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The contentious Ghanaian: An historical appraisal of social movements in Ghana

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Abstract

Ideas of freedom, liberty, and social justice are germane to most societies, including African societies. The quest for these values also often involves contentions, dialog, and compromise. Sadly, the often-told stories of political and social change in Africa are brush-stroked with bloodshed, tears, and anguish. This Africa of pessimism, unfulfilled dreams, state-sponsored violence, and civil wars is a familiar headline in the global North. This work, however, proposes that African countries such as Ghana have been resolving their disagreements and contentions through other means. These range from subtle, subversive, noncompliant and complex responses to the less preferred direct and open confrontation with authority. Secondly, the historiography of protest movements in Ghana reveals a lingering preference for twentieth century social movements, neglecting nineteenth century forms of protest and social movement bases, which employed subtlety, noncompliance, and sometimes, direct confrontation. Lastly, initial social movement literature showed a preponderance of male-dominated narratives, which eventually led to the creation of female-inspired alternate narratives. Using selected works in social movement theory, general surveys on the history of Ghana, monographs, journal articles, book chapters and unpublished theses, this article seeks to offer a panoramic view of the history-writing of social movements and its prospects in Ghana.

1 | INTRODUCTION AND CLAIM(S)

In September 1866, King John Aggrey of Cape Coast sent a petition to Governor-in-Chief Blackall through Edward Conran, Administrator of the Gold Coast, objecting to Conran's interference in native governance and adjudication. Following a second petition, Conran summoned King Aggrey to appear before him, but the king declined to honor the summon. In the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, the Talensi tenaciously resisted the imposition of British colonial rule from 1898 to 1911 through disruptive acts such as blockade, boycott, and brigandage. Elsewhere in 1929, thousands of women in Abia State, Nigeria, staged weeks of protest against the colonial government over direct taxation and imposition of Warrant Chiefs.

In May 1991, university students marched through the streets of Cape Coast, Ghana, and presented a resolution to the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) military government, demanding a return to constitutional rule. Down south, in March 2015, students from the University of Cape Town (UCT) demanded that the statue of British imperialist Cecil Rhodes be removed from the UCT campus. The movement generated around this controversy became known as Rhodes Must Fall (RMF). Initial acts of protest included desecrating Rhodes' statue with excreta and covering it with a cloth.

Across the Atlantic Ocean, the Argentine economy collapsed, compelling ordinary people to go out in the streets singing 'Que se vayan todos' (They all must go) to the sound of the *cacerola* (the banging of pots and pans) in December 2001 (Sitrin, 2012). On the same continent in 2011, thousands of Chileans, including students, took to the streets and organized massive protests, hunger strikes, and kiss-ins. Dubbed the "Chilean Winter," they demanded reforms in education and indigenous rights and criticized Chile's economic and political system, especially the 1980 constitution, which was crafted to secure elite interests and neoliberal reforms (*New York Times*, August 4, 2011).

These historical vignettes attest to the universal, innate hunger for freedom, liberty, and justice by humans across temporal and spatial restrictions. But in the quest for those three values, our paths intersect and often collide, setting us on a course of disagreement, contention and a call for change. Usually, agreements and compromises are reached after much public posturing, saber-rattling, and dialog. Unfortunately, when it comes to narratives on political and social change in Africa, violence is perceived as the default option by discourses obsessed with an Africa of broken dreams, civil strife, warlords, coup d'états, military juntas and humanitarian interventions (Branch & Mamphilly, 2015). To add to Branch and Mamphilly's point, this hegemonic meta-narrative of Afro-pessimism, an Africa of state failure where nothing works, and people are incapable of resisting authoritarian regimes without external help, looms. In such discourses, the African or Ghanaian story is mediated through global North interpretations, holding history and authorship hostage. Mediation in this work refers to an Africa-centered interpretation and is not prejudicial to nationality, ethnicity, race or the theoretical framework of any scholar. Thus, it is possible for a global North scholar to offer an Africa-centered interpretation. Additionally, the point of this current intellectual reflection is not to jettison over a century of western epistemic mediation of the African or Ghanaian past but to interrogate the process of that mediation, and the perspectives generated thereof.

The study of social movements in Ghana, and Africa in general, should be a narrative built on collective memories of the histories of struggle and contention against the colonial state and the post-independence state. For instance, theories on state failure in late-century Africa (see Bates, 2008) had examples such as Angola, Chad, Congo, Sudan, and Uganda, neglecting significant changes that took place in countries such as Mauritius, Botswana, Cape Verde, South Africa, Namibia, and Ghana in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This work proposes that countries such as Ghana have been resolving their differences through other means, pathways born out of people's ability to engage in quotidian acts of noncompliance against authority, and complex acts of contention and collective action. In the decades-long search for political stability and economic development, individuals, associational groups, and unions in Ghana coalesced at critical moments to make claims that led to the making of Ghana's democratic Fourth Republic (Sapong, 2009, 2021). Secondly, the historiography of protest movements in Ghana reveals that scholars have overstated the importance of twentieth century social movements, especially the anti-colonial movement, leading to the neglect of nineteenth century forms of protest and social movement bases. Finally, early social movement discourses

were skewed towards narratives which mainly excluded women agency, or at best, regarded them as extraneous sub-plots. This situation eventually led to a bifurcation in the historiography and the existence of parallel narratives. Thus, scholars speak of women's movements, activism, or protests in contrast to male-dominated social movements.

2 | ANALYTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reconstructing the past in the post-independence era took a radical direction, influencing the way historical research and writing was carried out in Ghana. The centrality of lived experiences, of ordinary lives, the desacralization of the archives, and the broadening of the scope of the archives, encouraged the study of interdisciplinary sub-fields such as social movements. Currently, our definition of the archives goes beyond buildings housing colonial and post-independence official records. The archives expansively include oral histories, material culture, the performing arts, and everyday acts of history-making. Thus, from quotidian expressions of frustration and hope on commercial vehicles to music and theater, street marches and labor union strikes, Ghana's contention terrain is complex and varied.

Moreover, to have a fruitful discussion on the history-writing of social movements in Ghana, relevant concepts such as social movements, a social movement base, a social movement campaign, contentious politics, contention, and collective action need to be clarified. At the basic level, everyday life involves contention and collective action. People engage in contention when they make claims that border on someone else's interests, while collective action involves a synchronized effort on behalf of shared interests. In 1866, the king of Anomabu (currently a coastal town in Ghana) found his subject guilty of a civil offence and imprisoned him. The British Administrator Conran sent magistrates to review the case, released the prisoner, and fined the king. At this stage, the situation was one of contentions, as the Administrator sought to supplant the judicial authority of the king. However, events escalated into the realm of collective action when the king of Anomabu and his chiefs responded to Conran's affront. They jointly wrote him a letter asserting the sovereignty of Anomabu and the primacy of the native laws of the land. Additionally, they encouraged the king to imprison another person who was found guilty of a civil offence. Finally, when Conran marched to Anomabu with a force, the chiefs refused to give up their king (Agbodeka, 1971). Again, at this stage, contention and collective action do not constitute social movements by themselves. What, then, is a social movement?

This work defines a social movement as 'a sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarity that sustain these activites' (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 8). This definition delineates two components of a social movement, namely, a social movement base and a social movement campaign. A social movement base comprises 'movement organizations, networks, participants, and the accumulated cultural artifacts, memories, and traditions that contribute to social movement campaigns.' A social movement campaign, on the other hand, 'is a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of concerted public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment, using such means as public meetings, demonstrations, petitions, and press releases' (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 114). These two components work in tandem to make social movements successful. It may be said that groups engage in contentious politics when they embark on a social movement campaign to make claims on authorities using public performances drawn from inherited repertoires and forge alliances to take advantage of political opportunities (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 4).

As Mamdani succinctly puts it, it is logical to 'analyse the historical relationship between state and society through a periodisation that captures its contradictory and changing character, rather than through a one-sided and ultimately ahistorical opposition.' After all, 'social movements in Africa are not just about opposing the state, but also about redefining the form of that state' (Mamdani, 1995, pp. 33–34). It is also not advisable to make a blanket application of the concept of social movements to 'all of contentious politics, its social bases, and its cultural contexts' because 'social movements are a historical—and not a universal—category' (Tilly and Tarrow, p.8, 2007). These statements imply three things for the purposes of this work. First, that social movements rely heavily on history; secondly, that

social movements are not by default locked in an eternal battle with the state; and finally, that a nuanced approach must be used in studying social movements in each society and context, even in the case of societies within the same colonial territory. In other words, Ghana may serve as a historical instance, with lessons that are applicable to other African situations where versions of British colonialism took root. However, scholars must refrain from hasty generalizations, paying close attention to local variations in historical agency, allodial rights and the politics of land ownership, and socio-religious conditions, among other factors. The histories of the Gold Coast Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) and Talensi resistance to colonial rule are illustrative of this regard.

In the 1890s, the colonial government's policy to make its colonies self-sufficient and profitable led to the introduction of certain policies. These included the imposition of new taxes, the introduction of land bills, and the so-called "pacification" of certain areas. The land question became one of the most contentious topics in the late nineteenth century. The Crown Lands Ordinance was published in 1895 to vest 'waste and forest lands and minerals' in the Queen. It also forbade a future grant of waste land, minerals and timber to non-natives of the Gold Coast without the Governor's consent. There was a general outcry, including a petition from the people of Cape Coast, Anomabu, and surrounding areas to the Secretary of State in 1895. The people of Accra went a step further by sending a petition to Queen Victoria. In 1896, Governor Maxwell decided to rethink the issue of landownership by replacing the Crown Lands Ordinance with the Concessions Bill. This new bill still gave the governor the power to restrict native landowners from granting land exceeding 20 acres. Additionally, only the governor could grant exclusive land rights to companies. Gold Coast opposition to the Concessions Bill was immediate, including a cablegram to Queen Victoria from the people of Axim. It was within this contentious environment that the ARPS was formed in April 1897.

The Gold Coast Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) was successful in contesting the land question because it transitioned from a social movement base to a social movement campaign. The ARPS benefitted from history and previous attempts at Fante political unity and cultural pride, as epitomized by the Fante Confederation of 1868–1873 and the Mfante Amanbuhu Fekuw, a cultural society founded in 1889. At its inception, the ARPS took advantage of inherited repertoires such as the writing of petitions, sending deputations, using the print media and a general concern for a declining indigenous culture. The society founded *The Gold Coast Aborigines*, a newspaper that effectively controlled the indigenous discourse on the land question. It also varied its approach and toned-down antagonism against the colonial state by adopting dialog and consensus. Ultimately, the ARPS's coup de Grace was sending a deputation led by Jacob W. Sey to London on May 24, 1898. In London, H. H. Asquith helped the delegation to present their views to a sympathetic Joseph Chamberlain. We may conclude with Grove and Falola's even assessment that the ARPS was successful because it was 'a very multi-faceted alliance of chiefs, lawyers, British business interests and radical politicians, personified by Joseph Chamberlain, Casely-Hayford and Mensah Sarbah' (Grove & Falola, 1996, p. 13). Indeed, David Kimble, in tracing the origins of Gold Coast nationalism, showed a keen interest in Victorian figures such as J. W. Sey and Reverend S. R. B. Solomon (later Attoh Ahuma) editor of *The Gold Coast Methodist Times*, George Ferguson, and J. E. Casely-Hayford. These African elites came to be deemed as likely successors to the colonial state.

The process of "pacification" up in the savanna areas, which later became the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast colony, was another point of contention. The Frafra subdistrict became a trouble-spot for the British, beginning in the 1890s. In January 1899, the Chief Commissioner sent an armed force to impose British authority and punish communities which were creating a hostile environment for initial British attempts. One such community was the Talensi town of Tongo. The repertoire of Talensi resisters included blockade, boycott, brigandage and open confrontation. By these means, the Talensi (and the greater Frafra community) were able to force initial British withdrawal from Bolgatanga, an outpost. Eventually, the British officials concluded that the chief culprits were the Talensi, especially the chief of Tongo, who also doubled as the chief priest of the Talensi and of all the Frafra, and a custodian of the *Tongnaab* shrine. The *Tongnaab* was the Talensi ancestor-deity whose shrine and the surrounding Tong hills were alleged to be the symbol of Talensi (and Frafra) resistance to "pacification." The British accused him of organizing a boycott against them and issuing orders for the British to be driven out. The chief of Tongo was subsequently arrested and taken to Gambaga, another British outpost, where he was confined until he could pay a fine of 200 cattle and

300 sheep. He never returned to Tongo alive. Later, the British targeted the shrine to break the perceived spirit of the resistance. In 1911, a punitive expedition organized by the British evicted the Talensi from the Tong hills, not allowing them to return until the 1930s (Allman & Parker, 2005; Anafu, 1973; Goody, 1990; Parker, 2013).

The Talensi and the chief priest's defiance against British colonial officials present us with an opportunity to engage two under-studied interpretations to resistance in the Gold Coast. Hobsbawm, in his classic work on bandits, presents the scenario of social banditry as a phenomenon of social protest, thereby providing the basis for a revolt (Hobsbawm, 2000). Given Hobsbawm's interpretation, the bandits on the roads in Talensi country were transformed from being scoundrels and highway robbers to symbols of Talensi resistance to British colonization. Similarly, Adas looks at prophet-led rebellions as a type of social protest to repel colonial incursion and preserve the indigenous way of life (Adas, 1979). Arguing along those lines, we can re-examine the role of the chief priest of the *Tongnaab* shrine in contesting the colonial intrusion. Although a tragic figure, the chief priest wielded the ritual power to revitalize the rebellion against those perceived to be invaders.

Finally, I find James C. Scott's approach in analyzing the everyday forms of resistance among peasants very useful. He points out that there is an unremitting struggle between peasants and those who seek to exact labor, taxes and rent from them. Instead of confronting and resisting the authorities, these peasants 'nibble away at such policies' by resorting to foot-dragging, desertion, pilfering, slander, gossip, feigned ignorance and noncompliance (Scott, 1985, p. xvi). Scott's work gives me pause on contention, collective action, and contentious politics in Ghana in three ways. First, it allows me to frame individuals, such as the cocoa farmer, the merchant prince, the intellectual, the student, the artist, the bandit, the king, and the chief priest as resistors, a quixotic or gritty persona who stood up for either profit, native culture, native law and customs, or common human decency. Secondly, it offers me the opportunity to contextualize the place of the cocoa farmer in a social movement framework. Finally, it speaks to the importance that Fanon gave to the rural masses, the peasantry, that unpredictable wellspring of spontaneity and endurance (Fanon, 2004, pp. 63–96). Interestingly, Scott's peasants preferred subtle subversion, while Fanon's peasants were itching to carry out an armed struggle. Cocoa farmers in Ghana were mainly cast in the frame of Scott's peasant. They chose noncompliance by boycotting the sale of cocoa 'to break the price manipulation by European firms and the appropriation of their income by the colonial state' (Amoah-Boampong, 2011, p. 64). In the 1930s, cocoa farmers staged 'hold-ups' or refused to give up their crop for sale to compel the big firms to increase the purchase price.

Comparatively, Latin America offers useful insights into the study of social movements in Africa, or specifically Ghana, due to its long history of resistance to the Spanish and Portuguese empires, global capitalism and neoliberal international institutions (See Kuecker et al., 2008). The Latin American catalog of resistance literature and collective action repertoires serve as useful points of reference for exploring social movement topics in the post-independent African nation-state. In the 1970s and 1980s, popular opposition to global capitalism and neoliberalism in Ghana found inspiration from Latin American protest narratives.

3 | SELECTED SCHOLARSHIP

Branch and Mamphilly (2015) suggest that the major protest waves in the modern history of Africa may be divided into three phases. These are the anti-colonial movements of the late colonial period (1940s and 1950s), the anti-austerity protests of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the recent wave of protests across the African continent, including the Arab Spring and Rhodes Must Fall movements. Larmer (2010), on the other hand, identifies four phases. According to him, the first phase of social movement struggle was born out of the nationalist period of the 1950s and 1960s, when Africans engaged in mass anti-colonial protests to attain independence. The second phase began from the 1960s into the mid-1970s when the newly independent centralized states turned on their former Allies by either suppressing or incorporating social movements. The economic crisis of the mid-1970s and the 1980s ushered in the third phase, when the state was forced to open-up in exchange for external help. The final phase, the pro-democracy period, began in the 1990s when mass protest movements and organizations teamed up to oust authoritarian governments.

Although these attempts to neatly stack a slippery subject matter into manageable time frames are useful, a study of the history of social movements in Ghana does not easily lend itself to such an endeavor. Larmer, Branch and Mamphilly's categorizations leave out an important period, the nineteenth century, which is littered with instances of contention, collective action and contentious politics, not only between Africans and Europeans but also between the different native polities. The nineteenth and twentieth century histories of Ghana reveal a nation-state that has been forged in the crucibles of a nineteenth century Afro-European encounter, a late nineteenth century colonialization push, a mid-twentieth century nationalist and decolonization drive, and a late twentieth century post-independence search for political stability.

Generally, the historiographical topography of protest movements in Ghana is heavily tilted towards events in the twentieth century, reducing a contentious nineteenth century to footnote status. Scholars have bandied around descriptive phrases such as "protonationalist movements" and "incipient nationalist movements" to refer to mid- to late-nineteenth century attempts at resisting British imperial designs in Ghana. This was mainly because these nineteenth century protest movements did not have the "organisation, methods and techniques" of the twentieth century political parties (Agbodeka, 1971). There are several good general history texts on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ghana, including Boahen's *Ghana: Evolution and Change* (2000), Buah's *A History of Ghana* (1998), Kimble's *A Political History of Ghana* (1963), Agbodeka's *Ghana in the Twentieth Century* (1972), Gocking's *The History of Ghana* (2005), and Amenumey's *Ghana: A Concise History* (2008).

Ultimately, when it comes to the subject matter of the history of social movements in Ghana, one is left to piece the puzzle together. The above listed books contain topics with phrases such as protest movements, youth movements, the nationalist movement, Gold Coast nationalism, and politics and protest in the model colony. Thematically, these general history texts provide useful examples, rough signposts of sorts, for writing a history of social movements in Ghana. Nineteenth century instances of protest abound, whether by kings, chiefs, merchant princes, the educated African elite, women, townsfolk, or farmers protesting against specific British policies. Paradoxically, this situation has pigeon-holed the instances of contention, collective action, and contentious politics as discrete and specific reactionary responses to colonial policies, devoid of a national character and a *longue durée*.

Agbodeka's *African Politics and British Policy in the Gold Coast*, however, has been most useful for three reasons. First, in terms of time frame, the book focuses on protest movements in the forgotten nineteenth century, even if these movements were labeled as "protonationalist" or "incipient nationalist" movements. Secondly, in terms of subject matter, it engages the stuff of social movements—issues of contention, collective action and contentious politics—even if these protest movements were localized and did not have the panache of a twentieth century nationalist political party. Lastly, this book sought to bring out African agency, and the influence of African political activities on the formulation and execution of British policy (Agbodeka, 1971). Through protest movements and resistance, the people compelled the colonial government to withdraw, suspend, or fine-tune its policies on the Gold Coast. Historical examples which clearly epitomized this situation were the Gold Coast Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS), a protest emblem of the African elite, and the Talensi in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In Ghana, it is generally agreed that modern nationalism involving mass movements came to fruition after the Second World War (WWII). The rise of mid-twentieth century political parties such as the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) and the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) in Ghana in the late 1940s encouraged political participation and influenced the course of nationalism (Bob-Milliar, 2014). However, in a social movement frame, narratives on this period make room for contingencies of history by framing individuals such as Nkrumah as a resistor, a quixotic and tenacious character who took advantage of unfolding events to stand up for the rest. In this contentious politics framework, Nkrumah 'made claims on the colonial government through both inherited and invented forms of collective action' (Sapong, 2016, p. 90). Apart from the contingencies of history, Fanon reminds us that the urban centers often provided leadership in liberation struggles, while the rural masses offered sheer numbers, brute force, spontaneity, and endurance (Fanon, 2004, pp. 63–96). Certainly, the rural masses, in assuming the role of the collective, were weaponized by nationalists who politicized and capitalized on rural discontent to gain traction during periods of contestation with the colonial state (Danquah, 1994). Yidana takes this argument a step further by emphasizing

the "vital" and "instrumental role" of the "critical masses" in bringing an end to formal colonial rule. By critical masses, he meant 'a mosaic of overlapping but closed social strata within the colonial system.' These included peasant farmers, market women, ordinary artisans, and school dropouts who identified with the decolonization movement (Yidana, 2012, pp. 105–106).

In the last 50 years, social movement chronicles in Ghana have expanded to include modernist conceptions of class interests. Scholars have subsumed issues of contention under the problematic construct of an African proletariat and bourgeoisie (See Gray, 1981). In the areas of agriculture and mining, there have been attempts at proletarianizing farmers and mine workers in Ghana. In the case of the mine workers, Crisp portrays a long history of struggle and attempts 'to resist their exploitation and subordination' by global capitalism and the state. Additionally, the mine workers 'have persistently asserted their autonomy, displaying a degree of militancy and solidarity rare amongst African workers' (Crisp, 1984, p. 179). In the case of cocoa farmers, their cash crop's importance to the state, farmers, and global capital set the stage for the contention as all parties sought to dominate. There were instances when this agrarian class sought to use cocoa as leverage in contestations against the state (Amoah-Boampong, 2011; Beckman, 1976; Mikell, 1992). Additionally, social movement narratives include the agency of a so-called African middle class. An interesting development with middle class movements was the weaponization of technology as a tool of social movement campaigns. Thus, critical information was disseminated instantly through social media platforms using mobile devices, and mass groups could be mobilized within hours (Castells, 2015; Teferra & Ntuli, 2021). Recent examples include the Occupy Ghana movement of 2014. Some of the common themes around which middle class movements such as the Occupy Ghana rally included high cost of living, unemployment, corruption, accumulation by dispossession, and inadequate infrastructure (Afagbedzi, 2019; Asante & Helbrecht, 2018; Noll & Budniok, 2021). However, Amin cautions scholars against attaching too much significance to a comprador bourgeoisie in the peripheries who have been compromised by capitalist interests, and have thus lost their revolutionary zeal (Amin et al., 1990).

In the historiography of social movements in Ghana, and perhaps in Africa, there is one social movement base, which is still understudied. Throughout the twentieth century, student associations and unions sporadically appeared at watershed moments in the continent's history. Students were part of the critical masses who contested power with the colonial state, they were there when the first African governments were toppled by military adventurists, and they were there when African countries experienced the 'third wave' of democratization. From the 1940s to the 1990s, student activism was a mainstay of the quest for social change. The immediacy of student movements became clearer in the post-independence era when African political actors and power blocs began to realign. In the ensuing contest for power, students were often courted by contestants for support. This situation, however, set the stage for a confrontation between students and governments when relations go sour. Negotiating those relations has been one of the driving forces behind the search for political stability in Africa. As a social movement base in Ghana, student movements were instrumental in the making of Ghana's Fourth Republic, as they contributed to the needed impetus from the 1960s to the 1990s (Asiedu-Acquah, 2019; Boahen, 1994; Sapong, 2009, 2014).

Lastly, the current expansion of the archives to include everyday acts of history-making allows for creativity and flexibility in social movement research in Ghana. In music and performance, we get to frame the artist as a resistor and music as a repertoire of contention. In highlife and afrobeat music, artistes such as Nana Kwame Ampadu and Fela Ani Kulapo-Kuti became symbols of resistance by using allegories, innuendos, metaphors, satire, or overt criticism to comment on the state of the nation. Nana Ampadu is known for popular hits like *Ebe te yie*—meaning 'some are favorably seated,' while Fela is known for hits like 'Expensive Shit' and 'Zombie' (Frimpong, 2011).

4 | SILENCES AND THE CREATION OF ALTERNATE SOCIAL MOVEMENT NARRATIVES

Pre-colonial and colonial narratives of petitions, deputations, boycotts, civil disobedience and contentious politics were mainly patriarchal, elitist, and the preserve of men. When women did show up in the plots, they were given

supporting roles, always languishing in the background, providing emotional support, food and shelter for the heroes of political intrigues and imaginaries. Excluding the often-vaunted example of Nana Yaa Asantewaa, Queen Mother of Ejisu, there were silences on the agency of women in the social movement narratives of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1890s, because of British attempts to consolidate colonial power, there were several instances of confrontation between the Gold Coast people and the British. The account of this period often regales the audience with king Tackie's heroics of swearing not to pay the house tax. However, an aspect of the narrative which is often not told was the women's march and the petition to the Secretary of State. On December 1, 1896, women staged a street protest in Accra against a new house tax levy on coastal towns in the Gold Coast, which was part of the Town Councils Ordinance of 1894. Six months later (May 31, 1897), they sent a petition to the Secretary of State, claiming that 'in the social and economic conditions of the country' women 'were responsible for the family, and they could not afford to pay such a tax' (Agbodeka, 1971, p. 132).

Thus, the development of women's movement accounts necessitated the creation of a putative past, a storehouse of collective memory, where a pantheon of heroine resides, waiting to be invoked to authenticate contemporary women's struggles. Consequently, most women activism literature include an account of a pre-colonial world where women's agency and power were embedded in traditional institutions and power structures (Akyeampong & Obeng, 1995; Allman & Tashjian, 2000; Amadiume, 1995; Amoah-Boampong & Agyeiwa, 2021; Saidi, 2021). However, during the nationalist phase, nationalism became a major obstacle to the fight for women's rights because "without a movement that can negotiate the boundaries of the power of male-dominated movements, nationalism imposes its hegemony on the women it mobilizes" (Hassim, 2006). In Ghana, women groups realized that it was a political imperative to continuously delineate their association with liberatory projects, just as student organizations, professional associations, and trade unions have been doing. Indeed, market women in the Gold Coast played a significant role in the 1948 riots, which signaled a turning point in the independence struggle. Yet, because of the vestiges of patriarchy, women found it difficult to freely operate in social movements dominated by men.

In the post-independence and contemporary period, however, complex economic and social problems, compounded by political instability, and considerable interest in female agency, opened different avenues for women to rally as a distinct social force. The scholarship in this period was framed in a multi-stage dialectical manner because of the intersecting levels of inequality imposed by gender, politics, ethnicity, among others (Crenshaw, 1991). In the past 30 years, the neoliberal agenda has affected choices and opportunities for women in politics, employment, healthcare, and education. Existing gender inequalities in the labor market, political participation and access to fixed capital have greatly shaped women's movements. Hence, women's history, gender and feminist scholars now speak of women and politics, women and development, women in universities, and women in parliament (Allah Mensah, 2005; Amoah-Boampong, 2018; Anyidoho, 2021; Bauer, 2021; Bouilly et al., 2016; Mama, 2005; Manuh, 1993; Mlotshwa, 2021; Prah, 2007; Sapong & Amoako, 2021; Tripp, 2021; Tsikata, 2009). This was a key rationale behind the publication of *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*, a compendium of works highlighting African women challenges, grit, wisdom and achievements.

5 | CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN GHANA

A perfunctory glance at the last two centuries reveals a saga of contention such as protests, petitions, deputations, vandalism, labor strikes, and public performances such as kings breaking protocol by refusing to meet colonial emissaries. This long history of struggle has created a collective memory of references for future movements and inspired new models of resistance. Through a bird's-eye view, this piece reflects on a selected corpus of scholarship that attempts to engage themes which are germane to the history of social movements in Ghana.

An important facet of this intellectual exercise is to construct signposts to aid and encourage the study of social movements (and student movements) in Ghana, and Africa. In the twenty first century, the traditional social movement bases are facing intense pressure from within and without. Traditional social movement bases, such as the

National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS), the Ghana Bar Association (GBA), and the Trades Union Congress (TUC), which spurred Ghana from the 1960s to a democratic Fourth Republic in the 1990s, have lost their enthusiasm. Across university campuses, the various levels of student representation (such as SRCs and JCRs) have been colored by political party affiliations, while the national body (NUGS) has been rendered ineffective. There may be several reasons for the current state of these traditional social movement bases in Ghana, but two really stand out. First, there has been a gradual politicization of social movement bases by successive governments. This is very visible, especially among the student associations/unions. Elections of student leaders to their representative bodies are frequently sponsored and blemished by party politics. Secondly, the current generation of leaders of these social movement bases are suffering from historical amnesia because they are unable to draw from institutional memory or an archive of contentious politics. At best, their collective memories lie with an aged generation who are gradually passing away without leaving trails of passage.

Having said this, this century presents new opportunities for social movements in Ghana. Technology has changed the face of contestation. Both the state and protesters have access to social media but because Ghana, comparatively, has a higher freedom and access to information, social movements will tend to benefit the most.

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