

Original Paper

Gambian Women's Struggles through Collective Action

Fatou Janneh¹

¹ Political Science Unit, the University of The Gambia, Brikama, The Gambia

Received: August 1, 2021

Accepted: August 9, 2021

Online Published: August 13, 2021

doi:10.22158/sssr.v2n3p41

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/sssr.v2n3p41>

Abstract

Women have a long history of organizing collective action in The Gambia. Between the 1970s to the 1990s, they were instrumental to The Gambia's politics. Yet they have held no political power within its government. This paper argues that, since authorities failed to serve women's interests, Gambian women resorted to using collective action to overcome their challenges through kafoolu and kompins [women's grassroots organizations] operating in the rural and urban areas. They shifted their efforts towards organizations that focused on social and political change. These women's organizations grew significantly as they helped women to promote social and economic empowerment. The women cultivated political patronage with male political leaders to achieve their goals. Political leaders who needed popular support to buttress their political power under the new republican government cash in patronage. Thus, this study relies on primary data from oral interviews. Secondary sources such as academic journals, books, and policy reports provide context to the study.

Keywords

Collective action, struggle, women's grassroots organizations [kafoolu and kompins], political patronage, and The Gambia

1. Introduction

The year 1970 marked a turning point for The Gambia because the country became a republic on April 24, 1970.¹ Gambians ceased to be subjects of Britain and became citizens of their own sovereign state, free to frame a constitution that attended to their wishes and aspirations.² Prime Minister Dawda Kairaba Jawara was sworn in as the country's first president soon after the announcement of results of the referendum in which seventy percent of the electorate voted for the republic.³ Thus, Sir Farimang Sighateh's position as Governor General ended. To secure the referendum vote for the republic in place of the monarchy, women assured the People's Progressive Party [PPP] and its leader of their support.⁴ This victory could not have resulted without the political involvement of a broad network of women's grassroots organizations.⁵

Scholars agree that grassroots activism created an avenue for political participation in national campaigns for the decolonization process and independence in Africa.⁶ Many African women, however, were sidelined by colonial states, marginalized in decision-making process by decolonization movements, and negatively affected by economic crises and political failure of the post-colonial states on the continent.⁷ This marginality had strongly influenced Gambian women, both individually and collectively. They developed strategies to defend their economic and political interests within the colonial and postcolonial environments. They became significant allies of politicians and political parties, expecting these individuals and parties would resolve their plight. Since authorities failed to serve their interests, Gambian women resorted to using collective action to overcome their challenges through *kafoolu* and *kompins* operating in the rural and urban areas.⁸ They shifted their drive towards women's grassroots organizations that focused on social and political change, and their collective efforts composed of women from various backgrounds. Without access to elected government offices, these women's grassroots organizations became visible in national politics. But it was a gradual process between colonial period to independence.

The Gambia's colonial past continued to have a significant effect on its socio-economic formation, geography, and constitutional and political orientations. Neighboring Senegal surrounds the country on all sides except for the west, where its boundary is the Atlantic Ocean. This was not a historical coincidence. Britain and France, who controlled the colonies of Senegal, demarcated the boundaries of The Gambia in the late 1880s and made subsequent modifications in the 1890s and 1970s.⁹ The Gambia is the smallest country on Africa's mainland, with a population of 1.8 million.¹⁰ An American journalist, Berkley Rice, described Gambia at independence as the "birth of an improbable nation" because of the country's weak economy, poor infrastructure, and massive illiteracy, among other factors.¹¹ These challenges likely informed Richard Burton's harsh description of Bathurst as 'nothing but mud, mangroves, malaria and miasma.'¹² This impoverishment was profoundly apparent in the rural areas, which concentrated more than half of the population. The country relied only on the export of peanuts for the revenue to support government in its provision of services such as health and education, which were mostly centralized in Bathurst. Condition became deplorable during rainy season which sometimes prevented farmers from harvesting their crops thus affecting their livelihood and causing a shortage of food.¹³ This period was locally called the *hunger season*. All these factors had influenced negative perceptions of the country's socio-economic and political prospects. Despite the uncertainty of the country's ability to survive as a nation, Gambians proceeded, undeterred in their strive for self-rule.

This paper argues that women acting through *kafoolu* and *kompins* were important political actors in the process of Gambia's independence. These organizations grew in significance as they helped women negotiate economic survival and access to land. The women cultivated political patronage with male political leaders to achieve their economic goals; political leaders who needed popular support to buttress their political power under the new republican government cashed in that patronage. Thus,

women helped build the new government, but from a position of political clientelism, exchange of their political support, rather than a position of political authority.

2. British Colonial Influence and Historical Past of Women's Organizations

British colonial rule influenced the organization of political life and culture of the people of Bathurst and by extension all Gambians. British colonialism and settlement of liberated Africans or repatriated free slaves from the New World and the West Coast of Africa called *Aku* and *Krio* brought European education, Christianity, and foreign languages, specifically English or *Krio*, among the Gambian people.¹⁴ Although Western culture seemed to dominate, it coexisted with African cultures among the indigenous settlers. This combination molded the ebb and flow of city life in colonial Bathurst. Concurrently, Islam affected people's lifestyles. It blended with some of the existing cultural practices and cemented male hegemony in the rural areas. A colonial report in the 1940s revealed that the colonial government, in recognition of the importance of Islam, desired to have a representative of the Muslim community in the Legislative Council. But it had to choose a man from Bathurst, as there was no one in the Protectorate the inland territory with sufficient knowledge of English to follow the proceedings.¹⁵ Therefore, levels of Western education became one of the major differences between the urban and the rural areas.

British colonial education and Christianity introduced by the missionaries influenced women's organizations. As an illustration, members of social clubs such as ladies or girls' clubs were overwhelmingly educated *Aku* and Creole women and girls.¹⁶ The present study has identified two categories of *kompins* that emerged during the colonial era in Bathurst. One was the group comprising educated and working-class women; they were predominantly Christians. Women Contemporary Society, Gambia Women Federation, Women's Corona Society, Girl Guides, Girls friendly society, religious-based groups such as Methodist Women Association, Mother's Union, Ex Pupils' Associations, namely Methodist Girls High School [MGHS] and the Freetown Secondary School for Girls [FSSG], were examples.¹⁷ The second category was less literate in the Western education system, and overwhelmingly Muslim. They were married women, some of them were stay-at-home mothers, while most of their membership engaged in trade at the market or homemade canteens. Members served as a support system to one another with a common value system. They embarked on local banking schemes, *osusu*.¹⁸ Occasionally, they organized entertainment programs, mostly *sabar*, as a way of strengthening the association.¹⁹ Before the mid-1950s, these women groups were not visible in the mainstream. However, a few individual women were prominent in the city council politics. In 1943, Hanna Mahoney became a member of Bathurst Advisory Town. Hannah Forster and Ceilia Davis became the first elected women into the Bathurst Town Council in 1946. Christianity and education formed the basis of most of these associations, which had influenced their mode of operation.

Through *kompins*, women engaged in diverse activities such as education, health, entertainment, and humanitarian services. The educated or elite women's groups dedicated themselves to empower women

and girls across the country, although they began within the city before expanding their advocacy into the interior. This is because the system limited educational opportunities to Bathurst. For example, the Women Contemporary Society and Gambia Women Federation employed education as a tool deployed for the advancement of women's and girls' interests. They organized reach outs and urged parents to send their daughters to school. As a founding member of the above organizations, Busy Bees and Women's Corona Society, people knew Rosamond Fowlis for her crusade in Kombo areas and provinces, encouraging parents to enroll their daughters in school. These organizations rallied women of diverse backgrounds to deliberate matters of the common good. They organized a "baby award" annually and offered incentives to mothers of the healthiest babies.²⁰ They sensitized the city residents on proper sanitation and hygiene, especially in underserved neighborhoods and among poor families.

Members of these organizations were predominantly teachers and nurses, and virtually all were from the Aku ethnolinguistic population.²¹ Their interaction with Europeans had a significant influence on their cultural lifestyle. Some of them were exposed to different educational environments that provided them with a broad awareness of social justice and the potential for social change experienced in other parts of the world, especially in British West African colonies between 1945 and 1960. For example, Fowlis was trained in England and was a domestic science teacher for over three decades. Louise Njie studied at Achimota College in Gold Coast [Ghana]; Lydia Joiner, Eliza Coker, and Lilia Johnson studied at Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone. Augusta Jawara proceeded to Edinburgh to study nursing after attending MGHS. Likewise, Lucretia S.C Joof studied in London.²² Studying abroad gave these women a sense of understanding the struggle for self-determination and internal self-rule. These women also resisted male hegemony that was blinded by gender stereotypes and discriminations. They were the vanguards of the struggle for social change and the dismantling of gender barriers by advocating for mass education for girls.

Women in Bathurst, through collective action, became supportive of veterans during the Second World War. The British colonial administration promoted the establishment of Gambian Women as the war created the need for workers from 1939 to 1945. Members attended to the conditions of wounded soldiers and their families. Such an act showed not only owing allegiance to one's country but showing loyalty to the colonial power.²³ The leaders of this association were prominent women of Bathurst and were wives of important men of the city. Louise Antoinette Njie was the wife of first Gambian dentist, Ebrima Njie and Hannah Mahoney was the wife of the first speaker of the Legislative Council, Sir John Andrew Mahoney, while other women, Lucy Joiner and Gumala Jones also played leadership roles. Despite the colonial government's inadequate preparations to fund the humanitarian project, the association had an estimated account of nine hundred and ninety-four British pounds sterling in December 1941 from its members' fundraising.²⁴

The rise in community service and the women's empowerment approach led these disparate categories of *kompins* to converge in the mid-1950s. The Gambia Women Federation extended its membership to ex. Pupils' association, Old Girls of St. Joseph's association, and *Musu kafoo* society to represent all women

across the country.²⁵ By 1955 and 1956, many members of these organizations had identified with the emergent political parties through the women's wings. Whereas *kompins* followed a Western model of organizational structure such as the idea of girls', ladies, and gentlemen clubs because of the acculturation process influenced by the British colonial rule, *kafoolu* have their roots in the precolonial era, originally as traditional associations. Despite differences in their trajectories and operations, *kafoolu* and *kompins* became intertwined with the purpose of enhancing women's economic and social freedom. The colonial system was discriminatory in its efforts to organize Gambian political life. It restricted voting to the Colony, the area of jurisdiction under the direct administration of the British colonial government, and not every woman had the right to vote.²⁶ First, before a woman could exercise her franchise in Bathurst, it required such potential voters to possess property and have a steady income. Second, she had to be at least twenty-five years old at the time of election, either to vote or to run for office. Unlike the Colony, the colonial system deprived women living in the Protectorate of such legal rights or privileges as enjoyed by women that lived in Bathurst. In practical term, women in the provinces were out rightly disfranchised. Two years before introducing universal suffrage in 1960, chiefs refused female voting rights at the constitutional conference while they granted these rights to men with or without property.²⁷

There was disagreement between the Colony and the Protectorate's delegates over women's right to vote. Bathurst politicians were advocating for women's suffrage, but their counterparts in the Protectorate were reluctant because they believed granting voting rights to rural women would cause insubordination to their husbands. Illustrating Gambian women's long struggle in politics, J. H Price quoted a renowned historian of West African History, Michael Crowder, stating:

...one chief replied that he has seen the trouble caused in Bathurst by giving the women the vote and they didn't want any palaver with their women. I asked an Upper River Division chief later why he wouldn't accept the principle of women voting in the protectorate. He replied that personally he didn't mind the idea, but chiefs living near Bathurst had painted a grim picture of the troubles the men had with women because of politics. So he thought it best not to let it happen in the chiefdom.²⁸

For these chiefs, female suffrage could undermine male authority. These controversies left delegates failing to reach a consensus on equal voting rights. This conference, held in Brikama on October 18 through 25, 1958, was historic, giving rise to the 1960 Constitution that adopted Universal Adult Suffrage. This marked significant development in Gambian politics because, for the first time, there was equal suffrage for adult men and women without discrimination.²⁹ The presence of women delegates, Cecilia Moore, and Rachel Palmer from Bathurst, gave women's issues a momentum in national political debates. Two subsequent conferences continued in Georgetown and Bathurst in January and March 1959, before the suffrage ultimately took effect in 1960 following the first House of Representatives election.³⁰ That said, such marginalization shows an interconnectedness between the

British colonial policy and indigenous patriarchal values that limited women's opportunity to take part in public life.

3. Path to Independence

Activism reinforced and accelerated the decolonization process of The Gambia. The press and labor leaders turned nationalist leaders were the vanguards of the campaign against colonial authority and their anti-colonial struggle played a vital role in the struggle for independence. Women journalists such as Marion Foon, Cecilia Moore, and Harriet Camara fought against colonial government anti-press laws, particularly the Newspaper Ordinance Act of 1944. This Law aimed to gag free press with an increased burden of bond and license fees. Some laws restricted private newspapers from covering stories at the Statehouse. While they opposed and exposed bad laws, they promoted women's issues and the liberation struggle of Africans and Blacks elsewhere. The Vanguard newspaper became synonymous with the plight of farmers under the leadership of Foon as its news editor- and editor-in-chief in 1958 and 1960, respectively.

This path to independence, however, was championed by nationalist leaders such as Edward Francis Small, who struggled for independence for several decades and paved the way for different anticolonial political actors.³¹ He defied colonial government policies and the unpopular reforms of governors such as Richmond Palmer and Arthur F. Richards to fight for the public interest using different platforms, notably labor unions. Small engaged in massive civic awareness campaigns and he would sacrifice his sleep to enlighten villagers about current issues, which helped the farmers to understand the exploitative nature of the colonial system. As a result, he helped them to organize themselves into cooperatives that would engage in mutual agreement on the prices of peanuts. He established the Gambia Farmer's Cooperative Association in 1917, Bathurst Trade Union in 1929, and the first newspaper, *Gambia Outlook* and *Senegambian Reporter*, among other initiatives.³²

Small and other nationalist leaders linked the struggle for workers' rights to the struggle for national self-determination.³³ The Workers' Unions, including dock workers, Rate Payers Association, Civil Service, and trade unions, were mobilized, and they oriented their energies towards the cause of national liberation.³⁴ Small's efforts culminated in the establishment of Urban Council. He advocated to expand Urban Council to the rural areas, but the governor denied this request in 1934.³⁵ In his advocacy for equal representation, he fought for electoral reforms to the Legislative Council and was granted in 1946.³⁶ Because of the paucity of material, little is known about the direct involvement of women, and to what extent they took part in these anti colonial efforts before the 1940s. Could it be that the banner of gender equality was not prioritized by anti-colonial activists who were not paying particular attention to gender disparities? Based on Small famous slogan, "no taxation without representation," it would be fair to conclude that women were his concern despite that gender equality was so naturalized in various parts of the world and more so, in The Gambia as he vied against colonial rule not only in The Gambia but also in the African continent, and elsewhere.

The mid-twentieth century witnessed the wooing of *kafoolu* and *kompins* by the emerging political parties. This quest to appeal to these women's organizations was pursued with the goal of benefiting from women's endorsement. The Gambia Democratic Party [GDP], Gambia Muslim Congress [GMC], and United Party [UP] all targeted the *kompins*. The colonial government outlawed political activities in rural Gambia, where traditional rulers called chiefs governed under the supervision of the colonial administration.³⁷ It was a strategic move by the British to prevent the rise of nationalism or independence movements among its subjects and to contain the use of violence as experienced in other British colonies. In colonial Kenya nationalist groups, notably the Mau Mau Movement clashed violently with British colonial authorities as they protested discriminatory and exploitative land policies that favored white settlers.³⁸ Fearful of a similar outcome in The Gambia, British authorities limited indigenous political parties' influence on local politics in urban areas.

The four political parties formed in the 1950s were relatively inclusive. Hannah Forster helped in financing and establishing GDP on February 25, 1951, led by Rev. John Colley Faye. She established the party's women's wing, became a prominent *yai kompin* and a resourceful mobilizer during the 1954 legislative council elections. She was a wealthy entrepreneur and among the country's first women political activists.³⁹ A year earlier, in 1953, Governor Wyn-Harris appointed her to the Consultative Committee for a new constitutional proposal. In 1959, Forster also urged provincial chiefs to enfranchise rural women by participating in politics at the All-Party Conference held in Georgetown. In the same way, women supported Ibrahima Garba Jahumpa's GMC formed in January 1952.⁴⁰ Under the leadership of Yadicone Njie, Bathurst women endorsed Pierre Sarr Njie when he became the leader of UP in 1954.⁴¹ Because women proved active mobilizers and volunteers, and effective in amplifying political messages, most parties recognized the necessity of involving them, increasing thereby their visibility in the political space. This is clear with Rachel Palmer, who was the only woman out of the ten delegates at the London Constitutional Conference of 1961.⁴²

Socio-economic conditions in Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary's drove the rapid development of women's grassroots organizations.⁴³ Through their collective action, women opposed colonial policies. Traders at the Albert market organized to protect themselves from colonial tax collectors and public health officials' harsh treatment. The 1920s exemplified a mass demonstration of women in Bathurst against prices increases.⁴⁴ Essentially, these forms of collective actions were means of empowerment for their members. Women's resistance against colonial taxation laws was also found in other parts of Africa, such as in the Temne-Mende crisis in Sierra Leone and the Akan protest in Gold Coast in the last years of the nineteenth century. Marc Matera et al. show extensive historical analyses of Aba women's resistance in 1929. The British colonial administrators in Southeastern Nigeria imposed special taxes on the Igbo market women, which culminated in protest of market women against the colonial government and the warrant chiefs.⁴⁵ Similarly, Abeokuta Women's Union under the leadership of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti led a series of protests between 1940s and 1950s against tax increment. Those protests were a major cause of the abdication of Oba Ademola II, then reigning Alake,

the traditional ruler of Egba in January 1949. The Women's Union also advocated for enfranchisement of all women in Nigeria.⁴⁶ In Guinea, in 1948, the market women defied colonial regulation and market tax. By 1955, these women got the colonial government to reduce taxes.⁴⁷ Based on this reason, these actions led to the growing interest in self-help groups.

The formation of women's grassroots organizations in The Gambia empowered women to challenge the status quo. This is certainly true with Women's Contemporary Society and Women's Federation, two organizations that promoted political awareness and women's rights. One of the founding members of these organizations was Augusta Jawara, who became the first woman to run for a national election in 1960 under the PPP ticket. Through these organizations, Lady Jawara built a powerful network and support for the PPP. She led a group that took part in house-to-house campaign and spoke to women's groups. Yet, she lost Soldier Town to her male opponent, Alieu Badara Njie, the candidate for Democratic Congress Alliance [DCA].⁴⁸ Lady Jawara's candidacy was a litmus test for women's ability to win national elections.

In 1965, The Gambia attained independence and held its first referendum the same year. The citizens were to decide whether to change the political system from a parliamentary monarchy to a republic.⁴⁹ Women were visible in celebrations of independence as they chanted and danced on that-momentous day of February 18, 1965. Almost every woman had sewn a new dress bearing the face of D.K Jawara with inscriptions such as the Gambia independence of 1965 or progress, peace, and prosperity. Since the eve of independence, women dressed in a variety of colors. Several people arrived from upriver districts to join the rest at the McCarthy Square.⁵⁰ Around midnight, the union jack was brought down and replaced by the Gambian flag; its red, white, blue, white, green colors were displayed on the flagpole while fireworks lit the sky and people sang the national anthem and liberation songs in unison.⁵¹ It was an emotional moment as Gambians looked forward to a better future; there were tears in the eyes of some of the people. They were tears of joy, hope, freedom, and uncertainty. The weeklong celebration started three days earlier. There was jubilation everywhere, in every village and every corner of the country.⁵² To honor this day, most woman stayed at home instead. As they aroused the city with a festive mood, the rural areas were also celebrating.

Nine months after The Gambia's independence, the first referendum was held on November 26, 1965. However, it was lost because of the government's inability to achieve a two-thirds majority.⁵³ Most of the electorate seemed to be unaware of the relevance of the referendum or what sovereignty entailed. The referendum would give people the mandate to make informed choices that would facilitate constitutional change, stipulate the type of government, and shape various institutions to run the affairs of the state of Gambian people. It gauged whether the electorate preferred to govern themselves or to be governed by a foreign power, and if citizens would cut the umbilical cord between the country and its former colonial master. Some politicians, however, opposed the proclamation of a republican state, stating that the country was unprepared for a transition because of its limited resources. The United Party and its leader, Pierre S. Njie, strongly disapproved of the republican state. They felt it was abrupt

and unwise for the people to take total control to run the affairs of the state. Many were of the view that the country's future statehood was uncertain, and its high poverty rate would cause its failure.⁵⁴ This referendum, therefore, failed to attain the two-third majority by less than eight hundred votes.

4. Origins and Workings of *Kafoolu*

Gambian women's ability to cultivate solidarity strengthened their collectivity. Despite the hostility of the colonial environment, women contested and negotiated with the system that gagged them. Women adopted different approaches to defend their economic and political interests within the British administrative system, which led to collective action efforts by groups from various regional and ethnolinguistic origins. Bala Saho's work portrays women's sense of solidarity in the Cadi court during the colonial period; he writes, "women-built networks along kinship lines at a social gathering, and through the market."⁵⁵ One woman's success in court was a success for other women. One of such instances was the landmark case of Horrijah Jobe.⁵⁶

There is a long-standing history of women's network in rural Gambia. But to date, we have found little evidence stating exactly when *kafoolu* were created. By illustration, community development practitioner Njaga Jawo concedes that:

We did not form *kafoos*; we found them there. People will claim that they form *kafoos*. Normally that is what people will say, but *kafoos* were here from days immemorial, even before we were born. What we did know is that we strengthened the *kafoos* and empowered them, but we found them there. So even before you and I were born, we found *kafoos* in our villages.⁵⁷

For Suwaibou Touray, women *kafoolu* emerged after independence. He claimed that the culture [farm work for prosperous families in the farming communities in return for reward] was that "it was the male and female youth who were in this culture before independence. Women's *kafoos* came into being later after independence, to part take in the farm work of this type or simply work for pay. It was these women *kafoos* that were infiltrated by politicians who then patronized them to gain their support. They borrowed this culture from the Bathurst area to the provinces changing the word *kafoo* to that of *kompin* and for Mandinka '*kompinoo*."⁵⁸ According to Sulayman Touray, *kompins* comprised different women and men, but the members were usually within the same age bracket or generation.⁵⁹ Binta Jammeh-Sidibe and Omar B. Jallow asserted that the idea of *kafoo* was brought to the city by rural-urban migrants, therefore metamorphosing into the concept of *kompin* in Bathurst and its surroundings.⁶⁰ As Saho states, the Colony could not provide "ethnic and kinship security," the formation of social network became inevitable as a survival technique to the changing conditions in the urban areas.⁶¹ Ethnolinguistic and economic aspirations and interests motivated these alliances, as with Mankinkas from Badibu of the North Bank Region and Serahuli from Garawuli of the Upper River Region.⁶² These Bathurst *kafoolu* and *kompins* were based on strong ethnolinguistic community ties and grouped men who were mostly clothes and textile traders who usually operated in Albert market. Most of them had lived in different areas in Bathurst, called *Half-Die* and *Tobacco Road*.⁶³

Jammeh-Sidibe and Touray highlighted that both women and men formed *kafoolu* to attain specific objectives and to address the community's needs. These necessities varied from one community or village to another. With time and a rise in population, individual *kafoolu* represented distinct groups and their respective identities. For example, secret societies for blacksmiths, leather workers, farmers, women groups, age grade, and weavers represented the interests of members of these occupations.⁶⁴ Mostly, in these groups, women were under the guidance of men in craftwork. In urban areas, however, women became more independent in handicraft. They created their market, where they predominantly sold to tourists. These women seemed to be more prosperous than their rural counterparts, even when they crafted similar products, such as dyed cloth and other fabrics.⁶⁵

In rural Gambia, *kafoolu* became a means for economic survival as women joined forces to promote their economic interests. They were created for socio-economic reasons aimed at improving members' income-generating potential by offering a support system for women's businesses and trades to become relevant actors in the informal sector of the country's economy.⁶⁶ Individual women, however, faced challenges when attempting to secure a living or profits from commercial activities.⁶⁷ By forming these groups, they exerted more pressure on local and regional leaders to protect their interests.

Members of *kafoolu* were mostly farmers. The Banjulinding, Bakau, Sukuta Women and the Ndemban Garden Associations are examples of *kafoolu*. The Gambia Women Farmers' Association [NAWFA] was later created as an umbrella body.⁶⁸ Involvement in food production made many of these women breadwinners within their households.⁶⁹ They engaged in horticultural ventures and the breeding of livestock for the provincial market, *lumo*, and the Islamic feast locally called *tobaski*. These women's labor contributed to the country's economy. Still, these women's ability to shape economic policy or gain political influence remained limited and subject to male authority.

Women formed *Kafoolu* and their membership includes mostly women. Men, however, have a limited presence in *kafoolu* sometimes help women with certain labor sometimes, including fencing gardens and digging wells. These co-opted male members made up between three and five men, and they took part as associate members.⁷⁰ These men sometimes served as advisers and helped women with their records. The members sometimes had their organizations' aims and objectives recorded in written documents. Even when that was not the case, they agreed about their goals *and* know them by heart.⁷¹

Although, there was no consensus as to when *kafoolu* were formed, they were instrumental in the collaborative work of their communities. Their act of voluntary service in their communities predated colonial rule. They took part in social and religious activities, such as funerals and naming ceremonies. Members of *kafoolu* played a complementary role to men to clear farms, weeding, and harvesting. They worked on individual farms as a way of mutual aid to their fellow members or sometimes for cash for their labor. They partook in other duties, such as fetching water and firewood and community cleaning. Besides cash, they received grains such as rice, corn, and millet in return for their services. Members would work on somebody's farm, such as a relatively wealthy person, very respectable individual, or successful merchants. They would also help the needy, who were incapable to work on their farm. They

also involved members in other economic ventures such as soap making and cloth dying to support themselves.⁷²

5. Political Partnership of Women and Political Leadership

Gambian politicians have used political patronage to gain support. The Gambia's ruling class systematically used political patronage not only to control power but also regime survival. This practice was clear in the 1960s, with the emergence of new political parties competing for a strong political base. For instance, Ibrahima Garba Jahumpa's party, GMC used Islamic symbols demonstrating sectarian politics. The formation of a merger or coalition between parties for a marriage of convenience such as the alliance between the leaders of PPP and DCA in 1960 to collectively gain urban-based support. President Jawara's marriage to Chilel Njie (as his second wife), the daughter of Alhaji Momodou Musa Njie, the country's richest man in the 1960s and the key financier of the UP. As a result, prominent members of the UP joined the PPP as Njie shifted his loyalty and financing to the PPP.⁷³

The Gambian politicians also promoted ethnicity and regionalism for political ends. While women mobilized to secure political patronage. This resulted in fostering division between the urban and rural areas. British officials purposefully created political fragmentation by encouraging regional political identities. For example, the formation of the PPP was a major political shift because, until 1959, the rural population was unrepresented. Thus, it came to symbolize the marginalized Protectorate. The extension of enfranchisement to the rural areas exacerbated the struggle for recognition among parties. Knowing the political rivalry between the UP and the PPP, Governor Sir Edward Henry Windley in 1961 appointed Pierre S. Njie as the First Chief Minister despite UP having a smaller number of seats [five versus nine seats of the PPP]. As a protest to this appointment, Jawara and Sheriff Sisay resigned from the Executive Council. Therefore, the 1962 election cemented partisanship and political patronage in the country's history.⁷⁴ During this election, the major parties were UP and the PPP. The leader of UP Pierre S. Njie, who was also the Chief Minister, gained the support of the chiefs.⁷⁵ The PPP, however, embarked on face-to-face campaign and concentrated on the farmers' support.⁷⁶ From this date onwards, the PPP came to symbolize with rural population who were legally excluded from national political scene by the colonial government.

Kafoolu and *kompins* provided resources and support for political parties. These supports included financing feedings of supporters during party meetings, hiring vehicles to voting centers during elections and purchasing a party designed T-shirts for supporters. This practice is still in existence. As shown previously, women's collective action led political parties to recognize their potential local influence and seek the support of women's organizations during elections. *Kompins* became political allies with GMC, UP and PPP who sought to work with these women groups. They directly linked with women's wing of political parties led by *yai kompins*. In other word, a *yai kompins* literary means "mother of association" but technically referring to a leader or a representative. They have played mentorship roles among community members and have made sure that members recognize the need to take part in development

work. Through these activities, they have become a strong mobilization force instrumental to politics. Most interviewees agreed that post-menopausal women assume the position of *yai kompins*. These women were eloquent, relatively “wealthy,” and from “important” families and traits that propelled them to a position of leadership. Many were the wives or daughters of important men, such as politician, an imam, *alkaloo* or successful trader themselves.⁷⁷ They are opinionated, skillful individuals who worked to expand their organization’s political engagement with a diverse national population. Women’s grassroots organizations endorsed and canvassed votes for their candidates during elections because voters listened to them. They sometimes supported the political goals of men close to them. Also, they hired vehicles to transport voters to polling stations.⁷⁸

Kafoolu and *kompins* embarked on fundraising and persuasion, facilitating political conversations and local diplomacy. They collaborated with the Women’s Bureau; an institution put in place by the Gambia government to investigate policies concerning women issues. It aimed to promote women in national development.⁷⁹ Through them, politicians could collaborate with urban and rural women for political gains. Much of that influence was also the product of the effective advocacy of these women. Using contributions of their members, women’s organizations supplemented the organization and entertainment efforts of political parties and candidates, providing *asobee*, food, water, and drinks for their political gatherings.⁸⁰

African women’s collective action was instrumental to liberation struggles across the continent. Scholars such as Filomina Chioma Steady, Susan Geiger, Deborah Pellow, Elizabeth Schmidt and Ampofo Akosua Adomako have examined the way women’s political participation transformed societies and the roles movements played either in societal success or failure.⁸¹ Geiger describes women as being ‘neglected’ despite their efforts and linked this constraint to patriarchy. These scholars hold the view that African women’s political participation diminished after independence because of illiteracy.⁸² The findings of the present study, however, suggest that women’s grassroots organizations were significant political actors despite their illiteracy.

Kafoolu and *kompins* have increased women’s political engagement through the organization of political activities.⁸³ Their pivotal role in the 1970 referendum emblemizes their achievement of political influence at a decisive moment in Gambian history. During the change to a republican government, Prime Minister Jawara faced massive opposition after his administration held the referendum. But in October 1969, women in Saba assured Jawara that they would campaign for its success. Similarly, in Fass Chaho, women affirmed their support during Jawara’s visit.⁸⁴ Women were therefore at the forefront of the PPP campaign for the republic. Gambian women were loyal followers of the PPP leader. Their position was not grounded so much on political ideology but on the notion that “God chooses a leader,” more of a cheerleader role. He was charismatic and had the firm support of women. As a result, UP, which opposed the call for a republican status, failed to secure the majority vote. The success of the PPP during this referendum made many personalities from various parties to shift allegiance to the PPP. This erratic changing of loyalty speaks volume of the country’s political

leadership and its direction.

From all indications, the political relationship and collaboration that existed between women and the country's political leaders remained asymmetrical. These women used their resources, energy, and time, but their compensation has been inconsequential compared to their political input. They calculated politicians would work to create solutions to their problems by providing them social amenities such as markets, schools, boreholes, health centers and good roads and provide jobs for their children. By focusing their efforts on securing votes for their candidates, instead of promoting critical political debate on policy issues, women in these organizations ended up doing the bidding of political parties. As a Prime Minister, Jawara had the authority to appoint the cabinet members of his government. All eight appointed ministers were men except Lucretia St. Claire Joof, who was nominated to the House of Representatives two years earlier.⁸⁵

In summary, the ability of these women to contribute to this referendum was connected to their extensive networks across the country, specifically the *kafoolu*'s well-established history in the rural Gambia and *kompins*' political trajectory in Bathurst. These women's organizations grew their members' socioeconomic and political advancement. Yet it failed to lead women to increased political representation. Their collectivity was a useful mechanism in partnership with politicians. It, therefore, enhanced a significant transformation, especially where *kafoolu* have made concerted efforts to gain increased access to village land. The political partnership of women's organizations contributed to the success of the referendum. Notwithstanding, this relationship culminated into political patronage between the *kafoolu/kompins* and the male-dominated parties and the government.

Endnotes

¹ Dawda K. Jawara, *Kairaba* (West Sussex: Domtom, 2009), 274.

² Alieu Jabang, "Halifa: April 24 Important in Gambian Calendar," *The Point Newspaper*, April 27, 2009.

³ Six months prior to the referendum, the Republic Bill was published and approved by the House of Representatives.

⁴ The PPP was called

⁵ All interviewees unanimously asserted that women played a crucial role in Gambian politics. Binta Jammeh-Sidibe affirmed that her mother was a very active *kafoo* leader since the 1960s whose efforts and other women shaped her political orientation in serving people. Her future husband, Bakary Sidibe was also very active in politics, and he was among the founding members of PPP. Sidibe was also a *kafoo* leader for men. Some interviewees claimed that women even sold their valuable such as jewelries to invest in politics in the 1960s and the 1970s.

⁶ Cheryl Jonson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Illinois press, 1997), 99-152; Schmidt,

“Women Take the Lead;” Hassoum Ceesay, *Gambian Women: An Introductory History* (Kanifing: Fulladu publisher, 2007); Almeida, *A Panoramic Portrait of the Contribution of Gambian Women*, 4-25.

⁷ Gisela Geisler, *Women and remaking of politics in Southern Africa: Negotiating Autonomy, Incorporation, and Representation* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2004), 208.

⁸ *Kafoo* [pl. *kafoolu* meaning traditional associations in Mandinka] operates in rural and peri-urban areas. While *kompins* [meaning associations/ organizations in Wolof] operate in urban settings. The name, however, does not affect the membership. Both *kafoolu* and *kompins* constitute different ethnolinguistic references of The Gambia. Binta Jammeh-Sidibe, telephone interview, July 31, 2020; Dusuba Touray, interview, Wuli Sutukonding, August 17, 2020.

⁹ Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, *A Political History of The Gambia: 1816-1994* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 1-2.

¹⁰ “Gambia 2013 Population Census,” n.d. <https://www.gbosdata.org/downloads/census-2013>

¹¹ Berkeley Rice, *Enter Gambia: The Birth of an Improbable Nation* (Boston, MA: Houghton Miffling, 1967), 1-389.

¹² Lamin Sanneh, “Foreword,” in *State and Society: The Gambia Since Independence, 1965-2012*, eds. Abdoulaye Saine, Ebrima Ceesay, and Ebrima Sall (New Jersey: African World Press, 2013), xxviii.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Some of Aku’s descendants came from different parts of West Africa particularly, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. For an insightful reading, see Patience Sonko-Godwin, *Trade in the Senegambia Region: from the 12th to the Early 21st Century* (Banjul: Sunrise publisher, 2004), 177-240.

¹⁵ National Archive file C.58S; CSO 3/205 appointment of unofficial representation of Legislative Council.

¹⁶ Sonko-Godwin, “Impact of the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery in the Senegambia Region,” in *Trade in the Senegambia Region: From the 12th to the Early 21st Century* (Banjul: Sunrise publisher, 2014), 148.

¹⁷ Some of these organizations had engaged in philanthropic work such as the women’s corona society that supplied food and clothing to the poor and needy in the Gambian society.

¹⁸ *Osusu* is monetary contributions [but not limited to monetary value] that has been accumulated by members of a group. Such a contribution is collected by individual members on rotational basis either weekly, biweekly, monthly, or even daily; it depends on the goal of the association. It is a form of micro finance or cooperative society strategy for commonwealth. This kind of scheme cements the group to remain together and stay loyal to their political patrons.

¹⁹ Wolof dance of which sounds are created from the beating drum (s).

²⁰ See Ceesay, *Gambian Women: An Introductory History*, 43 and 70.

²¹ Rosamond Fowlis, Florence Mahoney, Cecilia Mary Cole, Diona Christensen, Louise Njie, Julia Williams, Patience Sonko, and Augusta Jawara were trained teachers and nurses.

²² See Sonko-Godwin, “The Settler Colonies of Sierra Leone and Liberia-Achievements and Contributions of Blacks to the Development of West Africa,” in *Trade in the Senegambia Region*, 225-230.

²³ See Ceesay, *Gambian Women: An Introductory History*, 41.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *New Gambia*, Friday, March 11, 1966.

²⁶ The Governor (with the assistance of the Legislative and Executive Councils) was responsible for administering the colony. He was accountable to the Secretary of State for the colonies. It is important to note that the British colonial rule led to dividing the country into Colony and Protectorate. While the former was directly governed by the British, they used the indirect rule system to administer the latter.

²⁷ Ceesay, *Gambian Women: An Introductory History*, 94.

²⁸ Quoted in J.H Price’s article on “Some notes on the influence of women in Gambian politics,” published in Institute of Social and Economic Research, Conference proceedings, December 1958, 151-158.

²⁹ See David Perfect, *Historical Dictionary of The Gambia*, 5th ed (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 99.

³⁰ Governor Edward Windley was crucial in this process based on his efforts in convening these conferences. David Perfect noted that Windley was receptive to Gambians’ proposal for constitutional reforms unlike his predecessor.

³¹ Small was a nationalist journalist, and trade unionist. He became the first African to be elected to the Legislative Council in November of 1947.

³² See Nana Grey-Johnson, *Edward Francis Small: Watchdog of The Gambia*, 3rd ed (Banjul: Media & Development Specialists Publishing Co. Ltd., 2013), 1-122.

³³ Swaibou Touray, telephone interview by author, October 17, 2020.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Small was a nationalist journalist, and a trade unionist. He won the first Legislative election in February 1947.

³⁶ See *Foroyaa Newspaper*, February 21, 2016; Perfect, *Historical Dictionary of The Gambia*, 401-404.

³⁷ See Sonko-Godwin, *Leaders of the Senegambia Region: Reactions to European Infiltration 19th to 20th Century* (Banjul: Sunrise Publisher, 1995), 85; Sonko-Godwin, *Social and political Structures in the Pre-Colonial Period: Ethnic Groups of the Gambia* (Banjul: Sunrise Publisher, 1986), 70. In *Leaders of the Senegambia Region*, Sonko-Godwin noted that the Protectorate was areas locally controlled by indigenous people. They appeared to be autonomous, but they were under the supervision of the British colonial government’s representatives known as Travelling Commissioners who enforced the implementation of colonial laws. The Protectorate was divided into five divisions, each of which was sub-divided into districts.

³⁸ The Protectorate was excluded from national politics. See Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History of The Gambia: 1816-1994*, 134-139; Arnold Hughes, "From Green Uprising to National Reconciliation: The People's Progressive Party in the Gambia 1959-1973," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 9, no. 1 (1975): 62-65.

³⁹ Almeida, *A Panoramic portrait of the contribution of Gambian Women*, 5-6.

⁴⁰ Hassoum Ceesay, "I.M. Garba Jahumpa: Educationist, Nationalist and Pan-Africanist," *Weekend Observer*, February 7-9, 1995.

⁴¹ Most of the developments that occurred in women's struggle happened in the city. Little evidence was about women's political strife in the rural areas. From the evidence, one for this was the influence of Islamic religion and the practice of patriarchal culture. To many, the joy of womanhood was to have a successful marriage, and one's children become thriving in their endeavor as breadwinners of their families and good wives and mothers in their matrimony. Active politics was not a place for ordinary women in Gambian society. However, such perceptions became gradually replaced by an ambition to involve in politics, not to aspire as candidates in most cases but to vote for their male counterparts, usually along with religion or ethnic lines.

⁴² The delegates composed of Rachel Palmer, M.E Jallow, Henry Madi who represented the independent voices, Omar Mbacke represented the chiefs, David Jawara, and Sheriff Saikouba Sisay for the PPP, I.M Jahumpa and Rev. JC Fay for Democratic Congress Alliance, while United Party was represented by P.S Njie and Michael Baldeh. Palmer's father was a secretary to the Legislative Council through she developed interest and helped her father in writing minutes and clerical works where politicians knew. Her nomination was unanimously accepted said in her 1995 interview with the Foroyaa Newspaper. She was also instrumental in the National Consultative Committee that set up a transitional timetable to a democratic constitutional order for a second republic in 1997. Palmer also served as the Director of the Gambia Red Cross Society for over 20 years and became the Principal of the School of Nursing. She was the mother of Dr. Ayo Palmer and Fumike Sarr, who served as the chair of the National Consultative Committee (NCC) to seek Gambia's opinion about the transition period of the AFPR. See "Women's Affairs," *Foroyaa Newspaper*, May 10, 1995.

⁴³ Ceesay, "Women's Association and Social Development in Bathurst," 32-36.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-11.

⁴⁶ See Cheryl Jonson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 63, 94-95.

⁴⁷ Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses*, 122.

⁴⁸ DCA was a merger of the Gambia Muslim Congress [GMC] and the Gambia Democratic Party [GDP] in March 1960. Soon after that, the party became inactive due to a slip-up of GMC to form

Gambia Congress Party in October 1962. DCA later merged with PPP in 1965. Meanwhile, Augusta was a nurse, women's rights activist, and a playwright. She came from a very prominent family in Bathurst. Because of her social status, some of her critics alleged that she would be favored. Augusta Jawara was the wife of the leader of PPP, D.K Jawara and Sir John Mahoney's daughter, the country's first Speaker of the Legislative Council. The Gambia Echo's June 1960 publication dedicated an editorial paying tribute to the pioneering spirit of both the party and the candidate. The editorial allegedly stated that, despite a barrage of abuses aimed at opponents by some political parties, she stood firm. Through her literacy works and campaign, Augusta Jawara engaged in a variety of activities including sports and culture especially, at the Female Athletics Meeting organized by the Gambia Athletics Association. She attended seminars and based on her wide recognition; she represented the country in Dakar on the 19th of November 1962 on the theme Advancement of Women in Africa. The program was a concerted effort between the Senegalese government in collaboration with UNESCO. Lady Jawara was known for her exemplary leadership and intellect. She continued to advocate for women's political rights until her demise in 1981. For detail information, see Dawda K. Jawara, *Kairaba* (West Sussex: Domtom, 2009), 204-205; Almeida, *A Panoramic Portrait of the Contribution of Gambian Women*, 8-9; *Gambia Echo*, June 1960.

⁴⁹ There were controversies around the Independence because political leaders had different views on how to run the affairs of the state. Garba Jahumpa and P.S Njie's viewpoints failed to project complete freedom. Instead, they supported delaying independence. D.K Jawara and some PPP members, on the other hand, demanded immediate internal self-rule in 1961.

⁵⁰ See Berkeley Rice, *Enter Gambia; the Birth of an Improbable Nation*, 21-27; Dawda K. Jawara, *Kairaba*, 245-246.

⁵¹ Mrs. Julia Howe wrote the country's national anthem constituting three stanzas.

⁵² See Dawda K. Jawara, *Kairaba*, 245-246.

⁵³ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History of The Gambia*, 2.

⁵⁴ Lamin Sanneh, "Foreword," in *State and Society: The Gambia Since Independence*, xxviii.

⁵⁵ Bala Saho, *Contours of Change: Muslim Courts, Women, and Islamic Society in Colonial Bathurst, the Gambia, 1905-1965* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2018), 1-121.

⁵⁶ The plaintiff who filed against Rex in 1887, was a coos seller locally called *chereh* at Albert market and was alleged of stealing a bag worth two pounds along with few other items after involving in a barter trade with a destitute who wanted a plate of *chereh* but had no money instead gave her the bag. This act of fair exchange led to her arrest and detention at the Bathurst police station up to the time market women contributed to pay for the said amount. Due to this humiliation, she hired two outstanding men: lawyer Renner Maxwell and John C. Gray to defend her case. Eventually, she won the case. Despite the harsh policies of colonial rule, these women used the legal and economic opportunities to their advantage in the urban area. This detail is found in Saho, *Contours of Change*, 61.

- ⁵⁷ Njaga Jawo, interview, Wellingara, October 9, 2020.
- ⁵⁸ Swaibou Touray, telephone conversation with author, October 17, 2020.
- ⁵⁹ Sulayman Touray, interview, Brikama, October 11, 2020.
- ⁶⁰ Binta Jammeh-Sidibe, telephone interview, July 31, 2020; Omar B. Jallow, interview, Serekunda, July 28, 2020.
- ⁶¹ Saho, *Contours of Change*, 120-21.
- ⁶² The five Administrative Regions of The Gambia were referred to as Divisions before they were changed in 2007. These divisions were Western Division, North Bank Division, Lower River Division, Central River Division and Upper River Division and Banjul City. See introductory chapter of the present study for administrative areas.
- ⁶³ Although early settlers came to Bathurst in large numbers, they were fragmented. They constituted of Europeans who arrived from Senegal with their servants and technicians who were contributory to the construction of the colonial city. There was a group who arrived in search of greener pasture as in the case of Serahuli and Badibunkas. A few came for educational purposes and other opportunities that were available in the city. Among them was a group of settlers who came for safety reasons due to Muslim wars in the region for over five decades. For more detail, read Saho's work on *Contours of Change*.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.; Kaddy Dibba, interview, Sukuta Nema, October 11, 2020; Hon. Touray is a sitting National Assembly member for Wuli West since 2017.
- ⁶⁵ Aja Sima, telephone interview, Bakau, October 11, 2020.
- ⁶⁶ Telephone conversations with interviewees: Na Fanta Fatty, Tamba Sansan, Basse, September 10, 2020; Lisa Kanteh, Bundung Borehole, October 12, 2020; Aja Faye Camara, interview, Touba Kotou, Wuli, August 15, 2020; and Kaddy Dibba, interview, Sukuta Nema, October 11, 2010.
- ⁶⁷ Na Fanta Fatty, telephone interview, Tamba Sansan, Basse, September 10, 2020.
- ⁶⁸ Ya Sainabou Panneh was a leader of both kafoo and kompin in the North Bank Region. She has been instrumental in politics from Presidents Jawara, Jammeh to Barrow as a *yai kompin*; Fatoumata Jahumpa-Ceesay (former speaker at the National Assembly), in discussion with the author, August 28, 2020.
- ⁶⁹ Judith Carney and Michael Watts, "Manufacturing dissent: Work, Gender and the Politics of Meaning in a Peasant Society," *Africa* 60, no. 2 (1990): 207-241; Cymone Fourshey, "Women in the Gambia," Faculty Contributions to Books (2019), https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/fac_books/179; Londa Vanderwal et al, "Participatory Approach to Identify Interventions to Improve the Health, Safety, and Work Productivity of Smallholder Women Vegetable Farmers in the Gambia," *International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health* 24, no. 1 (2011):36-47; William G. Moseley, Judith Carney, Laurence Becker and Susan Hanson, "Neoliberal Policy, Rural Livelihoods, and Urban Food Security in West Africa: A Comparative Study of The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 104, no. 13 (March

2010): 5774-5779.

⁷⁰ Jaga Jawo was an agriculture extension and development worker. His work exposed him to every parts of the country and he has been working with *kafoolu* across The Gambia.

⁷¹ Na Fanta Fatty, telephone interview, Tamba Sansan, Basse, September 10, 2020; Aja Faya Camara, interview, Touba Kotou, Wuli, August 15, 2020.

⁷² See Mawdo Jatta, interview, Wuli Sutukoba, October 18, 2020; Na Fanta Fatty, Tamba Sansan, Basse, September 10, 2020.

⁷³ See the work of Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, *A Political History of The Gambia: 1816-1994*.

⁷⁴ Arnold Hughes, "From Green Uprising to National Reconciliation: The People's Progressive Party in the Gambia 1959-1973," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 9, no. 1 (1975): 61-62.

⁷⁵ Despite Njie's appointment by the Governor General to head the Executive, full self-government was not attained until 1963.

⁷⁶ Ibid.; Suwaibou Touray, telephone interview, October 17, 2020; Alagie Jambo Camara, interview, Sutukonding, August 15, 2020. Among the interviewees, Camara and Jatta gave an insightful discussion of the contestation for power between the UP and the PPP.

⁷⁷ Ya Haddy Panneh's late husband was an alkaloo of Njawara in the North Bank Region. She succeeded him to chieftaincy during the Second Republic after facing opposition before she was unanimously approved. Aja Fanta Basse's husband was a Governor-General representing Queen Elizabeth II before the republic. Fatounding Jatta was a successful merchant. Aja Fatou Sallah was also a strong woman of Muslim Congress and Democratic Alliance parties in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁷⁸ Alagie Demba Sisawo, interview, Sutukoba, August 13, 2020; Fatoumata Jahumpa-Ceesay, telephone conversation with the author, August 28, 2020; Neneh Isatou Jallow, telephone interview by author, October 8, 2020; Sulayman Touray, interview, Brikama, October 11, 2020.

⁷⁹ Jawara, *Kairaba*, 361; Alagie Jambo Camara, interview, Sutukonding, August 15, 2020.

⁸⁰ Asobee is a party-uniform [resemblance of a garment worn by members of an association during occasions]. It is not restricted to women, but they popularize the idea as an illustration of membership, cooperation, and unity. The word *asobee* may have originated from a Yoruba word, "aso ebi" meaning cloth or dress worn by family [but not limited to] for self-identification or show solidarity and friendship during ceremonies.

⁸¹ Steady, *Women and Collective Action*; Schmidt, "Women Take the Lead;" Susan Geiger, "Women in Nationalist Struggle: TANU Activists in Dar es Salaam;" Deborah Pellow, "Solidarity among Muslim Women in Accra, Ghana," *Anthropos* 82, no. 4/6 (1987): 489-506, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40463476>; Ampofo Akosua Adomako, Josephine Beoku-Betts and Mary J. Osirim, "Researching African Women and Gender Studies: New Social Science Perspectives," *African and Asian Studies* 7 (2008): 327-341.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ceesay, “Women’s Association and Social Development in Bathurst,” 31; Almeida, *A Panoramic Portrait of the Contribution of Gambian Women* (2014), 2-3.

⁸⁴ Ironically, the republican state witnessed the decline of a major opposition party, UP, who orchestrated the failure of the first referendum. Omar Jallow, telephone interview by author, July 18, 2020; Ya Sainabou Panneh, interview, Fass chaho, August 30, 2020; Jawara, *Kairaba*, 271.

⁸⁵ Earlier in August that year, a bill was passed to increase number of nominated members from two to four geared towards promoting women.