



PATHFINDERS, ENABLERS & MATRIARCHS

*Untold Histories of Ordinary Women
in Postcolonial Ghana*

“We, women from the ten regions of Ghana, of diverse backgrounds, religions, occupations, ages, resource endowments, abilities and challenges

hereby adopt this Women’s Manifesto as an affirmation of our commitment to collective action and as an agenda of minimum demands for action on gender equality and equity in Ghana.” - Women’s Manifesto for Ghana

The Women’s Manifesto for Ghana was launched in September 2004, following mass protests that rocked the sitting government, and at the end of a year long intensive mobilisation that involved individuals and organisations across the former 110 districts of Ghana. Its preamble paints a vivid picture of the social, economic, and political conditions of millions of ordinary women in Ghana at the turn of the century.

The decades leading to it were marked by rebellions and reforms, jubilation and tragedy, but also by countless individual acts of everyday resistance and community building.

The Pathfinders, Enablers, and Matriarchs whose histories take central stage in this exhibition are but a handful of a myriad of women from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds who not only managed to carve a space for themselves amidst turbulent circumstances, but also provided a nurturing environment for their descendants to thrive. Some of them are in this space today.

Family histories like *‘Flourishing after the Drought’* and *‘The Girl from Pepeease’* take us behind the curtains of the lived experiences of women assuming multiple roles as mothers, mentors, breadwinners, small scale traders, and community leaders. What these family histories unveil are touching accounts of personal sacrifices, resilience, hopes and aspirations of everyday Ghanaian women. We invite you to navigate this space to discover and reflect on true stories of

**Societal Change, Heritage,
Family and Entrepreneurship**

told by the very people whose lives they positively impacted. Join us in spotlighting, hailing and celebrating the extraordinary lives of ordinary women in Ghana ■

A HISTORY OF ORDINARY PEOPLE IN AFRICA

This exhibition is part of the series A History of Ordinary People in Africa (HOPIA), a cultural heritage project that emphasises the social experience of everyday life and reveals how ordinary people participate in the process of social change. It draws on oral histories, historical artefacts, and photographs to project into the past, centring women and the underprivileged and spotlighting their resistance, activism, preservation of traditions, innovations, creativity, and contribution towards positive change.

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ALL THE WOMEN ARE MEETING

Makola Market, established in Accra in 1924, was not only the trade centre of the capital, where goods and people of all sorts met, but also one of Ghana's most important social and cultural spaces. The market has long been the site of political contestation. **Like others in the country, it was dominated by women, who in the decade leading to independence, mobilised to campaign for and finance Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party.**

In the same year, Dr. **Evelyn Mansa Amarteifio** (1916-1997) established the **National Federation of the Gold Coast Women** following the model of the Jamaican Federation of Women. Among other things, the federation campaigned for recognition of customary marriages by the colonial government. It petitioned against discrimination in employment, marriage, and inheritance. The NFGCW allied itself with international women organisations while Amarteifio resisted pressure by the CPP to create a single government-controlled nationalist group. **The federation was eventually dissolved by the CPP in 1960.**

Makola was demolished twenty years later when market women were scapegoated for shortages and inflation. When Rawlings finally re-opened it, he named a section **31st December Market**, in celebration of his second military coup. The largest women's organisation of this time, the **31st December Women Movement**, was established by Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, the President's wife, with the same underlying idea: **when women meet, governments feel threatened, and often seek to replace grassroots associations with state-directed organisations.**

The images below were captured during the **Conference of the Women of Africa and African Descent** by a photographer for DRUM magazine. The Conference, held in July 1960, was the Federation's last act before dissolution ■



Miss Sophia Duku (left) seeks advice of Mrs. Evelyn Amarteifio

When asked about the genesis of the federation, Amarteifio commented: *"We had numerous market women, mutual aid societies, church and benevolent women's organisations but no central body. I felt that if we brought together all the organisations, we would be better able to advance the interests of women."*



Mrs Fathia Nkrumah (right) sits with Mrs Evelyn Amarteifio

Three months before the conference Amarteifio wrote to Fathia, Nkrumah's wife and the Federation's patron, about a change in name: *"There has been some misrepresentation about the name 'Federation' and we feel it would be in the interest of the organisation to change it."* The Federation became the National Organisation of Ghanaian Women, but that name also would be short-lived.



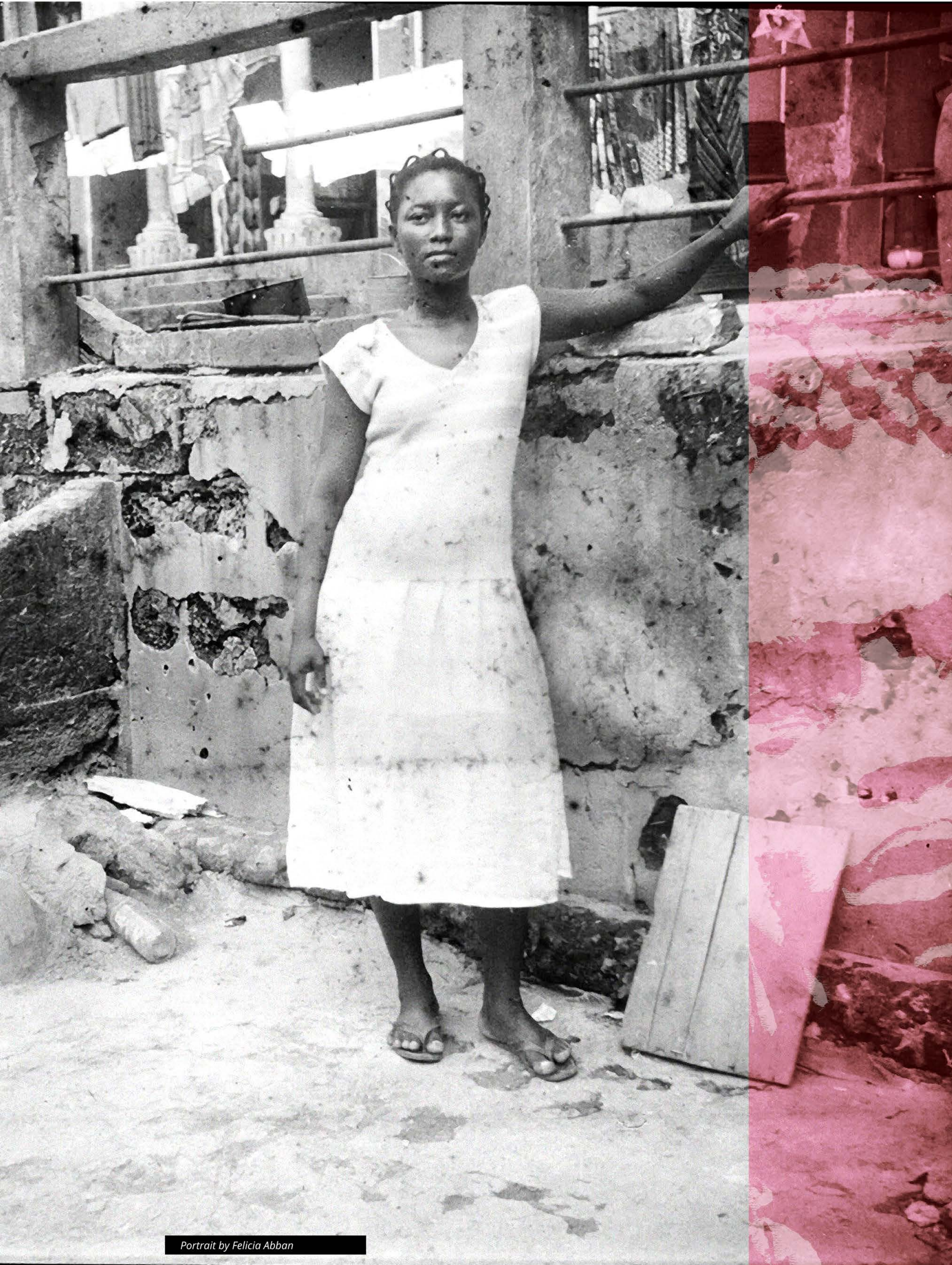
The Scene during one of the discussion sessions

The Federation sought government funding to cover the costs of the Conference. The request was initially rejected on false grounds, which prompted Amarteifio's appeal: *"The name of our dear country is at stake and should this conference be postponed or cancelled it would make a very bad impression on the whole country. . . We appeal strongly to the cabinet to reconsider its decision."*



Mrs. Evelyn Amarteifio Introducing Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, President of the First Republic of Ghana

Nkrumah agreed to fund the conference, but at a cost. The Federation was dissolved two months afterwards and folded into the newly established National Council of Ghana Women (NCGW). The NCGW was headed by Sophia Doku, who had previously served as the secretary of the CPP's Bureau of Women's Organisation. The choice of leadership was a clear signal. Ghanaians would have to wait many decades for the rise of another independent feminist group of the same breadth.



Portrait by Felicia Abban

WOMEN AND SOCIETAL CHANGE

During decolonisation and the transition to the new nation-state of Ghana, women across diverse social, economic, political, and cultural landscapes organised social and political movements, provided financial support, disseminated knowledge, contested imperial hegemonies, and advocated for inclusive interests. The theme 'Women and Societal Change' explores how women in post-colonial Ghana—amidst all socio-cultural and structural barriers, and alternating political and economic fortunes—embraced, contested, reformed, and navigated social change both collectively and individually.



A group of snail sellers at a CPP parade in June 1959. Market women were pivotal in mobilising people and funds for the CPP, Ghana's ruling party in the years leading to, and following, independence.

IN PRAISE OF PROFESSOR TAKYIWAA MANUH

Narrated by Isaac Agyiri Danso

It is staggering just how much nation building depends on women's knowledge, how much a nation's economy depends on women's free labour and how much the political organisation of the nation state is done on the back of women's political organisations.

Despite these important contributions, women are the least represented in institutional and political leadership. And although women's participation in nation building have not received the recognition it deserves, several female Ghanaians, such as Prof. Takyiwaa Manuh, have and continue to advocate for increased opportunities for women to assume leadership positions.

Born in 1952 to a food contractor and a trader, and raised in Ankaase (a village near Kumasi), Takyiwaa Manuh has become a pacesetter, a pathfinder, and a champion of feminist scholarship in Ghana. Until her retirement, she served as the Director at the Social Development Policy Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Ethiopia 2014-2017. She also served as the Director of Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana between 2002 and 2009. She has received numerous honours and awards including the University of Ghana's Meritorious Service Award in 2007 and Ghana's Order of the Volta for services to education in 2008.

She grew up in an era where unfair practices against women persisted including domestic violence. Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s, when Takyiwaa went to school, the term domestic violence, as we understand it now, was not commonly used. In those times, women who experienced abuse in their homes remained unprotected and the abuse was often not reported. We can position Prof. Takyiwaa Manuh as the foremother of the women's resistance movement in post-independence Ghana for several reasons.

First, her resistance journey heightened the discourse on women's empowerment and made gender inequality a national concern. In 1980 she founded the Federation of Ghanaian Women (FEGAWO), to advance women's interests in the socialist revolution. She was also a key builder of other coalitions like the NETRIGHT and ABANTU (where she also served as board chair from its inception in 1998 to 2013). Both of them were in the Domestic Violence Coalition, which advocated for policy change and for the passage of the Domestic Violence Bill in 2007.

Second, she almost single-handedly institutionalised gender studies at the University of Ghana. Her research work spans gender and labour, migration, African development, women's rights and empowerment issues, and African higher education systems and political representations of the women's movement. She has also ensured that women have a safe space to mutually support and elevate each other. Her philosophy of 'Lift as I climb' is exemplified by countless other scholars who were inspired by her to do academic work on gender.

Despite the fact that efforts on the part of governments have frequently ended at lip service, her activism has transformed the country and spearheaded other activism in different spaces apart from mainstream academia such as social media. Indeed, she is the champion of the women's movement in Ghana and a pioneer of feminist scholarship in Ghana. She has contributed to post independent Ghana in ways that has received minimal focus and consequently not recognized as it should. She stood up against giants in defending people's right to sexual orientation in Ghana even when research suggested that 92% of Ghanaians are intolerant to LGBTQ+ movement.

Takyiwaa took the mantle from the great foremothers of pre-independence movements. She remained strong even though some of the issues she advanced were met with willful deafness and obstructions. Standing on the shoulders of our ancestors, she fanned the flames of gender inclusion in Ghana. If there are any prospects for fair and equal inclusion of women, then Takyiwaa deserves our praise. **May we honour her, may we recognize her, may history be kind to her, and may we have her name forever on our lips when we speak about the giants. As your people would say "Obaa mo" (woman of substance, well done!)■**





