

## 1. Description

### 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

- Ga (1)

### 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

- [ISO 639-3: gaa](#) (1)

### 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

- Ghana (1)
- “Ghanaians live in the Southern Coastlands of Africa. The six sub-city states of the Ga people are Accra, La, Nugua, Osu, Tema, and Teshi.” (3)
- 2°W by 5°N. (6)

### 1.4 Brief history:

- “The origins of the Ga people are a subject of debate. Oral history indicates a great migration. It is generally believed that several Ga-speaking clans had settled in the current Greater Accra Region by 1275 AD. Since then, Gas have witnessed the growth of an urban industrial complex, including the operations of a national capital (Accra) and a major international harbor (Tema), on their traditional homeland. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, they profited from the coastal trade in gold, palm oil and other commodities, yet continually faced military attacks by their imperial neighbors who preferred not to pay for access to the coast. During the 19th century their coastal location both yielded a diversified economy (farming and fishing) and rendered them vulnerable to capture in slave raids. Some of the first 20th century Ghanaians to receive Western education, Gas often found themselves excluded from the rewards of professional careers. Their contributions to national development remain substantial...” (2)
- “There are different accounts of the origin and migration of the Ga, and this makes the date of their emergence as the Ga kingdom unclear. It is, however, certain that the Ga appear to have formed their kingdom by the time the Portuguese first arrived on the Gold Coast in the 1470s. Oral tradition trace their original home somewhere to the east of their present location, which historians believe could have been somewhere in present-day Nigeria... This legend relating to the arrival of the Ga is that some came by sea in large numbers...” (8)

### 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

- The Fante, a neighboring tribe, first taught the Ga to use canoes. (6)
- “In the Accra area the horticultural activities of the Ga were changed substantially and permanently by increasing incorporation into the world capitalist economy that began in the fifteenth century. The move to the coast also brought about increasing involvement in fishing; men first fished off the beaches from canoes; beginning in the eighteenth century they started using nets, a skill taught to them by their Fante neighbors. The villages in Central Accra became fishing villages, with the women working as fish sellers.” (6)
- “Ga ethnicity was constructed out of many strands because of the multiplicity of trade contacts, religious influences, founding ethnicities, and cross-cultural contacts fostered by intermarriage. A common saying at Asere is, “There is no such thing as a pure Ga.” Not only were many European and inland African ethnicities represented in Accra over hundreds of years, but also the lateral coastal connections produced migrations of Brazilian, Sierra Leonean, and Nigerian families, who formed clans and assumed Ga identity.” (6)

### 1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

- “The Area is “bounded on the west by the Densu River, on the east the Chemmu lagoon, on the south by the [Atlantic Ocean](#), and on the north by the Akwapim hills. The topography is largely flat and relatively dry, averaging 25 inches (65 centimeters) of rainfall per year concentrated in one season. Unlike most of the rest of the West African coast, the Accra plains are savanna, marked by large termite mounds after which the city was named.” (6)
- “The Ga are bounded in the north by the Akuapem Mountains which separate them from the rain forests and the and the Twi speaking people. Its western boundary is the River Densu and the Eastern border is the Lalo Lagoon. The Ga coastal towns from west to east are Accra, Osu, Labadi, Teshi, Nungua, Tema and Kpone which also own strips of land stretching northwards. Originally the Ga lived in scattered communities some kilometres inland...” (8)

### 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

- 600,000 (1)

## 2. Economy

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- The Ga originally cultivated crops and exchanged them for fish, but later moved into the city and now they both farm and fish. (9)
- The Ga have, “ established their system of rotating slash-and-burn horticulture, and eventually adopted maize as a primary staple as opposed to the earlier millet. (6)

### 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- The Ga are mainly involved in fishing. (2)

### 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

- The Ga began using nets for fishing after moving to the coast (6).

### 2.4 Food storage:

## 2.5 Sexual division of production:

- “Women did much of the farm labor, especially weeding and cultivating, while men cleared new land. Men fished, wove, and maintained nets. Women were and are the preeminent small-scale traders, relying on elaborate knowledge of contacts, profit margins, supply sources, and sales locations. Women as well as men bought and sold slaves. Some women became successful large-scale traders. Out of this activity came the rights of women to own and convey property without male permission.” (6)

## 2.6 Land tenure:

- The Ga are one of the predominant groups in Ghana that purchase land for farming (7).
- “Each quarter has rural land that historically belonged to it, where its residents farmed.” (6)

## 2.7 Ceramics:

- “The Ga variety of pots had a globular body, hard fired and glazed back.” (8)

## 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

## 2.9 Food taboos:

## 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

- Men fish from the beaches and in canoes. (6)

## 3. Anthropometry

### 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

### 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

## 4. Life History, mating, marriage

### 4.1 Age at menarche (f):

### 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

### 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

### 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

### 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

### 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

- There is a high proportion of marriages ending in divorce, due to flexible divorce rules and separate housing for men and women (6).

### 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

- “...many high-status men have what are called “outside wives,” de facto second wives who are younger and more educated than first wives,” (6)
- “Polygyny, once a symbol of high status for a man and a generator of wealth for him through the production of his wives, is now uncommon...” (6)

### 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

### 4.9 Inheritance patterns:

- “Although descent is traced unilaterally, inheritance rights are more complex and have been affected by women's economic independence. In the past sons inherited from fathers, younger brothers from older brothers, and daughters from mothers, but the increasing individuation of property ownership and inheritance through the use of written wills has introduced more variation into an already flexible system. Part of the flexibility that remains regards the heir's obligation to contribute substantially to an individual's funeral. Paying for a funeral in a society where funerals are far more important than marriage in perpetuating lineages is regarded as creating an obligation such that the payer inherits a substantial portion of the deceased's estate. However, lineage property devolves according to corporate rules enforced by the mostly male elders and the courts of the mantsemei. The elders are more likely to bestow property on collateral relatives than on children, but emphasis is placed on the fulfillment of mutual obligations in making that decision. Women tend to leave self-acquired property to the daughters with whom they were in business or coresident. Because of the devolution of the residential system and the attenuation of some males' rights in lineage property as a result of nonresidence and because of the residence of women who are not patrilineage members on it, in some cases both men and women invest in private property elsewhere rather than improving property in which their legal rights are tenuous. Most people follow a cognatic pattern in leaving self-acquired property to children of both genders, but there is a lot of variation.” (6)

### 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

- Children begin with mothers, however, “boys are sent to their fathers at some time between the ages of six and twelve...” (6)

### 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

### 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

### 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

### 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

### 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

### 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

### 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

### 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

### 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

### 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

- If the mother dies, the child is sent to live with the father. (6)

### 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?
- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

- “Contemporary marriage among the poorer classes is signaled by a simple gift of drink.” (6)
- “Marriages by customary law are celebrated with parties today.” (6)

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

- Names among the Ga are very important
  - “There are generally two sets of names: the senior or first set, i.e., the fathers; and the junior or second set, i.e., the children. The fathers give the names in the second set to their children, and the children give the names in the first set to their own children. It means that the customary law lays it down that children are bound to give to their own children the names which their fathers, uncles and aunts bear or have borne.

Among the Ga tribes one or two of the following are given to children, viz.: Tribal names. Family names. Day names. Fetish names. Kra names. Nicknames. The following are the names in general use among the whole of the Ga tribes, viz.: Ayite (Male), e.g., Ga Nyo Ayite. Ayele (Female), e.g., Ga Nyo Ayele. Dede do. Korkor do. Tette (male). Ayi do.” (9)

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

- “Intermarriage with non-Ga is increasingly common, especially among the highly educated; if a matrilineal Akan man marries a Ga woman, the children may be disinherited due to the conflict in inheritance customs.” (6)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

## **Warfare/homicide**

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

- “There were mock and sometimes real rivalries between quarters that were expressed in small-scale “battles” with few casualties, but clan elders settled most disputes, the most intractable of which were referred to the mantsemei or wulomei.” (6)

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

- “Large-scale wars were fought with those who came from the north to seek dominance in the European trade. The Ga united across quarters to pursue this warfare, sometimes successfully. The British conquest was gradual more than violent, a matter of increasing influence fostered by the Gas’ desire to protect themselves from those living inland.” (6)

4.18 Cannibalism? Not Found

## **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

- The Ga live mostly in several large coastal towns, including their main capital Accra, Osu, Labadi, Teshie, Nungua, Tema and Kpone. (9)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Not Found

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

- “The leader of the Ga tribe is referred to as the Ga Mantse. The Ga Mantse never speaks directly to anyone in public instead he speaks through his spokesman or linguist referred to as an Otsame.” (4)
- “Each quarter has a mantse; their ranking relative to each other depends on many factors, including the antiquity of the position, the age and personality of the holder of the position, and the authority and perquisites delegated by the government.” (6)
- “The original seven quarters of Accra have mantsemei who are the heads of influential patrilineages that have land rights within the quarters.” (6)
- “Much like the Akan, the Ga people have a linguist who speaks for the Ga Mantse. This spokesperson, the Otsame, carries a decorated staff that identifies him as the person who speaks for the king.” (5)

5.4 Post marital residence:

- “Among the Gas, the expected pattern [of marital residence] is separate for the spouses. The women cook and send food to their husbands’ houses during the day and go there to sleep during the night. Children stay with their mothers, but male children leave for their father’s homes at about the age of six or seven.” (7)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

- “Large-scale wars were fought with those who came from the north to seek dominance in the European trade. The Ga united across quarters to pursue this warfare, sometimes successfully.” (6)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

- Men usually live in suburbs, women live downtown (6).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: Not Found

### 5.8 Village and house organization:

- “Houses in Central Accra are arranged roughly in blocks that were sometimes forcibly created by colonial government demolition. Most are one-story rectangular compounds with large courtyards in which most of the functions of daily living are carried out. Women's compounds are usually livelier with the presence of small children and chickens, and because cooking, laundry, and household production are carried out there; men's compounds may be somnolent in the noonday sun, their residents absent at various jobs. There are a few two-story houses with courtyards beside them. Adjoining compounds may share a boundary wall, but most are separated by narrow pathways. Rural houses are usually smaller and form small villages; most are rectangular and are roofed with metal sheets that have replaced the older thatch.” (6)
- “The oldest area of settlement in Accra, now known as Central Accra, is composed of seven quarters, among which Asere, Abola, and Gbese are oldest and considered to be the most traditionally Ga. Otublohum originally was settled by people from Akwamu and Denkyera to the northwest. These four quarters make up Ussher Town, the area placed under Dutch jurisdiction in the seventeenth century. The other three quarters—Alata or Nleshi, Sempe, and Akanmadze—are said to be of later origin. Alata was settled by Nigerian workers imported to construct a European fort. These three quarters are commonly called James Town and formed the original area of British jurisdiction at Accra. Asere is by far the largest quarter in terms of population and area. All quarters have clan houses known as *wekushia*, the original homes of Ga patrilineages, and chiefs called *mantsemei*.” (6)

### 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

- Men live separately from women (6)

### 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

### 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

- “Clan houses (*wekushia*) in Central Accra and other coastal towns were and continue to be residences for patrilineally related relatives but have developed a distinctive gender segregation that does not conform to any conventional anthropological term because people do not change residence at the time of marriage. Men usually live with their male patrilineal relatives, and women with their female matrilineal relatives.” (6)
- “There are two types of residential groupings, with the most common being a multigenerational compound inhabited by a matrilineally related group that includes mother, daughters, granddaughters, and sisters. Next in frequency is patrilineal groupings consisting of fathers or several brothers and their sons and grandsons. Because men are more likely to move out and begin neolocal conjugal households in the suburbs, Central Accra now has more female-headed households. Because mothers leave their residential rights to their coresident daughters, the daughters' rights become de facto only, since they do not belong to the original patrilineage that owned the compound. In the contemporary struggle over land ownership of ever more valuable property, those de facto rights have become more difficult to assert.” (6)

### 5.12 Trade:

- “Ga were heavily involved in trade in many commodities, including slaves, over a long period of time. As late as the early twentieth century a few slaves were still sold in or near Salaga Market in Central Accra. Women were traders as far back as at least the sixteenth century. Over time increasing numbers of women took up trade as an occupation, at first selling their own agricultural produce and then, as urban expansion took up more land, selling fish and imported goods or products of home manufacture such as soap, pottery, maize beer, and prepared foods. An important commodity was and continues to be *kenkey*, or *komi*, the Ga staple food, which is made of fermented steamed corn dough.” (6)
- Cocoa has become a major export crop. (6)

### 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

- “The ideological separation between genders and the superior ranking of males are enforced by social conditioning. Being male is associated with everything good, straight, rational, and right as opposed to left, while women are thought to possess opposite and negative attributes. Men take precedence at all life cycle rituals. Boys and girls are encouraged to play in separate groups at different games and are expected to behave differently at a young age. Infants often are indulged, but older children may be punished harshly. Child abuse by both sexes is more common than spouse abuse, but neither is common. Girls are brought up by their mothers to take care of household responsibilities and are expected to mind younger siblings, while boys sent to their fathers are removed from much contact with young children and are not trained in domestic tasks, which are viewed as women's work. The labor value of girls militates against their completion of schooling in many cases, as does expulsion from school for pregnancy, a punishment not applied to boys who father children. Male dominance is apparent in the allotment of more space to boys, who are entitled to a room of their own in a compound, while girls are expected to share space with their sisters and/or children.” (6)

## 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

### 6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

### 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

- “The High Priests, or Wulomo, are especially revered. They are chosen and trained to serve, heal and care for the people. They also speak for the ancestors who are constantly in touch with the living. They are good, practical, natural healers. Wulomo prescribe medicines by using the knowledge of herbal healing passed on from generation to generation. They may also prescribe rituals for the good of the individual, community or the state. They are often consulted by the Ga Mantse and his counselors.” (3)
- “When the spirits want to communicate with humans, they enlist the services of priests, priestesses, and oracles that are referred to as Dzema Wagin.” (5)

## 6.2 Stimulants:

### 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

- “At the naming ceremony (*outdooring* ) eight days after the birth of a child the father gives the child a family name...” (6)
- The Most famous of all Ga rituals is the Homowo festival
  - “The word "Homowo" actually means 'making fun of hunger.' Our traditional oral history describes a time long ago when the rains stopped and the sea closed its gates. A deadly famine spread throughout the southern Accra Plains, the home of the Ga people. When the harvest finally arrived and food became plentiful, the people were so happy that they celebrated with a festival that ridiculed hunger.

The Homowo festival starts with the planting of crops before the May rainy season and continues through August. The actual time for the August celebration is determined by the Chief Priests after they consult with the Lagoon Oracles.

Sometime in June there is a total ban on noise throughout the State, and fishing is limited to certain days. In early August the celebrations begin with a special Yam festival in honor of the Spirits, the eternal protectors of the Ga people.

All Ga people are required by traditional law to return to the homes of their father's for the celebration of the Homowo Festival. The main celebration starts with the arrival of all the Ga people who live outside the State. During the appointed week in the month of August thousands of people come from near and far to all the Ga cities. On the Thursday before the main celebration thousands of people arrive from the outlying villages with their harvested crops of all kind. They are referred to as "Thursday People" or (Soobii). The Soobii, the local townspeople, and parades of musicians meander through the streets all day and into the night. It is a time for romance. Young people meet each other, get acquainted, and start new relationships.

At dawn on Friday a Memorial Service is held to honor all those who died during the previous year. Crying is heard from homes and streets all over the Ga State. Later on in the morning there is a Birthday Celebration for all the Twins. Twins and all multiple births are revered by the Ga people and are regarded as special blessings.

The celebrations continue on Saturday, the Homowo Day itself. Food for the Festival is cooked in large quantities. The special dish, "kpekepe," is prepared by steaming fermented corn meal. This is eaten with traditional palm soup prepared with lots and lots of smoked fish.

During the day each sub-chief in each city sprinkles some kpekepe at prescribed locations. This is done to please the gods and the ancestors. The head of each family also sprinkles kpekepe in special places. After these rituals are performed, people begin dancing and drumming through the streets. Visitors and total strangers are encouraged to visit any home. The homeowners welcome them, invite them in, and insist that the visitors share in the traditional meal.

The celebrations continue all Saturday night, and even until Sunday morning - which begins the Ga New Year. On Sunday morning the preparations start all over for the coming year.” (3)

- “The Ga are famous for funerals. They are skilled craft persons who make coffins according to the desires and needs of the families. Their belief is that when a person dies, he or she moves to another realm and should take his or her favorite objects with him or her to the new realm. Thus, if one is a pilot, he might want to have a coffin that is an airplane. A taxi driver may want to be buried in a taxi. A person could have a personality trait highlighted, such as wearing white shoes or loving red dresses. In that case, the Ga coffin maker would create a coffin that looked like a white shoe or one that looked like a red dress. The Ga accept the idea that there is life after death and the spirit (i.e., *Susuma*) lives on when the person dies. The rituals performed by the family and the priests throughout the year are done to ensure that the ancestors are revered in the afterlife.” (5)
- “The no longer practiced puberty rites for boys did not involve circumcision, which was done separately at a young age and took place in public. Girls' puberty rites involved seclusion for several months and emphasized the value of premarital chastity.” (6)

### 6.4 Other rituals:

- The Ga have ceremonies for both the sowing and harvesting of crops (7)
  - The *Nmaa Dumo* is a ceremony for the sowing of guinea corn (7)
  - The *Nmaa Kuu* is for the harvesting of guinea corn (7)

### 6.5 Myths (Creation):

### 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- The chief musical instrument of the Ga is the drum. (8)

### 6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

### 6.8 Missionary effect:

### 6.9 RCR revival:

### 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

- “[The} Ga ...believe in life after death. The spirit, or *Susuma*, lives on after the person dies. Special ritual ceremonies are performed for the dead throughout the Ga year. These ceremonies are held on special days in the Ga calendar.” (3)
- “Death may be attributed to supernatural or natural causes or a combination of both. Angry spirits can cause death. Spirits of the dead are thought to wander after death for a specific period before joining the ancestral spirits in the sky. Ancestral spirits must be propitiated for many reasons, often with libations or other offerings.” (6)

### 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

### 6.12 Is there teknonymy?

### 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.):

- “The traditional religion of the Ga people is [spiritualism](#). They believe that spirits dwell in all things created by the Almighty (who is called "Nyomo"). These spirits communicate through the selected priests or oracles called Dzema Wagin.” (3)
- “The Ga believe that all things have spirits. They say that the Almighty Deity, Nyomo, created all spirits and placed them in humans, trees, mountains, and rivers.” (5)

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

- Each tribe has its own facial cut. (9)

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

- “Wulff’s...account...confirms these accounts of elaborate formal dressing, referring to the Gas being generously adorned with strands of beads made of iron rings on their arms, fingers, feet and toes. The very wealthy wore large rings made out of the finest gold.” (8)
- “Other works of art used as ornaments included gold and coral...” (8)
- “There were...a variety of expensive ornamental necklaces used by the Ga...some of which were made out of stones and gold.” (8)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

- “Many Ga men covered their loins and pubis, with the rest of their bodies bare.”

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## 8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

- “Patrilineality is the dominant method of tracing descent in central Accra. Exceptions exist and are attributable to intermarriage with Akan or children's adoption by the mother's patrikin in the absence or unwillingness of a father to claim them. Matrilinearity sometimes exists among chiefly families, some of which derived from Akwamu. Villages west of Accra have more intermarriage with Fante and more matrilineality as a result. In general, the older the settlement, the less matrilineality is present.” (6)

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

## 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

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