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## GENDER IDEOLOGY AND MANOEUVRING SPACE FOR FEMALE FISHERIES ENTREPRENEURS

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### Abstract

Local gender ideologies vary considerably in fishing communities along the coast of Ghana. This article compares the extent to which women convert capital from the female market sphere into ownership of fishing equipment in the male fishing sphere in three ethnically diverse communities – Moree (Fante), Kpone (Ga-Adangbe) and Dzelukope (Anlo-Ewe). Kinship ideologies, post-marital residence patterns, and gender division of labour and roles in the local fishing economies shape women's place-specific manoeuvring spaces. It is argued that a loyal and trustworthy male cooperation partner is a prerequisite for the success of female entrepreneurs in a male arena like the fisheries.

### Résumé

Les idéologies liées au genre parmi les ruraux varient considérablement dans les communautés de pêcheurs le long de la côte du Ghana. Cette communication étudie auprès de trois communautés ethniques différentes- Moree (Fante), Kpone (Ga-Adangbe) et de Dzelukope (Anlo-Ewe) le degré de conversion du capital que les femmes tirent des ventes au marché en bien d'équipements de pêche dans un domaine dominé par les hommes. Les idéologies de parenté, lieux de résidence après le mariage, la division du travail et la répartition des rôles en fonction du genre dans les économies locales de pêche, déterminent le statut et l'espace de manoeuvre réservé aux femme dans la société. L'argument soutenu est qu'un partenaire fidèle, crédible et coopératif, est une condition préalable pour le succès des femmes entrepreneurs dans un domaine des hommes tel que la pêche.

### Introduction

Though situated within the same nation state, local gender ideologies vary considerably in communities along the coast of Ghana. Livelihood strategies and life-styles among the Fante in Moree, the Ga-Adangme in Kpone and the Anlo-Ewe in Dzelukope are similar and typical of fishing communities (see Map 1). Socially and culturally, however, there are notable differences in terms of language, kinship systems, marriage practices and the socio-economic organisation of production systems in these three places. Ideas about how women ought to behave thus also vary. Based on extensive fieldwork in Moree, Kpone, and Dzelukope in 1991, 1994 and 1995 (see Overå 1992 and 1998), I will compare inter-community differences in the extent to which women turn capital accumulated in the female dominated fish market into ownership positions in the male dominated fisheries. (The underlying idea is that local gender ideologies shape women's economic opportunities, and that the extent of male co-operation determines the "size" of female entrepreneurs' manoeuvring space within the male fishery sphere.)

In Ghana, fish processing and fish trade in the artisanal fishing sector are entirely in the hands of women. Many of them earn substantial amounts of money by smoking fish that they transport to the large inland market places (see Map 2). Successful fish traders invest in houses for their children and relatives, whereby they enhance their social position as well as their economic

position: Through recruitment of family labour the potential for expansion in fish processing and trade increases. Some of these "matrons" have become canoe owners themselves, securing their fish supply by hiring men to fish for them. By investing in canoes, outboard motors and new types of nets, and by hiring and managing male crews, these women transcend gender norms in the fisheries.

This type of female entrepreneurship "took off" when the outboard motor was introduced in the artisanal fisheries in Ghana from the 1960s onwards. When it became clear how much fish a motorised canoe could produce, outboard motors became an investment object for a large number of fish traders. As a result, the canoe fishery became more capital intensive, and the fish traders' importance as creditors became even more pronounced. For the most successful trader-creditors, the step towards canoe ownership was thus an obvious one. By integrating fish production and marketing, they could ensure their fish supply and increase their profit potential. Not only did female investors' entry into the fisheries benefit these women's personal careers: a process of technological innovation took place on a large scale, and led to an increase in production in the sector as a whole. Hence, the degree of motorisation of the Ghanaian canoe fleet increased from zero in the late 1950s to 20-25 % in 1970 and to 57 % in 1990, and consequently the annual fish landings increased from 20,000 tonnes in 1960 to 300,000 tonnes in 1990 (Lawson and Kwei 1974; Vercrujssse 1984; Hernæs 1991).

The degree to which women "crossed over" from being large-scale fish traders who extended credit to fishermen (receiving fish as repayment of the loan), to actually buying equipment and running fishing companies themselves, varied from place to place. Whereas Fante women became famous for their powerful role as investors and owners (Christensen 1977; Vercrujssse 1983), Anlo-Ewe women only rarely became owners of canoes and beach seines, and among the Ga-Adangme, it was mostly women in urban areas like Accra and Tema who became canoe owners. So, why do not women in Moree seem to meet the same barriers against canoe ownership as women in Kpone and Dzelukope? Factors such as localisation in relation to urban markets and fishing grounds, infrastructure, type of fishing technology, and so on, certainly account for some of the regional variation in female entrepreneurship in the fisheries, but in my view differences in gender ideology are the key explanatory factor. In order to gain a better understanding of local differences in gender ideology, each of the three places is analysed as what Doreen Massey (1994:5) calls a "mix" of power relations stretching out in space: between the members of a household, in the market place, on the beach, to seasonal fishery migration destinations, and in local and national institutions. The combination of one's social statuses such as gender, age, ethnicity and occupation defines a person's social position. Depending on his or her position in a constantly shifting "power geometry" (Massey 1994), each person thus has different access to resources.

I will show how women's access to resources in different fishing communities varies, and how the dominant or mainstream gender ideology in each place to varying degrees open up for women's investment of capital and positions of power and influence within the fisheries. The aim of this exercise is to develop a gendered and contextual entrepreneur approach that illuminates the relationship between women's economic opportunities and the socio-cultural context in which they live their lives. An entrepreneur model based upon the quite outstanding case of Ghanaian "fish mummies" could be a useful tool in improving our understanding of why and how women and men's entrepreneurial potentials vary according to the gender ideologies of particular contexts, historical eras, cultures, situations and places.

## Male and Female

In Ghanaian fishing communities, it is taken for granted that men fish and women trade: fishing and fish marketing are separate male and female spheres. Husbands and wives also keep their incomes from these activities separately. Production and distribution of fish can thus be regarded as a gendered exchange system: men provide fish for women's cooking pots, in which they transform fish into food – or money – with which children are provided for. Without the female pot and the market it would be meaningless for a man to fish. Symbolically, this complementarity can be seen in the light of men's role as provider of semen for women's wombs: she nurtures his seed and ensures the continuity of the generations. Logically, male cannot exist without female and female cannot exist without male. Gender complementarity (not necessarily implying equality) ensures continuity and welfare for the lineage and for society as a whole, and is a value system on which many West African societies are founded. Drewal analysed female and male among the Yoruba in Nigeria as "the container" and "the contained" (Drewal 1992:180): men are "contained" in women during sexual intercourse and women "contain" their children during pregnancy. Moran (1990) talks about complementary dual-sex political status systems in Liberia, and Kalu (1996) recognises this way of thinking in many African myths, which she calls a gender duality discourse.

Analysing the gendered division of labour – men providing fish for women's pot – in Ghanaian coastal communities as a duality discourse makes sense: the fishery at sea is a male domain, the market ashore is female. According to this gender duality people in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope define separate, parallel (and ideally complementary) male and female hierarchies. For example, this way of thinking is manifested in the Akan authority system with a male leader, the *ohene*, and a female leader, the *ohemma*, at all levels of governance from the lineage to the state. The power balance between the female and the male hierarchies is, however, often asymmetric: while male leaders usually exercise their authority in society as a whole, the authority of female leaders seldom extends beyond women's domains.

The gender duality discourse will here be used as a backdrop against which the construction of gender ideologies in the three local contexts will be analysed. The dual gender model is also useful in analysis of changes in the social construction of gender. What happens, for instance, in the local discourse on masculinity and femininity when actors at the summit of the female hierarchy (whose main arena is the fish market) achieve powerful positions in the male fishery arena? I will return to such issues, but before we take a closer look at life in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope, let me connect the concepts of gender and entrepreneurship to social practice and agency: woman, man or entrepreneur is not something one simply "is" or has "become", it is also something one "does".

## Gender as Performance

All societies have norms that are highly valued, and which it "pays" to follow. Clifford Geertz (1973) called such values models for good behaviour. Connecting models for good behaviour to gender, Linda McDowell (1997) says that gender ideologies are mainstream assumptions about gender-appropriate behaviour in a given context. Gender is thus a performance. Ideas about good and bad ways of being a woman or a man – the way in which one's role ought to be acted – vary from place to place, between cultures and social strata. If we connect the performative aspect of gender to Massey's power geometry, it is clear that one can (and must) be a woman or a man in different ways depending on where one is positioned in relation to others in a context. Our way of being a woman or a man may also change if we change our location in the local power geometry, or if we move into a different context. Concepts such as positionality and gender as performance are thus useful in understanding the different articulations of gender relations in different places, and thus how manoeuvring spaces are constructed for differently positioned individuals.

The social construction of masculinity in fishing and of femininity in the market is central in the perception of what good behaviour for men and women in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope ought to be. As in fishing communities in Ghana in general, a man would almost be looked upon as

feminine if he engaged himself in fish trade. As Nukunya (1969: 155) commented on the attitude of Anlo-Ewe men towards fish trade: "No man, not even a bachelor, would do any of these things." A male fish trader would simply not be a "proper man". He would not fulfil his role as provider of fish for women's pots and markets – society's source of life, welfare, and future wealth. Interestingly, Irene Odotei describes a male fish buyer who, in co-operation with a female fish buyer, sells fish in Accra: "He is unique and mixes well with the women. He behaves like them" (Odotei 1991: 213). As long as this man behaves according to the rules of the female market domain and is a good business partner, his behaviour among the female traders appears to be acceptable in the urban context. Nevertheless, men in Moree, Kpone, Dzeiukope, or in other fishing communities, do not regard fish processing and trade as admirable male behaviour.

How, then, are women who enter the male domain of fishing regarded? Many of the female traders who invest in canoes, motors and nets, do not solely do this indirectly through credit, physically distanced from the rough tone among fishermen on the beach: they are both owners and managers of their male crews. They manage the economy and organisation of the fishing company, negotiate the sharing of the catch and the payment of the crew. Some female canoe owners complain about the mannish behaviour they feel is required of them when they enter leadership roles in the fisheries. Men often perceive women who enter such roles as (literally) out of place, and female canoe owners must therefore find ways of behaving that the fishermen can accept within the male power arena. Odotei (1991) describes how women achieve this by combining an often tough and aggressive role of leadership – which includes shouting and rough talk to the extent that their voices change towards a more masculine tone – with more feminine strategies like giving the men good food for the fishing trip or nice clothes for the annual festival, through flattering and cajoling, and by showing a "motherly" concern towards crew members and their families.

To sum up ideas about gender-correct behaviour structure, the manner in which women and men perform economic activities and their choice of occupation, women or men transcending traditional gender barriers must often find new ways of performing their gender.

### Entrepreneurship

Fredrik Barth was one of the first to view entrepreneurship as an aspect of a role, rather than primarily as a quality of particularly clever persons or "economic men". Entrepreneurship is thus associated with agency, strategies and modes of behaviour – with the performance of one's role(s). Barth defines entrepreneurship as the ability to convert value from one sphere of exchange to another. Spheres of exchange are "discrete spheres of the economy, with unity within and barriers between, in which goods and services can circulate freely" (Barth 1963: 10). The idea is that certain types of value can circulate freely within each sphere, but not between them.

The entrepreneur finds channels of conversion through the barriers between the spheres, with the goal of accumulating profit. Importantly, the profit is not necessarily of an economic nature: social respect and prestige are also important measures of success and creation of value. This is what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) calls symbolic capital. An important point is that symbolic capital can be stored. One's "capital stock" can also be combined with other types of capital, and symbolic capital can be transformed into economic capital and vice versa. By finding new ways of converting capital from one sphere to another (as from market to fish production), or by finding new ways of combining different forms of capital (as by combining feminine and masculine strategies in leader strategies), the entrepreneur can enter new niches – or utilise old niches in new ways – in such a manner that the accumulated different capital types mutually stimulate one another. Hence, the entrepreneur changes her economic and social position, or her location in the local (and sometimes also the regional or national) power geometry.

Ghanaian women's conversion of capital accumulated in the fish market into ownership of canoes is true entrepreneurship in this perspective. As we shall see, relations to men by marriage or kinship are important channels of conversion for fish traders who aim at entering the fishery. One may even characterise women's strategies as "female" entrepreneurship. This does not mean that men who invent new fishing techniques or find new ways of accumulating capital in the fisheries

(within the male sphere), or that women who find new markets for fish (within the female sphere), are not innovators within their domains. However, a woman who expands and climbs in the female market hierarchy risks far less, both socially and economically, than if she invests in a male domain. As Green and Cohen (1995) point out, when women take up leadership positions in a male dominated area, this may in itself be seen as an entrepreneurial activity, even if the activity itself is not new or innovative in other ways. The financial or physical risk is not necessarily the greatest challenge for a woman compared with other types of risk – personal and psychological – which they often see as much more difficult. Correspondingly, a male entrepreneur who invests his capital, time and effort in fishing, risks less economically – and certainly socially – than if he were to become a fish trader in the female domain.

In the following section I will examine how entrepreneurial women in the Ghanaian canoe fisheries find channels of conversion through gender barriers, and how this led to technological innovation and increased fish production. Thereafter, the different degree to which local gender ideologies in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope open up for female entrepreneurship in a male sphere is compared and analysed.

### Fishing and Trading

Roughly 8,500 canoes employ 91,000 fishermen in Ghana, in addition to 1.5 million people who either make a living in processing and distribution of fish, or are dependants of fishermen and fish traders (Koranteng et al. 1993). In addition there are an estimated number of 2,000 Ghanaian canoes in other West African countries (Haakonsen and Diaw 1991). Ghanaian migrants' fishing is of great importance for the fish supply in their host countries, and their remittances and investments are vital for the welfare of their home communities in Ghana (Overå 2001). The largest canoes are 60-70 feet in length and have a crew of 20-30 men.

While the average level of motorisation of canoes in Ghana in 1995 was 58.7% (Quaatey et al. 1997), 88 % of canoes in Moree, 55 % in Kpone, and 18 % of canoes in Dzelukope had outboards motors (Overå 1998). The low degree of motorisation in Dzelukope compared with Moree and Kpone largely reflects differences in fishing techniques. In Moree and Kpone, fishing with purse seine (*watsa*) and drift net (*ali*), as well as deep sea line fishing in Kpone, that require outboard motors on large canoes that can go far and move quickly, whereas fishing with a large beach seine (*yevudor*), which is set in a circle from the beach and dragged ashore by man-power, is the main method in Dzelukope. It is, however, notable that whereas women own 25 % of the canoes in Moree, only a few unmotorised canoes in Kpone, and none in Dzelukope, are owned by women. This could indicate that the financial capacity and involvement in the fisheries by female fish traders is significant for the level of motorisation in these communities.

The adaptation of new technology from the 1960s onwards led to innovation and an increased production of the most important source of protein in Ghana: smoked, dried and salted fish. As mentioned, large-scale fish traders were the most important source of finance behind these new investments. They had a commercial interest in extending credit for new equipment. This enabled the fishermen to supply the traders with larger quantities of fish for their processing and distribution enterprises. Where banks either failed to give credit to fishermen for new equipment at all, or failed to retrieve payments of debts, the institutionalised exchange relationship between fishermen and traders was adapted to a more capital intensive mode of production in which large sums of credit and debts were in circulation. The fishermen repaid their debt to the trader in the form of fish, and therefore the trader was flexible and could – and had to – wait until her debtors caught fish.

To a greater extent than in the case of banks, the credit relationship between fishermen and traders was both of an economic and a social nature. The trader reduced the risk of losing money through her intimate knowledge about her debtors' personal character, social relations, his lineage and extended family, marriage, and other social and economic assets. Likewise, symbolic capital like parental authority, lineage loyalty, sexual attraction, religious influence, friendship and trust,

could be activated in the relationship between creditors and debtors in a way never possible for a bank.

With the motorisation of the canoe fisheries, the economic ties between the fishermen and the trader-creditor, and the dependence of the former upon the latter, became much more pronounced. This was a shift of power: the fish traders who previously had been dependent upon receiving fish on credit, experienced that the fishermen came to depend on them for credit to participate in the motorised fishery. Some scholars viewed this power shift in a Marxist perspective. Emile Vereruijsse (1984), for example, analysed the process as an evolving class division resulting from the exploitation by capitalist merchants, as he called the fish traders, of the fisherman labourers. What an analysis based entirely on a Western perspective missed out, however, is that the "exploiters" to a large extent are the mothers, aunts, wives, sisters or neighbours of the "exploited". In Ghanaian fishing communities where economic and social relations are closely intertwined and institutionalised through kinship and marriage, the power relationship between creditor and debtor, as we shall see, is better understood in a locally anchored and gendered perspective.

In the following I will therefore examine the embeddedness of marriage and kinship in the fishing economies of Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope. It will appear that regional variation in the social organisation of the economy greatly impacts upon the degree to which women are able to become owners of the means of production, managers and employers of men in the fisheries.

**Table 1:**  
**Regional variation in some of the variables that constitute three gendered contexts**

| <i>Place</i>     | <i>Ethnic group</i> | <i>Kinship ideology</i> | <i>Residence pattern</i> | <i>Fishing technology</i>     | <i>Motorisation</i> | <i>Female ownership</i>            |
|------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Moree</i>     | Fante               | Matrilineal             | Duo-local                | Purse seine, drift nets etc.  | 88%                 | 25% of canoes, motors and nets     |
| <i>Kpone</i>     | Ga-Adangme          | Patrilineal             | Duo-local                | Purse seine, drift nets, line | 55%                 | Some un-motorised canoes, some net |
| <i>Dzelukope</i> | Anlo-Ewe            | Patrilineal             | Viri/patri-local         | Beach seine                   | 18%                 | None                               |

The table displays differences in kinship ideology, post-marital residence patterns, fishing technology, degree of motorisation and female ownership of fishing gear. This overview is a rough presentation of the variables that will be compared, and is merely meant as a "map" to guide the reader in the comparative analysis of three complex contexts.

### **Kinship Ideology**

In the matrilineal kinship system in Moree, lineage membership and inheritance of lineage property descend through the maternal line, whereas Kpone and Dzelukope have patrilineal kinship systems with lineage membership and inheritance descending through the paternal line. Kinship systems involve culture-specific ideas about the procreation and attachment or possession of children. Terms such as structure or system are easily associated with stasis rather than with dynamic change through social practice. The term kinship ideology may thus be more appropriate. But even if kinship ideologies often are flexible and are negotiated in daily life, customs and ideas about inheritance through the generations nevertheless has consequences for one's rights and duties in relation to one's lineage, in relation to one's spouse, and men's and women's property rights.

Kinship ideologies thus influence one's primary access to resources for one's life projects, and therefore also in which direction one invests one's labour, loyalty and interests. Kinship ideologies thus set some premises for women and men's models for good behaviour through the life cycle, and for interaction between women and men. Karla Poewe writes that "kinship is an ideology which defines the room each of the sexes has to manage their affairs." This "room" is what I here have called female entrepreneurs' manoeuvring space. (Poewe 1981:11)

Simply put, one may say that in matrilineal kinship systems relations between siblings born by the same mother are given primary importance, whereas in patrilineal systems relations between siblings originating from the same father are considered the most basic and important (Poewe 1981: 5-6). When a child is born, it is evident for everyone who the mother is. In a matrilineal system no other proof than the self-evident fact that the child emerged from the womb of the mother is necessary to determine its kinship: kinship bonds are transferred from mother to child through her blood. In patrilineal systems, the transfer of kinship from father to child through substances like semen, blood, or spirit, are not equally easy to prove. As Poewe points out, this is one of the reasons why men (and often lineage elders of both sexes) according to a patrilineal logic often regard the control of sisters and wives (especially their sexuality) as necessary in order to secure fatherhood and recruitment of new members to the lineage.

These differences in attitudes to gender roles between matrilineal and patrilineal systems have two important consequences that are relevant for the "size" of women's room for manoeuvre, that are relevant for women's opportunities in Ghanaian fisheries: 1) in the matrilineal system it is less important for husbands and relatives to control women's sexual (and economic) activities than in a patrilineal system, and 2) whereas men in a patrilineal system tend to focus their interests on their father's lineage and the continuity of the patrilineage from father to son, the interests of men in a matrilineal system are focused on their mother's lineage and the continuity of the matrilineage through the children of his sisters: those who come from the same womb as himself.

In explaining the different degree of female entrepreneurship in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope it may thus be useful to compare how different types of kinship systems facilitate or constrain women's entry into the fisheries. According to the difference between the patri- and matrilineal inheritance practices outlined above, the primary interests of men in Kpone and Dzelukope are vested in their fathers' and/or fathers brothers' fishing company. In Moree, on the other hand, a man's interests are vested in both his mother's brother's canoe (which he may inherit together with his cousins) and/or his mother's canoe (which he will inherit together with his sisters). It is not attractive for a son in Moree to work in his mother's "female" fish processing and trade business; that is her daughters' task. But if his mother invests in fishing equipment, it is in her son's interest to invest muscle power, skills and loyalty in her enterprise. Not only does that secure him employment, but also an income and housing. By working for the mother he also enhances his social position and the long-term welfare of the matrilineage to which he belongs. For a woman who invests in fisheries, it is crucial to have male partners who support her efforts and who have "male" skills in fishing. It is thus no coincidence that almost all female canoe owners in Moree have employed one of their adult sons as captain.

### **House and Marriage**

The manner in which people locate themselves in relation to one another can be viewed as a spatial expression of kinship and gender ideologies. An examination of residence patterns in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope, reveals differences between the patrilineal and matrilineal systems, but also in the spatial organisation of the two patrilineal systems.

#### *Dzelukope*

Compounds in Dzelukope are traditionally composed of several houses where women and men, who are related through the male line, live in their own small units surrounding a courtyard. A typical compound would contain a man who has inherited his father's house together with his brothers, his unmarried sisters, father's sisters who are widowed, and his own and his brother's sons and unmarried daughters. Most beach seine owners are heads of such compounds. The ideal residence after marriage is virilocal. This means that a man is expected to set up his own household

and that the wife moves in with him. Often the husband is allocated a room or builds his own house in his father's compound. The wife is thus surrounded by the husband's relatives in her new home. If the husband has more than one wife, he may live with one of them and build houses for the other wives. A man gains a lot of prestige if he is able to marry many wives and build houses for them. Needless to say, this is affordable for the beach seine owners only, who may have ten wives (though this is becoming rare). Ordinary crew members usually have one, at most two, wives.

Whether women live in the compounds of their fathers or husbands, they are expected to subordinate themselves to their father, brothers, their husband and his relatives. Nowadays women sometimes build their own houses. They usually live there with their sisters and/or daughters. Only a couple of generations ago, Anlo-Ewe men were very provoked by women's investments of their earnings in houses, since this is clearly a female strategy to achieve a greater degree of independence (Greene 1997:37). Today men accept that women build their own houses. Female beach seine ownership, however, is still difficult.

### *Kpone*

In Kpone, the spatial organisation of groups linked by marriage and kinship is different. People live in lineage houses founded by a male ancestor. However, the lineage house is divided into a male and a female section. Over time, and as new generations of the lineage require more space, the male and female sections are built as separate houses, often located in different parts of town far from the original lineage house (Azu 1974). Therefore, most women in Kpone live in women's houses – *yɛiamli* – while men live in men's houses – *hiiamli*. Men and women continue living in their men's and women's houses after they get married. In the "male" house a group of brothers live with their sons and sons' sons. A man is thus surrounded by his father, his father's brothers, his own brothers, and by his sons and nephews. Often these men own one or more canoes and are fishing together. The "female" houses are often built for a group of sisters, or by a woman and her daughters. Since the daughters do not belong to the same lineage as their mother (they belong to the lineage of their father), but still continue living together with the mother when they get married, "female" houses come to contain women who belong to different lineages and who have children belonging to different patrilineages than themselves. Sons live with their mother until they reach puberty. Then they move to their father's house and are trained to become skilled fishermen.

Though women live separately from men, they stay in close contact with their male relatives. A wife also brings food to her husband and stays overnight with him in the men's house. Women in Kpone are expected to accept the decisions of their husbands and elders. However, the duo-local residential arrangement gives women ample opportunity to engage themselves in independent income generating activities. They have co-operation partners in the women's house, and though each woman administers her own income, they work closely together in fish smoking and trade. The aim for most women in Kpone who manage to make some savings, is to build a house for themselves and their daughters whereby they are highly respected and secure their old age. This is a long-term strategy: whenever there is enough money, they buy a bag of cement, and gradually – often in the course of a period of ten or more years – a house is built and extended. Even if sons and daughters in principle are entitled to inherit from both their mothers and fathers, daughters in practice usually inherit their mother's personal property while sons inherit from their fathers. A practical reason for this is simply that men do not need their mother's fish smoking equipment, and neither can they take over and live in her house. The same applies for a daughter with regard to inheritance of her father's canoe. The siblings would normally inherit the canoe as a group, with the brothers fishing and the sisters maintaining rights to parts of the catch.

### *Moree*

In Moree, both women and men live in houses, or *fiɛ*, whose residents are members of a subsection of a matrilineage (*ebusua*). This means that male and female lineage members originating from the same ancestress live in one house (for example a man with his sisters and the children of his sisters). Women often build their own houses where they live with their children. Upon marriage, husband and wife continue residing in their own *fiɛ*. They thus have their own rooms in separate houses and also keep separate purses. It is the responsibility of the wife to cook for the

husband. She brings the cooked meal to the husband's *fié*, and sleeps there. In the morning she goes back to her own house. If the husband has more than one wife, they alternate in this arrangement monthly. Children live with their mother. They belong to her lineage and do not inherit any of their father's property. Still, the father contributes to the up-keep of the children. He fulfils this duty by providing his wife with fish and – if he can afford it – with “chop-money”. Though the children do not belong to his lineage, it is essential for a man to prove his virility and masculinity by having children. The idea is that blood is transferred from mother to child, whereas spirit is transferred to the child from the father. Fathers therefore play an important role in the development of their children's personality.

Wives and husbands co-operate and extend credit to each other. However, in long-term projects like investments in houses and canoes, or in one's choice of trusted partners in fishing or fish trade, both women and men tend to focus more on members of their matrilineage than on their spouses. To invest too much in one's marriage may be directly unwise. Widows, who have invested in houses, canoes or trucks together with their husbands, experience that the matrilineage of the husband claims everything “back” upon his death. A much wiser strategy is therefore to invest in property outside the field of marriage, and women thus prefer to invest in houses for their children and matrikin. Thereby a woman gains prestige and enhances the wealth of her lineage, and – importantly – she secures a pool of labour for fish processing and trade. Unlike in Kpone and Dzelukope, the building of a house does not only consolidate a woman's position among her female kin: she also provides for male kin, especially sons, and this creates bonds of dependence and loyalty. As we shall see, the combination of a house, family labour, market capital and male partners (with personal interests in their wife, sister's or mother's enterprise) is crucial for the viability of women's fishery enterprises.

### When Market Women Become Bosses of Fishermen

The Ghanaian fish market is a female hierarchy with its own organisations, leaders and unwritten laws (see Robertson 1984; Clark 1994). At the top of the hierarchy are the large-scale traders with a lifetime of experience. Further down the ladder are those who sell smaller quantities, usually only during the main fishing season. At the bottom of the hierarchy are women without the economic and social resources required to trade independently, and who therefore make a living as carriers and hired fish smokers for the more wealthy women (Overå 1993).

Girls learn at early age to become good fish traders and are socialised into the female market sphere. Young girls carry fish in large head pans from the beach to the house. They wash, gut, smoke and pack the fish. When girls reach their teens, they join female relatives on trading trips. As they get older they are given more responsibility and may travel to Kumasi and other markets with other women's fish in addition to their own. During the most hectic season of the herring (*sardinella aurita*) fisheries from July to September, large-scale traders have their own representatives in the receiving end of the market chain (see Map 2).

The trade system is based on traders' ability to establish relations of trust and a network of co-operation partners. One's success therefore largely depends on one's experience and reputation as a trustworthy person. A trader constantly risks great losses. To reduce risk, promote safety and efficiency, and to make profit, she must be part of a “career network” (Overå 1998). This is her only security. In addition to building up trust through the trial and error method in working with other women over time, kinship is one of the most important conditions for entering into relations of economic partnership. It is not given, however, that relations of trust, reputation, authority and prestige acquired in the female market hierarchy are forms of symbolic capital that can be activated – or are even relevant – in the male fisheries.

Women interviewed in Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope (Overå 1998) express that their ambitions mainly remain within the female market sphere. However, whereas many of the wealthiest women in Moree have extended their strategies beyond the female market sphere to the male fishing sphere – they have so to speak “enlarge” their room for manoeuvre and incorporated the role of canoe owner into their gender-appropriate role of trader – women in Kpone and Dzelukope have not

succeeded in this endeavour to the same extent. In the following we shall look at the barriers that women in these three communities meet when they try to enter the fisheries, and what openings – channels of conversion of material and symbolic capital – those who succeeded have found.

### *Kpone*

The spatial and symbolic gender division has many practical outcomes that strengthen the barriers between male and female spheres. Such barriers may be articulated through condemnation of behaviour which is not gender-appropriate, or which is appropriate, but takes place in the wrong arena.

I interviewed women in Kpone who had previously invested in motorised canoes, as well as husbands who had given their wives loans for such projects. Husbands regarded these investments as highly unprofitable, their wives had not succeeded as canoe owners. Men who had worked as crew members for female canoe owners complained that female employers “don’t understand our problems”, that they “don’t know enough about fishing”, and that they “don’t understand how hard fishing is” and therefore “don’t pay us well enough”. The women complained that they could not trust their male workers, as for example when their crew sold their catch in other towns. The female canoe owners in Kpone thus ended up selling their motors and canoes, while their crews started working for male canoe owners again. However, some women in Kpone are still owners of nets that they rent out to fishermen. This is a strategy to increase their supply of fish, but without having to enter “male” leadership positions in the fishery.

Clearly, many fishermen in Kpone find it difficult to be in subordinate positions as workers in relation to women, even when they are their mother or aunts. In particular they find it difficult when the woman is related or married to a man with authority and wealth, that are highly respected among the fisherman. Neither is it in the interest of sons to invest their labour or capital in their mothers’ fishing enterprises, since the surplus tends to be directed towards the building of women’s houses. This means that men are not a resource for women who enter fishing to the same extent as female relatives are a resource for them in fish marketing. Adult sons in Kpone in general show great concern for and are close to their mothers, but their long-term interests – economically, socially and symbolically – are vested in the men’s house and in the fishing enterprises of their male relatives. It is by directing their efforts towards these men and “male” institutions that young men secure their future.

There are, however, women from Kpone who have succeeded as canoe owners, but not in their home town. I met one of them, Korkor, in the fishing harbour of Tema, five kilometres west of Kpone. Women from all over the country come to the harbour city of Tema to buy fish from cold storage plants, or from canoes landing fish in the fishing harbour. In this urban context, the female traders’ and canoe owners’ gender and kinship identity associated with their local origin recedes more into the background. They are first and foremost professional fish traders and canoe owners, and these roles tend to be more important and visible than their roles of mother or wife. In this setting, Korkor from Kpone had established herself as canoe owner.

Together with her brothers, Korkor inherited her father’s canoe. The brothers decided to run the fishing operations from Tema, and Korkor was the wholesaler of fish from their canoe. After four years Korkor had accumulated enough capital through fish trade to buy her own canoe. But instead of recruiting her crew from Kpone (as her brothers had done), she employed a captain from Ada (a fishing town further east), and he hired a crew for her. The captain turned out to be very reliable, and it is through him that Korkor now manages her fishing company. By avoiding gender constraints associated with her various female roles in Kpone, Korkor has managed to enter a position in Tema, in which her crew members primarily perceive her as a capital owner and employer, and not as an aunt, daughter, sister or mother. Nevertheless, Korkor’s goal is to gradually invest her surplus from fishing in a house for herself and her daughters in Kpone.

### *Dzelukope*

Women in Dzelukope face two barriers that seem almost insurmountable: the patrilineal kinship ideology and the organisation of beach seine companies. Usually, owners of the huge beach seines

in Dzelukope are men who simultaneously are head of a branch of a patrilineal clan, and head of a compound. A beach seine owner is thus in possession of a large stock of symbolic capital, to use Bourdieu's terms, in the form of masculine authority, which is strengthened and legitimised through the patrilineal kinship ideology. Such masculine authority is essential in the management of a beach seine company, and in the role of employer and leader of crews of fifty to hundred men. The interconnections between patrilineal descent and beach seine ownership are very strong. Polly Hill notes that "nets are often regarded as a perpetual non-vanishing form of property, analogous to inherited land" (1986: 11). To divide a set of nets (comprising a beach seine) between a group of heirs is regarded as undesirable. The beach seine should be passed on from father to son, and it is considered a great shame if the son is unable to take over: "A net should never die" (Hill 1986: 26). This ideology makes it almost as unthinkable for a woman to be an owner of a beach seine company as for her to be head of a patrilineal clan. Women thus do not have access to those forms of symbolic capital that are required within the male sphere of fishing. As in Kpone, sons in Dzelukope have more at stake in their father's and their patrilineage's fishing enterprises than in their mothers', and thus direct their efforts towards their fathers and father's brothers. With declining catches, even the wealthiest beach seine owners are struggling to maintain fishing as a profitable venture. The scope for female ownership in the fishery therefore seems more limited than ever.

There are, however, also among the Anlo-Ewe examples of women who have become owners in the fishery. The first beach seine was actually imported to the Volta Region around 1860 by Afedima, a rich female slave trader (Greene 1996: 165). There are also contemporary examples of women who are beach seine owners far away from Dzelukope, as in Abidjan (Odotei 1991) and Sierra Leone (field data 1995). In Tema, there are Ewe women who have invested in canoes for *ali* and *watsa* fishing. Women from Dzelukope thus have in common with women from Kpone that they have more success in entering the fisheries when they do it away from the social control of their home town. It also appears that women can compensate for the lack of masculine symbolic capital if they have enough economic capital. As mentioned, women in Dzelukope find alternative strategies by building their own houses and co-operating closely with daughters and female relatives, and there seems to be a tendency in the direction of more women's houses and a duo-local residence pattern. Since the fishery is regarded as a closed arena for women in Dzelukope, women rather seek new strategies in the female sphere by establishing more independent households. Moreover, men's increasing problems of fulfilling the economic expectations towards their traditional male role of providers and heads of households tends to strengthen such matrifocal tendencies.

### *Moree*

In Moree, many women invest in houses where they gather sisters, sons and daughters around themselves, and where they become important persons in the matrilineage as providers. The richest of these women have invested in canoes and outboard motors. Through such ownership in the fisheries, many women have carved out a position for themselves in the local community, not only in terms of wealth, but also in terms of social power and prestige.

The career path of a female canoe owner usually starts after she has reached a position in the market hierarchy through hard work and long experience, and through which she has built an extensive network of female business partners. The divorce rate is high in the matrilineal setting and many women in Moree, who have "made it" as traders, divorce and remarry a canoe owner. Alternatively, a successful trader may – through her extension of credit – enable her husband to become a canoe owner. These are strategies to increase her supply of fish in order to expand in fish trade: a wife of a canoe owner is entitled to buy the catch of his canoe. She must sell a portion of the catch (usually 50%) to the wives of the crew members, but she makes a profit on the price difference between the wholesale price and the price that the other women pay. The remaining 50% of the catch goes into her own processing and trading business.

A position as canoe owner's wife thus gives a trader an opportunity to expand and to gradually earn enough to build a house. She becomes a "matron" with many "clients" – both men and women

– who depend on her housing, employment and care. The house also functions as a family firm and a workshop, and is a necessary investment if she wants to expand her scale of operations. At this stage the woman may have adult children, access to credit in her extensive network, and savings large enough to buy a canoe and an outboard motor. Many are assisted by their husbands with loans and technical know-how. Though husbands and wives keep separate purses and do not live together, husbands do have an interest in enabling their wives to become canoe owners, when the wife expands her economic activities and earns more money (and pays back the loan he gave her), she can be a resource for his own fishing company. The wife continues to be his wholesaler also when she gets her own canoe, and she is thus an important source of credit. Husband and wife keep up the separation of their economy and residence, and run separate – though closely intertwined – fishing companies.

Whereas husbands are important sources of credit, sons are more important in the management of women's canoe companies, and almost all of the female canoe owners in Moree have sons as captains on their canoes. In the relationship between mother and son, age and parenthood are as important social statuses as gender. Perhaps this is the reason why women rarely recruit their brothers as captains: it is not appropriate for a woman to be in an authority position in relation to a brother who is of the same age or older than herself. Gender is thus never an isolated factor. Gender always interacts with other social statuses that jointly constitute social persons, whereby individuals are positioned in relation to each other in the local power geometry.

Through relations with men (sons and husbands) women in Moree get access to resources, contacts, knowledge and authority in the male sphere of fishing. The institutions of marriage and the matrilineal kinship ideology thus provide women with male intermediaries, or "brokers", to use Barth's term. These male relations become important channels of conversion for the transformation of material capital (market capital and ownership of houses) and symbolic capital (prestige in the matrilineage, trust, female charm and fertility) acquired in the female sphere into types of capital that are relevant in the male sphere and which indeed are required in fishing (authority in relation to male workers, fishing skills and technological knowledge). Because men have a personal interest in facilitating such conversion of capital across gender barriers, women in the matrilineal system find openings into the male fisheries through channels that are largely closed in the patrilineal systems.

### **Women's Manoeuvring Spaces**

We have seen how ownership of the means of production in local systems of fishing are influenced by cultural and social factors. Different local "mixes" of factors like kinship ideologies and residence patterns shape the manoeuvring space of women with regards to ownership in the male fishery sphere. Whereas the most affluent women in Moree manage to cross the gender barriers that exist between the market and the fisheries within their local context, women in Kpone and Dzelukope find these gender barriers hard to overcome locally. In general, the ambition of becoming a fishery entrepreneur is almost unimaginable, or even undesirable, for the majority of women in all the three fishing communities. The main strategy for women in both Kpone and Moree, and increasingly also in Dzelukope, is thus to invest their earnings in houses and provide well for their dependants, which ultimately enhances their capacity to operate on a larger scale as fish traders. The labour, loyalty and support of daughters and female relatives are essential inputs to achieve a position in the female market hierarchy. However, some entrepreneurial women see that instead of letting the capital that they have accumulated through fish trade circulate within the market and women's sphere, they can increase their profit potential by integrating production and distribution of fish into one enterprise. It appears that the gender barriers met by women who attempt to employ this strategy in communities with a strong patrilineal kinship ideology – and even more so when women share residence with their husbands and his relatives – are so high that their only way of succeeding is to relocate themselves to another context.

When there is little scope for accumulation of economic and symbolic capital outside traditional women's domains, as in Kpone and Dzelukope, women may look for opportunities elsewhere. Migration becomes a way of changing one's position in a power geometry that stretches out in time and space. While women in Moree find conversion channels from market to fishery through male co-operation partners, women in Kpone and Dzelukope find channels of conversion by moving both themselves and their capital – and often a male intermediary like a son as well – away from duties and social control at home. Through migration they may activate their stock of material capital in combination with resources in a new place (like cheap and qualified labour, good fishing grounds, or fish markets with less competition) without the risk of losing their reputations as respectable women. However, even when women move to urban areas or abroad to make money on fishing, they tend to channel their savings back into their home community. They invest in houses and their (female) relatives' welfare in ways that are in accordance with their home town's gender ideology: To be a rich woman is not considered immoral or inappropriate, especially as long as she redistributes her wealth. This moral economy is also valid in relation to male entrepreneurs (see Hart 1975). If, however, a woman becomes rich by strategies that require "masculine" behaviour, and therefore threaten men's honour, occupational identity and masculinity, the attitude towards the female entrepreneur in the local community tends to be negative, and her stock of symbolic capital decreases. When women risk negative sanctions and disapproval of "masculine" behaviour in the fisheries, and when their fishery-related roles are regarded as conflicting with their roles of mother, wife, relative or colleague in the local community, most women hardly consider the economic gains in the fishery worth the social costs at home.

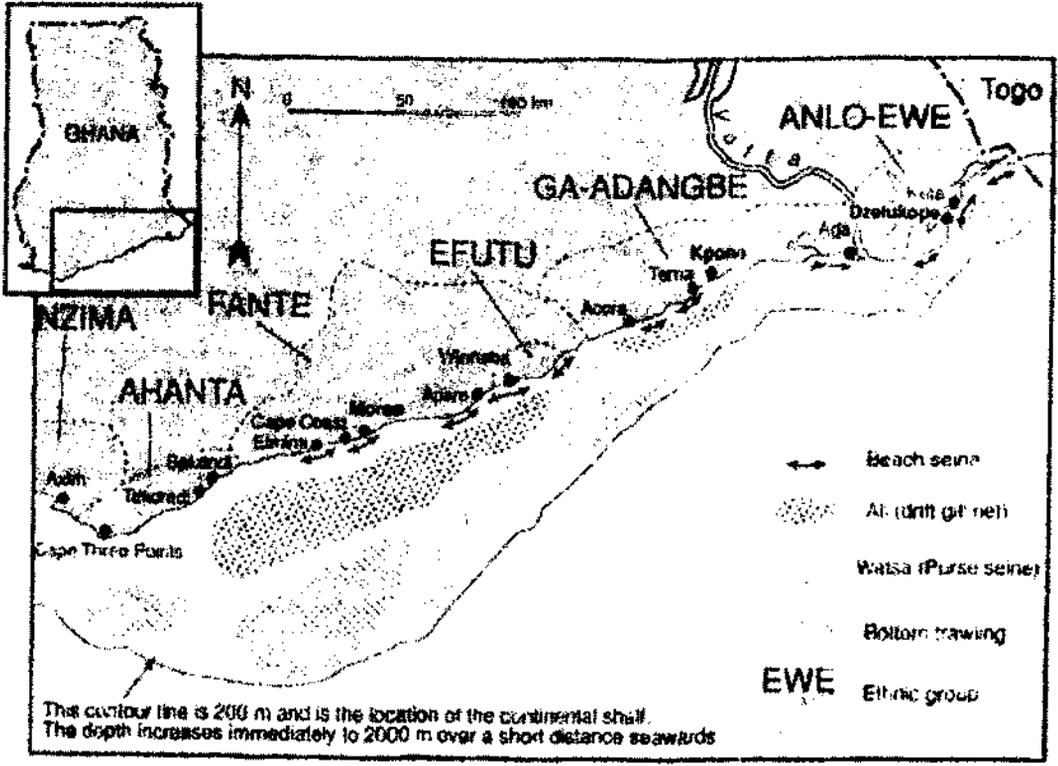
In contrast to Kpone and Dzelukope, the combination of the matrilineal kinship system and the duo-local residence pattern in Moree opens, rather than closes, women's manoeuvring space. An important reason is that men according to matrilineal ideology may gain when female relatives invest in fishing equipment. Men's loyalty, labour and other commitments may therefore just as well go in the direction of a female as of a male relative's fishery enterprise. They tend to view women's roles as owners, employers and managers in the fisheries first and foremost as an extension of the female trader role. By defining (the often very real) power of female canoe owners as irrelevant in the male hierarchy, and as long as men feel that their economic, social and political interests are well taken care of, men can tolerate that women use the male sphere of fishing to achieve their goal of accumulating prestige in the female sphere of market and motherhood. In this way men avoid the emotional and ideological paradox they inevitably face in relation to female leaders in a male domain. As long as female canoe owners maintain the female market hierarchy and the matrilineage as their main prestige arena, men feel less uncomfortable with female canoe owners in their midst. Hence men can write women off as a threat to their own masculinity, despite that the fact women who have one foot in the top of the female market hierarchy and another among the elite of owners in the fishery are powerful.

The place-specific manner in which gender relations are embedded in local fishing economies, is crucial for the opportunities and constraints of female entrepreneurs. In a process of modernisation in the fisheries, where new actors obtained power and the power was concentrated in fewer hands, the complementary dual-sex gender model has been a device to avoid conflict and chaos: a system of thought that maintains a sense of continuity and order when both production systems and gender roles change. However, the boundaries between male and female domains can be permeable. The degree to which women are able to employ entrepreneurial strategies beyond the female domain, largely depends on men's perception of these strategies. When their authority and positions of power are threatened, men use the duality discourse to confine women to their domains, as we have seen in Kpone and Dzelukope. When men's position is enhanced through women's enterprises, as in Moree, they conveniently mediate between the male and female domains at the same time as the dual-sex gender order is maintained.

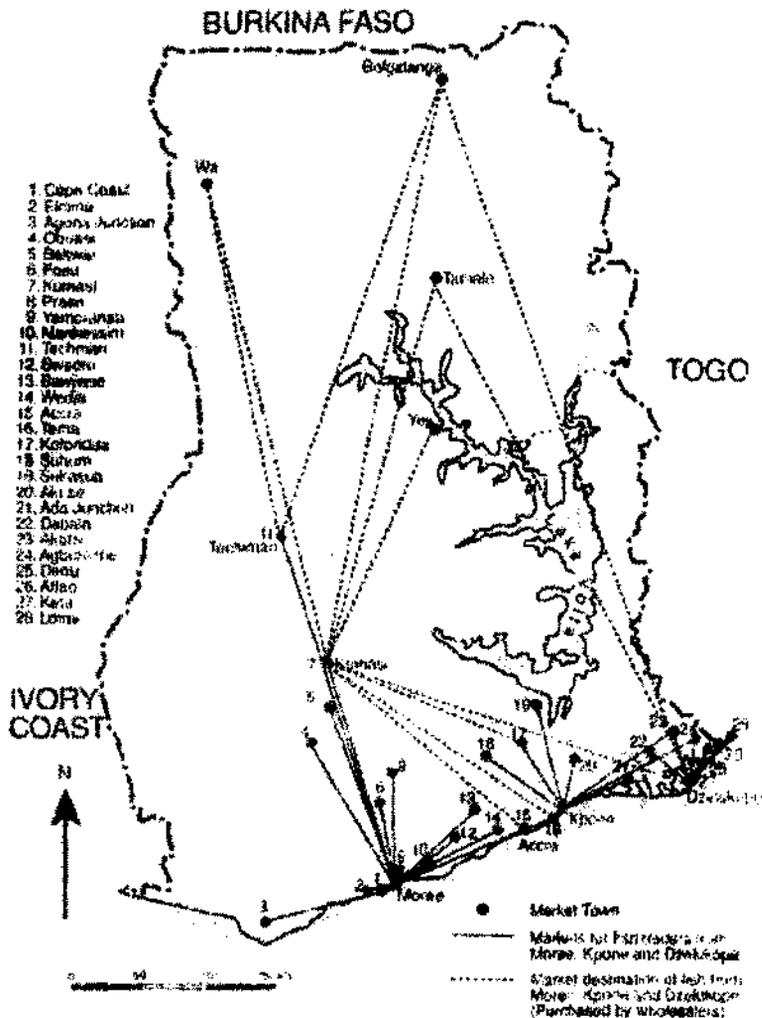
The degree of motorisation of canoes in Ghana did not increase in the 1990s, and has even showed a slight decline (Koranteng 2000). This reflects the harsh conditions resulting from liberalisation of the national economy and the increased costs of imported inputs like petrol and outboard motors. It cannot be ruled out that the activities of the industrial fishing sector also have

had a negative impact on the catches of canoes. During revisits to Moree in 1999 and 2001 it became clear that many of the female canoe owners, who had been active since the 1970s, were not able to replace a spoiled outboard motor or canoe and could thus not send their crews fishing. There were no new female canoe owners, and the most prominent of all canoe owners – both male and female – who owned six canoes in 1995, was now only operating two. This illustrates that in present day Ghana, women face constraints that may overshadow a local gender ideology that facilitates female entrepreneurship.

Map 1  
 Case locations, ethnic groups and fishing techniques along the coast of Ghana.



Map 2  
Marketing regions of fish from Moree, Kpone and Dzelukope.



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