and changing roles. In present day Gonja, the Wuriche collaborates with government and non-governmental agencies to



[www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) bring development to her people and provides representation for her community during workshops and meetings organised by agencies which need the views and opinions of the community. She also engages in sensitisation exercises to educate her community on some government policies including education on the harmful effects of female genital mutilation and the need to educate the girl child. These are new functions that the Wuriche must assume because her society has become more complex and integrated.

The institution of the Wuriche has, however, been bypassed by contemporary social and political discourse in Ghana notwithstanding the role situations the Wuriche occupies. Coupled with the challenges her immediate society poses, what authority would the female chief possess in a patriarchal society like the Gonja, where succession and inheritance are male centred and also the fact that the authority of chiefs has been affected in terms of influence and function over the years. It will also be particularly interesting to know how the Wuriche is able to maintain and exercise both ceremonial and executive political authority. This is against the fact that over the years she has been ignored and bypassed by researchers on the subject matter of Ghanaian traditional political systems and African political systems in general as suggested by Stoeltje (2003). Under challenging circumstances, her power and legitimacy are questioned by the very society that offers her the position. To consider this, benefit will be derived from the discourse developed by Africanist anthropologists and researchers, a perspective that considers both the present and the past in understanding current social institutions.





### **1.1 Problem Statement**

It has become an issue within contemporary social and political discourse to provide space for the inclusion of women in leadership positions. However, most African traditional political systems are influenced by patriarchal tendencies which ascribe authority to males. In the traditional setting, the traditional leader combines judicial, legislative, executive and ceremonial functions in one body or person. The power, authority and legitimacy of the traditional leader depend on the extent to which he/she is able to combine these functions effectively in the same person or body. It is that ability which establishes the authority of the leader over the subjects (community).

From history, the Wuriche derives her authority through appointment by the male chief. The position of the wuriche is to complement the male chief in the performance of their functions within the Gonja political system. The Wuriche is expected to perform such functions as mobilising women for communal labour and other ceremonial occasions, dispute resolution, passing of local laws to regulate the activities generally of women and providing counsel and guidance to the male chief. These roles relate to legislation, adjudication and ceremonial functions through which the Wuriche exercises her authority.

The Wuriche is to perform these functions within a social context of patriarchy which hardly allows for women to freely exercise authority. In this social ecology, the wuriche is circumscribed by social definition of the role of women and it is difficult for her to extend her role over men. There are also emerging challenges presented by formal government structures in the



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decentralised system where the roles expected to be performed by the Wuriche such as dispute resolution and enforcement of local laws have been taken over by other specialised structures like the judiciary and the police service.

In the contemporary gendered situation, the relevance of the institution of the wuriche and her functions is not guaranteed. The issue arises as to the extent to which the role of the wuriche complements or equals that of the male chief and whether the wuriche is just a cultural ‘token’ without political leverage. This raises the issue about the extent of the Wuriche’s authority and whether she has effective roles to play in the political arrangement of traditional Gonja. This is the issue for investigation in this study.

## 1.2 Research questions

Broadly, the study sought to answer the question: how does the wuriche exercise her authority and functions in the social organisation of the Gonja?

This study set out to answer the following specific questions:

- a. How is the Gonja traditional political system structured and organised along gender lines?
- b. How is the authority of the Wuriche established in the Gonja political organisation?
- c. What are the functions of the Wuriche in the Gonja social organisation?
- d. What challenges confront the Wuriche in the performance of her duties?



### **1.3 Research objectives**

The broad objective of this study was to examine the authority and role of the Wuriche in Gonja social organisation.

Specifically, this study sought to:

- i. Examine the structure and organisation of the Gonja traditional political system from a gendered perspective.
- ii. Examine the authority of the Wuriche in the Gonja political organisation.
- iii. Examine the functions of the Wuriche in the Gonja social organisation.
- iv. Examine the challenges confronting the Wuriche in the performance of her duties.

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

Contemporary social and political discourse on African traditional political systems has provided much literature on the structure and functions of African traditional leaders. There has been emphasis on the role of the King/chief who is considered the primus inter-pares in terms of traditional authority. However, there is the acknowledgement of the existence of female traditional leaders who are expected to play some complementing and, in some cases, equal roles to the male counterparts.

This study entails an investigation of the authority of the female chief in the traditional political system of the Gonja of northern Ghana. The study seeks to understand the male-female authority relations among the Gonja to locate exactly where the female chief (Wuriche) finds herself within the



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political system. This is because, it is not just enough to provide some space for women traditional leaders in the system but what role they play in all these arrangements is important. The gap here is that, the discourse has always centered on the representation of women or their presence or existence for that matter, in the traditional political set up, without examining exactly what role they play within the system. As society develops, actors continue to assume new roles and challenges as a result of social differentiation as argued by modernisation theorists.

This study is therefore intended to contribute to the discourse on Gonja traditional political system by way of providing empirical information on the gender authority and role relations between men and women traditional leaders. The study will also be a source for researchers and policy makers who are interested in gender issues in relation to the authority relations between men and women.

### **1.6 Organisation of the study**

This thesis is presented in seven chapters. Chapter One contains the introduction to the study. In this chapter, the background to the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, justification for the study and the organisation of the study are presented. In chapter two, literature is reviewed around definition of concepts, the theoretical underpinnings and thematic areas. The concepts of authority, power and legitimacy, patriarchy and traditional political system are operationalised. Theories of power and



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authority and feminist theory are reviewed to provide the theoretical foundation of the study. In terms of approaches, the women in development (WID), women and development (WAD) and the gender and development (GAD) approaches are examined to provide the context within which this study is being carried out generally. Works in the thematic areas of women in positions of authority, typology of authority systems in Africa, the role of women in positions of authority in Africa, the impact of colonial and post-colonial governance on African authority systems and traditional authority systems in Ghana are reviewed.

Chapter three presents the methodology and profile of the study area. In this chapter, the Size and location of Gonja and the traditional political institutions are discussed. The profile of the study area is intended to provide us with an understanding of the political setting and space over which the study is being carried out and how some of the traditional variables are likely to have an influence on the authority of the wuriche.

In terms of methodology, the research design (qualitative design), sources of data collection (primary and secondary), data collection methods (in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation and archival search are adopted and used. The target group; Chiefs (male and female) and key informants from whom data was collected is also presented in this chapter. In chapter four, a brief history of the Gonja and the organisation and structure of the Gonja political system are presented. The chapter specifically deals with a brief history of the Gonja, the organisation of the Gonja political system, the



Structure of authority in Gonja, the system of succession to high office, and the functions of the political system in Gonja.

Chapter five presents the authority and role of the Wuriche in Gonja social organisation. In this chapter, the traditional and Changing roles of the wuriche are discussed. The traditional roles in terms of; Motherhood, executive, adjudication, law-making and the changing roles as a result of; the introduction of male chiefs, the colonial influence, the post-colonial government influence, influence from other political systems are discussed. The next chapter, chapter six, deals with the challenges facing the authority and influence of the wuriche in Gonja. It looks at the socio-cultural challenges, the emerging challenges and perceived challenges. Chapter seven, which is the final chapter, contains the summary of findings and conclusions of the study. This chapter highlights the key arguments based on which conclusions are made and presented.



LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the study. Concepts as contained in the main topic are operationalized for the understanding of the reader and the theories that form the basis for the study are also examined. Following that, key arguments and issues related to the subject matter of the study are discussed according to themes. The concepts of power, authority and legitimacy and patriarchy are operationalised under this section. Theories of power and authority are reviewed to form the theoretical basis of this research.

This chapter considers the contextualisation of the study by reviewing approaches to the integration of women within authority structures. Three approaches of Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development approaches are reviewed. Related literature is reviewed in five themes of; women in positions of authority, typology of authority systems in Africa, the role of female traditional leaders in Africa, the impact of colonial and post-colonial government systems on authority systems in Africa, and traditional authority systems in Ghana. This helps to establish the existing gaps in the area of women in positions of authority which need to be filled and also provides information that is relevant for establishing the basis of the findings of the study which can help in arriving at some conclusions and recommendations. This is done by looking at the works of authors who have written about subjects and carried out works



which are related to [www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) women in positions of authority and African authority systems in general.

## **2.1 Definition of concepts**

### ***2.1.1 Power, authority and legitimacy***

The most traditional view of power is that it is a form of control over a person and a way of forcing one person to obey another. This could otherwise be termed domination (Barnard, 1938). Foucault (1982), argues that in a state of nature we would all have power over each other, meaning the most violent would win, in order to escape from this brutality, we would have to accept and submit to a monarch. The King would have power over people, would dominate and can force his will upon them and get them to do things they would not otherwise, but this is the price of order. However, this view of power as domination is very narrow, and runs into the problem that in our daily lives power is very commonly exercised through the acceptance and willing obedience of the public. This is because those in power are also in authority.

According to Weber (1958), authority refers to the willing and unconditional compliance of people, resting upon their belief that it is legitimate for the superior to impose his or her will on them and illegitimate for them to refuse to obey. Drawing from Weber's definition, authority for the purposes of this study is used to refer to the ability and the right of an individual or group to rule over a group of people by conducting their affairs according to laid down procedure established by the group. The focus is on the





right and ability of [www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) traditional leaders (the Wuriche) to conduct affairs within the Gonja political system in respect of the laid down procedure which claims obedience from the Gonja society.

Those in power do not merely possess the ability to make us comply but are also thought to have the right to do so. This is an important distinction and is the difference between power and authority. Power is the ability to make us do something while authority is the right to make us do something (Brydon, 1996).

Legitimacy is the perception that power is exercised in a rightful, justified and acceptable manner. Although a person may have authority a whole system of government would be regarded as legitimate. Legitimacy is the basis of stable political systems and all political systems seek legitimacy – how they achieve it and keep it is essential to their existence.

Power is thus considered as something which may be delegated or distributed almost invariably from a centralised point to various authoritative locations across any given territory. Latour (1986), has described this type of imagery as a ‘centred’ conception of power, where a central source is responsible for the diffusion of power within and across society. At its simplest, Bruno argues, power is delegated or distributed in a relatively straightforward manner down through an organisational hierarchy under clear lines of authority, and there may be one of two outcomes. Either the rules, regulations and constraints imposed by the centre are successful in meeting its goals or their organisational impact is minimised or deflected by the degree of resistance met.



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In making a case for the structural nature of power over others, Isaac (1987) locates the asymmetry in the unequal distribution of power in society. As he puts it ‘relations of domination and subordination comprise a subset of power relations, where the capacities to act are not distributed symmetrically to all parties to the relationship’ (Isaac,1987:84). Some people and some groups have more power than others, not by accident or by a series of fortunate events, but by virtue of the structure of relations of which they are a part. The capacity to secure advantage thus stands in relation to the potential loss realised by others, who in one way or another, are enmeshed in the same web of asymmetrical relationships.

To summarise, power, authority and legitimacy are components that every political system seeks. Power can be exerted by anyone, but unless that person is perceived as being in authority then they will face disobedience. Legitimacy can be seen as the way that a system of power can achieve authority by being seen as rightful.

### ***2.1.2 Patriarchy***

Patriarchy is a form of societal arrangement in which the father or the oldest male is head of the family. It is a society or government style in which males hold the authority and influence and females are largely excluded from decision-making and leadership roles. Patriarchy is used here to describe the Gonja society today, characterized by present and historic unequal power relations between men and women whereby women are systematically disadvantaged and marginalised. This takes place across almost every sphere



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of life in Gonja society but it is particularly noticeable in women's under-representation in key state institutions, in decision-making positions and in employment.

### ***2.1.3 Traditional political system***

The term 'traditional' is used to denote the conventional, customary and long-established ways of behaviour and living which have been held unto by a group of people or society for a long time without change or with minimal change over time (Ranger, 1984). This study focuses on the long-established customs and conventions which determine the way of behaviour and living of the Gonja with specific reference to their political and social arrangement. In short, the indigenous and native ways of behaviour before the coming into contact with the Europeans which have been maintained and practiced till date with little or no change.

The concept of 'political system' is used taking into consideration the meanings of the two words, 'political' and 'system'. Political is used here to refer to the exercising of power and authority and the organizing of a group of people or society into a form of government. The system is used to refer to a set of interconnected parts that functions as a single unit to achieve a particular goal (Easton, 1953). The political system according to Heywood (1997), refers to any organised social organisation in which authority system exists in determining the basic functions of political interaction which Lasswell (1936) attributes to 'who gets what, when and how'. According to Easton (1953), the



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political system is that system of interaction in any society through which binding and authoritative allocation of values are made and implemented. It is that part of social organization within which people make inputs which generate outcomes in the form of outputs to fulfill societal goals. To Easton, changes in the political system produce "demands" and "supports" for action or the status quo directed as "inputs" towards the society, through political behaviour.

The study relies on these perspectives of the political system as espoused by Lasswell (1936), Heywood (1997) and Easton (1953) to look at that aspect of Gonja society which is concerned with the control, regulation and the total organization of the people with the use of rules and some physical force. This involves the network of individuals, groups and organisations in Gonja whose relationships help to determine, enforce and interpret the rules of behaviour of the Gonja society. The thrust here, therefore, is to look at the Gonja society in its different parts of organization, that is, the office of the Wuriche, the office of the male chief, and the divisions and sub-divisions of Gonja which all function together as a single unit for the political administration of the Gonja kingdom.

## **2.2 Theories of power and authority**

The study reviews theories on state formation, functionalism and authority. In particular, the Max Werber's theory of authority (the classical theory of authority and the acceptance theory of authority) and conquest theory of state formation are examined. The section provides a theoretical framework and



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basis upon which the Gonja political system and the authority of the Wuriche will be examined.

### **2.2.1 The Theory of Authority (Weber, 1958)**

Max Weber in his “The three types of legitimate rule” espouses a theory of authority that outlines three forms of authority; traditional authority, charismatic authority and legal-rational authority. Weber suggests that traditional authority is that type of authority that is legitimated by the sanction of tradition. The ability and right of the leader to occupy a position and rule in the capacity of the office is based on inheritance and is passed on from one individual to the other often through heredity. This type of authority he argues does not change overtime and tends to be ‘irrational and inconsistent’ and perpetuates the status quo. Traditional authority in most African traditional societies, used to be embedded in patrimonialism and in purely patriarchal structure where the servants were completely and personally dependent upon the ruler or the servants may not be personal servants of the ruler but independent men. In both cases however, the system of authority does not change or evolve.

Charismatic authority he argues is exercised by an individual whose personal attributes, mission and vision inspires others. This form of authority is therefore, based on the perceived extraordinary characteristics of the individual leader. Weber suggests that the charismatic leader is the head of a new social movement, and one instilled with divine or supernatural powers, such as a religious prophet.



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Weber proposes that legal-rational authority is empowered by a formalistic belief in the content of the law (legal) or natural law (rationality). Here, obedience is not given to a specific individual leader but a set of uniform principles. Weber argues that the best form of legal-rational authority is political bureaucracy. This form of authority is frequently found in the modern democratic states, and city governments.

However, in considering authority, no authority structure could actually be exclusively traditional, charismatic or legal-rational as observed by Weber himself. According to Coser, Weber's forms of authority are based on "pure" types of authority and that "he was aware that in reality, mixtures will be found in the legitimation of authority" (Coser 1971, 227). Spencer (1970), suggests that legitimate order and authority stems from different aspects of a single phenomenon that underlie all instances of ordered interaction. He explains that "authority and norms represent polar principles of social organization: In the one case, organization rests upon orientation to a rule or a principle; in the other instance it is based upon compliance and commands" (Spencer 1970, 124). As such many examples of the authority types postulated by Weber may overlap. For example, as argued by Riesebrodt (1999), charisma plays a strong, if not integral, role in traditional authority systems. Weber himself suggests that Charismatic authority is routinized in a number of ways: orders are traditionalized, the staff or followers change into legal-rational or estate-like (traditional) staff, or the meaning of charisma itself may undergo change with the death or decline of a charismatic leader.



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Therefore, one form of these authority types will dominate the exercise of the right and ability to rule in most political systems. For instance, modern democratic systems with their bureaucratic arrangements may exhibit some features of charismatic authority, but their authority structures are underlined by the principles of rational-legal authority.

### **2.2.1.1 Formal or Classical Theory of Authority**

This theory is underpinned by the principle of scalar chain or organizational theory of society. Authority in the realms of classical theory is considered to flow from top to bottom through various levels of hierarchy. It flows from the leader through subordinates to the general societal level. Every subordinate accepts without question the authority of the leader and obeys instructions issued by the superiors. Coercive measures are used to demand obedience to prevent or punish disobedience. When the person leaves the organization or system, he or she also loses the authority to issue instructions (Spencer, 1970). The flow of authority is governed by the process of delegation. Each leader within the system can only exercise that much authority that is invested in him or her or is delegated through superiors.

The authority clearly defines the job of the position, that is, the task the position holder must achieve through orders to be given to the subordinates. Weber, a principal proponent of classical theory of authority states that “authority is the willing and unconditional compliance of people, resting upon their belief that it is legitimate for superior to impose his will on them and illegitimate for them to refuse to obey” (Weber 1958, 16). This theory of authority sees authority on a top-down process where leaders command their



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follows to do what they want and expect them to do and the followers by virtue of belonging to that society are obliged to obey the orders of their leaders.

### **2.2.1.2 Acceptance theory of authority**

Somewhat contrary to the classical theory of authority is the acceptance theory of authority. This theory of authority was formulated by Mary Parker Follett and later popularized by Chester Barnard (1938). It is also known as the bottom-up authority. Barnard (1938) argues, this theory is based on the premise that authority does not flow from top to bottom but flows from bottom to top. It implies that superiors can exercise authority only if it is accepted by the subordinates. The acceptance of authority by subordinates, thus, vests leaders with authority. The flow of authority takes the form of request by the leaders. If the request is accepted by the subordinates, leaders exercise the authority, and if subordinates do not accept it, no authority is exercised by leaders.

As against classical theory of authority, Barnard views authority as existent when subordinates are willing to accept it. If followers do not accept the authority, leaders lose the right to give orders. To this far, he argues that authority is the character of communication in a formal organization by virtue of which it is accepted by a contributor to or a member of the society as governing or determining what he or she does or is not to do so far as the system is concerned.





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The theory recognizes informal relationships in the society. It postulates that leaders have authority only to the extent that subordinates are willing to accept and provide a logical base to authority because authority is meaningless if subordinates do not conform to directives. Authority is exercised and accepted within the range of acceptance which Barnard calls “zone of indifference” and Herbert A. Simon refers to it as “area of acceptance”. It means that authority is accepted if it is in the range of acceptance. It is the area or limit set by individuals within which they accept the authority of their leaders over them.

### ***2.2.2 Theories of power***

Power is a factor of all social relations, particularly political relations. It is present in every society. However, its distribution differs from society to society. Several theories have been advocated by Political Sociologists and each of which seeks to explain the possession and distribution of power in society. This section reviews three theories of power; class theory of power, pluralist theory of power and gender theory of power as they relate to the subject for discussion.

#### **2.2.2.1 Class Theory of Power**

The class theory of power stands associated with the name of Karl Marx and his Marxism. It holds that in each society there are present two classes. As Marx observed, the class of the Rich (Haves) which owns the means of production and is the dominant economic class and the class of the Poor (Have-nots) which is the class of economically weak and poor workers who



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are economically, socially and politically exploited and dominated by the class of the rich (Marx, 1968). The class of the rich possesses social, economic, ideological and political power in society and it uses power to maintain its dominance over the society.

Marxism holds that in every stage of social evolution, the class of the rich (the propertied class which owns the means of production and distribution in society) has always used power in society. Marx argues that, in the slave stage, the masters used power over the slaves, in the feudal society the feudal lords (feudal nobility/ the class of land owners) used power over the serfs, peasants and the land labour, and in the present industrial society (age of capitalism), the power is being used by the capitalists for dominating and exploiting the proletariats. The class of the rich always imposes and maintains its economic, social, ideological and political domination over the whole society.

However, Weber (1968), advocates the view that undoubtedly power in each society is really in the hands of the dominant class which can be any class, the bureaucracy or an ideologically dominant class. This dominant class can use an ideology or political persuasion or leadership structure or intellectual power or morality as the means for securing the consent of the non-propertied class or other classes for securing its dominance in society.

In other words, while Marx and his traditional followers hold that power is possessed and always used by the economically dominant class of the rich, some other Weber holds that power is always in the hands of a class but this can be any class which dominates the society by using several different



means. Thus, Class [Theory of Power](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) holds that power is always possessed and used by a class of persons in each society.

### 2.2.2.2 Pluralist Theory of Power

The pluralist theory of power rejects the class theory of power as espoused by both Marx and Weber. It holds that power in every society is really used neither by one class nor by any group but by several different groups. In every society there are present several groups of people each of which represents a major interest or some interests.

There are competing groups which compete for sharing power and influence in society. They share and use their activities of influencing and determining all decisions and policies of society and its government. Sovereignty is exercised by social groups and associations and it is based on their capacity to do so.

Foucault, the French postmodernist, has been hugely influential in shaping understandings of power in this direction, leading away from the analysis of actors who use power as an instrument of coercion, and even away from the discreet structures in which those actors operate, toward the idea that ‘power is everywhere’, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault 1991; Rabinow 1991). Power for Foucault is what makes us what we are, operating on a quite different level from other theories. As observed by Gaventa, ‘the works of Foucault marks a radical departure from previous modes of conceiving power and cannot be easily integrated with previous ideas, as power is diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied



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and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them' (Gaventa 2003: 1)

Foucault challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of 'episodic' or 'sovereign' acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. 'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure (Foucault 1998: 63). Instead it is a kind of 'metapower' or 'capacity' that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation. Foucault uses the term 'power/knowledge' to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and capacity.

### **2.2.2.3 Gender Theory of Power**

The gender theory of power holds that in all societies, power is actually in the hands of the men who as a group dominate the group of women in society. Here power in each society stands centralized in the hands of the group of men and it is the power of the gender domination of man as a group over the women as a group.

Gender theory is supported by feminist writers and activists. They hold that each society stands divided on gender basis into the dominant group of all men and the dependent and dominated group of all women. They criticise the existing situation and want to end male domination of society. They strongly advocate and want the liberation of women from male dominance which is held to be unnatural, undemocratic and harmful for the progress of society. This theory builds upon the social concept of patriarchy. The system of patriarchy it is argued needs to be replaced by a society based on real and



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comprehensive equality between men and women. The prevailing system has for its basis the biological difference between men and women and wrongly gives all importance and power to men.

It has been working as a system of all round and wholesale exploitation, oppression and suppression of women who constitute half of the world population and perform nearly 2/3 of the work hours (Lorber, 2005). It is therefore imperative that women should have the right to be equal partners in the exercise of power in society. The gender theory of power holds that currently power in each society is exercised through a system of male domination which needs to be replaced by a system of real and effective social, economic and political equality of men and women in each society. The two classes of men and women must be equal partners in the exercise of power in each society.

Thus, each of the three theories, gives its own view of the distribution and exercise of power in society. Together, these theories adopt and advocate different standards and principles for the study of distribution and exercise of power in society. This study on the Wuriche approaches power on the basis of these theories of power. Power and authority are situated in the context of class theory where the chiefs (male and female) form the ruling class who control basically political power within the Gonja society.

However, within this, is the element of gender whereby the appropriation of power and authority is influenced by patriarchal tendencies which uphold the supremacy of male authority over female. Within this context it will be difficult for the Wuriche to exercise authority which is equal



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to the male chief as advocated by gender theory of power even though the Wuriche and the male chief both belong to the ruling class in Gonja. What is also important is that, the exercise of authority by the Wuriche is also dependent on her capacity to be able to influence her subjects within and outside the Gonja society

### **2.2.3 Social contract theory**

Social contract is an expression introduced into politics by Plato, and taken over by John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and David Humes, and now used as a general label for views which try to found all ideas of legitimacy and political obligation in a contract, whether express, implied or hypothetical (Thrasher, 2015). The essence of the view is that since to contract is to put oneself under an obligation, the grounds of political obligation could be objectively determined if all such obligation could be traced to a contractual promise. For Humes (1741), the contract is between subjects to set up and obey a sovereign and in accepting the sovereign's protection the subject implicitly contracts with all other members of society to obey him. Social contract is the relationship that exists between a subject and the ruler which establishes political obligation and can be traced to a contractual promise.

The aim of a social contract theory is to show that members of some society have reason to endorse and comply with the fundamental social rules, laws, institutions, and/or principles of that society. It is concerned with public justification of determining whether or not a given regime is legitimate and therefore worthy of loyalty (D'Agostino 1996). The ultimate goal of state-



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focused social contract theories is to show that some political system can meet the challenge of whether men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force (Hamilton 1788). Going further, Gauthier (1986) argues that any system of moral constraints must be justified to those to whom it is meant to apply.

The ultimate goal, then, of social contract theory is to show, in the most general sense, that social rules can be rationally justified. This does not, however, distinguish the social contract from other approaches in moral and political philosophy, all of which attempt to show that moral and political rules are rationally justifiable in some sense. The true distinctiveness of the social contract approach is that justification does not rely on some exogenous reason or truth. Justification is generated by rational agreement not by the reasons that generate agreement (Scanlon, 2014). That is, the fact that everyone in a society, given their individual reasoning, would agree to a certain rule or principle is the critical justification for that rule, rather than certain correct or sound reasons that sufficiently rational individuals would appreciate and, if appreciated, would lead to agreement.

Although contractarians differ in their account of the reasons of individuals, with some being attracted to more objectivist accounts (Scanlon 2014), most follow Hobbes in modelling individual reasons as subjective, motivationally internal, or at least agent-relative. This may be because of scepticism about moral reasons generally (Gauthier 1986, Binmore 1998), a conviction about the overwhelming importance of self-interest to the social



order ([www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh), Hobbes 1651, Buchanan 2000), a concern to take seriously the disagreement of individual view in modern society, and this includes differences about objectivity (Muldoon 2017; Moehler, 2015) or because this approach is consistent with the most well-developed theories of rational choice in the social sciences (Binmore 2005, Buchanan 2000).

In any case, the reasons individuals have for agreeing to some rules or principles are importantly their own reasons, not “good reasons” from the impartial perspective. Of course, those same individuals may care about what they perceive to be the impartial good or some other non-individualistic notion—they need not be egoists—but what they care about, and so their reasons will differ from one another. This point, as Rawls highlights in his later work, is crucial to understanding political justification in a diverse society where members of a society cannot reasonably be expected to have similar conceptions of the good (Rawls 1996). Recent contractarian accounts put even greater weight on heterogeneity (Southwood 2010, Gaus 2016, Muldoon 2017, Thrasher 2015).

### **2.3 Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory analyzes women's experiences of gender subordination, the roots of women's oppression, how gender inequality is perpetuated, and offer differing remedies for gender inequality. Feminism argues that women's unequal access to legal, social, political and economic institutions causes women's oppression (Tong, 1998). Their remedy advocates women's equal





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legal rights and participation in the public spheres of education, politics, and employment.

The claims of women's oppression originate in sexuality. Lorber (2005), argues that women's bodies are controlled through violence, objectification, and social institutions such as medicine and religion. According to Jones & Budig (2008), feminists see sexism as the oldest and most pervasive form of oppression; they argue that the eradication of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality are key to ending gender oppression. This would be accomplished by increasing women's control over their bodies, including transforming sexuality, childbirth, and motherhood.

Marxist and Socialist feminists root gender inequality in capitalism. They argue capitalists and individual men exploit women's unpaid reproductive labor within the family. Women are also exploited as a low-wage and expendable reserve army of labour (Jones & Budig, 2008). Marxist feminists claim patriarchy is produced by capitalism and will end with capitalism's demise. Socialist feminists argue patriarchy and capitalism are separate systems of oppression.

Feminism seeks to correct the male bias in psychoanalytic theory, producing theories that explore women's experiences with their emotions, bodies and sexuality. Psychoanalytic theory argues that, early childhood experiences shape women's psyches and create differences between men and women. They argue the phallus, a symbol of male power, dominates Western culture. Solutions call for an androgynous society, possibly created through dual parenting.

Women of color criticize feminist theories for ignoring coexisting



[www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) forms of oppression. This perspective includes Black, Chicana, multicultural, and third world feminisms. They integrate analyses of gender oppression with systems of inequality based on race, class and sexuality. They show how privilege and disadvantage are built into a matrix of domination and intersect to produce unique forms of oppression. They advocate for remedies that focus on the survival of entire peoples, rather than solely on women. Postcolonial feminism elaborates on intersectionality by emphasizing Western colonisation (Lorber, 2005). Here, sexism results from modernization and economic restructuring; it includes women's exploitation as workers and sexual beings. They focus on the roles of women as mothers within communities who can use this position to advocate for education of girls, adequate healthcare and environmental protection (Jones & Budig, 2008).

Postmodern feminists avoid overarching causes or solutions of gender inequality and focus on plurality and difference. They challenge inevitable and fixed characteristics of gender, including heteronormativity (assumption that heterosexuality is "natural"), and the undifferentiated category of "woman." They argue performativity—the repetition of gendered identity and display—perpetuates gender inequality. They advocate a blending of gendered characteristics, and questioning "normal" forms of gender and sexuality as remedies for gender inequality (Tong, 1998).

Feminist theory identifies patriarchy as a major contributing factor to women oppression and gender inequality in the appropriation of power and authority within society. Feminism therefore, calls for a transformation of relations within society through a redistribution of responsibilities, and changes in access to opportunities and political power.



## **2.4 Approaches to integration of women within authority structures**

In terms of context, the study examines three main approaches from which the arguments of the study can be situated. These approaches are; the Women in Development (WID) approach, the Women and Development (WAD) approach and the Gender and Development (GAD) approach. In the discourse of the status of women in society over the past four decades, these three approaches have been adopted in relation to men's and women's involvement in and with development. These approaches have been attempts at explaining how development affects women and men differently; that is, why women do not experience issues of development in the same way as men. A review of these approaches is worthwhile for our understanding of the authority of women in positions of power because the authority and role of women in positions can be explained within the general context of development. Though this study benefits from the perspectives of both the WID and WAD approaches, the general arguments and assumptions are carried out under the general context of the gender and development approach.

### ***2.4.1 The Women in Development (WID) approach***

The women in development approach can be traced to the 1970s when the thinking was that women had become disadvantaged because they had been left out of economic, political and social development. The central issue here was the absence and exclusion of women from development programmes and approaches in all aspects including political and economic. This approach supported the solution of empowering and involving women in development



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programmes in order to improve their access to resources and their participation in decision-making processes.

The study of the authority and role of the Wuriche may be seen in the light of attempting to argue that women generally have had it difficult to be part of the development process the world over and in that regard shares in the context of this approach. Two reasons, however, account for a despatcher of the view point of this study and the WID approach. The first reason is that, the approach concentrates narrowly on the inequalities between men and women and ignored the social, cultural and economic factors that give rise to those inequalities in society. Secondly, the approach focuses on women almost exclusively and assumed that women were outside the mainstream of development. But the position of women as this study seeks to argue can not be explained only in terms of exclusion in society.

#### ***2.4.2 Women and Development (WAD) approach***

Considering the weaknesses inherent in the WID approach, the WAD approach was developed in opposition to the arguments by the WID movement in the late 1970s. The argument advanced by the WAD approach was that, women had always been part of the development process, where the work women undertook both within and outside the household was vital to the survival and continuation of society. The WAD approach assumed both men and as being disadvantaged by the global economic and political order. Notwithstanding the vital role women play in terms of the survival and continuation of society, this study seeks to examine why the authority of women in leadership positions continue to suffer from societal challenges such



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as patriarchy. In this regard, though the assumption by the WAD approach may be helpful to the discussions in this study, the argument by the approach that the integration of women into development was to their disadvantage and only worsened their opportunities of equality is not the position that is supported by this study.

The WAD approach also assumed that, the position of women would improve if and when global international structures became more equitable. This assumption underplays the role of patriarchy and thereby does not adequately address the question of social relations between women and men. In this regard, the WAD approach can be relied on for purposes of this study to some extent but not in its entirety because a key variable, the role of patriarchy, which is being considered in this study has been neglected by the WAD approach in their assumptions.

#### ***2.4.3 The Gender and Development (GAD) approach***

Following the inadequacies of the WID and WAD approaches in providing a contextual grounding, this study is conducted within the context of gender and development. While looking at the authority of women, the GAD approach considers authority and participation from the perspective of both men and women.

In this regard, this study assumes the position that, the equal participation of both women and men in development and equal benefit and control in every-day events is ideal for societal advancement. The authority and role of women in positions of authority must therefore be highlighted



[www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) where it is not recognised and put in the right perspective in relation to men. This is a position shared by the GAD approach which arose in the 1980s. GAD is not just about women's ability to exercise authority, but with the way in which gender relations allot specific roles, responsibilities and expectations between women and men, often to the detriment of women (Duffy, 2016). One of the factors (patriarchy) which contributes to the situations where roles and expectations are allotted to the detriment of women is a central issue for investigation in this study. The focus of this study, which is also the argument of GAD, is on the social or gender relations between women and men in society and seeking issues of access and control over power, in this case within the Gonja society.

#### ***2.4.4 Gender Mainstreaming***

The imbalance in the creation of positions of authority to the detriment of women, is one of the issues raised for gender mainstreaming. The UN defined gender mainstreaming as “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal (of mainstreaming) is to achieve gender equality” (UN, 2006:142). Gender mainstreaming recognises the relevance of women and men working together to improve their lives and the lives of their communities.



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This takes a political empowerment approach and supports a more equal access to resources and equal rights including the right to participate and lead. This consideration is particularly important in this discourse because of the traditional absence of women from active participation in decision making and political structure formation where in Africa in particular their original role had been perceived to be one of homemaker as opposed to decision maker and policy maker. In many societies, the economic, social and political regime is run by law that has historically supported men. one of such social and political regimes is patriarchy.

The position of gender mainstreaming is shared by this study by trying to juxtapose the authority and role of the wuriche in terms of gender relations with that of male chiefs and advocating for prominence to be accorded the institution of the Wuriche. However, it must be noted that, in the case of the Gonja society, women in positions of authority within the political space may be different from the global picture of lack of space being provided them. But it is about how she is able to exercise her authority under the social and political regime of patriarchy which historically run by law that supports men and the need for giving equal chance and opportunities to both women and men.

## **2.5 Women in positions of authority**

Before we attempt to examine the position of women in authority, we need to provide data on women's status in the global context. Globally, 66% of the



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people who cannot read and write are women. Women provide 70% of all the unpaid time spent in caring for family members. An estimated amount of USD 11 trillion per year is attached to this unpaid work provided by women and this constitutes one third of the global GDP (UN, 2015). Against these facts, women own only 1% of the lands in the world. In terms of management positions, women's participation in managerial and administrative posts is estimated at 33% in the developed world, 15% in Africa and 13% in Asia and the Pacific. In the United Nations system, women hold 9% of the top management jobs and 21% of senior management positions, but 48% of the junior professional civil service slots. Worldwide, only about 14% of members of parliament are women and only 7% of the world's cabinet ministers are women (UN, 2015).

What these statistics attempt to put across is that, despite new local, national and international policies and laws focusing on bridging the gap between women and men in society and in positions of authority in particular, the number of women in positions of decision-making is generally abysmal. Though there are reports of improvement in action and attitude on the part of governments, religious bodies and other institutions, the status of women in positions of authority globally, is discouraging. It is therefore, still necessary, when looking at issues of authority, to consider these through a gendered lens. That is, looking at how access to authority and authority systems give opportunities to both men and women but often in favour of men.

To get a fuller picture of the role of women in positions of authority, efforts must always be made to consider a holistic approach in looking at the





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role of women leaders from both formal and informal institutions. This will provide an opportunity to appreciate the relationship between men and women in authority. In this regard, it is not unusual that, in addressing the issue of women in positions of authority to look at the relations between women and men on the world scale in terms of global inequalities.

In doing so however, as this study will want to point out, local situations are different and play a part in supporting inequality or otherwise no matter which part of the world they can be found. Consequently, this study considers issues of authority which can promote the position of women, provide opportunities for them and improve their involvement and those which hinder their participation, in their own society. All these factors are dependent on the type of political system that is in place for the particular society. African societies are characterised by different political systems which dictate in a particular society what position men and women occupy.

## **2.6 Typology of traditional authority systems in Africa**

The traditional political systems, structures and processes of government in Africa as well as the norms, rules, and traditions that underpin their existence are rooted in diverse contexts (Sesay, 2014). In their study of African political systems, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) identify two main types of African traditional political system. One group consists of societies which have centralised authority, administrative machinery and judicial institutions and in short, a government. Then the other group comprises of societies which lack



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centralised authority, administrative machinery and institutionalised judiciary, in short which lack government and in which there are no clear divisions of rank, status or wealth. Fortes and Evan-Pritchard, nonetheless distinguish between three types of political system. The first system they suggest comprise of small societies in which the largest political unit is by ties of kinship. The second group consists of societies in which a lineage structure is the framework of the political system. The final category includes societies which have an administrative organisation as the framework of the political structure.

In his address at the Fourth African Development Forum on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, 2004, in Addis Ababa, His Royal Majesty Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, notes that “most observers of traditional African political systems recognise two main forms, namely the non-centralised or fragmented traditional state and the centralised state”. The first category he argues have no sovereign in the Austenian sense. Their means of social control revolve around what Fortes (1940) calls the “dynamics of clanship”. Their norms and values consist of well and long-established rules of conduct usually enforced by heads of various segments of the society, and in more serious or subversive cases, by spontaneous community action. Examples include the political systems of the Sukuma of Tazania, the Tallensi of northern Ghana, the Kikuyu of Kenya and the Nuer of Southern Sudan.

Like Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, Otumfuo reiterates that this system exhibits the existence of well-defined norms despite the lack of a centralised system headed by a sovereign and that there is direct and pronounced



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participation of members of clans and segments in decision making assuring a visible democratic process. The centralised states such as the Mole-Dagbani and Asante in Ghana, Yorubaland of Nigeria, Baganda of Uganda and the Zulu of South Africa, he suggests have a more structured and sophisticated political system. They are organised under clearly established and highly structured sophisticated political authority. They also have all the elements of an Austenian state including a political sovereign backed by well-articulated law enforcement organ and habitually obeyed by the citizenry. The political sovereign rules with his council of elders and advisors in accordance with customary law and practice.

Lewis (1966), in discussion “The origins of African Kingdoms” also makes a distinction between “primary” or “pristine” and “secondary” or “derived” states as identified by Sesay (2014). Primary states he argues arise “without the stimulus of other pre-existing states” such as the ones that developed in the Nile Valley, Mesopotamia, China and Mexico. The secondary states developed in response to stimuli from previously established kingdoms or states such as the kingdoms of sub-Saharan African states. According to Sesay (2014), however, literature identifies three main traditional political systems of government in Africa. They include the widely dispersed empires and chiefdoms, the centralised medium –size kingdoms and the large centralised kingdoms and empires.

Closely related to the categorisation by Sesay, is the classification by Shumway (2015), in discussion precolonial political systems of Africa where she makes a distinction between three main categories of African traditional



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political systems “conventionally known as “bands”, “tribes” and “kingdoms”. The bands are widely dispersed, stateless and acephalous societies as described by Sesay. Bands are relatively few and are limited to the societies with economies based on hunting and gathering especially those of the Bushmen of the Kalahari and the foragers of the Central African Republic forest. These are not found in total isolation but are interspersed with culturally different groups with distinct and complementary economies. They are essentially large kinship groups under the authority of family elders and ritual leaders.

According to Sesay, widely dispersed chiefdoms have governance systems that operate at village and town levels. Here age plays an important part in the choice of leaders and chiefs in the community or clan. Executive, legislative and judicial functions are diffused among various centres of power such as the village councils of elders, age grades and secret societies. The principle of checks and balances are enshrined and utilised in such a way that power is not concentrated in the hands of a single person or group of people. Examples of these political organisations include the Igbos of Nigeria, the Dinka Gnoc of South Sudan, the Massai of Kenya and the Tonga in Zambia.

The tribes as referred to by Shumway are larger and more settled than bands, but they still lack any overall form of centralised political authority. They have no kings or chiefs although they may have ritual leaders with some degree of political authority. Most of these societies are based on a structure of clans, which are segmented into sub clans and lineages. A bigger clan or



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lineage is the basic unit of such political organisation in which the tribe resembles a series of small, equal and quasi-autonomous groups.

The traditional sanctions for social order are ritual, feud and warfare. These societies are found especially in eastern Africa among pastoralists, such as the Massai. The centralised medium-sized kingdoms by Sesay, as suggested also by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, consist of societies in which a lineage structure is the framework of the political system. They are organised into medium sized city-states with centralised and pyramidal structures of authority. Law making, implementation and adjudication powers are concentrated in the King-in-council. Royal elites monopolise access to vital economic resources such as land and revenue from taxes, and also control the military and security agencies. These societies are therefore larger and more settled than the dispersed systems. Examples of centralised medium size governance systems include, Oyo and Ife kingdoms in Western Nigeria, the Ashanti kingdom in Ghana, the Buganda of Uganda and the Zulu of South Africa.

In the third type of indigenous political structure identified by Shumway, that of the kingdom or state, political authority is centred on the office of a king and sometimes a queen, who is chosen from a royal clan and given sacred attributes by his or her subjects. These kingdoms may have arisen by conquest as those of the Zulu or Swazi of southern Africa and the Mole-Dagbani of Ghana or by combining into a federation of culturally related states as those of the Asante of Ghana. The ruler may be regarded as a senior kinsman to the subjects, as a member of a socially senior royal clan or as a



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member of an ethnically autocracy as in the former Rwanda and Burundi kingdoms. In all of the kingdoms, however powerful their rulers, there have always been institutionalised means by which the people controlled royal power.

The king is ultimately accountable and liable to deposition upon the violation of norms considered subversive of the entire political system. It is also universal for there to be periodic rituals of purification of both the king as an individual and the kingship as an office or institution in its own right, independent of the temporary incumbent. Sesay's centralised pyramidal governance systems however, involved large empires that were governed by kings with absolute powers. The kings operated vast court systems with a lot of grandeur. There was no separation of powers because the king and his court performed executive, legislative and judicial functions. They had sophisticated bureaucracies and tax systems that brought in valuable economic and financial resources. Examples of such empires included those in Ancient Egypt in North Africa, the Nubia and Axum in East Africa, Mali and Songhai in West Africa and the Shona and Zulu in Southern Africa. These centralised African governance systems did not last forever. Most of them succumbed to either protracted succession competitions, or because incumbents failed to consolidate their grip on power and control due to the expensiveness of their territories and the ambitions of vassal chiefs.

These classifications though helpful in providing rudimentary understanding about the fact that there are different political formations in Africa, the categorizations do not provide fuller appreciation of African



political systems. [www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) The classifications fail in establishing the role of various leaders especially women leaders specific to the identified systems. For example, what they had classified as centralized political systems can aptly be said to be hierarchical decentralized political systems. This presents a situation where every member of the society is at one stage of the ruling class or is at the lower level of the ruled. Also, because changes have occurred, there is difficulty in defining and understanding their supposed stateless or acephalous societies in the contemporary understanding of a political system.

What is described as societies without rulers are societies that actually have political systems that make tribal heads the centres of maintaining law and order. Once these political systems had ordered systems for regulating the behaviour of the people, one cannot say they lacked government. There is also the difficulty that one encounters in putting some societies under any one of the categories and the fact that various writers have sought to describe and categorise one society differently as can be found with the classifications of Lewis and Sesay. These notwithstanding, the various perspectives on the types of political systems in Africa provide some understanding of the nature and organisation of African societies.

It is evident from the literature that there are various systems of traditional governance in Africa. Just as there have been and remain different forms and orientations of western democracy, so there are different forms and institutions of government among the various ethnic groups and societies in different parts of Africa. However, in spite of the unavoidable variations, the different forms of African traditional governance systems have a number of



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important common elements and features. Invariably, they almost always involve the devolution of power by ascription and by age. A person inherits authority or position mainly by virtue of membership of a particular family or clan.

In many cases, however, the choice of the political leader is based not solely on the circumstance of birth, but involves other criteria, such as the character or other personal qualities. The persons who exercise political authority are referred to by various names in different parts of the continent, such as kings, chiefs, elders and emirs. In all cases, they rule or govern their societies with the assistance of lower rank rulers, as well as a large number and levels of advisors who for the most part also occupy their positions by virtue of their family or clan origins and status. This mechanism ensures that the king or chief does not rule arbitrarily. Although the king or chief has the final word, he is bound to consult very regularly, and decisions are reached by consensus. So, even though the chief is elected or installed for life in most cases, his continuous stay in office is subject to good conduct.

The arrangements and structures of traditional political systems in Africa, have gone through several changes as a result of modernisation and historical factors. What used to be the nature of the traditional political systems in Africa has undergone some changes in contemporary times as a result of the introduction of colonial and post-colonial formal governance processes.





## 2.7 The impact of colonial and post-colonial governance on African authority systems

Colonial and post-colonial rule have had a tremendous impact on the functioning and organization of traditional African political systems. According to Mahama (2004), the colonial system ostensibly enhanced chieftaincy through the system of indirect rule particularly in Nigeria and Ghana. Some chiefs and kings derived their power ultimately from the colonial regime which eventually undermined their authority. In some African countries the colonial authorities appointed chiefs directly thereby underscoring the uncomfortable fact that they were colonial creations, which were ultimately abolished with the demise of colonial rule.

Vassina (2005), notes that colonialism marked a critical milestone in the evolution and development of governance systems in Africa. Kings of large and centralized kingdoms and empires hitherto answerable to no superior authority came under the control of colonial officials through conquest, treaties or depositions and their powers were drastically curtailed. According to Gifford and Louis (1982), some kingdoms such as the Bini kingdom in colonial Nigeria were broken into smaller administrative units. They suggest that, indirect rule or divide and rule system especially in British West Africa, ensured that the royal elites retained their status but only to the extent that the interests of the colonial administration were effectively guaranteed.

The divide and rule or indirect rule system was successful in centralized states because they had well-established centralized governance systems. In some cases, the centralized political structures were preserved and incorporated into the indirect rule system because it served the overall interest



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of the colonial administration. The colonial authorities also arbitrarily merged different kingdoms, divided others into several administrative units in order to weaken their resistance to indirect rule (Crook, 1986). The system also weakened opposition to colonialism by putting groups or states against one another in the colonial territories. It is safe to say that British and French colonial authorities utilized in varying degrees, existing pre-colonial governance structures in Africa (Glifford & Louis, 1982).

More important also was the symbiotic relationship between the colonial overlords and their royal allies that allowed the latter to achieve their objectives at minimum cost. In return, the kings and royals maintained their paraphernalia of office and privileged traditional authority. According to Boone (2012), what scholars call hybridity in post-colonial governance systems in Africa is traceable to indirect rule, which created political space for the ruling elite while it retained important traditional governance structures.

Indirect rule encountered the most serious challenges among the widely dispersed empires or stateless societies because there was no clear source of sovereign authority. Thus, the colonial officials were compelled to appoint chiefs as administrative middle-men between them and local communities, and in many instances without regard for the prevailing governance practices that emphasized age and lineage (Sesay, 2014). The result was resentment and frequent uprisings against the colonial administration, because the rights and privileges of the chiefs appointed by colonial authorities eroded the powers of existing structures and institutions.



The net result was [www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) political tension and acrimony, which significantly undermined the effectiveness of the colonial administration.

Indirect rule was not benevolent because it was designed to facilitate the exploitation of the natural and human resources of the colonies, and guarantee law and order. Colonial officials were the most formidable and decisive actors in the colonial territories (Ninsin, 1996). To that extent, indirect rule in centralized African political systems was successful but it could not stop the expansion of the educated indigenous elite, who were keen not only to succeed the traditional power elite, but to eventually displace the colonial officials in the governance processes.

Not surprisingly, decolonisation represented a tripartite governance system that was made up of colonial authorities, traditional rulers and educated political elite, which led to a lot of suspicion and confrontation among them from time to time. As far as post-colonial African governments are concerned, it is hardly contestable that they saw traditional authorities as a dangerous bastion of rival political power and largely succeeded in dismantling or attenuating their authority (Awoonor, 1990). Examples exist in Liberia and other African states where these states were dismantled. The reality is that in most African states the traditional systems have been divested of their formal executive, economic and judicial powers except in narrowly defined areas. The leaders have also been denied the requisite resources for effective functioning, although in some jurisdictions such as Ghana the traditional political system has been guaranteed in their constitution (Agbodeka, 1992).



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The pre-colonial governance systems conferred special privileges and responsibilities on traditional elite in such a way that when the mantle of post-independence governance fell on the shoulders of the educated elite, its structures could only be a hybrid arrangement that incorporated traditional structures in the modern governance institutions (Harrison & Callan, 2013). During this period, nationalist movements transformed into political parties and nationalist leaders into politicians. According to Agbodeka (1992), a series of power transfer arrangements were held between indigenous people and colonial authorities, leading to the gradual transfer of power from the colonial administrators to the educated indigenous political elite that did not have royal backgrounds. It is worth noting that most of these educated elite and in fact in some jurisdictions all of them were men.

Expectedly, the traditional political systems felt threatened and demanded a greater role in the construction of the post-colonial governance system to reflect their own interests. Consequently, nationalist movements and political parties assumed ethnic identities in order to secure votes and rally support among the mass of electorates, a development that resulted in creating synergy or hybridity between the educated political elites and traditional systems in the post-colonial governance architecture (Awoonor, 1990). The educated elite emerged as the dominant actors in the post-colonial African state but the tension between traditional and modern elements in government persisted. Post-independence governance systems in Africa therefore became essentially a hybrid of modern governance norms on one hand, and on the other hand, traditional governance practices that emphasize unlimited tenure



and a fusion of [www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) some legislative, executive and judicial responsibilities (Boone, 2012).

In regions with a dominant ethnic group with a single traditional political system, the relationship between modern governance elites and traditional authority was negotiated and constructed without much tension (Sesay, 2014). In Ghana for instance, the dominance of the Ashanti King in the traditional domain creates less tension in managing the tenuous power configuration between traditional and modern sources of authority. Ghana's case is particularly interesting because it represents the system in which the tension that accompanied the independence struggle abated, leading to a stable post-colonial governance systems and institutions.

However, in Nigeria where there are diverse and very powerful traditional centres of power and authority, the contrary is the case. As Edo (2005) observed, "while the degree of their influence is often dictated by the ebbs and flows of the political system and the disposition of the regime in power, no government can afford to ignore their relevance in stabilizing the polity in times of crises. In fact, any government that overlooks the place and role of traditional rulers in promoting national unity and cohesion does so at its own peril". In all these however, the place and role of women leaders continue to diminish. According to Edo, women positions and roles were reduced in the political systems because in the fight and struggle for recognition within the new framework, as in the colonial regime, male traditional leaders were at the center stage and therefore seek to protect their interests in the new system. The role of women leaders in most communities



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was reduced to ceremonial functions from the initial roles of legislation and adjudication (Awoonor, 1990). This feeds into the larger hybrid system where women continue to struggle for recognition in both formal modern governance and traditional governance structures and institutions in Africa.

## **2.8 The role of women in positions of authority in Africa**

Although leadership in most African traditional political systems is characterized by a dual gender system or gender parallelism as observed by Sudarkasa (1987) and Okonjo (1976), the concentration of researchers has more often been directed towards the authority and role of males. While the role of males in African political systems has been extensively researched, less explored has been the role of females who play parallel roles to the males in every community and political system that they exist. However, some works in this regard are worth noting.

Stoeltje (2003), in a study of the authority of Asante Queen Mothers finds that the queen mother of Asante commands some significant authority and plays vital roles within the political system of Asante and their general society. This includes the authority to nominate the King (Asantehene) of that society and the role she plays as a development agent. The queen mother also has many ritual duties that she performs including the initiation of young women into adulthood in recognition of a young woman's maturity for marriage through the performance of various rites according custom and traditions of the Asante people. Among the Akans, young women were



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supposed to be brought to the female leaders when they begin to menstruate and they examine them to ensure they are not pregnant before they are prepared for marriage (Sarpong, 1977). Her role in nominating the King makes her authority very central to the functioning of the Asante political system known as chieftaincy.

Female traditional leaders are also important in the role they play in the performances of cultural ceremonies including funerals and festivals. Here their organizational skills are relied on for the successful celebration of such cultural activities which are important to the maintenance of the general society and the political organization in particular. According to Busia (1968), the everyday life experiences of the African woman traditional leader involves the attendance of funerals, marriage ceremonies and festivals where she is expected to play roles of leading particular women through the processes of such occasions. So, like the chief among the Akans, the queen mother is expected to celebrate 'Akwasidae' and 'Awukudae' festivals in her community. Usually, their presence is needed before the beginning of such ceremonies in recognition of their authority as office holders in the particular society.

Another important role female leaders played had been their participation in the military at warfare as observed by Arhin (1983). This is particular true of the pre-colonial states of Africa where societies engaged in warfare as a means of conquest towards state expansion and maintenance and mention can be made here of the heroic role of the Queen Mother of Ejusa in Asante who led the Asantes in the famous Yaa Asantewaa war against the



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British in 1900. Elsewhere in Cameroon, Henry Kam Kah (2011) writes that women leaders in Kom and Laimwe made use of their bodies as weapons of revolt against colonial rule. According to him “they would threaten to strip naked when men challenged their authority to champion the struggle for political space and the liberation of the territory. The sight of the vagina was an ill omen, and no one was willing to see women display their vaginas in public because the vagina is meant for the private and not public place” (Kam Kah, 2011).

He suggests that the women leaders of the Takembeng traditional organisation used the power of their nakedness which men could not withstand subdue men in Bamenda into submission in the early 1990s before the reintroduction of multiparty politics in Cameroon. The women did not only strip naked but they also used “their breasts as guns of war”. Many men it is believed could not withstand such acts and would simply flee for their lives. However, this role seems to disappear with the development of modern states and government where there are no longer wars being fought for conquest, freedom and defense purposes.

A further important role that the female traditional leader plays in Africa, is her ability to provide for her community in times of need. Specially, reference is made here to the rain making role of the ‘Rain-Queen’ among the Lovedu people. As an important component for agricultural activity, rain is the pivot of many agrarian societies. In the Lovedu society, the “Rain Cult” is an institution headed by the Rain-Queen. The authority of the Rain-Queen over the society is in her ability to make rain. According to Krige and Krige, the





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power of the Rain-Queen does not depend on her ability to rule, “but a rain-maker, and men rely for their security, not on regimentation, armies, and organisation, but on the queen’s power to make rain for the tribe and to withhold rain from its enemies” (Krige and Krige, 1947: 271). Female leaders are therefore very important when it comes to the role they play in providing special services to their society as in the case of rain-making by the Lovedu queen for her society and refusing her enemies with same.

However, they play these roles and carry their authority amidst some challenges. These include the fact that they have to carry out their duties in a male-dominated society where masculinity is so much respected and projected. So more often, they have to carry out their roles in relationship to men. Even in a matrilineal society such as the Akan of Ghana, the queen mother will still have to function in relation to the chief in a complementary role but not in equal authority as observed by Stoeltje (2003). Also, the historical experience of colonialism which sought to deal only with male authority presented a serious challenge to the authority of female traditional leaders in Africa. Notwithstanding the manner in which they were aggressively ignored by the colonial administration and the fact that modern states and research have failed to significantly acknowledge them, female traditional leaders in Africa continue to be conscious of their own significance and have continued to perform their duties in society.



## 2.9 Traditional Authority structure in Ghana

In discussing the authority structure of Ghana, the literature has generally pointed to the two main political systems in Africa; the acephalous systems and the centralized systems (Arhin, 2002, Lentz, 2003, Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940, Assimeng 1999, and Lewis, 1966). According to Arhin, 2002), from the pre-colonial period, all ethnic groupings in Ghana had and operated a form of political governance and administrative system over their jurisdictions. While some were basically acephalous or not organised into states and therefore did not have a central authority, others were sophisticated in their political governance and were organised into states or kingdoms with centralised authority.

Writing about the political system of the Tallensi of northern Ghana, Fortes (1940) argues that, the Tallensi were an acephalous society with their political administration organised along the clan and lineage lines. Political authority among the Tallensi revolves around clan heads. Inheritance and occupation of headship was by age. It was therefore a system of gerontocracy of a sort. The observation of the political system of the Tallensi by Fortes depicts the general structure of the acephalous societies in Ghana. However, the statelessness of these societies should not suggest in any way that they were leaders. Apart from clan and lineage heads, there was also the presence of earth priests whose authority was mostly in the religious realm but he did command some political authority in the society.

Lentz, (2003), writing on ‘the stateless societies or chiefdoms of the Dagara of north-western Ghana’ argues that, Dagara society in the pre-



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colonial period had no form of centralized political authority but their political organization was lineage based. This claim is confirmed by the works of Bozie (1969) in his studies on the political systems of the north-west societies of Ghana. Bozie (1969), describes the political organisations of the Sissala, Dagara and the Lobi as stateless societies which were without any form of centralized authority before the white man set foot on the area under consideration. Many of such societies including the Konkomba, the Nawuri, the Mo, the Vagla and the Nzema exhibited similar characteristics of stateless as observed by Fotes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Lewis (1966). These societies constitute one group of stateless societies which lack centralization and statelessness was very much an original tradition that was endogenous to their societies going back to pre-colonial period.

On the other hand, there also existed organised states or kingdoms within the territory called Ghana today. In these societies, authority revolves around a centralized sovereign and representatives (Lewis, 1966). These societies including the Asante and Ga-Adamgbe of the south, the Dagomba, Mamprusi, Nanumba and Gonja of the north and the Ewe along the Volta basin had developed sophisticated and well organised political systems before the arrival of the white man into the territory. These societies established their own courts and military to buttress the political authority that was vested in the sovereign (Rattray 1932, Busia, 1968, Arhin, 2002 and Goody, 1966). These societies centralized their political authority around Chiefs, Kings/Queens or overlords.



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The authority or leadership in centralized states was vested in both men and women traditional leaders. Among the Asante and Gonja for instance, women occupied the positions of Queen mother (Ohemaa) and female Chief (Wuriche) respectively and they exercised authority within the political system in relation to their male counterparts. The female traditional leader played complementary roles to the male chiefs and kings and were very central to the functioning of the political system. Busia (1968) notes that the queen mother's position and role in the Asante political system was critical to the existence of the Asante kingdom. Apart from the Akan political system, the Gonja political system and other traditional political systems have been less examined in terms of research into their organisation and function. Unlike the other political systems in Ghana, as observed by Goody (1966), the Gonja system of succession to high office is circulatory. One thing that is missing in all discussions on the political system of the Gonja, however, has been the authority and role of the Wuriche (the female chief). In the non-centralised societies in Ghana, women did not actively take part in the governance of their societies as observed by Fortes in the case of the Tallensi.

With the establishment of colonial authority over the territory called Ghana today, the colonial administration found it easier to operate within the centralized states through their chiefs and kings with the introduction of the indirect rule system. They encountered challenges with the acephalous societies and sought to influence the systems of these societies through the introduction and establishment of chieftaincy by supporting some strong and prominent persons to be installed as chiefs with the support of the earth priests



(Lentz, 2003). [www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) The introduction of chieftaincy into these societies and in some cases the influence of the colonial administration in selecting who becomes the chief affected the arrangement and organization of the political systems of these societies.

Lentz argues that some of the stateless societies including the Konkomba, Nawuri, the Dagara and Talensi had started organising their communities under the control of chiefs learning from the centralised states around them before the colonial administration consolidated the institution of chieftaincy in those societies. Despite the introduction and establishment of chieftaincy, these societies could not be organised into large states but every community had their own chief whose jurisdiction was more or less limited to the immediate boundaries of the community (Arhin, 2002). However, in the centralised states, the colonial administration relied heavily on the indigenous arrangement and organization of the state to propagate their colonial agenda. In few cases the colonial administration interfered with the system by removing chiefs or kings (King Prempeh I of Asanti and Yonaa Mahama of Mamprugu) who they saw to be recalcitrant and hostile to the colonial administration.

The post-colonial or independent state saw a somewhat continuation of the colonial influence on traditional systems of governance by the educated elite. They use these traditional institutions as channels to get down to the people at the community level. In addition to the colonial legacy, the new politicians of educated elite introduced new structures into the organization of the superstructure of the traditional political system of the country. The



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introduction of paramount skins and stools puts some skins and stools above others who are categorized as divisions in terms of authority and yet the divisions also superintend over sub-chiefs. By definition, the paramount chief is a chief that is not under the authority of any chief and usually with subordinates as divisional chiefs and sub-chiefs.

The traditional political systems in Ghana today are organised along the lines of paramountcy, divisional and sub-chiefs with their respective traditional councils, regional and national houses of chiefs. Chieftaincy is therefore the predominant form of traditional political governance in Ghana and its existence is guaranteed under the Constitution of the republic in a Chapter on “Chieftaincy” (1992: 164 – 168). Under this provision of the constitution, female traditional leaders especially Queen Mothers are included in the definition of a “chief” as outlined in page 168 of the constitution. However, every ethnic group or society organize their system according to their traditional and customary arrangements, for example, with regard to succession and rituals in relation to the skin or stool.

## **2.10 Conceptual Framework**

This framework is informed by the theories of power and authority and how these concepts relate to the actors within the traditional political system of the Gonja. The focus on the wuriche as a key actor in the political system is viewed from the perspective of her interaction with other players within the system. She performs her functions based on the power and authority that derives from the system and these roles are carried out in relation to other



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actors such as chiefs, formal government officials and the people in her community. In carrying out her functions, the wuriche is confronted with socio-cultural barriers which she must overcome in her line of duty.

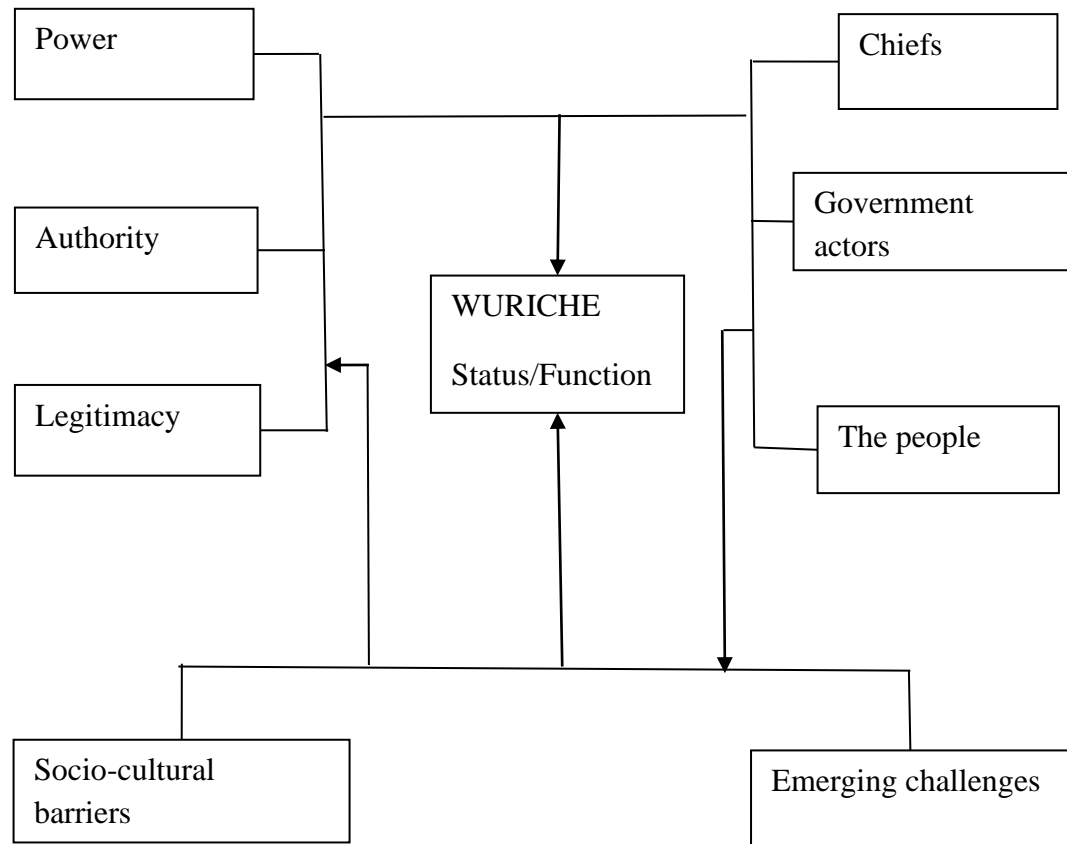
The authority of the wuriche revolves around her ability to influence people within the Gonja society. This authority is exercised through the power that she derives from the political system by her appointment and the acceptance by the people provide her with the legitimacy that she requires to perform her duties. The right that the wuriche has to play roles within the society stems from her ascriptive appointment to the position. The power from the system combines with the legitimacy that she derives guarantees her authority within the Gonja social organisation.

From Figure 1, the wuriche can only function if she has power, authority and legitimacy. Her function is dependent on the right and ability that she has to interact with government actors such as the District Chief Executives of the district Assemblies and Ministers of government ministries, her colleague chiefs and also the people on behalf of which she wields such authority. Her ability to carry out her roles in combining executive, judicial and ceremonial functions is important in defining her status in the Gonja society.

As noted by Lewis, (1966), authority within the African traditional political system is exercised by representatives of the people who are active participants in the system. The wuriche is able to function because she derives her representation from the people which is recognised by the other actors in



the system. Based on this principle of representation she exercises power and authority in the political organisation over her people.



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the status and function of the Wuriche**

Source: Author's construct

From the figure, the status and function of the wurich are also affected by some challenges which emanate from actors within the society. These challenges come from socio-cultural factors and emerging problems as a result of societal transformation. These barriers present problems on how the power and authority of the wuriche are exercised and have to do with legitimacy issues concerning the wuriche. These factors all combine with the relationship that exist between the wuriche and the other actors in the system to impact on





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how effective the *wuriche* can exercise power and authority over her subjects in society.

## 2.11 Conclusion

There is no denying the fact that some works have been done in relation to gender and authority and traditional political systems in Africa. As the discussions indicate in this chapter, some studies have been carried out to detail the types of political systems in Africa and also on the role of women in positions of authority. However, these studies leave out a gap whereby discussions on the types of political systems in Africa tend to neglect the component of female leadership and African political systems are present as if they were all a male authority system. In addition, the role of women in positions of authority have centered more on individual women in positions of authority without an assessment of the institution of women traditional leaders within which these women operate.

This study therefore, seeks to fill this gap in the literature examining the gendered perspective of the traditional political system of the Gonja. Though there is male dominance in the traditional authority system, this study will argue that, it is not enough grounds for the concept of African political systems to be discussed or defined in relation to only men.



**METHODOLOGY AND PROFILE OF STUDY AREA**

**3.0 Introduction**

This Chapter presents the profile of the area and the methods that were used in for carrying out the study. The section is intended to give background information and description of the area that the study is being conducted. It is intended to introduce the reader to the cultural setting and space over which the study is being carried out. It discusses the size and location of the Gonja in terms of their boundaries with other peoples and where they can be found with reference to the Ghanaian context. This is important because it provides the basis upon which certain assumptions and analysis were made and how conclusions were derived for the purposes of formulating recommendations.

The methodology of the work provides the framework within which the research was conducted. It is used to provide an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation through various sources and methods. This includes methods and techniques by which data was collected and analysed. The chapter outlines the various sources that were relied on for the purposes of gathering data for the study. Specifically, the study design, sources of data, data collection techniques, target population, the sampling techniques that were adopted in selecting a sample for the research, the instruments that were used for data collection and the methods used for analyzing the data collected are presented in this chapter.



### **3.1 Size and location**

The kingdom of Gonja is located to the south of Mamprugu, Dagbon, and Nanum kingdoms and bounded to the north by societies such as the Wala, Dagara and the Sissala. To the south, the Gonja kingdom is bounded by the Ashanti Kingdom. Present day Gonja extends from Kung, Kandia and Wasipe (Daboya) to the White Volta river in the north through Bole-Bamboi along the Black Volta river to the south West and through Old Wasipe, Tuluwe, Debre and Kuli to the Volta River in the South-East.

To the North-Eastern side is Kanyase, Kakpandi, Janton and Kusawgu. Administratively, the area falls within the Northern Region of Ghana. The area is located in the southern part of the region and bounded to the north-west by the Upper West Region and to the south by the Brong-Ahafo Region. The area is divided into six administrative districts under the Northern Region. The land area covered by the Gonja is estimated at 31,673km square which constitutes about 45 per cent of the total land area of the Northern Region (GSS, 2012).

### **3.2 Climate and Vegetation**

The Gonja area as it is with most areas in northern Ghana, is found within the savanna dry forest region. The area experiences a wet season with rains once every year from the month of April to October. From November to March, the region experiences dry and hazy conditions with the onset of the harmattan with its characteristic dry and windy conditions. Rainfall in this area ranges from as low as 840mm to as high as 1500mm and temperatures range from a low of 15 degrees Celsius to a high of 40 degrees Celsius (GMA, Tamale,



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2016). As a result of the single rainfall pattern, crop production is mainly undertaken within the period that there are rains to support crop growth.

The vegetation here varies from zone to zone. However, on the average the area is covered by the Guinea Savannah Vegetation belt. Trees and grass grow all year round along the southern belt of the region, although the vegetation depreciates and becomes more prevalent and shorter in height as one moves further north. The trees that can be found within this area include the shea tree, baobab, dawadawa, mango, rose tree, kapok and cashew. Some of these trees apart from serving as vegetative cover are a source of livelihood for some sections of the population. The shea tree and dawadawa for instance provide livelihood for women while rose wood has recently become a great source of raising revenue due to its demand in the international market especially in China. The savannah vegetation also provides conducive atmosphere for animal rearing especially cattle rearing due to the absence of tsetseflies in the area. This enterprise of cattle rearing is a male dominated area since it is unusual of women to keep livestock in this society. This type of climate and vegetation supports some economic activities which serve as a source of power for individuals and groups.

### **3.3 Local economy**

The Gonja are predominantly agriculturalist. According to the GSS (2012), about 74 per cent of the Gonja are into agricultural production. Their agricultural activities involve crop production, and animal rearing. The major



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crops cultivated include, maize, yam, cassava, groundnuts, soya beans and guinea corn. The production of some crops such as yam, maize and cassava is the preserve of the male population while crops such as groundnuts and soya beans can be cultivated by both sexes. In the production of yam in particular, females are culturally prohibited from its cultivation. The animals reared here include, cattle, sheep, goats, guinea fowls and chicken.

Although women are not prohibited from keeping any of these animals, cattle rearing is predominantly occupied by men. If even a woman will keep cattle, she will usually leave them in the kraal of a male under the care of the man. The keeping of animals in general is dominated by males as a result of the cultural significance attached to the rearing of these animals. It serves as a measure of wealth in the society and as such the more one is able to keep them the wealthier you are thought to be by the society.

Infact, the number of cattle kept by a chief and the farm size is a source of power for most chiefs in the area since these are used to influence people in the society. Because women are usually not encouraged to venture into these productive ventures, the wuriche is unable to derive power from this source since she does not keep animals and produce crops in any significant quantities.

The area also has a number of rivers that run across the length and breadth of the region. These rivers serve as a source of livelihood for a lot of people in the area. People mostly men are engaged in fishing for their daily maintenance. They catch fish from the rivers and some are used for food as their daily source of protein while some is sold for money. While the men are



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engaged in the catching of the fish, the women are engaged in the selling of the fish downstream. The women sell the fresh fish and also smoke some which are exported to other regions.

A number of people are also into hunting of wildlife. From their warrior background, the Gonja are generally considered good shooters. Some of them hunt to complement their farming while others engage in it as a life-long occupation. They hunt for animals such as the buffalo, antelope and elephant which they sell to buy their food items and use part of the meat for their daily protein requirement. Hunting is invariably a male affair and women do not venture into the profession.

There are other economic activities which are also for only females. The picking of shea nuts and the harvest of dawadawa are a great economic activity in the area which are reserved for only women. Women pick the nuts from the wild and process them into butter. Here the wuriche has a role to play since on most occasions she will have to announce the day the picking of the nuts begins.

The butter is used as domestic oil for cooking and a great percentage sold in the market for money to support family expenditure. The picking and processing of shea nuts into butter is a great source of livelihood for many women in this area. Dawadawa is processed from seeds of the fruits of the dawadawa tree which grows mainly in the savanna areas of the country. Like shea butter, dawadawa is a daily source of protein to many families in the area and also a source of raising revenue through sales to support in providing



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other family needs. Men are forbidden from engaging in the harvesting of dawadawa and shea nuts and also the processing of these commodities

### **3.4 Traditional socio-political structure of the Gonja**

Traditionally, the Gonja people, are ruled by Chiefs (Ewura for male chief and Wuriche for female chief). This chiefship is one over both people and over land. Every member of the male royal line aspires to the Paramount Chiefship of Yagbun, but he must first be content with a junior chieftaincy in his division to which may be a title without village or in a village, he and his family must be the only Gonja there. Having obtained his chieftaincy, he may ascend through the prescribed 'gates' to become the Divisional Chief which is the final gate through which he must pass to Yagbun. On the female line, the highest office is the Mankumawuriche (female chief of Mankuma).

Each of the ranks of Gonja commonalty and Chiefship has a name which are courtesy titles such as Napuna (Warrior), Cherega (the Honourable), Lorgna usually given to Ewurichibis (sons and daughters of female chiefs) in Western Gonja. There are also chiefly degrees such as Gariba, Yeramu and Wuripe. Yeramu, Gariba and Wuripe are courtesy titles for important chiefs in a division but strictly reserved to divisional chiefs themselves. Wuripe on the other hand is the highest title and used to describe Yagbunwura or Kpembewura. In the presence of the Yagbunwura, he alone is described as Yeramu or Wuripe. There are other chieftaincies in Gonja that descend from



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father to son and these are out of the general scheme of succession to Yagbun but are just the reward of a miniature gate system of their own.

A village chief irrespective of his or her rank has elders and advisors of whom there will be the chief of the Nyamase and the Liman of the Muslims. The court of the chief is the miniature of the court of the divisional chief. The divisional chief usually has his Nsuawura and Dogtes (heralds), Mbongwura (leader in war) mostly found among the male chiefs, archer, ferrymen if his land includes river, drummers, master of horse, sword bearers and horn blowers, Bisepu (the guardian of the ancestral walking sticks) and Begbangpo (singular Mbangpo) or traditional advisors. Any of these persons have access to the Divisional Chief in a system, which is a constitutional monarchy of which the monarch is the Divisional Chief and not the remote and frequently ineffectual imperial head.

The Gonja kingdom on the male side has one Paramount skin and eight main divisional chiefs namely, Yagbun the Paramount skin, Buipe, Kpembe, Tuluwe, Bole, Kusawgu, Wasipe, Kong, and Kandia divisions. All of the divisions could become the Yagbunwura except the Buipe Division. The female side has respective wuriches in all the divisions who are expected to represent female authority at the divisional levels.

Kandiawura Jewu was however, said to have long ago renounced his rights to succeed to the Yagbunwura skins. The Kandia division extended over present Wala area, Chasie and Ducie. The Kong Divisions also included villages in the North Western Gonja and Southern Wala but its rights of succession to Yagbun were withdrawn following the perfidious action of





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Kungwura Abdulai, nicknamed Kabondogodam, in invoking the aid of Samori to further his claim to Yagbun in the Jentilpe massacre around 1887 (Brammah, 1997). The removal of Kadia and Kong leaves the number of divisions that can succeed to the Yagbun thrown at five; Kpembi, Tuluwe, Bole, Kusawgu and Wasipe. Appendix E shows the traditional map of Gonja indicating the various traditional capitals and the divisions.

At the community level, every community has a chief (male and or female) who is under the authority of one of the divisions. At the family level, the family heads play roles similar to the chiefs in maintaining order within the family. The Kasawulewura and fetish priests also play key roles within the traditional political structure by providing guidance to chiefs and are consulted on matters of tradition.

The position of female chief (wuriche) is provided for within the traditional political system. This office is created in all the divisions and most communities in Gonjaland. The Paramount female chief is the Mankumawuriche who superintends over the activities of the divisional Buwurche and the divisional Buwuriche intend supervise the activities of the community Buwurche. In every division or community where there is a chief (Ewura), he is obliged to install a woman to the office of the wuriche within his jurisdiction of influence.



### 3.5 Study Design

Considering the processes of investigating the social phenomenon, which is being investigated, the study adopted qualitative case study design. This study adopts a qualitative design which offers descriptive reports of individuals', views and attitudes to events and issues on female chieftaincy in Gonja. The research design is a logical process of investigating a problem and connecting it to the data to be collected, where conclusions are drawn from initial questions of the study and that ensures coherence of information. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the research design is a plan or procedure for undertaking research work. The selection of a research design is therefore based on the nature of the research phenomenon or issue which is being studied, the researcher's personal experiences and the audience for the study

According to Moses and Knutsen (2007), a qualitative study is a way of finding out how individuals or groups ascribe meaning to social problems. It is a form of systematic empirical inquiry for understanding how others make sense of their experiences. Qualitative research therefore, involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to investigating and understanding social phenomenon. Here social phenomenon of female authority is studied in its societal settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret the issues in terms of the meaning respondents ascribe to them. According to Scharff (2008), however, qualitative research is an attempt to understand the unique interactions in a situation.

The purpose of understanding here was therefore not necessarily to predict what might occur, but rather the in-depth characteristics of the



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situation and the meaning given by participants and what is happening to them at that moment. Scharff suggests that, the objective of qualitative research is to truthfully present findings to others who are interested in what the researcher is doing. According to Hindmarsh and Llewellyn (2010), ethnography is the study of the socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings within cultural systems. The ethnographical research process in this study involved a study of the cultural and social structure of the Gonja. The political governance structure of the Gonja was also of special concern which was addressed using ethnographic methods.

The ethnographic methods helped to elicit information on how female chiefs feature in the governance structure of the Gonja. It was also helpful in examining how men consider female chiefs and whether the authority of female chiefs is exercised over both men and women in the Gonja society.

The strength of qualitative research lies in its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience or perceive a given research problem. It provides information about the “human” side of an issue related to the behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions and relationships of individuals and groups. According to Sarantokos (2005), human behaviour is best explained by using qualitative methods. He suggests that, qualitative research is advantageous in that it affords the researcher with the opportunity to go beyond the statistical results usually reported in quantitative research. Behaviours that could not be investigated by direct observation such as opinions and attitudes were best studied using the qualitative techniques of investigation.



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The qualitative research design was therefore, adopted for this ethnographic study as it was found to be a more useful approach in probing for information through in-depth interviews and discussions with respondents on their perceptions, beliefs, values, attitudes and opinions. The process allowed for an increased degree of flexibility in the research design and the ability to avoid over reliance on the researcher's pre-determined assumptions. It also focused on the meaning of key issues from the perspective of the respondents which provided the opportunity for cross-checking contradictions or inconsistencies in their perspectives. Though this was time consuming and expensive the design offered the best approach to investigating the social phenomenon that was under study.

### **3.6 Target Population**

In line with the objectives of the study, five categories of respondents constituted the target population for this study. These targeted respondents who were identified to be contacted included male Chiefs (Ewura), female Chiefs (Buwuriche), members of the council of elders, key informants and subjects in the communities that were covered by the study. The chiefs, female chiefs and secretaries to the traditional council were targeted for purposes of conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were to be conducted with the members of council of elders.

According to Sarantokos (2004), the target population for a study comprises individuals and groups from whom adequate and reliable



[www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) information can be collected about a phenomenon under investigation. These respondents were therefore identified based on the belief that they have some understanding about the functioning of the traditional political system and the general social organization of the Gonja and would be able to provide relevant information for the research. Also, the former secretary to the traditional council and people who are knowledgeable and, in some cases, have authored materials about the Gonja political system were also targeted as key informants. Having worked closely with the traditional political system, it is believed that the former secretary who served for over 20 years would have accumulated some knowledge and experiences about the system which could be relied upon.

### **3.7 Sampling**

In selecting a sample for the purposes of data collection, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select respondents for the conduct of the study. In using these techniques, the Gonja Traditional area was purposively zoned under seven main divisions. These divisions comprised Bole, Tulewe, Kusawgu, Kpembi, Wasipe, Buipe and Yagbon skins. The reason for this zoning method is that, every male chief or female chief falls under one of these main divisions which are clearly demarcated and form the main administrative divisions of the Gonja traditional political system.

From these divisions, samples were then drawn using the purposive and snowball techniques to select chiefs (male and female) and other key



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informants for purposes of data collection. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling where samples are chosen by intentionally seeking individuals or situations likely to provide greater understanding of a chosen concept of research (Sarantakos, 2004). Based on this understanding, respondents including male chiefs, female chiefs, members of council of elders and other key informants were selected based on the presumption that they would be able to give information on the issues of the traditional structure and organization among the Gonja. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the male and female chiefs for interviewing. The snowball technique was used to identify and interview other key informants where the researcher was led to individuals with knowledge of the issues under investigation.

The communities visited which were mainly the seats of the paramount skin of the divisions, and the ceremonies selected for observation were also purposively selected. Because these communities serve as the traditional capital seats there is always activity about traditional governance and the respondents here were expected to be knowledgeable on issues of the traditional political system. Appendix E is a map showing the traditional capitals that were visited. The sampling method was informed by the fact that not every person in the study area will be able to give relevant information on the social and political organization of the Gonja. It was, therefore, important to sample persons whose responses could help address the purpose of the study.



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In all, the respondents comprised of seven male chiefs, seven female chiefs, 17 key informants, nine kingmakers at the Yagbun palace and seven council of elders at the Mankumawuriche's palace. The total number comprised of 47 people with 22 females and 25 males across the six main traditional divisions whose responses constituted the report of the study. All the respondents were within the ages of 40 and 85 years.

### **3.8 Sources of data collection**

The study relied on the two major data sources of primary and secondary. Primary data was collected from the field using interviews, observation and focus group discussions. The primary data was gathered from the field by engaging various individuals and groups who were generally considered knowledgeable in the functioning of the Gonja social organization. Also, archival material from the Tamale Archives were reviewed and used. Records on the structure and organization of the Gonja traditional political system; the Gonja traditional affairs in the archives were relied on, reviewed and used as primary data.

Secondary data was also used for the study. Secondary data is simply a reference to existing data, as compared to primary data that was collected in the course of field work. As it is with ethnographic research, like any other type of research, the researcher would have to avail himself of the range of information that already existed on the issue and people being studied. This knowledge helped to identify gaps and generated objectives in the research process. Secondary data analysis also helped in exploring research



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assumptions to generate research questions to be further explored. Secondary data analysis, therefore, helped in identifying gaps in what was known about the Gonja political system, and suggesting the specific methods that could be used to secure the most valid data related to the questions or topics of interest.

Secondary sources involved scholarly and popular (including media) publications and products. Also, statistical data found in various administrative sources at the national, state and local levels (e.g., national censuses, government agencies, state and local planning offices). The reliance on both primary and secondary sources helped in validating and cross-checking the data that were collected from various sources since data from one of the sources could be used as a check on data emanating from another source.

### **3.9 Methods of data collection**

The study relied extensively on ethnographical methods to extract information from the respondents. Four major techniques were used for the purposes of data collection. These methods included; in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, observation and focus group discussions. In addition, information from archival search from the Tamale Archives were quite useful. Information from these methods was analysed and results generated to form the basis for triangulation. This was important to allow for data from the various sources to be compared, validated and analysed for a comprehensive understanding of the Gonja traditional political governance structure and organization and how is gendered. It was required for the purposes of improving the validity and





reliability of the [data](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) that was generated. The use of a combination of these methods was deemed important since the adoption of one method would prove inadequate in gathering the needed information for the study.

### **3.9.1 Interviews**

In-depth interviews were conducted on the chiefs, female chiefs (Buwuriche), kingmakers and council of elders to gather information on the general structure and organization of the Gonja as well as the role and perceptions of females in politics in the Gonja society. According to Sarantokos (2005), interviews are interactions between two people that benefits both the interviewer and the interviewee who learn from each other.

These respondents were contacted face-to-face and during these interactions they gave information individually on what they thought to be the role of traditional political leaders especially female traditional leaders and women in politics. These respondents were contacted and already prepared questions put to them to provide answers in the best of their abilities with opportunity for follow-up questions for more clarity and understanding by the interviewer. The respondents were selected from Bole, Tulewe, Kusawgu, Kpembe, Wasipe, Buipe and Damongo. The people who fall within this category were engaged individually to provide responses to questions to the best of their abilities. Through a face to face conversation, respondents were, therefore, gave information on what pertains in the traditional political governance system. Different set of questions were prepared for the chiefs and also for the kingmakers and council of elders.



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Telephone calls were also made as follow-up on the letters to confirm the date and time of the interview for each respondent. To do this successfully, an interview guide containing a list of questions on the perceptions on the role and challenges of the Wuriche in the Gonja social organisation was prepared to conduct the interviews. Questions here were more general and open to allow the respondents to provide adequate information to the best of their abilities. It also offered the researcher the opportunity to probe further for more detailed information in issues that were not clearer in the course of the interaction. In-depth interviews with the subjects were aimed at soliciting information on the perception of women in politics in Gonja and the role women leaders especially female chiefs play in the development process at the community level.

The use of interviewing as a method offered many advantages to the research process. The process of interviewing offered the respondent the freedom and space to describe and explain his/her feelings, beliefs, thoughts and opinions about the social phenomenon that was being investigated. Interviewing also proved to be helpful in the process because it yielded a higher response rate as a data collection method which other methods would not have provided. This is because it offered a face-to-face contact between the interviewer and the interviewee and the interviewee finds it as a less formal atmosphere and that makes him or her more willing to participate. The interview also allowed for the respondents to raise queries for better understanding and for the interviewer to probe further for clarification to the issues. The use of in-depth interviews therefore, provided an opportunity to



explore the general beliefs, motivations and processes of decision-making within the Gonja political set-up.

### **3.9.2. Key informant interview**

Here some people were identified as key informants and contacted and interviews arranged with them. This group of people included persons who have authored social and historical accounts on the traditional governance system of the Gonja and officials who have worked with the Gonja traditional council. This category of respondents included men and women across the selected communities and some officials of the Gonja traditional council. Such persons had considerable knowledge about the organisation and structure of the Gonja political system and the role of each actor within the system. In all, 17 key informant interviews were conducted.

Relevant questions on the organisation and structure of the gonja political system and the role of the Wuriche within the political system as well as the perception of people about the Wuriche in traditional governance were posed for responses from them. To do this successfully, an interview guide containing a list of questions on the organisation and structure of the Gonja political governance system and the role of the Wuriche in the Gonja social organisation was prepared to conduct the interviews. Questions here were more general and open to allow the respondents to provide adequate information to the best of their abilities. It also offered the researcher the opportunity to probe further for more detailed information in issues that were not clearer in the course of the interaction. In-depth interviews with the subjects were aimed at soliciting information on the perception of women in



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politics in Gonja and the role women leaders especially female chiefs play in the development process at the community level.

Some of the key informants were Katchitowura Sibū, Tolodompewura Abdallah Ahmed (a.k.a. Chief Monor) and the Kansawuriche. Katchitowura Sibū was the Secretary to the Gonja traditional Council and retired in 2014. He is a Gonja chief himself and well versed in the history and traditions of the Gonja having worked as the scribe to the Gonja traditional council. At the time of the study, he lived in the yard of the Yagbunwura in Damongo. Tolodompewura is a public servant with the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) in Damongo. The Tolodompewura is regarded as a repository of Gonja history and the traditions of chieftaincy. He had in his possession documentary evidence which he or other people have documented.

The Kansawuriche is the female chief of Kansa who is also the Assembly Member representing her electoral area and an educationist. She was introduced to the researcher by the Mankumawuriche as the most knowledgeable woman in Gonja as far as female chieftaincy and general chieftaincy matters were concerned. This claim could be explained partly by the fact that she is the most formally educated woman among the female chiefs in Gonja. By virtue of her education, she was elected the president of the female chiefs also referred to as Queen Mothers of the Northern Region. The information from key informants gave immense contributions in the data gathering process. They provided useful information based on experience in gathering relevant data with regards to areas where particular information



[www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) could be obtained and how to obtain them in instances where they could not provide the information themselves. Information from key informants was critical as a supporting source to data gathered from in-depth interviews and other methods.

### **3.9.3 Observation**

The cultural and social system under the circumstance was investigated through the following processes of observing, asking questions, interpreting, and sometimes participating in some relevant and related activities as festivals and funerals. With this approach, the rules, routines, and meanings of the cultural and social system that was under investigation were recorded. There are two main forms of observation; observations without the ethnographer participating in the activities being observed; and observations with participation in the community activities in addition to observation, a concept deemed participant observation in ethnography. Observation was adopted for the purposes of observing some of the activities that female chiefs are engaged in within the Gonja social organisation. Here, the researcher did not take part in the activities being carried out, but was close to the event or occasion that gave a fair view about what was going on. Based on the issues being observed, questions were asked for clarification of activities being carried out and their relevance to the social organisation of the Gonja.

Here the researcher did not, therefore, participate in the activities that were being observed but through the use of sight the issues that were observed could be described and analysed. Specific events and occasions related to the subject matter of the research were observed to get first-hand information.



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This involved the viewing and description of ceremonial activities which are related to the organization of the Gonja traditional political system. These ceremonial activities included such events as funerals, council meetings, installation and burial of chiefs to ascertain the roles played by various actors in the social organisation. The researcher stood closer to the events as they took place, listening to and watching the various activities being undertaken by the wuriche and other actors.

The processes and activities were interrogated by the researcher to get the interpretations on the place the activities are being carried out and why they do them. These interpretations helped the researcher to contextualise the issues and also do comparative analysis when necessary. Information gathered from this process was used to support and also crosscheck data gathered from other methods to ascertain the validity of the data that is being generated from other sources. Data from observation was therefore, used to triangulate the data that were collected from other sources.

The process of observation became important to use as way of looking at issues and processes that might have meaning for the members of the community, or that provide insight regarding their life ways. Some ethnographers often view this process as one in which they are responding to inquiries about the study community from themselves, although sometimes they might not consciously be aware of any questions that they are pursuing responses to. In observation process therefore, everything that was observed actually generated answers, and the process of observation was actually finding answers to questions and also finding question to those answers.



### 3.9.4 Focus group discussions

Two focus group discussions were conducted. One was conducted at the Yagbunwura's palace and the other at the Mankumawuriche's palace. The members of the Council of elders at the Yagbunwura's Palace and the elders at the Mankumawuriche's palace were put into two separate groups and used to hold focus group discussions for purposes of collecting information from them.

Focus group discussion is a form of interviewing that is conducted with a group of people at the same time either than individual one-on-one interviewing. These respondents were selected based on the believe that they have traditional roles in the creation of chieftaincy or traditional authority positions in Gonja. The focus group discussion was made up of eight participants because the ninth person, the Mankpawura was indispose and could not be part of the discussions. The group gave valuable information on issues about the organisation of the Gonja traditional political system and the roles of women leaders in traditional governance in Gonja. The discussions took the form of exchanges and interactions among group members about their individual understanding of issues and were facilitated by the researcher.

This method presented a useful opportunity for gathering data and was used in combination with other methods. A checklist of issues on the organization and structure of the Gonja political system and the role of female chiefs was prepared to ensure that the group did not drift away from the research focus. The information from the discussions was validated and used to complement the information that was gathered through interviews. The



information from [www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) the focus group discussion was particularly used to complement information reviewed from the archives on the succession system in Gonja and the appointment and installation of the Yagbunwura.

### **3.9.5 Archival search**

Finally, as a method of gathering data, the content of archival materials was reviewed from the Tamale archives. This involved a review of archival materials from files on the Gonja traditional affairs which contained documentations on matters including modes of succession, installation of chiefs, the constitution of the Gonja state and correspondence on traditional political matters. Proceedings of the Gonja traditional council were also reviewed from the archives.

The information from the archival search was particularly useful as a way of cross-checking the validity of some of the information that was gathered from the field through interviews and focus group discussions. In particular, the information gathered from the archives helped to throw more light on the succession system and the installation processes which in most cases could not be narrated vividly by the responses from the interviews. Two main files, File number NT. 0615: Gonja Native Affairs and also File Number L/75/3 Vol. 3: Gonja Traditional Council, Constitution and Proceedings were found to be relevant to the work and were reviewed and relied on for the study.





### **3.10 Instruments for data collection**

The instruments that were used for data collection depended on the methods that were adopted for the study in the research process. The instruments or tools in collecting data for the study included an interview guide for conducting in-depth interviews and an interview guide for the conduct of key-informant interviews. The interview guide comprised of a list of questions to which respondents were asked to provide answers to. Questions here were flexible to allow for an array of responses from the respondents but in a guided manner so that respondents did not deviate from the subject.

Focus group discussion guide for conducting focus group discussions was also prepared and applied during focus group discussions. The focus group discussion guide contained open-ended questions on thematic areas and allowed for elaborate but guided responses from respondents. The nature of the questions gave the researcher the opportunity to probe further for clarity and reliability of the responses.

### **3.11 Data analysis and Presentation**

This study adopts descriptive analysis and discourse analysis to describe information that was gathered from both interviews and texts. Interviews were transcribed and translated more freely into English and presented in continuous free flow writing. Descriptive analysis involved the examination and description of the views, opinions and attitudes of respondents. The discourse analysis centered primarily on the working of discussions in



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delivering, processing, storing and presenting of information within specific contexts based on relevance. This involved the role of context and relevance in the interpretation process.

Discourse as observed by Brown and Yule (1983) is used as a general term to refer to all acts of verbal discussions or narrations in the data gathering process. The discourse analysis helped to represent and categorise reality in terms of what information was being given during interviews. The approach was used to analyse the language of the actors with the political system to reveal the actor's perceptions of the political system and their role in it. Language was therefore, not seen or used solely as a medium of communication, but was represented by cultural and social institutions and structures. Discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, is used here to refer to the system of representation in which there is a link between what people say and what is being done in practice. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data analysis is the process of the research that enables a researcher to "manipulate" the data obtained from the field in order to assess and evaluate the findings and arrive at some valid, reasonable and relevant conclusions.

In addition, texts from archival sources were reviewed and analysed using content analysis. This involved the examination and interpretation of texts and images and sometimes speeches in the research process. According to Holsti (1969), content analysis is a technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages. The method was used to determine the significance of the role of the female chief by measuring and examining the responses that were given in



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terms of who was raising the issues, the context in which the issues were raised and how often and where the issues in relation to the role of the Wuriche were being raised. The descriptive analysis, content and discourse analyses were appropriate for this study considering the reliance of the study on qualitative data which was gathered from the field.

Responses from respondents obtained from interviews, focus group discussions and observation were therefore, transcribed and analysed using the three analytical techniques as discussed. The discourse aimed at analysing the information to describe the structure and social organization of the Gonja along gender lines and the perception of the people about the involvement of women in politics. The analyses were also centered on describing the information from respondents to examine, interpret and understand the role female chiefs play in the social organization of the Gonja. Information and discussions were presented in descriptive writing and some pictures are presented to give a pictorial view of some actors and institutional structures of the traditional authorities in the area.



## GONJA HISTORY AND ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE GONJA POLITICAL SYTEM

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses briefly the history of the Gonja people and how the Gonja political system is organised along authority and gender lines. As a social organisation, the system is made up of several structures along which succession and also the appointment and installation of the actors are carried out.

### 4.1 A brief history of the Gonja

Buipewura Jinapor II, states that, the true name of the Gonja is ‘Ngbanye’, meaning “brave men”. But according to Braimah (1997), Gonja was derived from a corrupted Hausa word ‘Goron-ja’ meaning red cola-nuts. The Gonja people and the Hausa from Sokoto were trade partners in cola-nuts. The Gonja secured a lot of cola-nuts supplies from Ashanti to the South and transported them to the ancient Salaga market. The Hausa traders from Sokoto, where cola-nuts were in high demand, travelled to Salaga to purchase the nuts. It was through this interaction that, according to Braimah, the Ngbanye became known as Gonja when the people came into contact with the Europeans and Gonja was coined from Goron-ja to refer to the Ngbanye people by the colonial administration.



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Narrations during a focus group discussion with the council of elders at the Yagbunwura palace hold that, Ndewura Jakpa the founder of the Gonja Kingdom, was initially a trader from Mandeland. He became bankrupt and decided to consult a certain Mallam about his fortunes in life. The Mallam told him that even though Jakpa hails from the royal family he would never ascend to the throne because his fortune was in a foreign land. Jakpa became so convinced about the Mallam's prophecy and mobilised a fighting contingent and other followers and set out to find and establish his own kingdom as prophesized by the Mallam.

It is narrated that, from Mandeland, Jakpa and his army on reaching a community called Jah, came into contact with Fati Morukpe. Fati Morukpe, it is narrated, was a very powerful Mallam of the town and Jakpa became friends with him. From there, Jakpa solicited his company for his impending adventures so that he would be an intermediary to offer prayers unto God so as to divert mishaps and evil deeds in his exploits. If the offer was accepted, Jakpa promised to pay a tribute of domestic animals including slaves, cattle and horses. In the ensuing friendship that developed, Morukpe agreed and anywhere Jakpa conquered and left behind his son or brother, Fati Morikpe also left a son. It is the descendants of Fati Morukpe who today form the Nsuawura's lineage in the Yagbunwura's palace and also the Sakpari (Mallam) section in every traditional division in Gonja.

The Bolewura (Chief of Bole) suggests that, the first point of entry into what is now Gonja Traditional Area was at Ntereso-Gbanfu in the Bole division. Jakpa conquered the communities along that route and on reaching



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Bole he was told of a powerful fetish or shrine priest who must be overpowered at Mankuma before he could settle down peacefully. Consequently, he marched on Mankuma, and after a fierce battle, Jakpa defeated the fetish priest and left his sister and nephew there. The sister was left there as the chief of Mankuma (Mankumawuriche) to oversee the day to day activities of Mankuma and to collect royalties on behalf of her brother Jakpa. This was the beginning of the creation of the office of the wuriche. The nephew was to become the Kakulasewura (someone to tap information from the fetish priest for Jakpa). Jakpa then conquered the Vagla people who largely occupied the area.

From the Mankuma area, Jakpa is said to have pushed into the Wala area of Kung and Kandia where he defeated them and established his authority over them. He later identified and settled at Nyanga as the capital of all the conquered people and lands. He then partitioned the lands among his sons whom he had made chiefs to administer these areas. After establishing Nyanga, Jakpa moved on to engage the Tampilma people on the Western banks of the White Volta River. These Tampilma are said to have been subjects of the Dagomba Kingdom who appointed their representatives to administer the area and also control the salt-making industry by the natives in Burugu (present day Daboya). Jakpa went into war with the Dagomba and in the process the Dagomba are said to have been defeated after very heavy casualties were suffered from both sides.

The Dagomba towns were captured and some put under the Jurisdiction of Kpembe to the east and others put under Daboya (Wasipe) to



the North-West. [www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) At this point, it is narrated, Jakpa placed Burugu (Daboya) under the authority of his daughter who assumed the title Burugu or Bur Wuriche (Female chief of Burugu/Daboya). The Burwuriche was left with a small garrison under her command to enable her protect the territory under her jurisdiction from external attack (Braithwaite, et. al, 1997).

Braithwaite et. al (1997), suggest that, the strategic importance of Daboya to the Gonja and also to the Dagomba was in two folds. One, Burugu was the gateway to the corridor of the food producing region of the Tampulma who also were a very brave fighting force that must be conquered and assimilated strategically to act as a buffer to their expansion drive. Secondly, Burugu or Daboya itself was economically and socially important due to the salt producing industry and the resourcefulness of the river which earned the town its name Daboya (meaning, our brother is better than us). These benefits and other factors urged the Dagomba to continue to make persistent military incursions into Daboya and surrounding villages. As a result of the persistent incursions by the Dagomba, Jakpa moved the Wasipewura from Wasipe in the Bole division to Daboya to reinforce the garrison of the Burwuriche so that they could have full control over the salt making industry. This movement of the Wasipewura to Daboya explains why the chief of Daboya is still referred to as Wasipewura and not Daboyawura because the chief of Daboya was initially the Burwuriche who was a woman.

After the Daboya and the Kpembe areas, Jakpa turned his attention to Bamboi area south of Bole where he conquered the Mo and Biega people. The Mo submitted with little resistance and the army marched to Mpaha and



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encountered the Debre people. At Debre, a fierce battle ensued and the indigenes were conquered. Jakpa then proceeded to the Tuluwe area through Tamanklan, a place where he rested before crossing the river and in the process forgetting his mat on which he rested and the village derived its name from that incident 'Tamaklan' (Goody,1966).

While still on the Western side of the Black Volta River, he continued his incursions towards Kafaba and the leader of Kafaba heard of his coming and sent to meet him in advance with peace overtures and sending with him drinking water and honey. Jakpa in appreciation of the leader of Kafaba's overtures is said to have reciprocated by promoting him as the peace-maker by giving him a blanket, red cap and a scepter as a symbol of authority for the Kafabawura to have the power and authority to evoke peace and settle or reconcile any feuding parties or misunderstanding arising thereof in any part of Gonja. From there, he is said to have engaged and subdued all the inhabitants along the way to Salaga which was then inhabited by the Nanumba people. The Nanumba were driven away and the kola-nut trade transferred from Kafaba to Salaga which later became an emporium for the slave trade and other products.

The Bolewura indicates that, from Salaga, Jakpa's insatiable demand for conquest and land soon took him to conquer the Kpamkpamba and the Bassari people. He took captives and captured cattle, sheep and goats. The captives taken were left between Nchumuru, Salaga and Nanumba to cultivate crops and animals to supply the Kpembewura with foodstuffs. To consolidate his hold and also place a check on the Dagomba expansion bid southward of





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Tamale, Jakpa went and took his fifth son living with his senior brother in Tuluwe and equipped him to go and take charge of Kusawgu which he captured from the Dagomba.

After years of rest, Jakpa is said to have crossed the Volta River towards Yeji to Kabako and encountered the Asantes. A raging battle ensued and Jakpa was mortally wounded by a gun shot in the ankle. When he realized that he could not survive the gun shot, he instructed to be taken to Mankuma to die so that he could be buried where his sister was. His men carried him and when they got to Trekpa (I have reached my end), where Jakpa is said to have confessed that he had reached his end, he died. On reaching Buipe ('Bui' or 'Gbi' means heavy or weighty load and 'pe' means settlement or village), the corpse was getting bad and he was therefore buried at Buipe (Brammah et. al. 1997).

Since it was Jakpa's express wish to be buried at the sister's place of abode at Mankuma, it has become customary for all Yagbunwuras to be entombed at Mankuma, a village on the Kumasi – Wa road between Sawla and Bole. The chief of Kung who was a son of Jakpa was elected to succeed his father. The town of Nyanga (the capital of Gonja) became known as 'Yagbun' which means 'big household' and thus became the name of the skin and title Yagbunwura. However, in 1944, the capital was moved from Nyanga to Damongo.

These processes of conquest led to the establishment of the present day Gonja with political influence and authority over the conquered territories. In an attempt to compare the histories of the Gonja and Dagomba, the former



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secretary to the Gonja traditional Council, Mr. Kachitowura, states that, in the case of the Dagomba, they came in as a tribe or group of clans, conquered many of the autochthonous people and impressed their authority and also their language on the people of the land, the aboriginal Grunshi and Guan, or driving them out as in the case of the Konkomba. The Gonja on the other hand were a warrior band of Mande stock, who conquered the Guans, Vagla and Apir people, but owing to their small numbers could do no more than establish a ruling dynasty over the many tribes and ended losing their language and adopting Guan, the language of one of the conquered tribes.

It is important to state that, at every point of their history, the Gonja created space for the participation of women within their leadership structure. The wuriche occupied her own office and participated in decision making and took decisions on behalf of her people. The authority of the wuriche can be traced to the very beginnings of the establishment of the Gonja state.

The Gonja speak the Kwa language which is spoken by over 300,000 people. The Gonja belong to the Guan speaking people. When the Gonja invaded the area, they found it already inhabited by numerous ethnic groups. Each of these ethnic groups were speaking a language or dialect slightly different from the other (Brimah, 1997). These ethnic groups were conquered and made subjects and were collectively referred to as Nyamase by the Gonja. There are other ethnic groups such as the Lo-Dagara who came into the area after the conquests and are not usually included in the collective name of Nyamase (Brimah et. al. 1997).



#### **4.2 Traditional institutions and customary law in Gonja**

The family as a social institution is one of a larger unit among the Gonja people in northern Ghana. The family revolves around the extended family arrangement where two or more nuclear families usually form a larger unit called family. Among the Gonja, the family is headed by the senior most male of the family. The headship of Gonja family is succeeded by the next senior male person usually a brother or son when the existing family head dies.

The family head wields power and superintend over every member of the family. It follows that, unless there is no brother to succeed the headship, that the senior son in the family can be made family head. There is no chance of the woman becoming the head of the family in Gonja. The woman in the family is always a subordinate to the male leader irrespective of her age or status in society. The wuriche as a traditional authority belongs to an extended family where she derives her legitimacy from. The family one belongs to is important in determining what role the person plays in the society. The wuriche belongs to the royal family and it is that relationship which provides the wuriche with the opportunity to exercise authority over people.

Another important traditional social institution among the Gonja people is that of marriage. As a people, the Gonja practice polygamous marriage especially in the past when it was economically viable and socially dignifying for a man to marry many wives. This institution is central to the traditions and customs of the people and the wuriche as a traditional figure must be married herself to ensure the sustenance of that institution. The marital status of the wuriche is a great consideration for her appointment. It is



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deemed that the Wuriche will be dealing with issues of marriage and without the experience, she would not be competent enough to handle them.

Marriage among the Gonja is contracted basically by a man presenting kola nuts to the girl's parents as a means of seeking their consent. In the Gonja tradition however, a brother of the man (suitor) can present the kola nuts on his behalf. This is usually the practice except where brothers of the suitor are not available that the man does it himself. When the kola nuts are presented and the parents of the girl take them, it signifies the agreement of the parents on giving out their daughter in marriage to the man. The man's family is expected to give some number of bags of millet to the lady's mother within a period of less than two years after the marriage. In present day, religious marriage practices (Islamic marriage arrangements and wedding) are more commonly observed in Gonja. The presentation of kola nuts, however, remains a very important practice in contracting marriages among the Gonja people. In Gonja tradition, this act seals all marriages in the Gonja society.

Unlike some other tribes in northern Ghana, such as the Sissala, Dagaaba, Kasena, Dagomba and Kusasi, a Gonja practice cross cousin and parallel cousin marriages. Under this arrangement, a man is allowed to marry his cousin (the daughter of his mother's brother or the daughter of his father's aunt). The belief is that; they will better look after each other as relatives than marrying an outsider. It is however, not unusual to find a Gonja man or woman marrying from a different ethnic group. The marriage age for girls and boys is not the same among the Gonja people. The age at which a girl may be given out in marriage starts with the first menstrual cycle of the girl while



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boys are allowed to marry when they are getting to a stage that they can be independent. Marriage ceremonies are important occasions that go with drumming and dancing.

Like in many societies, adultery in marriage is a major offence in the Gonja tradition and thus, the offender is made to pay compensations in the form of money to the outraged husband (husband of the woman who engages in the act). Rituals are also performed using a goat or ram to prepare a meal which is consumed as a means of pacifying the woman involved in adultery. However, the man is only asked to provide the items and does not need any pacification. Whereas it is normal among the Gonja for a married man to engage in extra-marital sex with an unmarried woman, it is a societal crime for a married woman to have sex with any man apart from her husband. Any woman who is caught in the process of having sex outside marriage, is deemed not fit to be a wuriche. This is explained by the fact that the Gonja practice polygyny where the man can marry more than one wife but the woman cannot marry more than one husband at the same time.

It is also an offence among the Gonja for a man to have sexual intercourse with his brother's wife. It is not only considered as an offence to the living but also an offence against their ancestors. Consequently, the offender is ostracized from the family as per their customary laws. Divorce in marriage among the Gonja used to be sought from the Divisional Chief of the area, especially in the past. There could be no divorce unless the consent of the Divisional Chief was sought. Among the Gonja also, children born outside marriage are considered bastards and such children live with their mothers. In



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modern times, however, the issue of divorce has been individualized and partners do not need the consent of their divisional chief to get divorced if efforts both internal and external aimed at sustaining the marriage fail.

The Gonja, as per their customs, circumcise all their male children mostly after a week when the child is born. The circumcision is done by the “Isepo” or barber and lately by a health professional at a health Centre. A child is circumcised when he is a week old in West Gonja while in Kpembe it is done when the child is one month old. In Wasipe, the child is circumcised when he is seven years old. The act of circumcision is considered as taking away the ‘dirty’ part of the new born baby.

In the Gonja tradition, in terms of honouring the dead, chiefs and wuriches have special burial places unlike ordinary people who are buried behind the compounds and marking the graves with upright stones. Traditionally, men and women are not buried in the same way. Men are usually buried in cloth gown with the corpse lying on the right side with the head to the south and faces the east. On the other hand, women are buried with the face to the West for the reason that the corpse can watch the sun go down which is a signal for women to prepare food and fetch water. The graves are prepared by the ‘Bechang Kurupo’ who are also responsible for the burying of the corpse. Becoming a Bechang Kurupo (grave digger) demands that one undergoes some traditional initiation process of being buried naked with a corpse for at least one hour in a closed grave. The Bechang Kurupo are usually given a male goat for their services for digging the grave and burying the corpse.



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The burial of corpse of ordinary people is done within an hour while the corpse of chiefs and other traditionally important people is done within a period of twelve hours in the Gonja tradition. The funeral is performed after three and four days for men and women respectively. This is followed by celebrations on the seventh, twelfth and fortieth day after the death of common people while the final celebration of the funeral custom of chiefs is performed after one year. Male mourners are identified by attaching red strips to their clothes and women mourners smear their bodies with ashes.

On issues of succession and inheritance of property among the Gonja, a man is succeeded by his brothers and sisters and then his children and their children. The widows of the dead man are free to contract new marriages according to the tradition. A situation where there are neither brothers nor sons, then the property goes to the family head and where the dead is a stranger, his property goes to the divisional chief through the local chief. On the part of a dead woman, her property goes to her sisters and where there are none, it goes to her elder child. In instances where there are neither sisters nor children, then the property goes to the family head of the woman. The widower has no control over such property.

Among the Gonja, land belongs to the divisional chiefs through the *kasawulewuras* (landlords) who are the *Nyamase* (indigenes) and no any other person; and encroachment on these lands is punishable by the chief. Land is not also leased to strangers. Even though a person cannot have rights over the land, he may have rights to his farm and trees. Farms are usually divided by



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paths. A stranger can have use-fractural rights over land that has been given him by the owner of the land but cannot claim ownership over the land.

Some offences are traditionally recognised as criminal among the Gonja and punishments range from payment of fines to death penalty. Murder, witchcraft, defilement of infants, theft, adultery, having sex in the bush or farm, stealing from the farm, arson and intercourse with an animal and same sex marriage are some of the major offences among the Gonja people. Punishments for these offences vary. Any attempt at committing any of these offences is punishable. Offences such as murder, witchcraft and defilement of an infant leading to her death were punishable by death. For instance, the punishment for murder and witchcraft in the past was instant beheading on the order of the divisional chief, if the offender admitted guilt or was found guilty. The severed head it is said, was displayed in a public place for public viewing.

Also, the defilement of an infant was punishable with death if the victim dies as result of the act. On the other hand, if the victim does not die, the culprit is made to pay monetary compensation to the parents or guardians of the victim. Other offences such as theft and adultery were equally punishable by death on a second offence. The punishment for a male on first offence of committing adultery was payment of a cow as compensation and swearing the 'Ntang oath' on the divisional cushion not to do it again. The woman was also whipped.

In the tradition of the Gonja people, having sex in the bush or farm is regarded as an offence against the land deities and offenders are fined to provide sheep and goat to the Kasawulewura for sacrifice at the place the act





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took place. Before this however, the offender was punished by public exposure and whipping as well as led round the community in nakedness with a rope tied around the man's waist. Criminal and civil cases were heard by the community chief and his elders on whose jurisdiction the offence was committed. If a party was dissatisfied with the decision taken on an offence, the person could have the case transferred to the court of the divisional chief by swearing his oath. One of the parties or both would have to inform the Mbonwura which the Mbonwura would claim his fee known as Kagbon. Cases involving only women were heard by the village wuriche while cases involving both men and women were heard by both the Chief and the Wuriche of the community.

Land cases were handled by Gonja chiefs based on the advice of the Nyamase Land Priest (Kasawulewura). At the trials, witnesses were sworn on fetish and afterwards the successful party gave the divisional chief a present in token of gratitude. With the introduction of formal government courts, issues of criminal nature such as theft and murder are handled by the state apparatus while minor offences which have traditional bearing such as issues of witchcraft and adultery are still matters that are handled at the Chief's or Wuriche's court.

#### **4.3 Religion and Custom of Gonja**

The Gonjas, though dominated by Muslims in present-day, were in the past predominantly African traditional religious practitioners. They believed in a



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supreme being whom they called 'Ebori'. They believed that the Supreme being has hosts of subordinates that inhabit in stones, rivers and trees. As time went on, Muslim priests were brought to add to fetish priests and this manner led to the conversion of many Gonja to Islam. Communications are done and information is gotten through the soothsayer known as the 'Ejo' in Gonja who may be of any tribe and is a very fearful personality with his cloth belt and dress of cowries.

Ancestral spirits are also highly revered and they also believe in the dead or ghosts (ancestors). The spirits of divisional chief's predecessors are believed to answer the call of his drums on Mondays and Fridays. They also believe the spirits come to greet their reigning brother when their names are announced through the drums. The wuriche is expected to have a link with the ancestors and it is believed that these ancestors protect her and give her protection to exercise her authority in a rightful manner.

Gonjas will usually attribute the death of an individual to spirituality than believing that the person died a natural death especially the death of prominent and young energetic people. They believe people can turn themselves into poisonous snakes and dangerous animals to cause the death of other people in the community. Therefore, the relatives of a dead person may try to find out the cause of death by consulting the "Epalepo" (soothsayer or medicine man). The process of identifying the one behind the death goes with mentioning of names of suspects to which the soothsayer through his stick will be rejecting until the right suspect's name is mentioned. It is the belief of the Gonja that spirits reside in rocks, trees, or streams and so villages have some



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of these as their shrines. Sacrifices are made to these deities periodically by fetish priests as a way of seeking for good fortunes for the community members. Individuals or family may also have their shrines at their homes or farms which sacrifices are made to them. The Gonja people also believe that some people have 'evil eyes' that can ruin the fortunes of a farmer. Their farms are usually protected from such evil eyes and ill-wishers by placing a stone marked with black herbs at the corner of the farm. This is usually done at dawn with the farmer abstaining from sexual intercourse the night prior to the exercise and without talking to someone.

The most respected and popular fetish in Gonja is 'Senyon Kipo', which is situated at Senyon near Bole. It is a stone served by the Kasawulewura (Earth priest) of Western Gonja, who is elected by the villagers from Samape family and the Bampaware family assists him. An annual visit is made to the Seynon Kipo by representatives of all the villages for the celebration of the Den Festival. People including the Yagbunwura bring presents during their visits. Another known fetish is the Malkunde Fetish at Lamasa in the Tuluwe Division brought originally from Kandia in the Wala country. People with problems of childbirth come to it in order to have children. The Lasah fetish of Chama and Tigari fetish are known for healing and fertility in barren women. Yipala is the home of the Tigari Fetish, which was discovered in about 1903 by Kakuro who handed it over to his brother, Jarama. They devolved next to his younger brother, Kaluna, who also passed them to his son, Tifo. The Sigma Fetish is a secret society that originated from the Tampluma area and has followers in many villages of North Western



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Gonja. People go to the fetish in the fetish hut to seek for support in the area of farming, business and good health.

There are also certain villages in Gonja that have sanctuaries in addition to Buipe and Bagbangpo. Kafalba and Ka in Janton are also sanctuary villages in Gonja land. The chief of kafaba was said to have been made a peacemaker by Ndewura Jakpa on his (first) visit to Kafaba. The Ka sanctuary is a sanctuary for runaway wives and it is connected with the Jalo fetish which can dissolve marriages. The Karakpema, the chief of Kasawulewura of Janton is the guardian of this sanctuary.

Aside the fetishes, there are also shrines and sacred objects in the kingdom. The most potent of these sacred objects are the two Alite which are red clay dwarf images which are said to have been given by Mallam Fatu Morukpe to Burilanyon at the time of the division of the kingdom. It is said that Burilanyon took the Alite with him to Bole and later to Nyanga when he was elevated to the Yagbun skin. The Alite are kept secretly at Nyarwupe in the Kusawgu Division, a reason why Yagbunwura would always stop there to give gifts to the *Enumu* (elders) on his journeys to Yapei. It is said that these gifts in the past, were a white cow, white sheep and mats in which to wrap the Alite and other sacred objects. However, the gift now is a white fowl and mats. The white colour signifies white (clean) heart and so, any other colours than white are rejected. The Alite serve as the source of the Yagbunwura's powers and a lost of them is regarded as a disaster for the Gonja people. Mallam Fatu Morukpe was said to also derive some of his powers from them. The Yagbunwura clothes each of the Alite with white gown every six months.



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The grave of Ndewura Jakpa at Buipe is also revered as a shrine by the Gonja people and a sanctuary for male factors. This shrine is a subject of many superstitions and one of them is the annual bush burning which is started by the Buipewura in person. The belief is that, if the fire burns over the grave it represents a bad omen for the year and that the man who started the fire will die. On the other hand, if the fire stops before reaching the grave, it signifies a prosperous and happy year. The precaution of weeding the grave is taken before the date for bush burning is fixed.

With the introduction of foreign religions, the Gonja have embraced Islam and Christianity as ways of worship. The day to day activities of the Gonja has been influenced by these foreign religions especially Islam which is professed by about 70 per cent of the people according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census by Ghana Statistical Service (2012). Islam has become a critical component of Gonja culture permeating every aspect of their life. At the level of the chieftaincy institution, every palace has the wing of the Sakpare Muslims who say prayers for the Chief and on behalf of the people. A smaller population compared to the Muslim population, practice Christianity and their daily way of life is influenced by the Christian doctrine. However, the Gonja people, be they Christians or Muslim still have a lot of respect for their traditional deities and would make periodic sacrifices to pacify them. The Wasipewura states that;

*“The Gonja are not Christians nor Muslims, we are Gonja. People only decided to follow Islam or Christianity as a way of worship because it has become like a norm for the people of Ghana. The Gonja will usually practice*



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*the Islamic or Christian faith when there is no problem but immediately, he or she is confronted with a problem in life, they run to the traditional shrines because that is where their belief is".* Interview with Wasipewura, Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2017.

The statement by the Wasipewura emphasises how strong the belief system of the Gonja is and signifies the fact that, the people may publicly hold foreign religious views but that is only to the extent that they do not encounter challenges in their lives. Majority will find comfort in the traditional belief systems of their society.

The celebration of festivals is a common custom among the Gonja. Damba is the most important festival in Gonjaland. All the Divisional Chiefs, the Yagbunwura and some other chiefs in their villages, celebrate the Damba festival. The original practice was, however, that all Divisional Chiefs and their Limans were ordered into Nyanga to celebrate it with the Yagbunwura. The celebration of the festival follows a similar plan in all the divisions except Kpembe, which follows the Dagomba practice of celebrating small Damba on the twelfth to the seventeenth days of the Damba month and the big Damba on the thirtieth day of the month. Other festivals that are common to all Gonja include Jintigi, Ambatigi or Jumbenti.

The Jumbenti is a ceremony in the villages at the beginning of the dry season where people dance with lighted grass of fire in their hands. Ceremonial cleansing in water provided by the Chief and blessed by the Liman follows this. The Guinea Fowl festival, which is of Muslim origin, is also celebrated yearly in the month of 'Kachanjiful'. The Den festival of the



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Nyamase of Western Gonja is performed annually at Senyon in honour of the Senyon Kipo Fetish. It takes place about three months before Damba and lasts for three days. With the advent of Christianity and Islam the most important festivities observed are Eidul fitr, Eidul adha and Christmas and Easter which are of Islamic and Christian origins respectively.

The wuriche as a traditional leader is expected to live her life within the confines of these religious beliefs and practices. She is to ensure in certain case the adherence to the practices and observance of the rituals. This is because, the authority of the wuriche and other traditional leaders is believed to be guaranteed by some of these beliefs and practices.

#### **4.4 Organisation of the Gonja Traditional State**

For our understanding of the authority of the wuriche, it is important to examine the structure and organisation of the political system within which she operates. The organisation of the indigenous political arrangements of the Gonja revolves around the institution of chieftaincy. The chieftaincy institution among the Gonja people is one of the most resilient traditional political systems in Northern Ghana. The Gonja are among a few of the societies in Northern Ghana who are centrally organised in terms of traditional governance. By far, it is one of the most stable in Northern Ghana because they have not experienced serious conflicts with regard to succession to the central seat. Among the Gonja people, Chieftaincy plays a key role in the governance of their society.



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All the rulers of Gonja including the male chiefs and female chiefs are of the royal line of their founder Sumaila Ndewura Jakpa and his sons. At the head of the Gonja state is the Yagbunwura. Every Prince (Ewuribi) of the Ndewura Jakpa's line may aspire to the Paramount chiefship of Yagbun, but he must first be content with a junior skin in his division. Yagbunwura Tuntunba Boresa I, states that such a position may be a title without a village, or a village the candidate/prince and his family may be the only Gonjas among the more numerous commoners (Nyamase) in a given area. This situation arises because the Gonja often rule over other ethnic groups who are settled within the conquered territory of Ndewura Jakpa.

On the female line, the Mankumawuriche is the highest authority. She is appointed by the Yagbunwura and she is usually a sister or daughter to the Yagbunwura who appoints her. Like the Yagbunwura, the Mankumawuriche occupies her seat till her death. This gives her the power and legitimacy to carry out her functions as a traditional leader without fear or threats of her removal from office. This provides representation to women at the top hierarchy of the organisation of the Gonja political system.

According to Bolewura, Awuladese Pontonpron II, (Chief of Bole), the Gonja state is organised along five main levels of hierarchy. At every level of the hierarchy, there are the male chiefs and the female chiefs who are expected to play complementary roles in the society. The Yagbun is the head skin of the Gonja state and it is followed by the Buipe Skin. There are also the five divisions who ascend the throne of the Yagbun; Wasipe, Kpembe, Bole,





Tuluwe and Kusawgu. These divisions provide the seats for the authority of the wuriche in their respective areas of jurisdiction.

These five divisions which used to be seven (including Kung and Kadia which have been removed from this bracket) are believed to be the line of Ndewura Jakpa and his sons' lineage from which eligible chiefs can ascend to the skin of Yagbun (the Paramount Skin of Gonja State). The skin is used in northern Ghana for occupancy of chiefly positions as a symbol of authority which signifies the availability of livestock and wildlife in the region.

The next line are the nine divisional chiefs who are the Sonyowura, Damongowura, Debrewura, Choriwura, Mankpanwura, Kulaw-wura, Kpansawguwura, Nsuawura and Busunuwura. The chiefs of these divisions act as council of elders and kingmakers to the Yagbonwura and therefore do not inherit the Yagbun throne because the Yagbun skin is regarded as the skin for their sons. Various sub-divisions also qualify to occupy vacant skins of the various divisions. For example, according to the Kpemewura, the Kpembe skin can only be occupied by the chieftains of Kanyase, Singbing and Lepo. There are various families that are also eligible to occupy vacant skins of the sub-divisional chieftains. For instance, the Denkeripebi and the Labopebi families are the only eligible royals to occupy the vacant skin of Buipe.

While the Yagbunwura is in charge of the general organisation and the day to day administration of the entire Gonja state the divisional chiefs (male and female) handle matters which come directly under their specific jurisdictions. The divisional chiefs are thus, responsible for the administration of matters of the communities which fall under their sovereignty. Then the



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sub-divisional chiefs who are chiefs of various villages are in turn responsible for administering the day to day concerns of the people of their respective communities of which they are chiefs over.

It was observed that, during council meetings at the Yagbun palace and the divisional palaces, the seating arrangement is according to this organisation. At the Yagbun palace, divisional chiefs sit to the right of the Yagbunwura with the division next to succeed seated next to the Yagbunwura and the kingmakers sit to the left of the Yagbunwura. When the Mankumahwuriche is present, she sits next the Yagbunwura to his right. Issues are also discussed along those lines where the divisional chiefs speak before the kingmakers (elders) and then the Mankumawuriche and the Yagbunwura speaks last. This arrangement is replicated in a similar manner at the divisional palace where the divisional chief is the head authority. What must be noted is that, the position of the female chief is exhibited throughout the organisation.

The fifth and final category consists of female chiefs who have the Mankumawuriche as their senior-most in terms of authority and influence. According to Yagbunwura Tuntumba Sulemani Boresa II (the paramount chief of Gonjaland), the precondition for the occupancy of any vacant skin in Gonjaland is for the person (male or female) to hail from the lineage of Ndewura Jakpa and his sons. The position of the female chief is created in throughout the divisions down to the village level. This arrangement creates space for the representation of women at all levels of the organisation. He states that;



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*“There are a number of Buwuriche (female Chiefs) across the various divisions of Gonja. The Buwuriche are appointed by the Yagbunwura, the divisional chiefs and elders or sub-chiefs depending on the area of jurisdiction for which the vacancy for the position of the Wuriche (Female chief) occurs. The Yagbunwura, for example appoints the Mankumawuriche in case of an existing vacancy and the Buruwuriche in the Wasipe division is appointed by the Wasipewura”.* Interview with Yagbunwura Tuntumba Boresa II (14<sup>th</sup> March, 2017).

The Wuriche is usually the sister or daughter of the appointing chief. Sometimes however, she needs not be related to the chief. But she must be a member of the royal family and her father need not hold, nor have held the office of a chief. The female chiefs therefore, may or may not be directly related to the appointing chief. The sons of Buwuriche are also qualified to occupy some skins in their respective lineage. In the Bole division for example, Bolewura Awuladese Pontonpron II states that, the sons of Buwuriche are entitled to the Serikpe, Kulmasa, Maluwe and Kpankpanhiri chiefships.

Mr. Kachitowura Sibuh (former secretary to the Gonja Traditional Council) suggests that in Gonja the principle of structural organisation is a patriarchal principle of authority where men are generally seen to be heads of families. The Gonja society is not only patriarchal but also patrilineal and as a general principle, the society is characterised by ingrained male chauvinism where it is the man who is expected to provide for the woman and the man must be recognised as the head of the family. Mr. Sibuh argues that, despite the



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patrilineal and patriarchal arrangement of the Gonja society, space is provided for some women to be chiefs within the structure and organisation of the Gonja traditional political system. He states that;

*“The status of the Wuriche in Gonjaland like that of the male chief has its historical antecedents and can be traced back as far as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century when the Gonja Kingdom was founded by Ndwura Jakpa. Ndwura Jakpa appointed his sister to the skin of Mankuma to take charge of the Mankuma community after he had conquered that community and brought it under Gonja authority. From then, more women were appointed to occupy skins of communities but majority were believed to be close family relatives of Ndwura Jakpa. These Buwuriche held and administered their respective communities on behalf of the founder of the kingdom, Ndwura Jakpa”.*

Interview with Kachitowura (20<sup>th</sup> February, 2017).

It is believed that these female chiefs exercised legislative, executive and judicial powers in their communities and reported to their divisional heads who were male chiefs or the Yagbunwura in the case of the Mankumawuriche. The position of the wuriche is therefore an ascribed one by criteria based on which she derives authority. It is the process of her appointment through ascription that legitimises her power as a traditional authority.

The central seat of government was at Nyanga, which was later moved to Damongo in 1944. The Buipewura, in an interview suggests that the movement of the capital was as a result of the need to find a central location which was more accessible to all the divisions that ascend to the Yagbun skin. In the search, Damongo was identified as a more suitable place by all the



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divisions to host the central authority. However, the council of elders at the Yagbunwura's palace disputed the claims of the Buipewura. They suggested that so many Yagbunwuras died at Nyanga (between 1907 and 1942) shortly after they were installed. So, it came to a point that the divisional chiefs were not willing to ascend to the Yagbun skin again and that left it vacant for the period because no chief wanted to die shortly after installation. In 1942, Singbing Lannyo from Kusawgu ascended to the Yagbun skin and died after nine months. Following this, his successor, Ewur Bunyangso (who became Yagbunwura Ewisi upon succeeding to the Yagbun skin) from Wasipe upon his installation moved to Damongo and lived for 32 years. All successors after Yagbunwura Ewisi subsequently chose to live in Damongo and established Damongo as the new capital.

From the palace of the Yagbunwura, and those of his divisional chiefs, the chiefs rule their subjects through the issuance of directives and sanctions for violations of such directives usually based on recommendations from the deliberations of the council of elders. The chiefs used to have a standing army which was used to protect the territory and its people, but this has since given way following the advent of modern state formation by the British through colonialism and post-colonial modern forms of government. Chiefs still keep horses at their palaces to symbolize the warring calvary function of the past. Following that, the Mankumawuriche also relocated from Mankuma which was closer to Nyanga and settled in Damongo where her brother lived.

These traditional leaders also operated their court systems where they adjudicated upon cases that were brought before them. They also instituted



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their own laws, rules and regulations that were used to govern the people. The authority of the wuriche depends on her ability to carry out these functions in her society. Though some levels of these functions are still being exercised by the chiefs presently, most of that responsibility has been whittled away by the formal state institutions. However, the Gonja people are still well organised under their traditional political system which gives space for female representation and participation. It is this arrangement that provides the power and authority which is expected to be exercised by the wuriche.

#### **4.5 The Structure of Authority and System of Succession in Gonja**

The structure of authority in Gonja is a promotional hierarchical system on the male line. Tolodompewura suggests that, in Gonja, the chiefship relations are structured in such a way that the divisional chiefs are in fact classificatory younger brothers and sisters of the paramount chiefs of the state. He further states that, the authority structure which is in the form of a pyramid has at the top of it the Yagbunwura.

The Yagbunwura is revered as the King and Overlord of the Gonja state. Tolodompewura indicates that the Yagbunwura is regarded as the symbol of unity and power of the Gonja people. The Tuluwewura during an interview also suggests that the Gonja political system is structured according to a clan system where various clans constituting the Gonja state occupy respective positions within the system. He identifies the ruling or royal clan



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(Ewurbi), the elders (Dogtes), the warrior clan (Mbongopu), and the Muslim clan (Sakpare Muslims).

The head of the royal clan is the Yagbunwura and the Mankumawuriche is on the female line. The senior elder (Dogte) is the Senyonwura and the Nsuawura heads the linguists. Among the Mbongopu (the warrior clan), the senior most is the Mbonwura who doubles as the Busunuwura (chief of Busunu) while the head of the Sakpare Muslims is the Liman at the Yagbunwura's palace. These offices are replicated in all the divisions through the sub-divisions and to the village level. The roles of each of these clans are clearly spelt out in such a manner that it is difficult for anyone to crisscross to perform functions that are not ascribed to him or her.

Directly below the Yagbunwura are two major important skins; the Buipewura and the Mankumawuriche. The Buipewura is a unique position in the structure in that he is not the Yagbunwura and he does not also belong to any of the divisions. The Buipewura Jinapor contends that;

*“My position as a chief in Gonja is equal to, if not greater than that of the Yagbunwura because I enrobe the Yagbunwura and that explains why there is no need to leave the Buipe skin and ascend the Yagbun skin”.* Interview with Buipewura Jinapor I (23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2017).

However, this position was disputed by the council of elders who agreed that the Buipewura plays a significant role when it comes to the installation of a new Yagbunwura but that does not put him in the same position with the Yagbunwura or higher. Also, the other five divisional chiefs of Kpembe,



Wasipe, Bole, [Tuluwe](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) and Kusawgu agree that the position of the Buipewura is higher than their authority but definitely not up to the authority of the Yagbunwura. These accounts signify the important authority the Buipewura holds within the Gonja traditional structure.

The Mankumawuriche leads the female chieftaincy wing. She is not equal to the Yagbunwura in terms of authority but usually regarded to be ahead of the divisional chiefs and Kingmakers. She therefore, occupies a key position within the structure as far as traditional governance is concerned. She also has other chiefs at the sub-structures at the various divisions who are subordinates to her in terms of authority and influence.

If any political system is to be sustainable and stable, the system and mode of succession is crucial in maintaining and ensuring the continuous existence of the system. It determines how strong or weak the system can be under succession pressures. The mode of succession to high office from sub-divisional to divisional and finally to Yagbun is a rotational promotional ladder system of inheritance along male lines. Goody (1966), describes this system of succession as “circulating succession”. The ultimate office of succession in the Gonja state is the Yagbun skin. However, this does not apply to some chiefs since their positions do not allow them to ascend to the Yagbun skin. The circulating system does not also apply to the female chiefs. The chiefs who do not qualify to ascend to the Yagbun skin include the divisional chiefs of Buipe and the nine divisional skins who are kingmakers and councilors to the Yagbunwura.





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The Buipewura by tradition installs the Yagbunwura and therefore, cannot abdicate his skin to assume the position of the Yagbunwura. The other divisional chiefs who constitute the council of elders and kingmakers of the Yagbunwura, do not ascend to the seat of Yagbun because they are considered by tradition and custom to be the fathers of the Yagbun skin. It is considered not appropriate for a father to compete with his son over the occupancy of the same seat. The female chiefs as well cannot ascend to the skin of Yagbun for their equivalent of Yagbunwura is the Mankumawuriche. They nonetheless also have their processes of succession to reach their apex position. The system of succession involving female chiefs is thus different from what pertains in the male line.

On the male side, the structure is such that, five main divisional skins exist and succeed to the throne of the Yagbun skin in order of rotation. These divisions are: Wasipe, Bole, Kpembe, Tuluwe and Kusawgu. When it comes to the turn of the Wasipewura to ascend to the apex office of the land, then the Bole skin stands in waiting as the heir apparent. Then the next gate is the Kpembe division, to Tulu, then to Kusawgu and back to Wasipe. However, there are circumstances under which a gate could be skipped to the next gate in the line of succession.

These circumstances include the event whereby the heir apparent is physically or mentally incapacitated and is deemed not able to undergo the normal installation rites to make him a Yagbunwura. What it means however is that, when the seat becomes vacant again the next person to occupy it is the gate that was skipped unless the reason for skipping the particular gate still



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pertains. For example, the immediate past Yagbunwura came from Kpembe and going by the normal succession arrangements, the next Yagbunwura was to have come from Tuluwe. But the Tuluwewura then had advanced in age which made him physically and mentally incapacitated to undergo the installation processes including riding on horseback to qualify him as the Yagbunwura. Due to that reason, Tuluwe was skipped and the present Yagbunwura ascended to the throne from Kusawgu who was next in line.

What this means is that, in the event of the demise of the present Yagbunwura, the skin is reversed to Tuluwe if the sitting Tuluwewura is not incapacitated in any form at the time the vacancy occurs. From Tuluwe it will skip Kusawgu because they have had their turn already under the circumstance, then it goes to Wasipe and the rotation in the promotional ladder continues. According to the Tolodompewura, the skipping automatically disqualifies the chief that had been skipped from ascending to the Yagbun skin but does not in any way affect the divisional skin concerned.

In a similar arrangement, sub-divisional chiefs also inherit vacant skins of the divisions that finally get the Yagbun skin or end at the divisional level. This again does not apply to the female chiefs. The Wasipe division has three sub-divisions which can ascend the skin of the Wasipewura. They include the Tampulma, Hanga and Garma sub-divisions. Each of the three sub-divisions also has either three or two gates from which a prospective sub-divisional chief is gotten. The Tampulma sub-division has three gates. These gates are the Asiepe gate, Jentrepe gate and the Takorape gate.



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The Hanga sub-division comprises the Tipkiriye, Jakpape, Ayamepe and the Kankrasupe gates. The Akosipe gate and the Adamape gate comprise the Garma sub-division. However, to qualify directly for the Wasipe skin, one must be an occupant of the sub-divisional gate skin of Yazori and coming from one of the three sub-divisions indicated. What this means is that, the Tampulma, Hanga and Garma sub-divisions move to occupy the Yazori skin on a rotational basis before they actually get to occupy the Wasipe Skin. The Asiepwura, the Jentrepewura and the Takorapewura also succeed the Tampulma Skin in a rotatory promotional ladder. For example, if you are from the Asieppe family, your line of succession will start as Asiepwura, to Tampulmawura, to Yazoriwura and to Wasipewura where you then wait to ascend to become the Yagbunwura. At every stage of the ladder, the prospective successor will have to wait at his present position until the succession system rotates to his turn.

The Kpembe division also has three sub-divisions that are eligible to the occupancy of the Kpembe Skin. These include the Singbing gate with the sub-divisional skin of Singbungwura, the Kanyase gate with the sub-divisional skin of Kanyasewura and the Lepo gate with the sub-divisional skin of Lepowura. These three sub-divisions move to occupy the Kpembe skin in a rotatory system in turns. This is quite different from what pertains in the Wasipe division in two folds. One, each sub-division here has just one family from which the sub-chief can be selected. Secondly, the sub-divisional chiefs move direct to occupy the divisional skin without having to go through another step.



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The Bole division also offers similar characteristics to the Wasipe and Kpembe. Like in the Wasipe and Kpembe divisions, the Bole division comprises three sub-divisional skins that take turns to ascend to the Bolewura skin. These skins are the Mandari skin designated the Mandariwura, the Jentilpe Skin designated the Jentilpewura and the Wulase skin designated the Wulasewura.

Among these three sub-divisional skins, the Mandariwura is considered the head skin and therefore it is the Mandari skin that automatically qualifies the occupant of the skin to the Bole divisional skin (Bolewura). What this means is that, the Jentilpewura and the Wulasewura are kept on hold until the Mandariwura moves to the Bole skin before either of them depending on a rotational promotional ladder then graduates to the Mandari Skin. It should be noted, however, that there are three recognized gates which qualify to ascend the Jentilpe and the Wulase skins. These gates are the Jagape gate, the Denkeripe gate and the Elope/Sarfope gate. The occupants of these three skins are promoted to the Jentilpe skin or the Wulase skin in times of vacancy on a rotational basis.

To ascend to the Tulewe divisional Skin, one has to occupy the sub-divisional gate skins of Banda being Bundawura from one of two gates. The two gates which are eligible to the Banda sub-divisional skin are the Latepe gate and the Jewupe gate. The two gates of Latepe and Jewupe ascend the throne of Bundawura on a rotational basis. For instance, the current Bundawura is from the Latepe gate and the next opportunity will go to the Jewupe gate. What it means is that, the sitting Tuluwewura who hails from the



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Jewupe gate will be succeeded by someone from the Latepe gate who is the sitting Bundawura.

The Kusawgu division exhibits similar characteristics in terms of succession with the Wasipe and the Bole divisions. This division has a sub-divisional skin that automatically fills in the vacant skin of Kusawgu. This is the Yapei skin entitled the Yapeiwura. This sub-division has four gates which are eligible to the Yapei skin. These include Japkape, Adamape, Mumunipe and Soalepe gates. These gates ascend to the sub-divisional skin of Yapeiwura through a strictly adhered rotational system. This rotational system of succession avoids unnecessary chieftaincy disputes and ensures continuity according to the Kusawguwura.

Similarly, various sub-divisions move to succeed the divisions of the council of elders or kingmakers. In Sonyo for example, three sub-divisions ascend the skin of Sonyowura. The Sapewura, the Takalpewura and the Kankumipewura succeed the throne of the Sonyowura on a promotional rotatory system. When one is promoted to the Sonyo skin the next in line gets ready as the heir apparent. In Damongo, there are two sub-chiefs who succeed the Damongowura in turns. They are the Lemupwura and the Dangepewura from the respective skins of Lemupe and Dangepe. Kanyawura in the Chori division is the only sub-chief who succeeds the throne of the Choriwura. In this case there is no rotation among gates. The moment you are installed the Kanyawura, you automatically move to the position of the Choriwura when a vacancy occurs. The Debrewura resides at Mpaha and he is succeeded by



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 three sub-divisional chiefs. The Kanyenpewura, the Kapuasewura and the Abrasewura are promoted on a rotational basis to the skin of the Debrewura.

The Jakpawewura, Kugoropewura and Bangpewura are the three sub-divisional chiefs that move to succeed the Mankpanwura in turns. At the Kulaw division, the three sub-divisional chiefs of Jewupewura, Chapewura and Kibiapewura inherit the Kulaw-wura in turns. The Kulaw-wura resides in either Kijewu or Kinyange within the Kpembe traditional division. The Kpansheguwura is succeeded by the two skins of Chemaoripewura and Dirigupewura. These two sub-chiefs inherit the Kpanshegu divisional skin on rotation. The two sub-divisional chiefs of Gbansopewura and Dangepewura succeed the divisional skin of the Busunuwura. Finally, at the Buipe division, the two sub-divisional chiefs of Dinkeripewura and Lebopewura succeed the Buipewura skin in turns. The Buipewura is essentially central to the Gonja political system because of the role he plays during the enskinment process of the Yagbunwura. The lieutenant to the Buipewura in this regard is the Kagbapewura.

What is worthy to note here is that, in this category of sub-divisional chiefs, their succession to higher office is once. When the chief is promoted from the sub-divisional level to occupy a divisional skin by way of succession, he ends at the divisional level and remains there till he dies or he is removed even though the later scarcely occurs. For example, the lebopwura after moving to occupy the Buipe skin remains as the Buipewura till he dies. As such, the highest office for this category of sub-divisional chiefs is at the level of the divisional skin. But in the case of the other five divisions which have



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the opportunity to succeed the throne of the Yagbunwura, their sub-divisional chiefs have two promotional skins and in some instances three promotional skins as the case may be, to move to occupy and the Yagbun skin being the highest.

It was observed that in all these processes of succession, the kingmakers vary. It is generally agreed as confirmed by the interviews conducted that, when it comes to the nomination of a chief for the position of the Yagbunwura, it is the Sonyonwura who does the appointment in consultation with the other eight members of the council of elders or kingmakers. After the appointment and on the day of the installation, the Yagbunwura elect is enskinned at Nyanga by the Buipewura acting through his lieutenant, the Bagbapewura. Also, at the sub-divisional level, it is the divisional chiefs who make the appointment and enskinment from a number of applicants who approach the divisional chief from the respective family or gate of inheritance.

However, what is not clear and could not be agreed on even by the council of elders was the person who is responsible for the nomination and enskinment of chiefs at the divisional level. While some contend that it is the duty of the Yagbunwura, others suggest it is the duty of the Kasawulewura (Tendana) to nominate and enskin the prospective chief to the appropriate division. This conflict of opinions could be realized at the Damongo division following the demise of the Damongowura in 2016. The Yagbunwura saw it as his duty to nominate and enskin the new Damongowura and went ahead to appoint and enskin a Damongowura.



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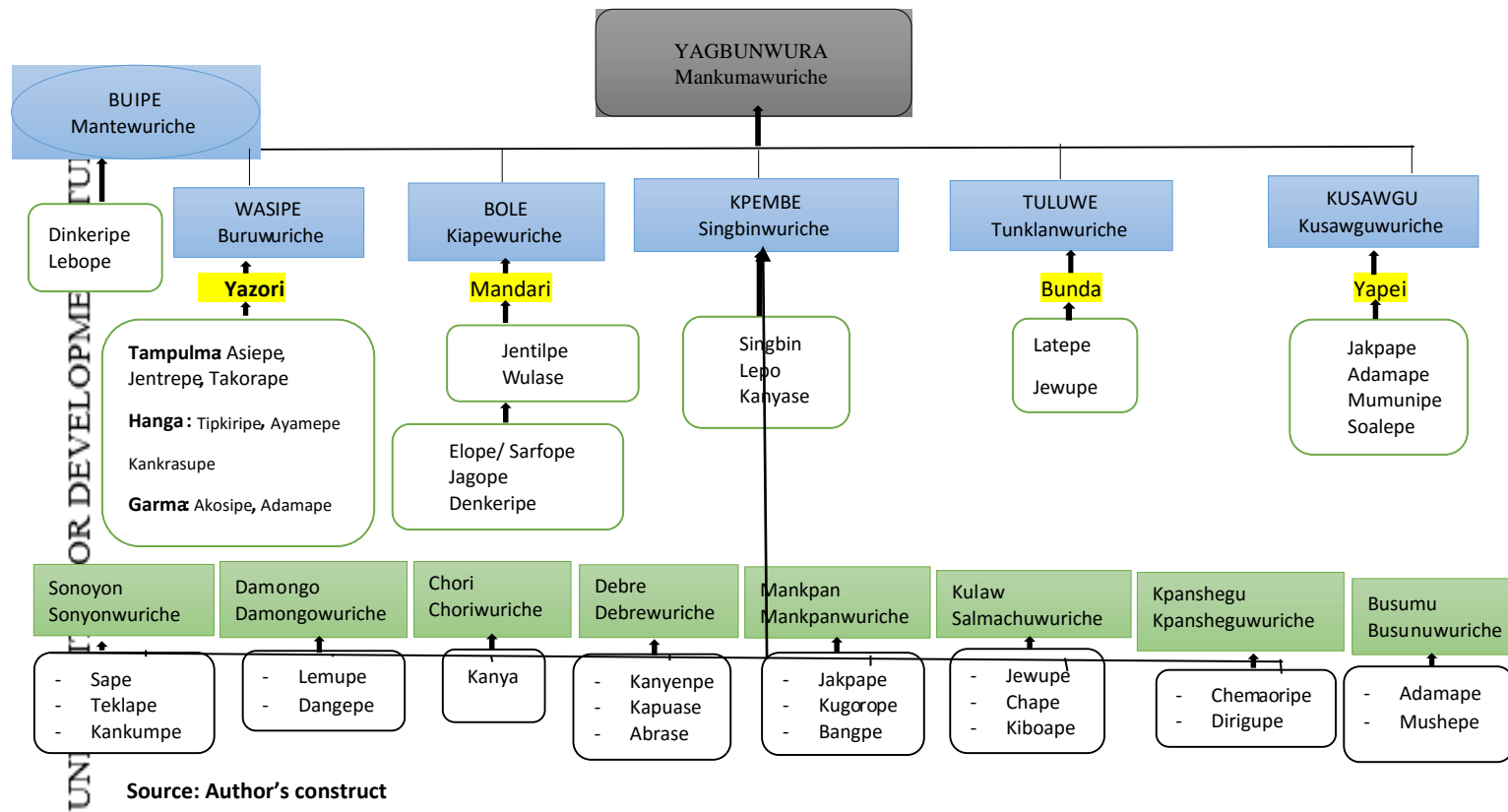
The Kasawulewura also supported by a section of the elders nominated and enskinned somebody as the Damongowura. So, at the time of the field work, there were two Damongowuras in Damongo; one by the Yagbunwura and the other by the Kasawulewura. One would have thought that, with a well-structured system of succession where in most cases the successor to a vacant skin can easily be determined even before the vacancy occurs, the system would be spared of any succession disputes. But that was not to be. The Damongo case indicates that the system of succession, though well laid out, is not perfect after all. By and large, irrespective of the weaknesses, the Gonja system of succession happens to be one of the most transparent and reliable systems in northern Ghana. The resilience of their political system and the fact that the Gonja chieftaincy system has very few cases of succession disputes points to the strength of the system of succession that is in place.

On the female line however, what is seen to be a clear structure of succession from one skin to the other in a promotional basis on the line of the chieftaincy does not exist. The female chief is appointed to her position once and she exercises the authority of that office till she dies. In this case, the positions of most male skins are predetermined by the structure and no body can do anything about the succession process. So, in terms of a vacancy the occupant to the vacant skin is always almost known by the players and the processes may just be a formality.





**FIGURE 2: AUTHORITY STRUCTURE AND SYSTEM OF SUCCESSION IN GONJA**



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From figure 2, the movement of the arrows indicate the succession line for only the male chiefs at the various levels. Even though the structure clearly shows provision for women representation through which the wuriche can participate in decision making, there is a marked difference between the succession processes among male and female chiefs. While male chiefs succeed through a hierarchichally promotional structure, female chiefs assume a permanent office where they are expected to exercise their authority till death. The successor on the male line is almost usually known. On the female line, however, the succession to vacant position is usually done through an appointment by the respective male chief under whose division the vacancy has occurred.

#### **4.6 Functions of the Gonja Political System**

The functions of the traditional political system in Gonja are a reflection of the roles of various individual actors that constitute the system. As proponents of structural functionalism suggest, the performance of every system depends largely on how well the individual components of the system operates to enable the system to effectively discharge its role as a single unit. As a governance system, the functions of the actors and the political system for that matter revolve around the cardinal functions of executive, legislative and judicial.

Following its establishment by the founder, Ndewura Jakpa, the most important function for the Gonja political organisation was protection over the



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land and people. According to the Buipewura Jinapor II, the Gonja state had a central standing army comprising a battalion of soldiers and horses that was used to wage war against opponents. This standing army was controlled by the Yagbunwura and led by the Mbonwura (Chief warrior). Each division also kept and maintained a divisional army. After the wars of conquest for expansion were over, there was the need to protect and defend the conquered lands and people from external aggression.

The primary role of the political leaders acting through the respective standing armies was to protect the lands and their people. Each division through the divisional chief kept the lands and people under their jurisdiction in check and the army was used to prevent people from attempts to claim authority over those lands and people. When a situation became too serious for the division to handle, the central force from the standing army at Yagbun was released to go and assist. In other instances, one divisional army could be called upon to go and assist. The Wasipewura and his army were sent to Daboya on a similar mission following the continuous incursions by the Dagomba in their attempt to reclaim the salt-producing industry at Daboya. The Wasipewura was later stationed in Daboya to assist the Burwurche who was the divisional chief of the area to fight and protect the economically viable region of Daboya also known as Burugu.

This function has become less manifest over the years following the advents of colonial and post-colonial modern government regimes. Following the partitioning of Africa, the colonial administration maintained a state army, which was responsible for defending the people from any external and internal



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aggression. This structure of the state army has been maintained by the subsequent independent modern state till date. As a result, over time, the various armies of the Gonja Kingdom became disintegrated and, in some cases, dissolved.

The primary function of defense by the traditional Gonja political arrangement was thus, taken over by the modern state. According to the Buipewura, the modern state of colonialism and post-colonial administration has come to weaken their defence mechanism since it has become illegal for the Gonja state to keep an army for their own use. To him, “a lot of people now have the courage to encroach on our lands and at worse try to claim ownership of those lands. To get those lands back, we will have to engage in litigations at the law courts which takes so much time and money to resolve”. Hitherto, they would just mobilise their army to the affected area and drive the people away and even capture some to be kept as slaves to be working for the chief.

But as a symbol of that function the Yagbunwura and the divisional chiefs are mandated to still keep horses at their palaces. So even in present times each of these chiefs try hard to keep a horse to symbolize that defensive mechanism that was vested in the authority of the chief by way of keeping and maintaining an army. It is worth noting, however, that the Gonja chiefs still keep a group of guards who periodically move round the boundaries of the land to check on new settlers who are encroaching on their lands for purposes of settlement and farming. Such activities are brought to the attention of the chief and the people involved are summoned before the chief and charges



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preferred against them. In some instances, they are expelled after the charges, while at certain times they are allowed to settle and are charged to contribute farm produce in royalties to the chief at the end of every farming season.

After a period of time when the settlement grows into a community, a Gonja chief is appointed over the community as a way of exercising authority over the people and the land. In this regard, the system functions as a custodian of the lands and people of the Gonja society. Though the function of defense has become less manifest over the years, following the advents of colonial and post-colonial modern government regimes, the political system continues to guard the lands and people of Gonja against outsider encroachment and attacks.

The responsibility of governing which involves mobilising and organising is a central function of the political system of the Gonja. The system used to organize and mobilise the people to undertake communal labour for putting up community projects such as the clearing and construction of foot paths and cleaning of the community public spaces such as markets and play grounds. With the introduction of colonial rule, this function continued in the form of the conscription of the people as forced labour to undertake projects that were being initiated by the colonial administration. This also involved mobilizing the people for public fora and sensitization exercises on health and security.

According to the elders of the Yagbun palace, this organizing and mobilizing function is normally still carried out with the help of the traditional political system after independence till date. According to the Kpembewura



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“anybody that want to speak to the people or want to carry out any activity that will involve the participation of the people, will have to first of all meet the traditional political leaders (chiefs) who will call for a meeting for the purpose. If it involves only women, then it is the duty of the Wuriche to to invite them for the occasion. However, if it involves meeting only men, then it is the duty of the male chief to organize the people and he does so through his linguist. On the other hand, if it involves the both men and women, that responsibility is carried out by the male chief sometimes with the assistance of the wuriche”.

The traditional political system is very important when it comes to the mobilisation of the people for any activity. Without the involvement of the chiefs (both male and female), it is difficult to bring the people together for any purpose and if the chiefs get to know of any arrangements without their consent, the activity or programme could easily be disorganized just by an announcement carried by the chiefs. The ability of the chiefs to mobilise the people easily shows how influential they are within their jurisdiction and this function continuous to be central to the performance of the traditional political system in Gonja.

In addition, the traditional political system, through the institution of chieftaincy, has been very crucial according to the elders at the Yagbun Palace when it comes to dispute resolution. They suggest that, it is the traditional political system acting through its actors that tries to ensure law and order, peace and discipline in their society. The political system ensures this by enacting laws and regulations that are aimed at putting the activities of every



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community member in check. When the boundaries are crossed by any member of the community, it is the same institution that disciplines that member in order to serve as a deterrent to others while at the same time whips the person in line.

Dispute between two parties are easily resolved by the actors of the system by bringing together the parties involved and talking to them to find a settlement agreement where both parties are expected to accept the decisions that are arrived at during the settlement process. The village level is particularly affected by serious negotiations processes between community members over the ownership and control of land and status. According to the Kpembewura, these processes often lead to violence and if the people do not agree to the processes of resolution of such matters by the traditional system, the various formal courts involved find it difficult to change the situation. This is because, these courts are not only absent in the communities, but are also very costly in terms of both time and money to access.

This function used to be very visible before the era of colonialism but has also held sway during colonial rule and after independence up to the present though not in the same magnitude and influence because of post-independent government arrangements. For example, criminal disputes are more often than not handled presently by the police and the courts which are the respective state institutions responsible for such functions under the present democratic dispensation in Ghana. Despite the presence of formal institutions, the traditional system continuous to provide an alternative dispute



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resolution mechanism for the people in terms of dispute and conflict resolution and settlement.

In the development arena, the present Gonja traditional political system has been increasingly used as a cultural asset to attract development in the form of investment into the communities. This has led to a situation where the agency of the political system acting through the agents, becomes a development broker to the Gonja society. Because some of their functions have been subsumed under the formal government system, the traditional system has to continue to strive for relevance by taking on other functions which were not originally central to their core functions.

After their annual Gonja State Council meeting in 2016, the Buipewura Jinapor II in an address to the media suggested that at the top of their discussions in the meeting was their appeal to the government to create an additional administrative region from the present northern region. This address follows several petitions that had been sent to the seat of government by the traditional authorities on the need for the northern region to be divided to pave way for more infrastructural and economic development especially in the Gonja areas since most of the Gonja communities are located very far away from the regional capital, Tamale. Because of the gap created by distance, these communities are not able to access the services that they are expected to derive from the regional capital.

Consequently, the government has heeded to their petitions and has pledged to hold a referendum in 2018 which will pave way for the amendment of the national constitution to allow for the creation of additional





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administrative regions including what the Gonja chiefs have advocated. According to the Mankumawuriche, ‘today, the only people the politicians fear are the traditional authorities. Look, when we need water, schools, roads and hospitals, we have to mobilise as an institution to go and put it before them sometimes with threats before the requests by the people can yield results. When you advocate as an ordinary individual, these politicians will never take you seriously. So, a lot of the schools, health facilities and roads that you see around, we the chiefs have to lobby for their construction’.

The ability of the political system to lobby for projects in this regard has become critical to the people and the actors within the system. The actors assume the responsibility to lobby and advocate for various developmental infrastructure on behalf of their people. However, it must be noted that this is an added function which comes with the changes that are taking place within the society as a result of the forces and challenges of modern political democratization and government systems.

As a historical overview of the functions of the Gonja traditional political system would show, the functions of the system have transformed over the years. The importance of their functions in politics and administration, has metamorphosed and been reduced in certain instances since colonial rule through to independence, but what is certain is that, a lot of the functions ascribed to the institution can still be seen in the realms of politics. According to Brempong (2006), this ambiguity can be reduced by differentiating between what is statutory and what is non-statutory functions. Non-statutory functions include the roles and responsibilities that have been



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carried out from the past since time immemorial, mostly with modifications and are not easy to be defined.

These functions are in line with the culture and traditions of the people as they try as an institution to maintain the traditions of their society which makes them unique. The statutory functions are found in the 1992 Constitution (Article, 272) of the Republic where traditional political system exists to advise the government on chieftaincy and traditional issues, to create standards for customary law and to help do away with customs and practices that are economically and socially harmful to society.

In this categorization, the functions of the traditional system as a custodian of the land and settlement of disputes fall partly in line with the statutory function of the institution and its actors. Ruling over the people and acting as a development agent are non-statutory functions that are being carried by the traditional system. These functions interfere with the functions of one formal governmental body or the other. The role of settling disputes also definitely overlaps with both the executive acting through the security agencies and the judiciary although their role as arbitrators is contained in the constitution. Also, their function as development brokers can be put together and understood to be the various social responsibilities by the nation state.

But to the extent that respondents were able to identify the traditional political system with all these functions reflects the importance of the role and influence of the institution in the Gonja society. It can be suggested that it is a reflection of the fact that the formal actors responsible for such roles are either



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not available to most of the respondents or the traditional system is competing with the government institutions in terms of functions.

It could be argued that the transformation of the traditional political system in Gonja since independence has been accompanied by a process of informal decentralization which may indeed be the case for all the traditional political systems in Ghana. This has led in a way to a kind of informal disposition of the nation state especially at the local level.

The formal local government structures have also sought to dispossess the traditional political system at the local level. The legislative function and power of the traditional system has been taken by the Assembly, their judicial function assumed by the courts and their executive power assumed by the police and other decentralized departments. The function of the traditional system in trying to assume or take back the roles of state institutions is seen by Trotha (1996) as a key feature of parastatal groups where they try to dismantle governmental authority, sovereignty and jurisdiction in their area of control.

The aforementioned conflict situation between the traditional system and the government in Gonja in terms of functions notwithstanding, the functions of dispute settlement, mobilization and organization, ensuring peace and discipline and attracting development came up strongly among respondents as major functions of the traditional system. To the effect that the actors within the traditional system did not have the cash and other resources to carry out development projects on their own, they nonetheless, brought about a lot of development initiatives and projects to the area by acting as development agents.



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It is also worth mentioning, that irrespective of the conflict between the formal state and the traditional political system in terms of function, it was found out that, the key actors within the traditional system seem to be an integral part of the government system. In addition, these actors at the traditional set up, are somewhat dependent on the state. Not only that, the Yagbunwura, the divisional chiefs, the Mankumawuriche and the divisional wuriches receive monthly allowances from the government, a considerable number of actors within the traditional political system in Gonja are public servants who draw their monthly wages directly from the state.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

The Wuriche is a symbol of female authority in Gonja. Her position from history defines her power and authority within the Gonja society. The position of the wuriche is an ascribed one by criteria based on which she derives her authority. The authority of the wuriche within the Gonja political system is hierarchally structured with the Mankumahwuriche as the head authority of female chiefataincy.

The authority system of the Gonja political system is organised along both female and male lines from the village through the sub-divisions and divisions to the paramountcy. However, there are marked differences in the system of succession between the wuriche and the male chiefs. Whereas, the system of succession on the male line is a promotional circulatory basis, the system of succession on the line of the Wuriche is not necessarily, and usually not promotional or circulatory. The position and status of the wuriche is



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therefore, an established institution in terms of authority in the Gonja social and political organisation. Within this authority structure, the wuriche is expected to carry out executive, judicial as well as legislative functions at the various levels of political organisation.



**AUTHORITY AND ROLE OF THE WURICHE IN GONJA SOCIAL ORGANISATION**

**5.0 Introduction**

The Wuriche's authority and her role within the larger traditional political system of the Gonja is examined in this chapter as an attempt to contribute to the debate on the gender discourse in power relations. This is important because an examination of the position and the role of women leaders within the traditional system will generate information which can be used to guide broader national discussions and policy frameworks that seek to achieve a balance of power relation in terms of representation and participation between men and women.

The authority of the Wuriche is guaranteed within the traditional system and she plays advisory, executive and judicial roles which complement the roles of the male chief. Discussions on the status and position of the wuriche are presented in this chapter. In addition, the processes that qualify a woman to be a wuriche, the appointment and installation are examined. Also discussed in this chapter are the roles of the Wuriche in the Gonja social organisation. The chapter finally examines the challenges that the wuriche is confronted with as a woman in the Gonja society.



### 5.1 The Wuriche: Processes of Appointment, installation and succession

The Wuriche occupies her own skin or office within the traditional political system as created by custom and tradition of Gonja. A vacant skin is filled through the appointment by the respective male chief within whose jurisdiction the vacancy occurs. For example, the Wasipewura is responsible for appointing the Buruwuriche within his division when the skin is vacant and the Yagbunwura appoints the Mankumawuriche. Chiefs of the various divisions and communities also appoint their respective female chiefs according to laid down customs and traditions. By the Gonja tradition and custom, the Wuriche is always a member of the respective royal lineage and the appointment is usually done by a father or a brother conferring the authority of the title on the daughter or sister as the case may be.

The practice of appointing and installing the Mankumawuriche for example, involves procedures which are initiated by the Yagbunwura. The Yagbunwura makes the nomination upon the occurrence of a vacancy. He does the appointment in consultation with the Nsuawura (Senior among of the elders) and the chief linguist. The appointee is usually his sister who hails from the same lineage as the Yagbunwura. After consulting the Nsuawura and the chief linguist, he sends a message to inform the Buipewura (chief of Buipe) and the Sonyonwura (chief of Sonyon) about his decision. He then follows with an announcement stating the date for the enskinment.

The announcement is usually made either on a Friday or Saturday because by Gonja customs, these two days are said to be accompanied by blessings of the gods and ancestors. It is believed that these are the days the



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gods and the ancestors visit the palaces to bless the traditional leaders. The Gonja believe that a chief who is installed on a different day either than the Friday or Saturday will not live for long after his or her enskinment.

On the day of the installation, the Yagbunwura enrobes the sister who is the candidate in this case, who would be surrounded by the divisional female chiefs and in the presence of the divisional chiefs. He recites words of blessings and invoking the spirit of the ancestors asking them for their guidance and protection over the wuriche. He will then hand over the tail of a horse and a traditional skin to her as the insignia of her authority. The Kpembewura opines that, a horse is regarded in the Gonja society as an animal that can see and drive away witches using its tail. The tail of the horse that is therefore handed to the wuriche associates her with the powers to identify and drive away evil people from causing harm to her brother, the Yagbunwura.

Though the process does not attract much attention as that of the installation of the Yagbunwura, the Wasipewura suggests that the occasion can be big or small depending on the resourcefulness of the Wuriche and her family. If the family from which the Wuriche hails from has the financial resources they can decide to make it as big as they like it, but it cannot in anyway be as big as the ceremony marking the installation of the Yagbunwura or even the divisional male chiefs. The Buipewura indicates that she cannot be removed from office. After she is enskinned, the Mankumawuriche remains in that position till she dies. In that case, while she remains the Mankumawuriche, and her brother dies, the new chief that is enskinned as Yagbunwura has no power to remove her from the office.





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In all cases, therefore, the Wuriche is either a sister or a daughter to the appointing authority who is the male chief. This makes the position of the female traditional leader among the Gonja different from other female traditional leaders in Ghana where in some instances the Queen mother or Queen may be the biological mother of the male chief or the wife of the male chief, as in the case of the Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II and his mother, the Asantehemmaa. Among the Gonja therefore, there is no practice where the Wuriche would be the mother or the wife of the male chief and whereas it is the chief who appoints the Wuriche, the Wuriche does not appoint the chief in the existence of a vacancy.

The mode of succession reflects how appointments are made to fill vacancies within the system. In the event of the death of a Wuriche, there is no laid down procedure which has to be followed by the successor as the power to appoint is vested mainly in the male chief with or without consultation. It is only the chief who can determine the person being his sister or daughter to succeed the deceased Wuriche. More often than not, the Wuriche dies on the skin to which she has been appointed without any movement along the system whether horizontal or vertical.

This is a different succession process from that of the male chiefs where most of the male chiefs can succeed to higher office by a laid down system of vertical promotion and appointment. For instance, through the circulating system of succession to the office of the Yagbunwura, a vacancy of the Yagbun skin is filled by one of the five divisions whose turn it is through the system of rotation to nominate the successor. This is always almost known



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to the entire people as to the next person to occupy the paramount skin in the event of a vacancy. However, in the case of a vacancy to the Mankumawuriche, nobody can tell the next successor until the appointment is made by the Yagbunwura who is the appointing authority in this case. The Tolodompewura suggests that:

*“Whereas in the case of the Yagbun skin the successor must be someone who is a sitting chief in one of the divisions and waiting to be promoted, the skin of the Mankumawuriche can be filled and mostly so, by a woman who is sister to the Yagbunwura and must not necessarily have been female chief to any skin before”*. Interview with Tolodompewura (16<sup>th</sup> March, 2018).

What this means is that, the Mnankumawuriche can be chosen from the royal family of the appointing male chief and the woman must not have been a chief before. This is unlike in the case of the Yagbunwura who must be a chief waiting to be promoted to Yagbun from the divisional level. Consequently, the appointment and succession to the office of the Wuriche are determined by the male chiefs who are responsible for the appointment and installation to office of the male chiefs as well. The appointment and succession to office of the Wuriche is therefore a male dominated area even though it can sometimes involve the consultation with some women leaders within the system. The Kpembewura notes that the appointment of the Buwuriche at the divisions is usually done in consultation with the Mankumawuriche. In the words of the Wasipewura:

*“The appointment of the wuriche by the respective male chief is important because, she is expected to provide protection and advice to the male chief. If*



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*somebody else is given that responsibility to install the wuriche, we cannot be sure of the results*". Interview with Wasipewura (18<sup>th</sup> September, 2017).

The argument here is that, when the appointment is done by the chief involved, he cannot come later and accuse anybody of non-performance of the female chief, if he is not able to get the right protection and counsel from the wuriche. Because it is the role of the wuriche to provide protection and good counsel to the appointing authority, it is only the male chief involved who can identify a woman from the royal family who can trust. This is to prevent accusations and bad intentions from the appointment process. The number of female chiefs as at the time of the research across the various divisions was estimated at 79 as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: List of Buwuriche and appointing authority and divisions**

<b>Title of Wuriche</b>	<b>Appointing Authority</b>	<b>Paramountcy/Division</b>
Mankuma Wuriche	Yagbunwura	<i>Yagbun</i>
Mante Wuriche	BuipeWura	<i>Buipe</i>
Danyanpe Wuriche	BuipeWura	
Singbing Wuriche	SingbingWura	<i>Kpembi</i>
Kpanape Wuriche	SingbingWura	
Nyolo Wuriche	SingbingWura	
Dinipo Wuriche	KanyanseWura	
Kidenge Wuriche	KanyanseWura	



Alfae Wuriche	KanyanseWura	
Tanchi Wuriche	KanyanseWura	
Kpencheer Wuriche	KanyanseWura	
Lonpe Wuriche	KanyanseWura	
Chindire Wuriche	KanakuleWura	
Lepo Wuriche	KanakuleWura	
Jongkombo Wuriche	KanakuleWura	
Bosho Wuriche	KanakuleWura	
Larba Wuriche	KanakuleWura	
Buru Wuriche	WasipeWura	<b>Wasipe</b>
Gbinpe Wuriche	WasipeWura	
Bun Wuriche	WasipeWura	
Buna Wuriche	WasipeWura	
Sei Wuriche	WasipeWura	
Sanya Wuriche	WasipeWura	
Sanoeri Wuriche	WasipeWura	
Bussa Wuriche	WasipeWura	
Kiape Wuriche	BoleWura	<b>Bole</b>
Souma Wuriche	BoleWura	
Bugei Wuriche	BoleWura	
Tuna Wuriche	BoleWura	
Sannyari Wuriche	BoleWura	
Kasuepe Wuriche	BoleWura	
Kunfunsi Wuriche	BoleWura	



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Gbenfu Wuriche	BoleWura	
Balle Wuriche	BoleWura	
Kulmasa Wuriche	BoleWura	
Seripe Wuriche	BoleWura	
Jelinkong Wuriche	BoleWura	
Jarbore Wuriche	BoleWura	
Nahari Wuriche	BoleWura	
Karinson Wuriche	BoleWura	
Tarinyan Wuriche	BoleWura	
Gurpe Wuriche	BoleWura	
Nakwabe Wuriche	BoleWura	
Tunklan Wuriche	TuluweWura	<b><i>Tuluwe</i></b>
Sinbin Wuriche	TuluweWura	
Gbemasi Wuriche	TuluweWura	
Akoel Wuriche	TuluweWura	
Jasenpe Wuriche	TuluweWura	
Kusawgu Wuriche	KusawguWura	<b><i>Kusawgu</i></b>
Zou Wuriche	KusawguWura	
Dawele Wuriche	KusawguWura	
Yapei Wuriche	KusawguWura	
Sonyon Wuriche	SonyonWura	<b><i>Sonyon</i></b>
Busunu Wuriche	BusunuWura	



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Danbayiri Wuriche	BusunuWura	<b><i>Busunu</i></b>
Grupe Wuriche	BusunuWura	
Bedima Wuriche	BusunuWura	
Langantere Wuriche	BusunuWura	
Damongo Wuriche	DamongoWura	<b><i>Damongo</i></b>
Kasiepe Wuriche	Damongo Wura	
Ban Wuriche	Damongo Wura	
Buduma Wuriche	Damongo Wura	
Kpanshegu Wuriche	KpansawguWura	<b><i>Kpansawgu</i></b>
Nom Wuriche	KpansawguWura	
Vaare Wuriche	KpansawguWura	
Chesi Wuriche	KpansawguWura	
Jinlo Wuriche	KpansawguWura	
Libe Wuriche	KpansawguWura	
Zarm Wuriche	KpansawguWura	
Selmachu Wuriche	KulawWura	<b><i>Kulaw</i></b>
Kabako Wuriche	KulawWura	
Kparse Wuriche	KulawWura	
Buachepe Wuriche	KulawWura	
Akemandi Wuriche	KulawWura	
Debre Wuriche	DamongoWura	<b><i>Debre</i></b>
Kijaso Wuriche	DamongoWura	



Landpor Wuriche [www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) DamongoWura

Mankpan Wuriche MankpanWura *Mankpan*

Wuwato Wuriche MankpanWura

*Source: Field survey, 2017*

From Table 1, the Yagbunwura is responsible for the appointment and enskinment of only the Mankumawuriche, the head of the Buwuriche. The divisional chiefs appoint and install a number of female chiefs within their jurisdiction. The processes of appointment and installation and the succession to office of the Wuriche, even though are considered important and taken seriously by the Gonja society, the processes and ceremonies are not attended by many people as those involved in the appointment and installation of male chiefs. People attach more importance to the issues of male chieftaincy than issues of female chieftaincy because of the tendency to associate authority to males.

## **5.2 Position and status of the Wuriche**

Female chieftainship is a well institutionalised aspect of the Gonja traditional political system. Women are provided the space to occupy positions of chiefly authority which puts them in a decision-making status. This creation of female authority was and still is central to the foundation of the Gonja political system.



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Following the traditions of their founder, Gonja chiefs continue to appoint and install their sisters and daughters as chiefs of various settlements where they exhibited absolute authority over such communities and also to communities where there were already male chiefs to complement the efforts of the male chiefs. In present day Gonja, however, where there are female chiefs there are equally male chiefs throughout the kingdom. In recent times there has been the practice of appointing female chiefs to communities that do no longer exist; for these communities have been ruined by war or the residents have deserted the settlement. For example, the Bugeiwuriche is the female chief of Bugei a community which does not exist anymore because the inhabitants have all relocated to Bole. Consequently, when the Bugeiwuriche is appointed, she resides in Bole and attends meetings at the Bolewura's palace. These female chiefs have become titular chiefs without chiefdoms.

There is therefore, a kind of a parallel system where female chiefs parallel the male chiefs in terms of position in the traditional system of chieftaincy. The title of a chief (male or female) reflects the name of the specific area under his or her jurisdiction. For instance, the overlord of Gonja (Yagbun) is called the Yagbunwura and the paramount chief of the Wasipe division is the Wasipewura. The female versions are for instance the Mankumawuriche and the Buruwuriche.

This replication principle of authority between men and women within the political system has been characterized by Okonjo (1976) and Sudarkasa (1987) as a dual gender system. But under the circumstance, the authority of the Wuriche is not or cannot be equated to the authority of the male chief for it





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is considered a complementary position to the male chief in present day Gonja. The authority and influence of the Wuriche in terms of her roles and responsibilities reflects her relationship to the male chief. Their status within the system is recognised and respected to the extent that even some skins including Mankuma, Daboya and Damongo are usually referred to as female skins.

Mr. Kachitowura Sibū (former secretary to the Gonja traditional council and now a chief in Gonja) indicates that, male chiefs were later appointed to head communities such as Mankuma, Damongo and Daboya which were hitherto headed by female chiefs even though there are still appointments being made to the position of the Wuriche in those communities. This has been an attempt by the males to perpetuate their patriarchal tendencies which has been supported by the actions of the colonial administration through indirect rule and post-colonial governments.

The reason for this change in events was the need to mobilise revenue and people for communal labour which the men felt the female chiefs in those areas could not execute up to their expectation. With the introduction of the male chiefs, the status of the Buwuriche as the 'overall ruler' had to change to a parallel position to the male Chief. From that point, Buwuriche have also been appointed to communities such as Bole and Kpembī which were occupied by only male chiefs. However, in this case, the authority of the female chief does not supercede that of the male chief. This was introduced because it was felt that the reasons for the introduction of male chiefs to the female headed communities could not be sustained.



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Also, the wuriche need not necessarily live in the community to which she is given the appointment. For instance, the current (2018) Mankumawuriche who is also the senior of all the Buwuriche, resides in Damongo. Therefore, the status of the wuriche, has over the years, transformed from being the head of her community to a parallel one in communities that used to be under the authority of only the wuriche. Mr. Alhaji Losina Affuli (the chief linguist to Yagbunwura) indicates that, this change in status is partly explained by the influence of colonial authorities who had to rely on chiefs to administer the colony. Throughout their experience, all the chiefs the colonial officials encountered were male.

Following their interaction with colonial officials, the Gonja people appointed male chiefs to these communities with facilitation from the colonial administration to help enforce the authority of the colonial administration which the appointing authorities felt the wuriche could not carry out. Another reason was also that the wuriche could not effectively mobilise revenue for the central skin so there was the need for a male chief to facilitate revenue mobilization in such communities as suggested by Mr. Afuli. The third reason is that, the wuriche plays an advisory role to the appointing authority and it is important that she stays closer to the male chief to enable her play that role effectively. This definitely has implications for what roles they played and the roles that they continue to perform in their new status. First, they lost their authority to collect revenues directly from their subjects and second, they lost that authority of occupying the number one position in their respective communities.



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In her position, the wuriche is expected to attend council meetings at the respective chief's palace where key decisions are taken about issues that affect the development of the area. These council meetings are held once every week. In the Kpembe division for example, the council meeting is held on Mondays and the Singbingwuriche represents her colleagues at the Kpembewura's palace. From the council meeting at the Kpembewura's palace, the Singbingwuriuche also convenes a council meeting at her palace on every Wednesday to consider the decisions arrived at during the council meeting at the Kpembewura's palace. The council discusses these issues and other matters that are brought for the consideration of the Singbingwuriche and her council which is composed by women.

At the wuriche's palace, they discuss issues in relation to societal problems, such as marital problems, disputes and other matters that are brought before the council. When agreements cannot be reached or solutions are not found, the issues are referred to the council of the male chief counterpart of the particular division. The decisions taken at the meetings of the council of the wuriche are binding on both men and women. The results of the discussions at the Singbingwuriche's palace are then taken back to Kpembewura's council on the Monday of the following week by the Singbinwuriche. This position provides the wuriche to have some influence over the people she leads. Based on her status and position within the system, she is then able to carry out various roles through which she is able to influence development and the lives of the people.



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The position of a female chief therefore puts the woman that is appointed a wuriche in a certain status which from observation makes her play roles in ways different from ordinary women in society. This status provides her the opportunity to participate in decision making processes and she exercises power and authority on behalf of the people that she represents. In her position and status, it was observed that men including male chiefs below the status of a particular wuriche will have to remove their footwear and hats when exchanging greetings with the wuriche. For example, during a meeting at the Yagbun palace, it was observed that all the divisional chiefs took off their footwears and traditional hats before they went to exchange greetings with the Mankumawurich. A similar situation was observed at the Kpembe palace where all the sub-divisional chiefs attending a meeting removed their sandals and hats to greet the Kiapewuriche. This shows that the authority of the wuriche is recognised and exercised over both men and women in her society. Even though in some instances the authority of the wuriche is threatened, the wuriche continues to occupy an important position in the Gonja social organisation.

### **5.3 Leadership qualifications of the Wuriche**

The nomination and appointment of a woman to occupy a leadership position in traditional political governance in Gonja demands that such a woman possesses certain qualities. First and foremost, as suggested by the Kpembewura, she should be from the royal family. It is her royal status that is the primary factor and forms the basis upon which all other factors are



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considered. Nothing qualifies a person to the skin than the person hailing from the appropriate royal lineage. Also, the woman should be someone that is respected by her colleague women, men and children.

Another consideration is that, a woman should be seen to be playing roles that are desirable in her community to qualify as a female chief. She is expected to treat everybody in society with the same conditions irrespective of their sex or age. This quality is what she will apply in settling disputes and finding solutions to issues that will be brought to her attention. She is expected to have experienced motherhood through child birth and she is expected to be the mother of the community and by extension the mother of the chief. By this, the woman should be someone who is not only interested in the needs and demands of only one segment of the population which will put her in the position of attending to only those group of people. She should possess knowledge and wisdom as the mother of the family and community and she is therefore expected to impart this knowledge and wisdom to the male chief on a regular basis. It is this knowledge and wisdom that legitimizes her power and authority including knowledge of customs and traditions of the society and the royal family as well as matters of traditional political governance.

In addition, she should be able to control some resources so that she does not become a liability on the community. Instead, she is expected to use her wealth combined with her position to help others in times of need. This is important because, at her status it is considered embarrassing for the wuriche to engage in acts such as stealing and begging because she lacks food and other materials that will make her life comfortable.



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Physical appearance was also mentioned as one of the qualities for enskinment as a female chief and here the Bolewura indicates that:

*“A woman should be physically beautiful, and by physical beauty, I mean that the woman should not have any disability or the woman should not be a known criminal in order to qualify her to be made a female Chief”.* Interview with Bolewura (15<sup>th</sup> March, 2016).

From the point of view of the Bolewura, disability is a major barrier to any woman or man who wants to be a female chief in Gonjaland. He suggests that, the woman should not be a blind person, should not be deaf and dumb, and should have all limbs in place to qualify her to occupy the position of the Female Chief. He further states that the woman should not be of abnormal height. All these considerations are dependent on the interest of the chief who is the appointing authority. He is the person who determines these qualities and he is able to tell who can best serve his interest.

#### **5.4 Roles of the Wuriche in Gonja**

The study finds that the wuriche plays some significant leadership roles in the traditional governance system of her society. The results of the study do not support the general notion over the years, which seeks to suggest that women do not play any leadership roles in traditional governance in this part of the country. The wuriche plays roles which complement the efforts of the male chief. These roles have been categorised into traditional roles that have been assigned the Wuriche from the beginnings and the changing roles as a result of some influences on the institution of the Wuriche over the years.



#### 5.4.1 Traditional roles of the Wuriche

As in the general Ghanaian society, Alhaji Losina Afuli (Linguist to the Yagbunwura) states that Wuriche in Gonjaland plays the role of a mother-figure first and foremost. He states that:

*“As a mother, she “bears” and teaches children and she is loyal and loving to her families and community. In many cases she subordinates herself in the service of her husband, children, families and community”.* Interview with Alhaji Losina Afuli (10<sup>th</sup> October, 2017).

From this quote, the Wuriche should be a woman who has given birth to children and understands the challenges that come with raising a family. Before she can provide that motherly care, and protection for the people of the community, she should have had that experience of caring for her immediate family first.

Women contribute immensely to the economic wellbeing of the society. Women contribute over 60% of labour involving planting, harvesting and head portage in agriculture in this part of the country (GSS, 2015). This makes their contribution to the maintenance of the household crucial since the major economic activity of the people of this area is crop cultivation. The motherly role and the economic contribution which are particularly true of the Gonja woman are of immense importance for the proper appreciation or examination of their role within traditional political governance.

The position of the female chief among the Gonja is a traditional requirement and a woman who qualifies and agrees to occupy such a position



[www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) helps in the maintenance of the culture and traditions of the Gonja people.

Mankumawuriche Memuna states that:

*“It is the duty of the senior wuriche to take the newly appointed one(s) through the laid down customs of the office of the Wuriche upon their assumption of office. This ensures that the traditions and customs guiding the position of the Wuriche and the chieftaincy institution in general are passed on from one generation to the other”.* Interview with Mnankumawuriche (16<sup>th</sup> March, 2018).

To the Mankumawurich, the wuriche plays the role of socialising and educating the younger ones on the culture and traditions of the Gonja and this is one of the reasons why the institution of the wuriche was conceived. In this respect, the Wuriche plays the role of cultural preservation and maintenance. Through the periodic meetings of courts, the frequent attendance of funerals and other regularly occurring rituals the Wuriche continues to perpetuate and preserve the identity and culture of the Gonja people. As observed by Stoeltje (2003), because the political system is inextricably linked to the kinship system, female chiefs together with their male counterparts in this case are seen as part of the cultural identity of the people.

The Mankumawuriche suggests that, in the period before formal (colonial) governance was introduced, the role of the wuriche was very central to the day to day administration of the Gonja state. She had the authority to mobilise revenue on behalf of the Yagbunwura. Her position also allowed her as the head of the community to resolve disputes and report to her superior and refer unresolved disputes as well. The wuriche was in charge of the





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mobilization of the entire community that she headed in times of war and communal labour. However, some of these roles have been taken over by the male chiefs following the introduction and appointment of male chiefs to communities that were hitherto administered solely by the Wuriche as a result of colonial and post-colonial government demand and the quest by the men to control resources directly from these communities.

Alhaji Losina Afuli suggests that in present day Gonja, the duties of the Wuriche include the mobilization of her colleague women for communal work but not men. The wuriche is not also allowed to take royalties on behalf of the Yagbunwura any longer since that is being done by the male chiefs. He however, agrees that, the wuriche still plays a key role in the traditional governance of the Gonja kingdom in terms of her ability to mobilise women for communal work and occasions. To him, development projects which often require community support in terms of labour are carried out with the assistance of chiefs by the mobilization of communal labour. It is the duty of the Wuriche to mobilise the women of the affected community/communities to play their part as expected by the particular project. This may involve activities such as fetching water from water sources to the project site amidst dancing and singing to cheer the males as they work. In all these mobilization and organization, the Mantewuriche argues that, the Wuriche is also responsible for organizing food stuff to provide feeding for the workers during the period of the communal labour.

It was observed that, the Wuriche like the male chief participates actively in the celebration of the annual Damba festival which is the



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celebration of royalty and chieftaincy in Gonja which is a major occasion for the Gonja people. During the celebration, the Buwuriche are usually responsible for the preparation of food during festivals and installation of new chiefs and the ceremonial food (kusutu-dwe) for the dead. It is the duty of the Buwuriche to supervise the preparation of these meals during such occasions. It was observed during the Damba festival in 2018 that a great assembly of chiefs and people gathered and the food which was prepared by the Buwuriche from slaughtered cattle and gifts of grain given by the chiefs, was brought and placed in the arena and distributed to the people.

The celebration of the festival is incomplete without the preparation of the special traditional food for the dead. To the extent that it is only the wuriche who is allowed by tradition to prepare this meal, the role of the wuriche and women for that matter in this process of mobilising food stuff and cooking is an important aspect of the celebration of the Damba festival. From the point of view of the former secretary to the Gonja Traditional Council, Mr. Kachitowura Sibul, the celebration of the Damba festival is an important element of the customs and practices of the traditional political system of chieftaincy among the Gonja people. He argues that, the role the Wuriche plays during these festivals places her at a central position within the traditional Gonja society.

Another role that the wuriche performs is the consultative role she plays in the political system. Kachitowura suggests that before the installation of a new chief, the Wuriche is always consulted. Women whose sons are to be appointed chiefs are supposed to confide in the wuriche if there is any reason



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to disqualify such persons from being appointed. For example, the man may not be the true son of his father, but that may not be known to the public. This is important to the tradition because, in his words:

*“The woman is the only one who knows the real father of her son and can therefore, advice the kingmakers as to the suitability of the person that is being installed in terms of his true identity”.* Interview with Mr. Kachitowura Siibu, (12<sup>th</sup> December, 2017).

In his view, they have to always be sure that the right person from the appropriate lineage is installed and this authentication can come from the mother of the person who is being appointed.

Because of her interaction with her colleague women, the wuriche is expected to receive such information from the women and to release it when necessary. So, during the proceedings toward the installation, the Nsuawura (senior linguist/Chief linguist) after addressing the chiefs and kingmakers also addresses the Buwurche (Female chiefs) announcing to them the date and time of a proposed installation and distributes to them small amounts provided by the chief-elect. This process ensures that women who constitute a critical portion of the population are involved through their leaders in the activities leading to the installation of the chief.

By custom, the Mankumawuriche suggests that, when the Yagbunwura elect takes his seat on the “Kawul putti” (the skin), he is addressed by the Kagbapewura, the senior Dogte, the senior Mbangapu (Senyonwura), the Mankumawuriche, the Mbonwura and finally the drummers. From her



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accounts, during the installation of a new chief, the Wuriche, addresses the new Chief saying;

*“As you are being installed, it is my expectation and the expectation of all women that when you are given food you will not forget us. I assure you the support and assistance of all women and our children under your jurisdiction as long as you reign”*. Interview with Mankumawuriche (18<sup>th</sup> March, 2018).

This is to send a message to the new traditional ruler that while women in the area will stand by him in times of trouble, they nonetheless should not be forgotten in times of joy. The address by the Wuriche is a significant aspect of the installation process as it indicates a pledge on behalf of the women and their children to support the chief in all his endeavours. Without that address, any chief that is installed is considered not the chief over the people but a chief for only the Gonja chiefs because he is deemed not to have been properly installed. Apart from being consulted on the suitability of the candidate, the role of the Wuriche is not directly linked to the nomination and appointment of a person for the position of a chief. Her advice on the suitability of the candidate is nonetheless taking into serious consideration in the appointment of the candidate. This ensures that the new chief is properly appointed and that his or her appointment process is inclusive enough to make him or her acceptable to the people.

Apart from her advisory role in the appointment of a chief, the Wuriche is also consulted on major matters on custom by the chiefs and elders. She exercises her moral authority as an advisor to the chief on matters regarding custom and tradition. Here, the knowledge and wisdom of the



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Wuriche is very critical for her to be able to give informed advice that is seen relevant by the chief and elders and which they cannot do without under the circumstance.

As recounted by the Bolewura, the Yagbunwura would not make a public statement without consulting the Mankumawuriche. It is however, not binding on the Yagbunwura to act according to the dictates of the Mankumawuriche but he more often than not heeds to her advice. For example, during one of their meetings at the Yagbun palace, it was observed that before the Yagbunwura will make his final statement, he would usually invite the Mankumawuriche to come closer to him. In the process, he will have some conversation with her before he then makes a statement to the hearing of all present in the meeting. This principle applies to the relationship between the other chiefs and the Buwurche within their respective jurisdictions.

Of equal importance to the aforementioned is the Wuriche's responsibility for the welfare of women and domestic issues in her community. Having to deal with a wide range of societal issues and relations, her responsibility in this regard is heaviest on matters of conflict resolution and settlement involving most of the time, women. These issues may involve quarrels between two or more women or a divorce case between a man and woman. The Wuriche also handles issues involving different kinds of domestic problems, not only those between men and women, but also those having to do with extended family members or tenants in a house. Under such circumstances more often than not, the Wuriche hears cases and pronounces



judgement, by [www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) providing guidance and direction, sometimes through persuasion for the settlement of the issues rather than pronouncing judgement as in a formal court. Her knowledge and wisdom must be brought to bear as those are key attributes needed in the settlement and resolution of such matters.

The Kiapewuriche (Senior Female Chief of Bole) suggests that, the current roles they carry out are mostly performed during festivals and periodic gatherings. She further states that this current status of the Wuriche takes them away from the original role they were given when the first Wuriche of Mankuma was appointed by the founder of the Kingdom, Ndewura Jakpa. She argues that,

*“Today the Wuriche does not command the ‘holistic’ authority that she was accorded when the position was first envisaged by the founder. This has therefore put the Wuriche in an obscure position in the Gonja society now. But we continue to carry out our duties including dispute resolution and advising the chiefs where the need be”*. Interview with Kiapewuriche Abiba (12<sup>th</sup> November, 2017).

The suggestion here is that, without the Wuriche the chief is naked because it is only the Wuriche that protects the chief from the venom of evil forces and also guides the chief in matters of dispute resolution. To corroborate Kiapewuriche’s submission, the Bolewura suggests that he would not be a successful leader without the support of the Wuriche. In the words of the Bolewura:



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*“People usually say that the Wuriche does not do anything in the palace and feel that she is just there for nothing. But it is because they do not know the important hole that these women cover. On all important decisions I take, I will have to consult with them. They have been very helpful with the kind of advice they give me and the duties that they perform in that position to ensure that my territory is managed effectively without any problems. Some of them even know the customs and traditions of the skin more than me”.* Interview with Bolewura (20<sup>th</sup> February, 2017).

This statement by the chief shows that they the traditional leaders are also aware that people do not seem to regard the role of the female chief. He however, hastens to indicate how relevant and useful the role of the female chief is especially to him. There is therefore, no doubt that the wuriche despite the transformation that affected her authority, still plays vital roles toward the administration of the Gonja state.

#### ***5.4.2 Changing roles of the wuriche***

Due to the changes that affected the institution and its authority through the processes of colonial and subsequent post-colonial administrations, coupled with their interaction with other political systems, the wuriche has over the years taken on other roles that were not hitherto performed by her. The wuriche plays collaborative roles by engaging with governmental and non-governmental organisations such as the Ministry of Gender and Social Protection, the District Assemblies, Action Aid Ghana, Pronet North, and Community Development Alliance (CDA) to bring development to her people. As with many leadership positions, for the Wuriche to perform her duties



effectively, she [needs to collaborate](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) with other traditional and formal government leaders. To gain the cooperation and support of others to authenticate her authority, the Wuriche needs to be engaged in the process of dialogue and collaboration.

First of all, mention is made of the collaboration taking place among the female chiefs themselves. They have in their own way brought themselves together under one umbrella called “the Buwuriche Association of Gonjaland” loosely referred to as the Gonjaland Queen Mothers Association. The Mankumawuriche is the leader of the association and chairs meetings of the association. The Kiapewuriche suggests that, in times of need, under the auspices of the association, they support each other through contributions by members to help affected members during instances of bereavement and also during marriage ceremonies of family members. Through this association, two girls were sponsored to offer nursing in Tamale Nurses Training College.

This process has helped them develop a sense of unity and togetherness for a common purpose of championing the interest of members and their society at large. The Buruwuriche recounts the support she got from the association during the funeral rites of her late mother in the following words:

*“Our association has been so helpful to me and my family. When my mother died, the members supported my family with a lot of items and cash to help us celebrate the funeral. Their contributions went a long way to relieve the family of certain pressures in having to look for money to acquire those items especially in the area of trying to feed the huge number of visitors. Above all,*





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*the members of the association were there in their numbers to solidarize with the family*". Interview with Kiapewuriche (12<sup>th</sup> November, 2017)

This is very important to the people because of the honour that comes along with it. In narrating what happened, it could be seen on her face that she and the family were so happy and felt they could not have been treated any better.

Through their interaction with traditional women leaders from other systems, the female chiefs of Gonja have become part of the larger body of traditional women leaders in Ghana known as the Queen Mothers Association of Ghana (QMAG). This Association has its regional organisations where the Buwurche of Gonja are part of the Northern Regional Queen Mothers Association. Through these associations, the female chiefs received training on sensitisation, issues of gender mainstreaming and empowerment. For instance, they were trained on the importance of girl child education and the effects of early child marriages by the Ministry of Gender and Social Protection in 2016 under the larger umbrella of QMAG. As women leaders, their fellow women are more prepared to listen to them on such matters than if the information was to come from men because they understand the issues and how these issues impart on their lives.

The wuriche has to also collaborate with the chief as their roles complement each other in the governance processes of the community and also for the fact that her authority is exercised in relationship with the chief. The Wuriche assists in mobilizing the people for durbars and other occasions and supports in making sure that all functions organised under the auspices of the skin get to successful end. The chiefs together with the Buwurche hold



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meetings to discuss the organization of festivals, funerals and installation of chiefs. For example, it was observed that during the 2018 Damba festival, the chiefs met with the female chiefs to discuss what will be needed for the organisation of the festivities including feeding and logistics. Here they pull together resources and ideas that will aid in carrying out activities of the occasion to an end that is free of violence or any negative events that can bring the name of the people into disrepute.

With the partnership of the chiefs, they are able to help implement and monitor projects being executed for the benefit of their respective communities by government and non-governmental agencies.

*“We have to work together with the chiefs so that facilities that are being implemented for the benefit of our people are carried out in the best way. Even after such facilities are provided, we need to work together to ensure that such facilities are maintained to function for a longer period possible”.* Statement from an interview with the Singbingwuriche (11<sup>th</sup> November, 2017).

In her view, it is only when the female chiefs and the male chiefs collaborate that they can get the needed development for their community. After the development projects have been provided, they need to be maintained for maximum benefit and this can be ensured through the collaboration between the two wings of the traditional system. They have also collaborated in lobbying for projects to their various communities. For example, from the narration of the Mantewuriche, working together with the Buipewura, they were able to lobby for a borehole to be drilled in the community through the



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District Chief Executive (DCE) who is the representative of the government at the local level. To convey this message, she says:

*“Just go outside this compound and look by the road side, you will see people fetching water from a borehole. It came about as a result of the combined efforts of myself and the Buipewura whereby we had to visit the DCE to complain about the water situation in Buipe and he gave attention to our plea and delivered”*. Interview with the Mantewuriche (26<sup>th</sup> February, 2018).

Under such circumstances there is no doubt that the presence of the two traditional leaders would have more weight in the eyes of the DCE than their individual presence. This kind of relationship develops on their authority and yields better results for the development role that they are expected to play.

As indicated by the Mantewuriche, their engagement with government agencies and officials and their relationship with non-governmental organisations has expanded their horizon of collaboration. She recounted their engagement with Pronet North where they got three boreholes to be drilled at Jentilpe, Busunu and Kbampe.

As a consequence of the need to involve women in decision making, the Wuriche is gradually becoming visible outside of her usual place of affairs that she has been confined to. The Wuriche is provides representation on behalf of women at fora that are organised by government and non-governmental organisations. These traditional leaders are now collaborating with government from so many fronts of development including education, water delivery, leadership and governance.



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To enhance this collaboration, the government through the Ministries of Gender and Social Protection (MGSP) and the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs has organised leadership workshops and also discussions on the need for girl child education. For example, on June, 2015, the MGSP organised a training workshop for Gonjaland Queen Mothers Association on the need for women participation in local governance in Ghana. During the training, it was identified that one of the reasons why women do not participate in the district level elections was lack of resources at the disposal of women. Following that, the Ministry got some funding and sponsored all female candidates in the district level elections that year. As a result, the number of females who got elected into the various assemblies in the Gonja area increased from 15 to 23 which was an improvement over the previous elections.

Also, the operations of World Vision International and Action Aid Ghana in particular are fresh in the minds of the Buwurche who mentioned several interventions including school buildings, boreholes, loans and sensitisation workshops as projects that these NGOs have undertaken through their engagements with the female chiefs. According to the Buruwuriche, Action Aid provided the Daboya community with a three-unit classroom block following an appeal she made during one of their engagements in February, 2017.

The Mankumawuriche suggests that, World Vision International (WVI) has been helpful in the area of providing boreholes for communities in Gonja. She recounts that, in 2016 WVI had a meeting with her including some



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selected Buwuriche where to identify challenges facing women in the Central and West Gonja areas. There the female chiefs identified that there was inadequate supply of potable water for their communities. Following their engagements and discussions from that meeting, five boreholes were provided by WVI. It was observed that these boreholes which were sited in Mankuma, Laribanga, Tinga, Yapei and Kulmasa were labelled with WVI plaques.

These roles played by the wuriche certainly could not be carried out without some challenges. In her attempt to influence the lives of the people she represents, the wuriche is confronted with several difficult situations which impede on her performance as a traditional leader. These challenges serve as barriers to her authority and influence in the society as they reflect in the discussions that follow.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

From all the submissions from the interviews conducted, what is clear from the discussions is that, the Wuriche mostly carries out her roles in relation to the male chief. Her authority is linked to the powers of the male chief and her role and influence is dependent on the support of the male chief. Because her duties reflect her relationship with the male chief, and also mostly considered for the wellbeing of women in particular within her community, the Wuriche functions in parallel roles and responsibilities based on a principle that complements the authority of the male chief but not on the presumption of equivalent power or authority.



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This function of the Wuriche ensures that women especially have an avenue where they can take their issues to and a female authority will be there to listen to their concerns. Even though the wuriche's position is guaranteed under the tradition of the people, she must meet certain other criteria which qualify her to be appointed. In addition to the criteria of qualification, she should fulfill the processes of appointment and installation. The mode of succession to the office of the wuriche is markedly different from the succession processes of the male chiefs. The wuriche usually is not promoted to a higher skin of authority after her appointment.

The argument here as presented, is that, female chiefs carry out various important roles within the system. The performance of these roles makes the Wuriche's position important to the functioning of the Gonja political system and the Gonja society in general. The views of the female chiefs are particularly important because, some members of the society do not appreciate the roles being played by the Wuriche and hence her relevance. But it is significant that both the male chiefs and the female chiefs are able to tell how important the role of the Wuriche is to the system and which by extension establishes her relevance.

In sum, the status of the Wuriche in the Gonja traditional system, many consider, does not put her in a central position and her role though relevant to the Gonja society, seems to be peripheral to the traditional governance processes of that society. However, the discussions suggest that the role and contributions of the wuriche continue to be critical for the proper functioning



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of the Gonja society combines the various spheres of executive, legislative and judiciary authority in performing her traditional and changing roles.



## **CHALLENGES TO WURICHE’S AUTHORITY AND INFLUENCE**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the societal barriers that impede the work of the wuriche in the Gonja society. The views and oppinions of respondents were sought about the challenges facing the institution of female chieftaincy by examining how respondents consider the difficulties within which the wuriche has to carry her authority in respect of the functions that she performs. The respondents included chiefs and key informants who from their experiences were able to give relevant information on the obstacles to the functioning of female chieftaincy institution and its actors because they are supposed to be affected by the roles of the actors. In the discussions, pseudo names have been used in place of the real names of respondents where a quote is presented from an interview because of confidentiality.

Since the adoption of democratic governance in Ghana after independence, women have been trying to join the ranks of both elected and appointed officials in positions at both national and local levels in Ghana. Under the current Fourth Republican dispensation from 1992, the proportion of women holding elective positions in the national parliament has doubled from about 5.5% in 1993 to about 11% in 2017. At the District Assembly level, women hold about 14% of the Chief Executive positions while at the state level women hold nearly 18% of appointed offices as at the beginning of 2018 (ILGS, 2018). Notwithstanding the apparent improvements in the





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percentage of women in public office positions men continue to dominate even though women constitute 51% of the population of Ghana.

The low numbers of women in formal government positions is a reflection of the struggles women have to go through to get elected or appointed into public office. The reasons for the low participation are mostly based on male chauvinistic tendencies of the Ghanaian society. This phenomenon is not different from what happens to women traditional leaders in Gonja traditional governance cycles.

### **6.1 Socio-cultural challenges**

The society in which the wuriche finds herself makes it challenging for her to carry out her duties as a chief. The Wuriche is confronted with a number of challenges within the Gonja social organisation. These barriers tend to undermine her position or impede her performance. The wuriche, therefore, has to deal with these challenges in her line of duty to remain relevant to the society.

Even though the Gonja traditional political system provides chiefship positions for women, the dominant socio-cultural attributes are those which favour men and are also determined by men. This creates a patriarchal order which tends to impact in different ways on the lives of women traditional leaders in Gonjaland. This societal order where men are seen to be superior to women enforces rules and laws in such a way that affects the self-confidence of women.



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This does not only limit their access to resources and information but also keeps them in a lower status than men. This in no little way affects their involvement and participation in traditional governance since they are more often than not left out in the decision-making processes that affect them especially in formal government circles. This plight of the wuriche in Gonja is also felt by the women as members of their society.

For instance, the Kiapewuriche Abiba recounts that if even the woman or wuriche is invited to participate in a meeting, her contributions and utterances are often seen to be offensive and disregard for the authority of the men present in the meeting. To her such women are normally labelled as witches and should be avoided. In her words, ‘during one of our meetings before the celebration of the Damba festival this year (2018), the Kpembewura angrily asked me to sit down when I put up my hand to ask a question. He said I was talking too much in the meeting and it is only witches who take over meetings when men are present’. This tag of witchcraft weakens the person who has been labelled as such and she will never speak during meetings in order to do away with such accusations. Alhaji Losina Afuli confirms this position when he intimated during an interview that women are:

*“Loose talkers and cannot keep secrets and therefore must be avoided in times of taking serious decisions”.* Interview with Alhaji Losina Afuli, Chief Linguist to the Yagbunwura (23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2017).

To him, women easily leak information and that explains the reason why they are often left out in the decision-making process of very serious important matters. He gave an example of the Damongowuriche who disclosed the



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outcome of a meeting about the decision of the traditional leaders on their choice of a DCE for Damongo to the New Patriotic Party Chairman of Damongo. So, before they could invite the party executives to the palace the following day, the Chairman already knew their choice and he immediately stated that he has been already informed by the Damongowuriche about their choice. The chiefs present were surprised at the action of the Damongowuriche because it was decided that the decision was not supposed to be disclosed to the executives until they met them. The Damongowuriche apologized and pledged not to repeat it.

But this would have been different if the person involved was a male chief because when he was asked if the person who leaked the information was a male chief what would have been done, Alhaji Losina suggests that it was normal for male chiefs to interact with party executives on those lines. As such, the reasons given for the non-involvement of female chiefs based on that reason alone remains targeted and can be traced to the patriarchal attitudes associated with the system.

This position of patriarchy was also particularly adopted and perpetuated by the British colonial administration through the indirect rule system where the male chiefs were used to get to the people to do what the colonial administrators demanded. A close examination of the dynamics of power as observed by Aidoo (1981) illustrates women traditional leaders in precolonial Ghana exercised considerably more authority than during the colonial period and after. Caused by the sharp differences that exist between chiefs and female chiefs in Gonja, the consequences of different experiences



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under colonialism and post colonialism, and the growing pressures of economic survival in modern society, the burdens the Wuriche bears threatens to subvert her authority and undermine her performance. Ignored and bypassed by patriarchy over the years, despite the fact that she continues to be important to the maintenance of society, the Wuriche has survived and is still clear about her position in society.

That apart, polygyny and bride-price are two cultural influences that combine in one way or another to affect the status and role of women traditional leaders in the Gonja traditional system. From the customs and traditions which stem basically from patriarchy, these two factors tend to put the woman under the care of the man as property. In this circumstance women cannot take decisions on their own when they are being kept as property by their husbands. The system does not therefore allow an arrangement in which the woman (wife) is elevated to a status higher than the man (husband) who is seen as the owner.

These practices therefore compromise the dignity of the woman and make her a convenient tool for the man. The Mantewuriche suggests that, as a chief, the wuriche still needs to accept to be under the influence of her husband because the bride price that is paid by the husband keeps the woman under the care and control of the man. Under the circumstance, everything that the wuriche does should be in consonance with what will acceptable by the men. Failure to do so, the man simply divorces the woman or ignores her and concentrates on his other wife or wives since polygyny is a common practice among the people. Because the wuriche will not also want to lose her marital



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status, she has to continue to succumb to the dictates of her husband under the dictates of these cultural practices of polygyny and bride-price.

The Mankumawuriche suggests that, the problems of divorce loom large in the general picture of wuriche's status in Gonja traditional society. As in many African societies, divorce, according to Gonja traditional custom can take effect by extrajudicial arrangements. One of the problems connected with this is that, more often than not, what are considered good grounds for divorce do not hold for husband and wife alike. A man may legitimately divorce his wife for adultery, while a woman cannot, because the system of polygyny does allow for a man to have extra-marital relations. This position confirms the findings of Odame (2014) where a woman may be divorced for laziness, for 'witchcraft and sorcery' whereas, a wife cannot accuse her husband of witchcraft. In many cases, a woman may be divorced for barrenness, for the presumption is that she is barren. Because of this believe and practice that a woman can be divorced at any point in time by her husband, it is not encouraged to give women any sensitive traditional position, for the woman is not considered traditionally a permanent member of the community. And in fact, women who take up the position of wuriche are most likely to be divorced by the husband as is evident in marital statuses of most Buwuriche. Out of the eight Buwuriche interviewed, five were divorced, two widowed and one was married.

The reason is that, because of their status, they are not able to carryout their household duties like cooking and fetching water for their housebands. They are mostly in engage in meetings and other assignments required by the



[www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh](http://www.udsspace.uds.edu.gh) office. According to the Mankumawuriche her husband divorced her because he felt she was no longer taking proper care of the home as she is always attending meetings within and outside Damongo. On her return from one of such meetings in Tamale, she came and noticed that her husband had married a new wife following previous complains that the Mankumawuriche had neglected him. It was observed that the Mankumawuriche has moved out of her matrimonial home following the divorce to build her own home in Damongo.

Moreover, the wuriche's time is devoted to the performance of her role of resolving conflicts, attending public functions and working with the male chief, leaving no time to attend to the desires of her husband. This is partly explained by the fact that these women will normally have to leave their places of marriage to take up their new positions which their husbands would not understand and would simply pronounce divorce to enable them marry another wife. The Bolewura puts it clearly in the following quote:

*“we are always careful when we are appointing a woman to the position of a chief. You know, women are not like we men, they can decide to leave the community at any time and maybe follow a man to a faraway land and even leave the skin. They also misbehave, they like talking and can bring the name of the skin into disrepute”.* Interview with Bolewura (28<sup>th</sup> February, 2017).

An example was given of the Kiapewuriche who following her divorce with her husband, got remarried to a man in Accra in 2005 and has since never returned. Event though some chiefs do live outside of their communities, but thy frequently visit their communities to attend to matters of their office.



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The male-biased environment within the traditional system the Singbingwuriche suggests, deters women from participation. She argues that when you accept to be a Wuriche, it means that you have to work within styles and modes acceptable to men. Sometimes they are treated harshly by men and many, if not all, husbands have negative attitude towards female traditional leaders. The men she believes do not even want women to be installed as chiefs and therefore should not play any significant role within the system. Such men therefore do not cooperate with the female chiefs in their line of duty. For example, they can tell people summoned to the wuriche's palace not to attend upon the summons. The lack of cooperation from men is therefore a significant barrier to the performance of the wuriche.

## **6.2 Emerging challenges**

Furthermore, a major obstacle to the authority of the Wuriche in the Gonja society is lack of formal education. Formal education, is one of the strongest factors influencing the control of women by men in Gonja. Female chiefs are handicapped in the system because of lower educational attainments and the prevalence of social norms that severely restrict their freedom of movement in the public space. For instance, all the Buwuriche interviewed had no level of formal education indicating a high level of illiteracy rate while over 60% of the male Chiefs contacted had some level of formal education and could read and write.

The finding confirms the observation by Stoeltje (2003) where he indicated about that illiteracy was a major hindrance to the performance of



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female leaders. This weakness reduces the status of the female chiefs in the economic and social space since they are unable to appraise issues put on paper for their benefit or put them in a better position for employment. This leaves them with only the chance of engaging in economic activities which are linked to the agricultural sector and petty trading which are predominantly controlled by men since women do not own land in this part of the country and are unable to raise the required amount of money to engage meaningfully in business. Because of this reduced space as a result of illiteracy, the ability and capacity of the Wuriche to participate actively in the traditional political governance process is limited since she fears her involvement and participation opens her up for public assessment and criticism which she is unable to contain.

That apart, there are the obstacles which stem from the modern Ghanaian state which affects the performance and authority of the Wuriche. The modern Ghanaian state provides sites where major negotiations of power take place that generally exclude the Wuriche from many considerations but do not always exclude chiefs. In these arrangements Chiefs have gained advantages over the Wuriche. For example, the state through the government has provided an institutional apparatus for chiefs to meet together. Chiefs meet regularly at two chiefly houses of National and Regional houses of chiefs. The Buwuriche and by extension female traditional leaders do not have a similar meeting avenue even though the definition of a “chief” in the national constitution of Ghana (1992:168) includes female chiefs.





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These houses of chiefs are outlined in the Ghanaian constitution in the Chapter on “Chieftaincy” (1992: 164-168). The female chiefs are therefore, put at a disadvantaged position compared to male Chiefs. These houses provide chiefs with information and contacts that facilitate their collaboration with government leaders. Chiefs by this arrangement have access to the officials of the state, whereas female chiefs scarcely get these privileges. These institutional factors have therefore, combined to bring chiefs closer to the modern state and have at the same time created a separation between female chiefs and male chiefs.

The government has also put in some support mechanisms to uplift the image of chiefs without considerations to the office of the Wuriche. The government has assisted in the refurbishment and building of palaces for especially paramount chiefs in the Gonja area. Mention is made here of the reconstruction of the Yagbunwura’s palace, the Buipewura’s palace and the Kpembewura’s palace. A number of paramount chiefs including the Yagbunwura, Buipewura and the Kpembewura have also been given vehicles, and this was confirmed by the chiefs involved, that the government provided vehicles to some chiefs to enhance their movement. The Mankumawuriche indicates in connection with the aforementioned favours from the government that:

*“The government continues to give support to the male chiefs and does not look to the side of the Wuriche. Take a look at my house, this is where I also use as my palace as the paramount Wuriche of Yagbun and compare that with the mansion with a fence wall provided with the support of the government to*



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*be used as the palace for the Yagbunwura. Will you have any basis to compare the two?"* Interview with Mankumawuriche, 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2017.

She further submits that her duties involve a lot of movement to and from communities within and outside Gonja but the system does not provide her with any means by which she can transport herself under the circumstance. In her words:

*"As the Mankumawuriche I do not have any means of transport but I am compelled by my position to travel up and down in fulfilment of my duties. But the government has decided to give vehicles to chiefs without considering our plight despite the fact that these chiefs also have horses in their possession. My walking stick becomes my helper and transporter and I have to go through all the struggles associated with public transport when I am invited to participate in functions outside my immediate community. This is not fair because the government continues to strengthen the male chiefs against the weakness of the Wuriche".* Interview with Mankumawuriche, 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2018.

These submissions by the Mankumawuriche summarize the imbalance support relationship that the government offers the traditional political system which is mostly executed in favour of the male wing of the system.

Another factor that militates against women leaders' effective participation in the traditional political governance system of the Gonja is the lack of resources at her disposal. The Wuriche has to overcome the obstacle posed by financial difficulties as the economy becomes increasingly rewarding



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of direct engagement in work. Leaders would always need resources if they would want to have control over their subjects. The Mankumawuriche argues that for effective mobilization through the proper functioning of the institution of the Female Chief, the Wuriche would usually need some money and food stuff to carry out most of her duties. However, most female Chiefs are not gainfully employed as a result of the position they occupy and would usually rely on their own little resources, contributions from market women and some community members.

All skin resources are put under the control of the male chief who would normally not relinquish any portion to the Wuriche. Yet the Wuriche must meet her expenses. She must be present for the many public events. Mindful of the fact that she is appearing as a representative of her people, the Wuriche must be dressed in expensive cloth. Also, such events require one's presence for at least a day, and in most cases several days, and the Wuriche must travel with an entourage, the size depending on her status. These responsibilities cannot be compromised if she is to exercise the authority of the position she occupies. The lack of education of these women is a major contributory factor to their increasing poverty levels because they cannot be engaged in the formal sector which can easily be combined with their office and the informal sector is so volatile that they cannot easily continue to do what they were doing in their private life or at best to the scale that they were engaged in be it agriculture or business which are mostly the occupation of these women.



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As a consequence of the disparities that have been created between the Wuriche and the male chief, the effect of social, economic and political outcomes of changes in the Gonja traditional society has been to elevate the authority of the chief and to diminish the role and relevance of the Wuriche. This has resulted in altering the gender-power relations inherent in their complementary roles of authority in the Gonja social organisation.

### **6.3 Perceived Challenges**

The low representation or participation of women in Gonja is because of various obstacles which are either perceived or real. Among the Gonja, women are generally thought of as natural followers and their participation in politics is seen by the people not to be playing very significant roles though they feel it is relevant for women to be engaged or engage in politics. The situation of women representatives or leaders in both traditional and formal politics in Gonja where there are low numbers in decision making positions may not be different from what happens in the rest of Ghana.

The inadequate representation of women in politics is an important governance issue all over the world. There is only a difference in the magnitude or degree in which this fact changes in all societies across the world. So, some societies and countries may have relatively more women involved in politics as opposed to some other societies and countries, but the basic fact that women are underrepresented in politics, remains unchanged. So even if a state or society is democratic, this only helps to a certain extent.



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Overall, both male and female respondents considered similar factors as being reasons which tend to draw women away from leadership positions as well as impede the performance of those who are leaders in the system. The lack of confidence breeds a lack of interest on the part of these women in decision making positions and leadership. Issues raised during a focus group discussion at the palace of the Mankumawuriche also pointed to this factor with participants agreeing that women fear to venture into political leadership arena because their male counterparts usually shut them up and the women leaders under the circumstance cannot make any meaningful contributions towards decision making because they must always keep quite in the presence of the males. Consequently, they argue that it is better not to be a female leader if one cannot guarantee the support from the men. In support of this view, madam Sheitu during an interview had this to say;

*“Taking up a leadership position in our society as a woman is not easy. You are looking at a situation where all these people will be looking up to you to take decisions on their behalf and when you make a mistake in the process you will not be spared. No woman wants to put herself in such a situation”.*

Interview with Madam Sheitu, Kusawgu, 22<sup>th</sup> March, 2017

This response was in relation to a question that sought to solicit her opinion about factors that tend to draw women away from leadership positions in the Gonja society. The suggestion from her response is not that women do not just have interest in taking up leadership roles, but the fact that they do not have the confidence to withstand the issues that confront such women after they



have assumed office. So, for the fear of those issues, women just do not develop interest in becoming leaders in their society.

Alhaji Losina considers as a challenge that women political leaders are weak and incapable of making smart decisions. In his opinion women have been seen across generations to be only capable of trivial matters, constantly engaged in gossip and hearsay, incompetent and less intelligent. It was observed that, this view has been projected and reinforced through the years through male-dominated institutions which internalised the idea that the woman is inferior. With the constant reinforcement of the notion that women are inferior in every aspect, it becomes hard for the wuriche to effectively carry out her roles as a traditional leader. For a woman to occupy a leadership position, such patriarchal attitudes make it even harder. Such believes continue to exist in the society as the female leaders continue to strive for space and relevance.

Within her immediate environment, the wuriche needs to secure support from the people, usually the men. Mr. Munawari (from Damongo) believes that:

*“In order for the wuriche to be successful, she has to secure the support of the male community and political leaders. Thus, the female chiefs will have to secure the support of the male chiefs and those in formal government positions will have to secure the support of male officials. Most woman are indecisive and incompetent and will have to rely on their male counter parts make*



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*informed decisions*". Interview with Mr. Munawari, Damongo, 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2017.

In judging the personality of female chiefs, it was observed that stereotypes cloud the judgment of the respondents and this seems to be apparent in their political culture as well as in the Gonja general society. Respondents, under the influence of patriarchal stereotypes and generalisations, just believe that a woman is not capable of making big decisions which concern the lives of others, that she is not capable of understanding and conducting policy and is not strong enough to accomplish anything significant. This threatens the power and legitimacy of the wuriche in the system. Because of these considerations, the wuriche does not get the support that she requires from the general society and from their male colleagues.

It was also suggested by respondents that marriage and the responsibility of the woman to the husband, to provide food for the children and other family members will not permit the wuriche enough space to carry out her functions effectively. Married women face opposition from their husbands because if they go into politics the husbands think the wives will renege on their family obligations. Alhaji Fuseini argues for instance that:

*"You can imagine you go out and on your return to the house, your wife because of a meeting is not home by evening to cook dinner and the children are not bathed. Who is she expecting to do that? Married women cannot*



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*engage in such nonsense*". Interview with Alhaji Fuseini, Wasipe, 13<sup>th</sup>  
January, 2017.

One could get into serious trouble with the husband for not preparing meals because she has gone to attend a meeting or attend to some issues which require her attention as a woman political leader. Madam Ajara suggests that:

*"If you want to be happily married as woman in Gonjaland, you need to take yourself out of situations that will divert your attention so much from keeping your family. But that is exactly what political leadership entails; to have time for outsiders more than your own family members"*. Interview with Madam Ajara, Buipe, 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2017.

An interesting view was expressed by Mr. Mustapha who sees marriage to be a serious challenge which prevents and discourages women from engaging in politics. He submits that:

*"By our culture, when you marry, the woman moves to join the man in his community. Under the circumstance, the woman is said to belong to the man's family and she is separated from her original family. However, the community members will not see her as a full member of their community because she can get divorced at any time. Because of this, it is difficult for people to support her to become a leader. It is not also easy for her to go back to her father's home to occupy a position because she is no longer considered a member of the community because of her marital status"*. Interview with Mr. Mustapha 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017.





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The institution of marriage is therefore, seen as a major obstacle that prevents women from engaging in politics because of the patrilocal arrangement that is imposed by the society on married couples.

Another important perception about the challenges confronting the wuriche in the Gonja society is lack of financial resources. Women are usually considered not to have enough money at their disposal which they can use to help and influence people to accept them as leaders. To be able to perform their duties effectively, women leaders need the support of their followers. Often, this support is gotten from the ability to use money and other resources to solve the individual and community problems for the people. In the words of Madam Ajara:

*“I think women who want to take up leadership positions do not have the required amount of money that will enable them compete with men because politics at all levels is very expensive here. For instance, the woman will have to give money to influence the appointing authority if the position is by appointment and most women cannot do this because women are financially handicapped. If even she struggles to get appointed, she must use money to command respect from the people”.* Interview with Ajara, Buipe, 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2017.

In madam Ajara’s view, she believes that men are financially better endowed than women. To the extent that the female chiefs lack these financial resources to influence the people, they always are unable to derive the needed authority from the system within which they function. It is considered, therefore that, if



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the wuriche wants to be successful, she must control some amount of reasonable wealth that affords her the ability to influence the lives of the people in her society. In other words, the lack of financial resources will render the female political leader ineffective and unsuccessful. As more and more women become ineffective and unsuccessful, it discourages other women from venturing into positions of leadership.

The results of the study also indicate that women in traditional positions are also subject to more stringent scrutiny of their personal lives unlike their male counterparts. If a woman is unmarried and has an active sex life, the Gonja society deems her promiscuous and that promiscuity becomes her identity, and this affects her public image. And if the same woman is married, then respondents were concerned about how she would manage both work and family at the same time. These trivial details of her personal life then define the wuriche as a traditional leader rather than what she does in society or in her office as a leader which does not seem to matter in this case.

Without being able to secure the support of men, the woman in traditional leadership position is unable to capitalize on her capabilities because she is not given a chance to prove herself as a leader. This in effect, creates a situation where a woman cannot project her capabilities because she has no support. As opposed to what may be commonly believed, women are believed to have a hard time not only rallying the support of men, but also in rallying the support of females.



Women leaders in Gonja don't have a guaranteed support from other women. Women have to lobby as hard – and even harder sometimes - to garner female support. Madam Mariam during an interview believes that their colleague women are more wicked towards them anytime they get positions than the male leaders in their society. This view was shared by Madam Ayishetu to the extent that they believed it would be proper for all political positions to be occupied by men. But again, it can be explained that, this perception is because patriarchy has reinforced a sense of inferiority within women, which has been internalized over the years. It is therefore much easier to be a male leader to influence women's support among the Gonja than a woman who wants the support of her follow women. In the view of Madam Ayishetu:

*“Women are our own enemies. We would never support our colleague woman who is or wants to be a leader. In this community, we are more than the men, and we can decide to make the wuriche very powerful if we are united. But we are always the ones seen to be criticizing and ridiculing the wuriche and calling her all manner of names to make her look bad. Interview with Ayisheitu, Kpembe, 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2017.*

This view goes to support the perception that women in general do not want to be led by women leaders and therefore, are likely to support men to the disadvantage of women leaders. Women regard male leaders to command legitimate authority over both men and women, but women leaders are perceived to be inimical to the progress of society by both men and women. One would have thought that under the circumstance, women would be



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supportive and positive of their own who they will expect to be the best people to articulate their interest but that does not seem to be the case here.

Consequently, female chiefs are expected to be more than just pro-woman to secure the support of their colleague women. For a male leader, being pro-woman is perceived as a bonus or a privilege, while for a female chief, this may be taken for granted. A combination of perceived factors namely, the negatives of patriarchal attitudes of the society towards women, women being subjected to different standards and the refusal to take women seriously fosters a general atmosphere in Gonja where women are not encouraged and willing to participate in traditional politics. In the traditional system where the position is ascribed, they may feel reluctant to occupy the office and usually when they do, their performance is affected by the fear of the societal perceptions people hold about them.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Several factors including patriarchy and low levels of education combine to put the wuriche in subordination. This impacts negatively on her authority and level of influence and participation in decision making processes in her society.

The considered challenges confronting women political leaders in Gonja tend to have common roots with the problems that prevent the emancipation of women in any other sphere. Female leadership in traditional governance that involve exercise of certain power in Gonja, will always come



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with common forces opposing growth in their fields. These perceived challenges are inherent in the patriarchal values embedded within the Gonja society that deem women to be incapable of handling power and responsibility. When patriarchal values are reinforced this way in the society, people will continuously refuse to believe that a woman can take charge of affairs and can make decisions that are binding to everyone. These factors that are considered here combine to discourage women from leadership positions and at the same time these factors tend to negatively impact on the performance of the wuriche who is already in the arena of power and authority.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS

**7.0 Introduction**

This chapter gives a summary of the findings as contained in the discussions of chapters three, four, five and six. The Chapter presents the conclusion on the thesis based on the arguments that have been advanced from the discussions of the results of the work. This chapter also considers the limitations of the study and concludes on the contributions that the study makes to knowledge acquisition.

**7.1 Summary of findings**

The authority of the Wuriche in the Gonja social organisation is institutionalised and women who assume that position within the traditional political set-up are expected to exercise authority over both men and women. Though over the years societal transformation following the introduction of colonialism and formal governance systems have affected the political authority of the institution, the institution remains well grounded in the traditional political arrangements of the Gonja. The tendencies of patriarchy also continue to negatively impact on the political authority of the wurichje because of the believe and practice of seeing only men becoming family and community heads. Nonetheless, the status of the wuriche continues to be revered by both women and men in the Gonja society. Both men and women continue to identify with the political authority of the female chief as a cultural



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heritage for the Gonja people in their social and political arrangements. The political arrangements of the Gonja therefore guarantees the exercise of the political authority of the Wuriche where there are male subordinates as well as female subordinates. In that status the female chief also interacts with men in similar positions of authority within the dynamics of patriarchal relations.

The Gonja political system largely revolves around the principles of traditional authority within the framework of the institution of chieftaincy. The system none the less exhibits some semblance of charismatic authority because the individual ruler must possess some personal attributes before, he or she is considered a chief. Also, with the forces of globalization and the colonial legacy of formal governance, there has been a gradual introduction of legal-rational authority where the installation of chiefs has to be carried out based on state laws as a result of court rulings and orders. Therefore, as argued by Collins, Weber's categories of authority "do not exist merely for the sake of labelling and classifying history; they are embedded in a larger network of concepts and in an image of how they work (Collins 1986, 6). In this case, Webers theory of authority none the less, pioneered a path towards understanding how authority is legitimated as a belief system.

The acceptance theory also helps in understanding the authority structure in Gonja. Even though the authority in the institution of chieftaincy is structured along the lines of classical hierarchical authority, chiefs derive their authority from the fact that their subordinates tend to be compliant to their orders not only because of the fear of being punished but also because they see those orders as suggestions which will benefit the entire society. The



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exhibition of authority within the Gonja traditional political system can be better understood by combining the classical and acceptance perspectives of authority.

However, the assumption of absence and exclusion of women in the processes of development cannot be supported because, in Gonja, women play central role in the life of their society particularly within their families as mothers, as workers and as political leaders. In the case of the Wuriche therefore, the issue is not about absence and exclusion, but she has not received the necessary recognition over the years that will put her on the world map like her male counter-part.

In relation to her political authority within the traditional political system, the wuriche carries out judicial, executive and legislative functions as well as ceremonial functions. These roles are categorised into traditional roles and changing roles. The traditional roles she plays include mobilising women for political and ceremonial occasions, legislating on what is that right time and period for women to harvest shea nuts and dawadawa, advising the male chief and providing him spiritual protection, preparing traditional meals during festivals and settlement of disputes. Her role also extended to maintaining and commanding a standing army to protect her people against external aggression. She was also in charge of revenue mobilisation in her jurisdiction on behalf of the kingdom.

These roles it was observed, are extended to issues affecting males and females. But the control over men issues in terms of the role of the female chief is gradually diminishing since such roles are being taken over by male





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chiefs and in some instances by the modern state government. It is worthwhile to note that, the role of the wuriche has been carried out to include the executive, judicial, legislative and ceremonial functions of the Gonja social system.

The considered view of the people is that, the wuriche plays key roles within the social organisation of the Gonja. The people find the role and authority of the wuriche very vital for the maintenance of their culture and traditions. To the extent that the existence of the institution of the wuriche helps to give meaning to the traditional political system of the Gonja, the people consider that, the institution guarantees the existence and continuation of their cultural heritage. Consequently, some people may find the individual wuriche of their communities not playing any significant roles, but they will nonetheless, associate themselves strongly with the existence and authority of female chiefs. This goes to support the argument that the female chieftaincy is institutionalised in Gonja and as such people may not be happy with the performance of a particular female chief, but they would always revere and recognise the status and authority of the institution within their social and political arrangements.

The wuriche's authority is challenged on various aspects. There are the barriers of socio-cultural factors such as patriarchy, divorce and marriage which negatively impact on the authority and role of the wuriche. Other emerging challenges posed by formal government structures combine with societal norms and values to affect the authority and legitimacy of the wuriche.



These factors contribute to the inability of the wuriche to carry her exercise her authority effectively over both men and women in Gonja.

## 7.2 Conclusions

Eventhough the wuriche continues to play critical roles in the Gonja social organisation, her authority as a traditional political leader is exercised in relation to the male chief because of the male dominance in the Gonja society. She is expected to carry out her role over both men and women but this is mostly effectively carried over women because of the patriarchal tendencies which tend to limit the influence of the wuriche over men. However difficult the situation she finds herself, the wuriche strives under the circumstance to maintain her position and status in society and exercises her authority within the Gonja social organisation. The authority and role that is exhibited by the wuriche is well recognised by the people as she carries her influence over the people.

This study also establihes the fact that, there are situations which provide for women to exercise authority over both men and women in some societies with patriarchal social arrangements. This is often difficult to find because, in most cases where this is thought of, the female authority is carried over women and does not extend to men. In this case, providing space for women to be enskinned as chiefs, though may not be new, but it may be unique in the sense that in patriarchal societies one would expect a complete dominance of and reverence strictly for male authority.



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What is clear about the structure of authority in Gonja social organisation is that, the paramount chief and divisional chiefs who often receive the attention from external agents and agencies are only a ‘tip of the iceberg’ of a much bigger institution. The traditional political system of the Gonja consists of various offices including a line of female chiefs and other lower male chiefs and positions reaching down to the village level. Even at the lowest level of the community, there exist a kind of traditional authority structure which is almost always unnoticed from outside. A detailed hierarchical structure of the Gonja political system shows a gendered organisation of male and female power and influence. In the male line, succession is in the form of vertical movement to higher office from lower divisions. However, on the female line, succession and appointment to high office does that follow any particular order.

### **7.3 Recommendations**

Government and other development agents should recognise the authority of the wuriche in their interaction with the Gonja society. Government in particular should take steps to empower the wuriche by giving similar treatment to the wuriche as they do to the male chief. This will boost the confidence of the wuriche and help maintain her status and influence as a traditional leader in her society. The preferential recognition and treatment given by the government to the male chiefs is discriminatory and helps the male chiefs to continue to relegate the authority of the wuriche to the background.



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There is also the need for the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs to sensitise the wuriche through sensitisation fora and other means to enable her take advantage of the changing and transforming opportunities within and outside of her society. Without education and sensitisation, the wuriche is unable to effectively carry out her roles especially the changing roles of having to collaborate with development partners and also providing representation to her people. This will help the wuriche to appreciate current development dynamics and also enable her articulate the needs and interests of her people.

The Gonja traditional political system should be modified to create more space and opportunity for female chiefs to operate. Some resources should be allocated to the wuriche to function because only providing her with the title is not enough to ensure she is able to carry out relevant functions in her society. The wuriche should be seen and accepted by the people as a traditional leader who complements the efforts of the male chief but not to do the bidding of the male chief as considered by some respondents. She should be recognised and accepted by her own people as a development agent as prescribed by her authority within the Gonja political system. Government agencies such as the Ministry Gender and Social Protection and Non-governmental organisations interested in the issues of women empowerment should be seen championing this course.



#### **7.4 Limitations of the study**

The study adopted a case study design that relied heavily on purposive and convenient sampling techniques which were used to select only 47 participants in the data collection process. It is worth noting that this selection process excluded the views of a lot of people who could have contributed to the information gathering process. Also, the process of interviewing and discussions took longer periods because research assistants had to translate the interviews and discussions in most of the cases from the local language, Gonja to English for purposes of recording because the researcher could not speak nor understand the local language. Through this process, it is possible that some information would have been lost by way of omissions of some relevant responses or additions of some issues which did not reflect exactly what the respondents sought to put across.

Considering the qualitative approach of the study, the small number of people contacted, the scope of the study and the selection bias, it is imperative to caution that the findings of this study cannot be used to generalize to include other groups without further research. The limitations notwithstanding, the study provides evidence from the top hierarchy of the Gonja political system and a cross section of the people on the authority of female chiefs and how the general political system is structured and organised to provide space within the scheme of things for the various actors to function as a unit to maintain the society.



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**Appendix A: Interview guide for Chiefs (male and female)**

Good morning/afternoon/evening (as the time may be). My name is Tanko Daniel Dawda, a PhD candidate from the University for Development Studies. As part of my PhD programme, I am carrying out a research under the topic “Female authority in a Patriarchal Society: the role of the Wuriche in the traditional political system of the Gonja in Ghana”. The broad objective of the research is to examine how traditional leadership roles in the political organization of the Gonja are gendered. Specifically, the study seeks to;

- i. Examine the structure and organisation of the Gonja political system along gender lines.
- ii. Analyse the current perceptions of women in traditional political arrangement among the Gonja.
- iii. Examine the role of the Wuriche in the social organisation of the Gonja.

You have been identified as a key actor in the traditional governance system in Gonja to kindly assist in providing answers to the following questions to enable me gather information for the purposes of writing-up a final research report. Your responses are sought particularly to to enable me address objectives one and two. This work is purely an academic exercise and would not be used for any other purpose without your consent. The answers you will give will be treated as confidential as possible.

Thank you.



**SECTION A: Profile of respondent**

1. Name of Community:.....
2. Religious affiliation of respondent: (a) Islam [ ] (b) Christianity [ ] (c) African Traditional Religion [ ] (d) Others (specify) .....
3. Age of respondent: (a) 20 – 35 [ ] (b) 36 – 50 (c) 51 – 64 [ ] (d) 65+ [ ]
4. Marital status of respondent: (a) Single [ ] (b) Married [ ] (c) Divorced [ ] (d) Widowed [ ]
5. Educational level of respondent: (a) None [ ] (b) Basic [ ] (c) Secondary [ ] (d) Tertiary [ ]
6. Occupation: (a) Teacher [ ] (b) Health worker [ ] (c) Farmer [ ] (d) Security Officer [ ] (e) Business [ ] (f) Other (specify).....

**SECTION B: Structure and organisation of the Gonja political System**

1. Kindly give a brief historical background about the political system of Gonja.
2. Kindly describe the hierarchical arrangement of the political system in Gonja.
3. How different is the hierarchical arrangement for male chiefs from female chiefs?
4. In the hierarchical arrangement, is the position of the female chief parallel or equal to that of the male chief?
5. Explain the conditions that qualify one to be a chief in Gonja.
6. Which clans/gates are eligible to the skin of this division?
7. Who are the kingmakers of the skin?
8. Kindly explain the arrangement of succession to a vacant skin in this division.
9. Kindly explain the processes of installation of the chief of this division.
10. Under what conditions can a chief be de-enskinned?



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11. What is the difference between the succession arrangements of men and women to traditional positions in Gonja?
12. What about the structure and organization of the traditional political system has changed over the years?

### **SECTION C: The role of the Wuriche in Gonja social organisation**

13. What are the qualities that qualify a woman to be a female Chief (Wuriche)?
14. Who nominates the female chief?
15. What are the processes for installing a female chief?
16. What are the roles and responsibilities of the Wuriche?
17. Have the roles of the Wuriche changed over the years?
18. How does the female chief carry out these roles in relation to men?
19. How is the relationship between the Wuriche (female Chief) and Ewura (male chief)?
20. Is there any collaboration between the Wuriche and formal organisations (governmental and non-governmental organisations in her line of duty)?
21. What are the challenges that confront the Wuriche as a traditional leader in her society?
22. What in your opinion can be done to help the Wuriche come out of these challenges?
23. What is your assessment of the performance of the wuriche in the social organization of Gonja?
24. Is there any other issue you would want to tell me about what we have discussed so far?



**Appendix B: Interview schedule for key informants**

Good morning/afternoon/evening (as the time may determine). My name is Tanko Daniel Dawda, a PhD candidate from the University for Development Studies. As part of my PhD programme, I am carrying out a research study under the topic “Female authority in a Patriarchal Society: the role of the Wuriche in the traditional political system of the Gonja in Ghana”. The broad objective of the research is to examine how traditional leadership roles in the political organization of the Gonja are gendered. Specifically, the study seeks to;

Examine the structure and organisation of the Gonja political system along gender lines.

Analyse the current perceptions of women in traditional political arrangement among the Gonja.

Examine the role of the Wuriche in the social organisation of the Gonja.

You have been selected as a respondent to kindly assist in providing answers to the following questions to enable me gather information for the purposes of writing-up a final research report. Your responses are particularly sought to enable me address objectives one and two which I believe you can provide the needed information. I assure you that, this work is purely for academic purposes and will not be used for any other purpose without your consent. Your responses will be treated as confidential as possible.

Thank you.



**SECTION A: Profile of the respondent**

1. Name of Community: .....
  
1. Religious affiliation of respondent: (a) Islam [ ] (b) Christianity [ ]  
(c) African Traditional Religion [ ] (d) Others (specify)  
.....
  
2. Age of respondent: (a) 20 – 35 [ ] (b) 36 – 50 (c) 51 – 64 [ ] (d)  
65+ [ ]
  
3. Marital status of respondent: (a) Single [ ] (b) Married [ ] (c)  
Divorced [ ] (d) Widowed [ ]
  
4. Educational level of respondent: (a) None [ ] (b) Basic [ ] (c)  
Secondary [ ] (d) Tertiary [ ]
  
5. Occupation: (a) Teacher [ ] (b) Health worker [ ] (c) Farmer [ ] (d)  
Security Officer [ ] (e) Business [ ] (f) Other  
(specify).....

**SECTION B: Current views on women in politics in Gonja**

6. What is the name of the female chief (Wuriche) in this community?  
.....
  
7. Kindly name some women who occupy other political positions in  
Gonjaland who are not female chiefs.  
.....  
.....  
.....
  
8. What do you think are some of the qualities that a woman should  
possess to qualify her to be a Wuriche?  
.....  
.....  
.....  
Do you think the female chiefs that you know possess these qualities  
and why?





.....  
.....  
.....

How do you think about the performance of women in formal government positions?

.....  
.....  
.....

How will you assess the performance of female chiefs in Gonja?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

9. Do you think it is relevant for women to occupy political positions and why?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



**SECTION C: The role of the Wuriche in Gonja**

10. What are some of the roles of women in Gonja social organization?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

What are the roles of the female chief in the Gonja society?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

11. Does the role of the Wuriche in the Gonja society extend to issues about males or it is only limited to women?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

12. What have been the changes over the years with regards to the roles the female chiefs play in Gonja?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

13. How would you assess the authority of the Wuriche in relation to the authority of the male chief?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

14. What challenges do women leaders in both traditional and formal government face in this area?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

15. In your view should women be encouraged to take part in active politics?

Explain Why.



.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

16. What can be done in your view to improve on the participation of women in politics in this area?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

17. What else would you like to add as far as our discussion so far is concerned?

.....  
.....  
.....

Thank you for your time. Should I need further information I will humbly come back to you.



**Appendix C: Focus group discussion guide for female Council of Elders**

Good morning/afternoon/evening (as the time may determine). My name is Tanko Daniel Dawda, a PhD candidate from the University for Development Studies. As part of my PhD programme, I am carrying out a research study under the topic “Female authority in a Patriarchal Society: the role of the Wuriche in the traditional political system of the Gonja in Ghana”. The broad objective of the research is to examine how traditional leadership roles in the political organization of the Gonja are gendered. Specifically, the study seeks to;

- iv. Examine the structure and organisation of the Gonja political system along gender lines.
- v. Analyse the current perceptions of women in traditional political arrangement among the Gonja.
- vi. Examine the role of the Wuriche in the Gonja social organisation.

You have been selected as respondents to kindly assist in providing answers to the following questions to enable me gather information for the purposes of writing-up a final research report. Your responses are particularly sought to enable me address objectives two which I believe you can provide the needed information. The work is purely for academic purposes and nothing else. However, should I want to use it for any other purpose, I would ask for your consent before doing so. Your responses will be treated as confidential as possible.

Thank you.



**The role of the Wuriche in Gonja social organisation**

1. What are the qualities that qualify a woman to be a female Chief (Wuriche)?
  1. Who nominates the female chief?
  2. What are the processes for installing a female chief?
  3. What are the roles and responsibilities of the Wuriche?
  4. Have the roles of the Wuriche changed over the years?
  5. How does the female chief carry out these roles in relation to men?
  6. How is the relationship between the Wuriche (female Chief) and Ewura (male chief)?
  7. Is there any collaboration between the Wuriche and formal organisations (governmental and non-governmental organisations) in her line of duty?
  8. What are the challenges that confront the Wuriche as a traditional leader in her society?
  9. What in your opinion can be done to help the Wuriche come out of these challenges?
  10. What is your assessment of the performance of the wuriche in the social organisation of Gonja?
  11. Is there any other issue you would want to tell me on what we have discussed so far?

Thank you for your time.



**Appendix D: Focus group discussion guide for male Council of Elders**

Good morning/afternoon/evening (as the time may determine). My name is Tanko Daniel Dawda, a PhD candidate from the University for Development Studies. As part of my PhD programme, I am carrying out a research study under the topic “Female authority in a Patriarchal Society: the role of the Wuriche in the traditional political system of the Gonja in Ghana”. The broad objective of the research is to examine how traditional leadership roles in the political organization of the Gonja are gendered. Specifically, the study seeks to;

- vii. Examine the structure and organisation of the Gonja political system along gender lines.
- viii. Analyse the current perceptions of women in traditional political arrangement among the Gonja.
- ix. Examine the role of the Wuriche in the social organisation of the Gonja.

You have been selected as respondents to kindly assist in providing answers to the following questions to enable me gather information for the purposes of writing-up a final research report. Your responses are particularly sought to enable me address objectives one which I believe you can provide the needed information. The work is purely for academic purposes and nothing else. However, should I want to use it for any other purpose, I would ask for your consent before doing so. Your responses will be treated as confidential as possible.

Thank you.



**Structure and organisation of the Gonja political System**

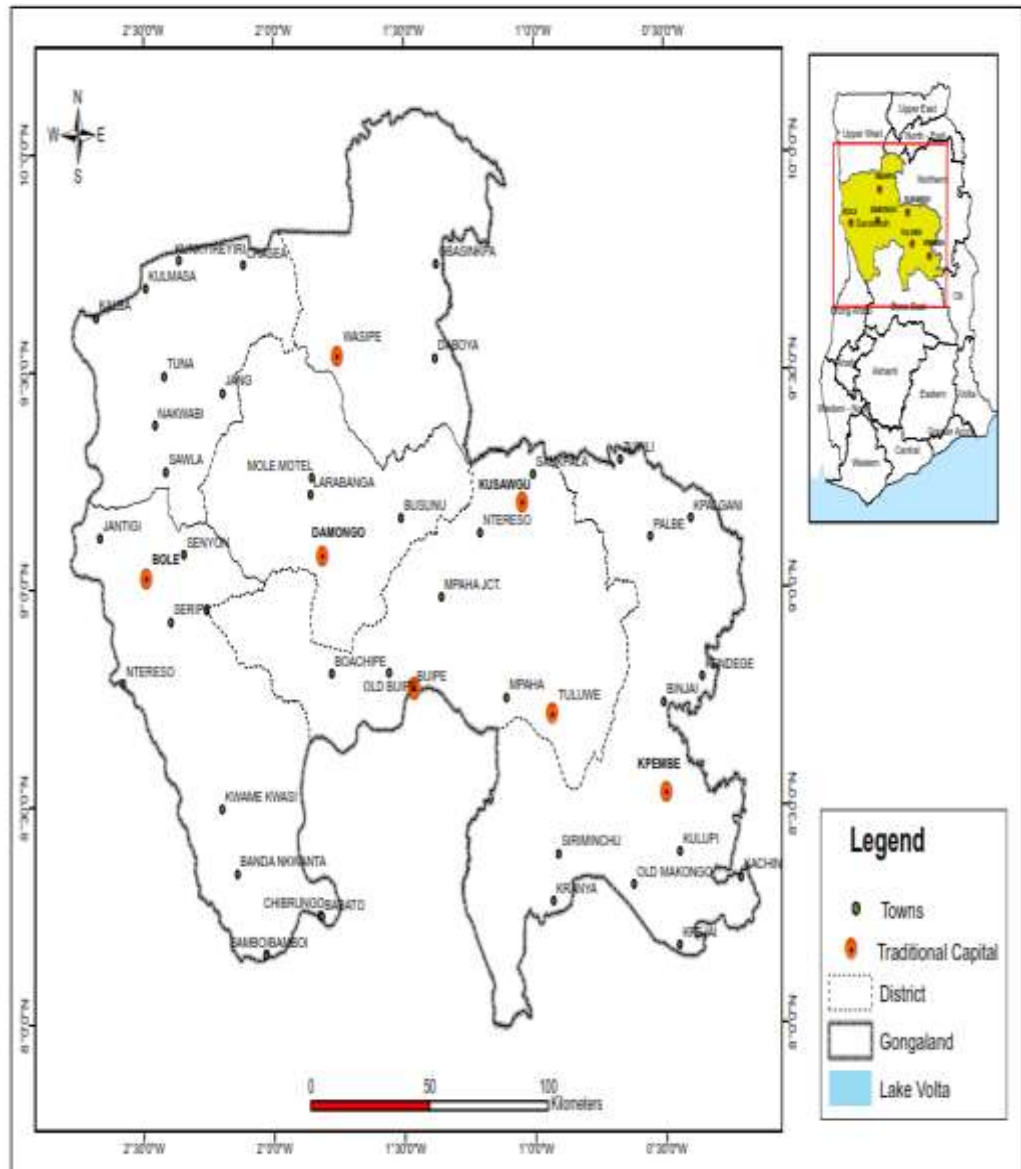
1. Kindly give a brief historical background about the political system of Gonja.

2. Kindly describe the hierarchical arrangement of the political system in Gonja.
3. How different is the hierarchical arrangement for male chiefs from female chiefs?
4. In the hierarchical arrangement, is the position of the female chief parallel or equal to that of the male chief?
5. Explain the conditions that qualify one to be a chief in Gonja.
6. Which clans/gates are eligible to the skin of each division?
7. Who are the kingmakers of the skin?
8. Kindly explain the arrangement of succession to a vacant skin in each division.
9. Kindly explain the processes of installation of the Yagbunwura.
10. Under what conditions can a chief be de-enskinned?
11. What is the difference between the succession arrangements of men and women to traditional positions in Gonja?
12. What about the structure and organisation of the traditional political system has changed over the years?

Thank you for your time.



Appendix E: Traditional map of Gonja



Source: Cartography Unit, UCC

