

**Mainstreaming or Caricaturing Gender in a democratizing
Ghana?**

The Gender “ Movement” in search of Results and Authenticity.

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Abstract

In a democratizing Ghana gender issues have moved from the periphery to arguably a difficult to ignore position on the public agenda. Policymakers ignore matters involving gender at their own peril. Politicians must at worst feign sensitivity to gender issues or risk losing vital votes.

This paper will attempt to discursively offer an explanation of why gender has become a buzz word in Ghana's policy space in the last three decades and substantively remained just that. Gender mainstreaming has been the arrowhead of attempts to make national policy sensitive and responsive to gender issues. The paper will argue that the gender mainstreaming approach while useful may have undermined the broader task of extracting significant policy gains by becoming an end itself instead of a means to a multiplicity of ends. Linked to this is whether or not an authentic, home grown, ideationally astute and sophisticated gender movement has emerged over time. The claim will be canvassed that without such a movement gender issues ran the risk of being caricatured (used as a convenient foil for partisan political interests) and losing the policy value and urgency required in a democratizing Ghana facing a myriad of social challenges.

The paper will argue that if gender advocates in Ghana are not to be content and saddled with pyrrhic policy victories new paradigms of thinking and action will have to be crafted and quickly.

1. Introduction

In contemporary times gender² issues³ have assumed an overwhelming global significance in academia, the policy arena and the media. In the developing South women's groups are increasingly exerting considerable pressure on policy makers to address the existential challenges women face in society. In Africa the stirrings of women for equity in the workplace and the home has found a place on the public agenda.

The role of women in African society has a long history⁴ enmeshed and intertwined with the cosmogony, epistemology, ontology and indeed culture of the African people (Wiredu, 1996). We will not be detained in this work by going into the specifics of this history but wish to draw attention to the fact that the pithy sayings, proverbs, oral accounts and documented history among other sources provide evidence that African societies grappled and responded to the problematic of the role of women in society. In the post independence African state women issues acquired a certain primacy and urgency within the ambit of a modernizing nationalism that considered women a veritable force for the modernization⁵ project embarked upon by nationalist leaders of various hues and persuasions. The democracy wave which swept Africa in the last two decades of the twentieth century (Huntington, 1991) seemed to have created the civic and political space for the articulation and pursuit of women's interests. It is within this time frame that we set our attempt to discursively interrogate the policy successes and failures of Ghana's women's "movement" and to argue for a paradigmatic and organizational re-

² We follow Nanda (2000) in understanding gender as "the social, cultural and psychological constructions that are imposed upon biological differences of sex."

³ Gender issues will be used interchangeably with feminism throughout this work and to encapsulate children's welfare as well.

⁴ Nefertiti's influence in Pharaonic Egypt of classical antiquity is a case in point.

⁵ Scott (1996) provides a bruising critique of modernization as a development paradigm exposing the masculinities that underlie its organizing framework.

orientation if an authentic Ghanaian women's movement is to emerge to pursue and attain far-reaching policy outcomes for women and children.

2. A Democratizing Ghana and the Gender Problematic

To engage productively the gender problematic in a democratizing Ghana it is important to trace the historical evolution⁶ of the quest for women's emancipation in the rich Western industrialized nations in the twentieth century. The value of this analytical manoeuvre is to contextualize and interpellate the influences that have conditioned and constrained the ideational orientation, organizational patterns and policy techniques of Ghana's women's "movement."

The Suffragette Movement immediately comes to mind. The motivating force for this movement in Britain was the pursuit of the right to vote for women which was eventually won in 1918. It must be stated that the organizational and mobilizational impetus and inspiration for this movement had been laid in the nineteenth century with the holding of the first North American women's rights convention on the 19-20 July 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. This convention is considered in the gender studies literature as essentially the founding act of the women's movement in America. This phase must be seen as being characterized in the main by a rights based approach to women's emancipation and reflecting essentially a response to the socio-economic, political and cultural condition of women in Western society. The civil rights movement in 1960s America and the emergence of student radicalism in Europe formed the context within which the women's movement in the West began to display in addition to its rights advocacy role a strident focus concerned with achieving a more radical programme of social change(Molyneaux, 2006:738), suffused with reformist and revolutionary currents(Molyneaux, 2006:738).

⁶ Here the focus will be on what we consider in our view the defining moments/phases of such a history. This section draws liberally from Molyneaux(2006).

It is worth noting that while in this second phase the American women's movement continued to focus on far reaching legal and political gains for women their European counterparts directed their attention to self-help initiatives within an anti-elitist and decentralized associational form (Molyneaux, 2006:739).

In mitigation of conveying a sense of irredeemable differences in approach between these two groups Molyneaux(2006:739) avers that

both varieties.....shared a *common perspective on some issues and certain goals....(italics mine⁷)*.

By virtue of their advantaged position in the global power structure, by the 1970s the ideational orientation and policy techniques, broadly speaking, of the Western women's movement had began to find expression in policy formation at the global level. The launching of the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women in 1975 in Mexico and with it the various conferences on women⁸ held under the auspices of the UN underpins our view. This process seemed to have coincided with a democratizing tendency that swept the world and symbolically marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

In Africa this turn to democratic governance was promoted in the main by the leading Western nations⁹ and the international financial institutions¹⁰. In Ghana the democratisation process had

⁷ At the risk of being accused of essentialism and cultural determinism we argue that such commonality in purposes and ideas will tend to reflect the concrete socio-economic and politico-cultural realities faced by women in these rich, industrialised Western societies.

⁸ Notably the Fourth UN sponsored international conference on women held in Beijing which has come to signify an ideational and policy reference point for women in the global South including Africa.

⁹ The Ghanaian scholar Kwame Bofo-Arthur (1998) argues that Ghana's multilateral and bilateral partners leveraged her dependence on them financially and otherwise to bring about democratic reforms.

¹⁰ Here the role of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund(IMF) is well documented. See Amoah(2005).

began with the inauguration in early 1989 of one hundred and ten district and municipal assemblies whose members had been elected for the first time in almost a decade. The adoption of the 1992 constitution via a national referendum in April, 1992; the lifting of the ban on party political activity a month later and the holding of the general parliamentary and presidential elections in November 1992(after a thirteen year interregnum) reflected Ghana's deepening democratic process. The 1992 constitution reflects its libertarian spirit in guaranteeing fundamental freedoms (Article 21). Also notable in this constitution is the protection of some of the rights of women (Article 27) and children (Article 28). In other words a democratizing Ghana offered the civic, political and legal space within which to articulate and pursue gender issues. The key question to ask at this juncture is whether it can be argued that this policy space was usurped by external ideas, organizational and policy approaches which undermined the possibilities that Ghanaian woman could have realised? We turn to a discourse on the gender mainstreaming turn in gender policy formation to unpack where we stand.

3. The Mainstreaming Turn

Scott (1995: 1973) reports that in the WB's 1981 report entitled "*Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action*," "women are mentioned approximately three times." By its 1989 study, "*Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crises to Sustainable Growth*," the WB mentions women "no less twenty-five times (Scott: 74)." Pointedly reflected in this instance is the nascent response of a major international financial institution to the mainstreaming turn in gender policy formation. Arguably tracing the genealogy of gender mainstreaming (GM)¹¹ is a messy enterprise. But it needs no emphasizing that the 4th World Conference on Women (held in Beijing in 1995) internationalized GM as a policy tool/strategy and via a bottom-down approach expressed in the projects, programmes and policies of international development agencies¹² inscribed its imprimatur on the policy formation of a developing polity like Ghana. In the last decade public discourse on gender issues by the Ghanaian elite has been suffused with references to GM. The former minister for Ghana's Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs (MOWAC), Hajia Alima Mahama tended to consistently make references to GM in her public pronouncements. Indeed at her vetting¹³ by the Appointments Committee of Parliament of Ghana in January, 2005, she consistently made references to GM in her responses to queries. The Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (II) (2006-2009) which is the key policy document on Ghana's development priorities reflects the imprint of GM on Ghana's gender

¹¹ Eveline et al (2009:200) describe GM as "the process of vetting policy for its gender impact," and further assert following Benschop and Verloo(2006) that "GM seeks to guarantee that every part of an organization or national policy machinery assumes responsibility for ensuring that policies impact evenly on men and women."

¹² Scott (1996) underlines this position when she argues that the World Bank and other institutions through their relations with developing polities effectively establish "universal law" via the international policy framework with the establishment of development targets. The World Bank under James Wolfensohn attempted to cure the the top-down tendency in its policy formation by introducing what it labelled the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS).

¹³ <http://www.ghanaweb.com/newsarchive/artikel.php?ID=78049>. Accessed on the 1st March,2010.

policy formation. Indeed the National Development Planning Commission (the lead agency in the drawing up of the document) in its public consultation process held a Gender Mainstreaming Stakeholder Workshop in February 2005(Government of Ghana, 2005:13). The GPRS II document underscores subtly and unwittingly the linkages between the emergence of GM as a gender policy tool/ strategy and the international gender policy environment when it asserts that

Ghana is yet to attain the standards set by the international community as far as incorporating gender considerations into governance policies and programmes are concerned(Government of Ghana,2005:60).

It can be argued that a democratizing Ghana has experienced a shift from broad sensitivity to gender issues in the 1990s to an attempt to embed and envelop these in national policy formation through GM post 2005¹⁴. The emergence of GM lately is not the only reflection of the influence of the international political-economy of North-South power relations on gender thinking and action in Ghana. The employment of terms like “empowerment,” the focus on micro-finance schemes for women, the proliferation of all manner of women’s advocacy groups speak to a generalized, en-masse and worryingly pervasive adoption(without adaptation?) of the ideas, organizational patterns and policy techniques from the international arena. On this gender theoreticians like hooks (1984) and Spelman(1988) have drawn attention to the issues of the voice of women of colour in the gender world against the backdrop of the essentialization and universalization of the realities of white, college-educated, middle class women. Scott (1996) on her part exposes the masculinities that underline the notions of development promoted by institutions like the WB and calls into the question the in-grafting of gender issues within this framework. In the light of the issues raised we pose some questions:

¹⁴ The 2007 Budget (2007:253) makes reference to GM in its section on MOWAC.

- i. has Ghana's gender "movement" reached a dead end?
- ii. is this dead end inescapable?
- iii. what can be done?
- iv. Are there viable options?

4. 4.0 Pyrrhic Victories and Caricaturing?

Broadly speaking Ghana's gender "movement" has chalked some successes. The reform of the Marriage Ordinance Law (1951) relating to intestate succession led to the promulgation of Intestate Succession Law (PNDCL 111) in 1985. This law ensured that the spouses and children of men who died intestate would have a right to the property of the man (regardless of mediating factors such as the state/nature of the marriage/union, cultural norms and practices). This law was a major piece of legislation that provided the needed fillip for women's groups in the democratic era. In 2007 the Domestic Violence Bill was passed into law. The Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service has become engaged and active in dealing with all forms of violence against Ghanaian women. Ghana now has a Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs. Negative cultural practices¹⁵ inimical to the welfare of the Ghanaian women such as the *Trokosi* system and female genital mutilation have become matters of public policy and discourse. In contemporary Ghana no policymaker can argue against the need to provide more opportunities for the education of the girl-child. In spite of these successes, catalyzed in part by the civic space forged by the democratic process in Ghana, weighty, life and death matters affecting and afflicting women and children still remain. We will term these the Everyday Living Realities Question (ELRQ). The ELRQ refers to the daily, lived, real socio-economic¹⁶ challenges that women face in Ghana. The persistence of the ELRQ in our humble view underlines the reality that policy and advocacy action by Ghana's gender "movement" has not attained far-reaching, transformational and radical

¹⁵ The normative value of these cultural practises is a deeply contested matter and far from settled.

¹⁶ We focus on the socio-economic (in a first principles manner) because in our view these are fundamental and indeed when adequately responded to will impact on the politico-cultural dimension. We acknowledge that such a separation is indeed at best a convenient analytic manoeuvre.

outcomes which the gender question requires. The Ghana Maternal Health Survey ¹⁷ 2007 indicated that the maternal mortality ratio remains shockingly high at 451 per 100,000 live births and this

“despite *heightened* efforts to reduce maternal deaths in Ghana over the last decade..... (Yeboah , 2010:11)

This year the media¹⁸ has brought home the almost total neglect and abandonment of maternity facilities in major hospitals in Ghana. At the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital women after Caesarian Sections had to climb a couple of floors to breast feed their premature babies because the lifts simply were broken and the authorities scarcely lifted a finger. Ditto the Effienkwanta Hospital which in exasperation allowed sick, weak women to be carried up the maternity section’s flight of stairs(in make-shift stretchers) for a fee of 10Ghana cedis!!! In obvious desperation the Ghana Health Service signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2005¹⁹ with the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) to transport women at the point of labour in the Cape Coast Municipality. Taxi cabs and *tro-tros* transporting our women in labour? Where are the ambulances? How much do sanitary pads cost? The sanitary pads on the market have recently been assailed for quality problems with health implications²⁰. Shoes for children sometimes cost more than that for adults. There are virtually no play grounds for children even in Accra let alone the other regions. The Efuia Sutherland (she did her part for Ghana) is an apology of a playground; virtually always under lock and key Women take their babies to town in Ghana and there are no baby friendly washrooms where the baby’s diaper (if these babies are “privileged” to have one on) can be changed. Pregnant women have to board the rickety, uncomfortable, death trap contraptions passing off as public transport across

¹⁷ The facts on maternal health are drawn liberally from Yeboah(2010).

¹⁸ TV3 prime time newscast.

¹⁹ Asiedu-Addo(2010).

²⁰ Quaicoe-Duho(2010).

Ghana. These are just but a sample of some of the issues under the ELRQ which on account of bearing directly on the existential realities of women and children in Ghana call into question the successes attained on the gender front. These are weighty and pressing policy matters which call for a re-examination of the ideational orientation, policy techniques and organizational forms of Ghana's gender "movement".

5. Towards a Paradigmatic Turn

In the gender policy literature GM is a highly contested concept. While some scholars argue that GM has a transformative potential ((Rees, 1998; Verloo, 2005; Walby, 2005), others argue that it cannot be relied upon to deliver the expected system wide policy outcomes. A key issue which Evaline et al(2009) highlight in this regard

are the broader questions of the philosophical underpinnings(2009:200)

of the analytical categories employed and promoted by GM. We ask: do the dominant philosophical²¹ undergirdings of GM as practised in Ghana sit fairly well with the Ghanaian context in particular and the African one in general? Or are such pertinent theoretical considerations that would inevitably impact on the goals, procedures and strategies of GM simply taken as given or wished away? The notion of gender itself and how it is conceptualized is a critical matter for gender policy formation in Ghana. Our view here is that ideational independence is a crucial step in the emergence of an authentic gender movement in Ghana. A gender movement without ideational independence is hamstrung and can scarcely respond robustly to the existential challenges that the Ghanaian woman and child confront daily. By ideational independence I seek to call for a critical reflex in the global South which approaches theories, ideas and concepts from the global North as potentially hegemonizing(on account of power assymetries) and therefore fair game for deconstruction, re-reading and contestation. These ideas CANNOT be taken as a given; the " truth ". Ideational independence

²¹ These need to be teased out and interrogated. From a Western perspective Evaline and Bacchi(2005) point to one such typical philosophical posture as a “ tendency in GM to portray gender as fixed oppositional categories of ‘men’ and‘women’, a theoretical stance that they see as denying the complex ways in which power and privilege circulate in specific social contexts(Evaline et al,2009:201).”

will be crucial in dealing with the real and present danger that GM will be implemented as a one-off project (Eveline et al, 2009:201),

rather than recognizing that the process must necessarily be sustained for as long as policy making endures((Eveline and Bacchi, 2005:503).

The challenge then is if and how GM can respond to the ELRQ and the imperative search for novel policy techniques beyond (in addition to?) GM to deal with the ELRQ. Such a search for innovative policy techniques must be coupled with other society wide actions.

Such society wide actions in our view cannot be effectively driven by the current organizational forms characterizing Ghana's gender terrain. The leading women's groups tend to be small, non-governmental organizations registered as limited by guarantee entities based in Accra and headed by highly media visible personalities. While such organizational forms have relevance in terms of providing the context for some targeted advocacy work their actual mobilizational reach countrywide maybe limited. An authentic Ghana gender movement will require in addition to such organizational forms a grassroots approach which can mobilize Ghanaian men and women as and when necessary in support of a given gender issue. The gravity of the gender challenge makes such grassroots based formations imperative to exert maximum pressure on the politicians and policymakers. The absence of such grassroots formations is in our view one of the reasons why politicians in Ghana have not treated gender issues as hot button ones and the caricaturing of gender advocacy by these self same politicians as an exercise in sabre rattling led by teary eyed, suppliant, emotional, aggressive, chip on the shoulder women. The Kufuor Administration set up the MOWAC and appointed its first minister an obviously tired Gladys Asmah. She was subsequently replaced by Hajia Alima Mahama who barely managed to get into her motions at the ministry. The Mills Administration has already changed the minister it first appointed to the MOWAC, Sena Dansua . In his first

press encounter in 2010 the President Mills suggested obliquely that gender issues were not top priority in response to a question by a female journalist about sexual assault on young girls. The two main political parties in Ghana, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) are simply engaged in “tokenism” when it comes to gender issues. Both have appointed²² women to top positions in the Republic hitherto unoccupied by women to demonstrate their gender credentials in order to grab the women vote while dancing around substantive gender policy issues. In our view a highly mobilized, highly engaged grass roots based women’s movement can be counted on to respond adequately to this “tokenism” game by Ghana’s politicians. This will require in our view a de-elitization of the leadership of the Ghana gender movement in terms of its personnel and dominant values. A creative way ought to be found to bring more actively and conspicuously the experiences, realities and world view of the rural woman to the gender table on her own terms and for her to represent herself as well. The logic of numbers dictates so and natural justice too.

In our view an authentic Ghana gender movement needs to emerge and quickly in the early years of this century. A paradigmatic shift in terms of ideas, organizational forms and policy techniques is required. We do not have all the answers but have herein expressed some of our sentiments. Let the debate rage !!!!

²² The NPP appointed Ghana’s first female chief justice; the NDC responded with the appointment of Ghana’s first female speaker of parliament and attorney-general .

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