

Blood is Your Bond: Newspaper Perceptions of Lineage Complications in Ghana, 1956-1992

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On May 3rd, 1957, E. E. B. Oferi Atta published a contentious op-ed in Ghana's *Daily Graphic* challenging the long-standing Akan practice of Nephew inheritance. In his article, "The Problem with Nephew Inheritance," Oferi Atta directly opposes A. Ohene-Saforo's "The Case for Nephew Inheritance," published a week prior on April 25. Oferi Atta contends that Ohene-Saforo's claim that "peace and harmony often predominates [when the] *Abusua* system of inheritance is practiced," presumes that an *Abusua*, or matrilineal inheritance structure, is invariably without fault and by extension concludes that patrilineal systems of succession are rife with "misunderstanding, discord, and disharmony."¹ Ohene-Saforo goes on to attest that the use of this practice is to ensure that "lands [and] possessions do not belong to the individuals, [therefore holding] everything in a trust for the benefit of the entire *Abusua*." In continuation, Ohene-Saforo states that in the event of son inheritance, the "property is thus broken up [and] disputes, litigation, and endless unrest are the result."² Through educated conclusions, however, Oferi Atta asserts that this school of thought does not allow for modern growth, concluding that nephew inheritance is problematic and should be updated as Ghana moves forward into modernity. Consequently, this will not be the only instance of inheritance mentioned in the *Daily Graphic*.

By the late 1950s, matrilineal inheritance had survived British colonization, withstanding new European marriage practices and legalities. Despite its longevity, matrilineal inheritance began to encounter challenges regarding its efficiency. While some individuals, such as Oferi Atta, took aim at the "unchallenged Akan system of inheritance," questioning not only its process, but

¹ E. E. B. Oferi Atta, "The Problem of Nephew Inheritance," *Daily Graphic*, May 3, 1957.

² A. Ohene-Saforo, "The Case for Nephew Inheritance," *Daily Graphic*, April 25, 1957.

how it affected household wealth and structure, others stood in ardent defense of matriliney.³ In 1957 alone, the same year as Ghana's independence, the *Daily Graphic* published series' of articles regarding the continuation of matrilineal inheritance and addressing marriage-related discourse. Through the use of its public platform, the *Daily Graphic* allowed readers to weigh in on these topics and provide personal opinions, insight, and rebuttal. Although Oferi Atta is the only individual presented here in opposition to matrilineal inheritance, his stance insinuates that some might have felt similarly in regards to the lasting custom.

By examining Ghana from the year of Ghanaian independence in 1957 and the decades that followed, we can see how Ghanaian women reclaimed their autonomy by demanding the right to financial independence and how they challenged gender and marital expectations despite western influence. Furthermore, we can consider the changes that followed as women challenged their husbands inherent "right" to their productive and reproductive labor, and how in turn, men demanded more ownership of their children. In this essay I argue that the longevity of *abusua* inheritance is reliant on Ghanaian women's desire to maintain a degree of personal autonomy. While I am not the first to examine the intricate relationship between *abusua* inheritance and women's self-determination, I consider how Ghana's *Daily Graphic* attempted to influence public opinion in favor of *abusua* inheritance, but not necessarily for the benefit of women. According to writers for the *Daily Graphic*, women could not simultaneously work for themselves and be good mothers and wives. With this in mind, we can consider how inheritance becomes the underlying factor in this discourse. The *Abusua* was the reason to get married and bear children, but it is also reason enough to *not* get married.

³ E. E. B. Oferi Atta, "The Problem of Nephew Inheritance," *Daily Graphic*. May 3, 1957.

At the forefront of written histories on women in colonial Ghana, are Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian. Together, they have published *"I Will Not Eat Stone:" A Woman's History of Colonial Asante* and the essay "Marrying and Marriage on a Shifting Terrain: Reconfigurations of Power and Authority in Early Colonial Asante," which is included in the larger body of work *Women in African Colonial Histories*. Allman and Tashjian focus on accounts gathered during the first part of the 20th century, cultivating a source of information that encapsulates changes in gender roles toward the end of Ghana's colonial period. By examining Ghana during the post-colonial and interwar period, Allman and Tashjian attempt to disentangle the changes occurring in familial and household relationships by identifying areas of conflict in maternal and paternal roles, consider changes in the *Abusua* inheritance, and colonial attempts at controlling women's physical and reproductive labor. Allman's lone work, "Rounding up Spinsters: Gender Chaos and Unmarried Women in Colonial Asante," expands the topic of "gender chaos" and she considers how financial autonomy allowed for colonial Asante women to have control over their own finances, personal independence, and eventually provide familial wealth to their *Abusua*. By examining personal testimonies, narratives, and national archives between 1929 and 1933, Allman identifies how the "rounding-up" and detainment of unmarried women was an attempt at controlling women's autonomy. Both Allman and Tashjian argue that as women asserted their financial freedom, gender roles regarding the caretaking of children shifted, allowing for men to take on more prominent roles as caretakers, making further changes to *abusua* inheritance.

In addition to Allman and Tashjian's research on marriage in colonial Asante, other historians have examined gender dynamics following the advent of European influence. For example, Sean Hawkins' work, "The Woman in Question:" Marriage and Identity in the Colonial Courts of Northern Ghana, 1907-1954," discusses the complexities of women's identities in

marriage. Hawkins' discusses complications in the fluidity of marriages in Ghana, and the perception of colonial officials "towards the autonomy of women," especially those who were wives.⁴ Additionally, in the realm of economic and class changes, historians, Claire Robertson and Dorothy Vellenga, examine matrilineal and patrilineal factions within Ghana and the way in which the economy impacted the organization of the family structure and changes in the transmission of wealth. In her work, Robertson examines changes in hierarchical structure in relation to age and gender, and the role of women in a household and how women's work typically falls into the category of "informal work," meaning that it becomes classified as formally unproductive.⁵ This characterization of women's labor as being unproductive within the home directly correlates with their desire for autonomy. Lastly, Stephen Miescher serves as an exemplary source for men's perspectives as household gender roles shifted. As marital and kinship relationships were modernizing, men obtained the ability to pick and choose what aspects they wanted to apply to their marriages, thus creating a complex familial system as Ghana progressed into modernity.

In 1957, Ghana's *Daily Graphic* published various articles tackling inheritance and marital discourse. The frequency in which inheritance arises during late 1957 in the *Daily Graphic*, however, alludes that matrilineal inheritance was possibly being challenged and losing favor amongst modernizing Ghanaians. For instance, with Ohene-Saforo's "Case for Nephew Inheritance," and Oferi Atta's "Problem with Nephew inheritance," both published in the *Daily Graphic* in the spring of 1957, only Oferi Atta's op-ed directly argues against the continuation of *abusua* inheritance. In the months that followed, however, the *Daily Graphic* continued to publish

⁴ Sean Hawkins, "'The Woman in Question': Marriage and Identity in the Colonial Courts of Northern Ghana, 1907-1954," in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. Jean Allman et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 119-120.

⁵ Claire Robertson, "Women and Socioeconomic Change," *Sharing the Same Bowl*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 4-5.

articles adamantly arguing in favor of the abusua. In December 1957, a two-part series was published by P. A. Owiredu of Adisadel College, entitled “On the Akan System of Inheritance...” and “Influence of the Father Over his Children,” providing historical and cultural evidence in favor of the *Abusua*. Furthermore, to expand upon changing household gender roles, I will draw upon two minor articles regarding the upbringing of children, “Why Some Children Become Wayward” and “Child Training is the Parents duty,” which are intended to serve as contextual examples for changes in men’s parental roles. If the *Abusua* was the unchallenged norm, then why require continued reinforcement?

As I will demonstrate, it can prove difficult to maintain a matrilineal inheritance structure when women are both encouraged and discouraged from marrying. For instance, another concern expressed through the pages of the *Daily Graphic* involved contradictory discourse on marriage. In May 1957, Gladys Kotey rhetorically asks “Why Should A Married Woman Go Out to Work,” challenging women’s desires to work outside of the home. Kotey asserts that when a woman chooses to work, the household is neglected, causing marital discourse. In the later part of the year, the *Daily Graphic* published Charles Graham’s “Why Must Men Pay Bride Money,” arguing against the longstanding tradition of paying a bride-price to the bride’s family, claiming that the practice has become too costly. Similarly, in the November 16th, 1957, edition of *Daily Graphic*, Edith Wuver’s column asked, “Why do Some Men Refuse to Marry,” and the response was overwhelmingly similar to the former. Wuver’s reader response, “It’s All the Fault of The Girls,” concludes that women were asking for too much financial support. Then, in an article a month later, “Why Most of Our Educated Women Marry So Late...” Graham writes again, attempting to make sense of women’s continued desire to pursue education and work. While we can see that not all of these articles explicitly discuss inheritance, they discuss money and marital expectations and

question how these factors are resulting in fewer marriages. In order to demonstrate how *abusua* inheritance was integral into Ghanaian life, I will be considering these articles alongside oral interviews conducted by Miescher, Allman, and Tashjian in the early 1990's, in order to present, not only a resistance to change, but a heightened sense of gender unrest, which required repeated consideration of both marriage and the *Abusua*.

Historical Background

In 1821, the Gold Coast became a British colony, bringing change to Ghana's social, political, and economic structure. By 1918, British ideologies had infiltrated even the most intimate parts of Ghanaian life, and thus, impacted marriage, inheritance, and household gender roles. In the years immediately following British colonization, came the eventual enforcement of euro-centric marital practices. For instance, Ghanaian marriages were typically customary, meaning that there was an exchange of marriage payments between familial lineages.⁶ Marriages that occurred in either the colonial court or with religious affiliation, however, often implemented the paternal inheritance structure, meaning that inheritance transferred from parents to children. In the Gold Coast, inheritance was matrilineal, meaning that inheritance was passed down through the mother's blood line and children belonged to the mother's family, or *Abusua*. Matrilineal custom thus encouraged customary marriages. As the colonial government altered both the economy and gender roles, women's labor became subservient to their husbands and their unpaid labor became their husbands' benefit. In this manner, *Abusua* wealth was lost, progressively lessening familial wealth with each generation. In response, Ghanaian women enacted new measures to ensure wealth for themselves and their *Abusua*.⁷ This resulted in what Allman and

⁶ Stephan Miescher "The Marriages of Men: Sexuality and Fatherhood," *Making Men in Ghana*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 115.

⁷ Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian, "*I Will Not Eat Stone*" *A Woman's History of Colonial Asante*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000) xxiv.

Tashjian's call "gender chaos," when women asserted their reproductive and economic autonomy against a societal structure that benefitted from women's unpaid labor.

The rise of conjugal labor between wives and husbands was the natural trajectory of colonial influence. By the early 1900s, Ghana's cultivation and harvesting of cash crops such as palm oil and even more importantly, cocoa, had become part international commerce and was crucial to the Ghanaian economy.⁸ Therefore, the organization of labor changed as a result of monetization of Ghanaian agricultural goods. Allman and Tashjian explain that "women-as-wives provided much of the labor necessary for the creation of farms, yet men-as-husbands dominated ownership of these farms and therefore controlled the resulting profits."⁹ As a result, matrilineal wealth and inheritance were affected as a direct result of men becoming the primary benefactors of their farms, even when both husbands and wives shared in the labor.¹⁰ However, in the first couple decades following colonization, the full extent of women's economic contribution was hindered by their domestic obligations such household labor and child rearing.¹¹

The primary motivation for marriage amongst Ghanaian women was to bear children. In colonial Ghana, lineages are survived through female members of the matrilineage, therefore if there were no female dependents, the lineage would end. According to Allman and Tashjian, "The mothers blood determined the lineage of the child... the bond between mother and child [is] the keystone to all social relations. Your mother is your family, your father is not."¹² Since providing heirs for their abusua was of the upmost importance, women were willing to put their economic interests on hold in order to enter into a marriage for reproductive purposes. In contrast, while

⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹ Ibid., *xxxi*.

¹⁰ Ibid., 61-65.

¹¹ Ibid., 60.

¹² Ibid., 86.

fathers were responsible for providing the *ntoro*, or spirit, of the child, they held no legal authority over their children.¹³ Between 1920 and 1940, however, evidence suggests that fathers had a tendency and desire to provide for their children.¹⁴ During this period, a father's authority transformed from being strictly "use," or the ability to use his children as labor, to a present, caretaking, authority. "Authority" as Allman and Tashjian observe, "resides in the one who takes care of the child."¹⁵ As the economy of the colonial government grew and more women desired to work, fathers began adopting their children into their lineages, thus undermining the inherent "natural" connection of the *abusua*.

Changes in Men's Familial and Marital Expectations:

On December 17th and 18th, 1957, P.A. Owiredu conducts a two-part argument in favor of nephew inheritance. To develop his argument, Owiredu conducts his writing as though he is conversing with someone who is unfamiliar with *abusua* inheritance, allowing him to provide contextual and historical information regarding Akan kinship. In the first article of the series, "On the Akan System of Inheritance," Owiredu explains that in an effort to preserve familial lines, Akan families are matrilineal in order to ensure continuity. The establishment of this rule was generated by the argument that mother-child relationships are more obvious than those between a father and a child. Owiredu maintains, that by establishing "[a matrilineal] family structure, the authority of the mothers family lies in the hands of the mother's brother."¹⁶ To further his argument that matrilineal kin are more important in terms of wealth and inheritance, Owiredu's second publication, "Influence of the Father Over his Children," claims that outside a father's ability to

¹³ Ibid., 86.

¹⁴ Ibid., 88.

¹⁵ Ibid., 89.

¹⁶ P.A. Owiredu, "On the Akan System of Inheritance," *Daily Graphic*, December 17, 1957.

enact discipline and request labor, fathers had little influence over their children.¹⁷ In fact, fathers have the most influence over their children in their youth, as children tend to work for their fathers. Therefore, profits derived from the child's labor go to the father instead of the *Abusua*. This distribution of profits is partially due to the fathers responsibility to secure good marriages for their sons, therefore, the money incurred typically goes to a son's marriage expenses or taxes made against them.¹⁸

In contrast to what marriage meant for women, confirmation that their *Abusua* would continue, premarital responsibilities were the responsibility of the husband. In Miescher's *Making Men in Ghana*, Miescher explains that "adult masculinity is signified by marriage [and] taking the role of material providers and protectors of families."¹⁹ Fathers were responsible for paying marriage payments and finding a suitable match.²⁰ For example, in an interview between Miescher and Kofi Ankoma, a Ghanaian man who entered a customary marriage without the church, Ankara explains that "in those days it was the father who would marry for you. If he saw a woman and realized that is was good to marry from that house... you would give money to your father and he would go perform all the necessary things."²¹ To help explain the rationale behind marriage payments, Charles Graham's "Why Must Men Pay Bride Money," published in November of 1957, defines bride-price "as payment made by a husband-to-be to a woman's kin in the money and goods. [It] is a prominent feature of customary marriages in most African societies."²² Furthermore, Graham asserts that "bride-price," "bride-money," and "marriage-payments" cannot be conflated with the "purchasing of a wife" although there are certain productive exchange values

¹⁷ P.A. Owiredo, "Influence of the Father Over his Children," *Daily Graphic*, December 18, 1957

¹⁸ P.A. Owiredo, "Influence of the Father Over his Children," *Daily Graphic*, December 18, 1957

¹⁹ Stephan Miescher "The Marriages of Men: Sexuality and Fatherhood," *Making Men in Ghana*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 124

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 125

²¹ *Ibid.*, 125

²² Charles Graham, "Why Must Men Pay Bride Money," November 8, 1957

involved.²³ Prospective husbands are expected to pay bride-money as compensation for the loss of the woman to her *abusua*, as they will suffer the monetary and productive loss of her labor.

Despite the commonality of marriage-payments, as Ghana progressed into the modern world, pushback on the long-standing custom ensued. Following his explanation of the purpose of bride-money, Graham challenges the continuation of the practice, arguing that women are hardly ever in a position to be “lost” to her *Abusua*. Since women are never without their *abusua*, there can be no significant loss to the family. Therefore, Graham contends, “what justification is there for the payment of bride-price?”²⁴ Graham continues that bride-money does nothing to ensure the success of a union, but rather success lies in the compatibility of the married couple.²⁵ Furthermore, Graham goes on to question other justifications for the continuance of bride-money, such as arguing that it does not even ensure legitimacy of children, because all children are considered legitimate through the mother. In an interesting twist, when Graham reaches the end of his article, he argues in favor of the gifting of bride-money. Graham concludes that bride-money validates an “important milestone,” amongst Ghanaian newlyweds, signifying unions between families.²⁶ To conduct further research on reader opinions regarding marriage payments the *Daily Graphic* asked for reader responses to the article. The reader who responded, G.K.T. Asiedu Affansi, was ardently in agreement with Graham’s initial assertion.²⁷ Asiedu Affansi affirms that the expectation of bride-money does not benefit the newlyweds and can cause men to go into debt in order to satisfy the bride or brides family.²⁸ Furthermore, Asiedu Affansi, suggests that families should encourage

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ G.K.T. Asiedu Affansi, “Readers Write” The ‘Bride Money’ Case,” *Daily Graphic*, November 15, 1957.

²⁸ Ibid.

compatible and happy unions without the obligation of money due to the fact that women will always remain “property” of her parents.²⁹

However, Asiedu Affansi’s “parental property” assertion is contradictory to Owiredù’s evidence that fathers held minimal roles in the lives of their children and demonstrates a shift in their parental rights. For instance, as fathers became more significant caretakers, they became notable contributors to their children’s education. As an example, on December 21, 1957, the *Daily Graphic* published a small un-authored op-ed “Why Some Children Become Wayward,” calling for parents to care for the emotional and educational wellbeing of their children.³⁰ In the article, Mrs. Violet Dixon, with the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, calls upon mothers to “take good care of their children.”³¹ Dixon advised that in the event that fathers failed to provide funds for their children’s education, “wives should report the matter to the department.” This insinuates that fathers had become the designated provider of education, and in response, men demanded more paternal rights.

To expand, in an interview conducted by Allman in 1992, Akosua Marsha explains that while the children belong to her, “[the father] was responsible for the school fees and everything in terms of finance.”³² Although fathers were expected to provide financially, in 1956 both mothers and fathers were encouraged to hold active roles in their children’s upbringing.³³ For instance, on December 22, 1956, an article entitled “Child Training is Parents Duty,” school officials urge parents to “give their children excellent training when they are young... [the] things which children

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “Why Some Children Become Wayward,” *Daily Graphic*, December 21, 1957.

³¹ Ibid., Violet Dixon’s full title is the Senior Assistant Welfare Officer for the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development. For clarity, her title has been shortened.

³² Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian, *“I Will Not Eat Stone” A Woman’s History of Colonial Asante*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), 91.

³³ “Child Training is Parents Duty,” *Daily Graphic*, December 22, 1956.

see and hear from their parents weigh heavily on their morals.”³⁴ In an *Abusua*, a maternally related uncle was typically responsible for father-related responsibilities. Therefore, by extension, this assertion allowed fathers to transition from holding secondary roles to the mother and her *Abusua*, to raising children alongside their wives. This is significant because, as anthropologist Carmen Nave explains, “[in customary marriages] the relationship between a husband and wife is secondary to the relationship between people and their matrilineal families.”³⁵ Despite the request being made by academic officials, this encouragement further centralized the responsibilities of childrearing within the household, giving fathers more jurisdiction over their children.

Why Isn’t Anyone Getting Married?

In 1956 and 1957, the *Daily Graphic* published numerous marriage announcements while simultaneously publishing articles questioning why young men and women were not getting married. These contradictory publications present an interesting question; were marriages on the decline or not? Since women could potentially provide for themselves financially, bearing children through marriage was the best method to ensure the continuation of their *Abusua*. For instance, women interviewed by Allman and Tashjian explained that while children born out of wedlock were still members of the *Abusua*, “childbearing in marriage was held in higher esteem, therefore they sought to bear children through marriage.”³⁶ However, should a woman choose to get married, the possibility of losing financial autonomy of her productive and reproductive labor to her husband increased. Obtaining both financial independence and marriage for the purpose of bearing children, however, were not without its complications. As such, I will demonstrate how Ghanaian

³⁴ “Child Training is Parents Duty,” *Daily Graphic*, December 22, 1956.

³⁵ Carmen Nave, “Marriage in Kumasi, Ghana: Locally Emergent Practices in the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” *Hypatia* 32. no. 3 (2017): 559 <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12338>.

³⁶ Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian, “*I Will Not Eat Stone*” *A Woman’s History of Colonial Asante*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), 47.

women struggled to “have it all,” facing criticism for having children, not having children, and being the “cause” for marriage decline.

On May 2, 1957, Gladys Kotey asked “Why Should a Married Woman Go Out to Work?” While the question can be interpreted as an explanation for *why* a woman should go to work, in actuality, the question asks, “why should a married woman *have* to go to work?” In her article, Kotey implores upon *Daily Graphic* readers, “A career and marriage? It works well for many girls, but it involves so much work and planning. Such a mixture [can be] exciting if there are no children.”³⁷ Complexity lies in the contradictory opening statement of Kotey’s article. For example, Kotey encourages women to get married and remain in the home, where women can better serve their families and provide children. While producing children guarantees the continuation of her *Abusua*, it firmly establishes a woman's productive labor as solely beneficial to her husband. Furthermore, Kotey asserts that in instances where women are married with no children, would there be ability for them to work. Allman and Tashjian explain, however, that while women “were willing to forgo some of the expected benefits of marriage” such as “compromising on their economic interests,” Ghanaian women do not believe in continuing within a marriage that does not provide children.³⁸ Kotey continues to be critical of women who attempt to have a family and work concurrently, defining women who fail to maintain their household as lazy. “Your job here,” Kotey directs at women, “is to stay at home and be what nature intended you to be, a mother.”³⁹ When this school of thought is applied, it leaves no room for women accumulate their own *Abusua* wealth, requiring women to rely fully upon their husbands for financial support. Furthermore, it vilifies women for pursuing their own economic interests.

³⁷ Gladys Kotey, “Why Should A Married Woman Go Out To Work?” May 2, 1957.

³⁸ Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian, “I Will Not Eat Stone” *A Woman’s History of Colonial Asante*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), 47-48.

³⁹ Gladys Kotey, “Why Should A Married Woman Go Out To Work?” May 2, 1957.

Similarly, on December 20, 1957, Charles Graham published another article, this time entitled “Why Most of Our Educated Women Marry So Late...” and, as though answering Kotey, considers how women work and gain an education before marriage in order to feel that they have worked for themselves prior to settling down. However, even this method is met with criticism. For instance, Graham explains that marriageable men have already settled down with younger women by the time educated women have completed their learning.⁴⁰ Graham contends, “Many educated women in this country are obsessed by the idea, perhaps rightly, that it is desirable for every girl to have some profession... but when these girls are ready for marriage, these men are not.”⁴¹ This example demonstrates an author that indirectly challenges women’s financial autonomy, coincidentally blaming the combination of women pursuing education as the potential cause of declining marriages. While Graham does remark that Ghana’s educated women pursue careers at the urging of their families, his tone suggests that women prefer to work in order to serve their own self-interest. Furthermore, Graham almost deliberately does not reference *Abusua* inheritance, kinship, or women's financial dependency in marriage. By omitting these essential factors in Ghanaian life, Graham's article fails to identify that families encouraged women to have careers because of their *Abusua*.

While both of the previous authors directly target women as the cause for marital decline, on November 16th, 1957 Edith Wuver asked *Daily Graphic* readers “Why do some Men Refuse to Marry,” instead asking for the men’s perspective of why they remained unmarried. Unfortunately, the answer provided by men interviewed was consistent to both Kotey and Graham; “it was all the fault of the women.”⁴² The initial article is different, however, in that Wuver

⁴⁰ Graham, “Why Most of our Educated Women marry so late...” December 20, 1957.

⁴¹ Graham, “Why Most of our Educated Women marry so late...” December 20, 1957.

⁴² Edith Wuver, “It Is All The Fault of the Women,” *Daily Graphic*, November 16th, 1957.

challenges men's blame, asserting, "it amuses me very much when I hear young bachelors giving the lame excuse for not marrying that modern young girls are too expensive."⁴³ Wuver called men out on their hypocrisy, claiming that women only expect what has previously been presented to them. For instance, had the young men asked for financial assistance early in the relationship, "[he would have built] a sound foundation for the sympathy and understanding which most men expect on the part of their wives [in order] to make headway in life."⁴⁴ Instead, Wuver continues, these young men are misrepresenting themselves by constantly presenting their beloved with gifts. When the men no longer do so, women are then accused of "nagging" based on false expectations.

To elaborate, in their joint essay, "Marrying and Marriage on a Shifting Terrain: Reconfigurations of Power and Authority in Early Colonial Asante," Allman and Tashjian discuss the ways in which changes to the Ghanaian cash economy also changed expectations in spousal conjugal labor. As such, since it was a wife's responsibility to provide continuous labor for their husbands, both productively and reproductively, men were expected to be financial caregivers.⁴⁵ Therefore, should a man present himself inaccurately, as Wuver contends, this resulted in marital discourse. Then, expecting responses from women in agreeance, Wuver asks her readers to respond with their perception of events, and on December 7th, only men wrote in, still blaming women. Interestingly, the most common response correlates to Graham's "Why Must Men Pay Bride Money," with men arguing against expensive unions, and women expecting ample financial support within those marriages.

As evidenced by Graham and Wuver, men were expected to continue with marital payments to their bride's families despite repeatedly expressing their desire to discontinue being

⁴³ Edith Wuver, "Edith Wuver asks: Why Do Some Men Refuse to Marry?" *Daily Graphic*, Nov. 16, 1957.

⁴⁴ Edith Wuver, "Edith Wuver asks: Why Do Some Men Refuse to Marry?" *Daily Graphic*, Nov. 16, 1957.

⁴⁵ *Women in African Colonial Histories*, 242

their household's sole financial proprietors. Despite this commentary, *Daily Graphic* contributors continue to encourage women to give up their financial autonomy and prioritize working in the home. In some cases, as with Gladys Kotey, *Daily Graphic* articles chastised and discouraged women from pursuing work while simultaneously working to maintain a household. These derisive standards placed financial hindrances on both men and women. Therefore, these examples demonstrate contradictory expectations for potential husbands and wives, thus contributing to the perceived decline of marriages.

Women's Marital Expectations and the Resilience of the *Abusua*:

Under colonialism, women's familial labor was expected to function in a manner similar to Europe, placing women in a subjugated position to their male counterparts. For instance, in Jean Allman's "Rounding up Spinsters," she considers how tribal leaders, with the help of the colonial government, would detain unmarried women until they agreed to be married. In an interview with Allman, Adowa Addae argues that the practice of customary marriage allowed for convenient separation from a husband if a wife was dissatisfied. Therefore, Addae recalls, "in those days, even though women wanted to be independent, they still got married. If you had a wife and you did not look after her well, she would just go."⁴⁶ Thus, colonial enforcement of marriages, as well as attempts to legitimize them, served as a blatant attempt at controlling women's independence. To elaborate, Allman utilizes a quote by British historian Megan Vaughan, who explains that, "'the problem of women,' was shorthand for a number of related problems including changes in property rights, rights in labor, and relations between generations."⁴⁷ Despite western influence being a prominent fissure in Ghana's development, in the years leading up to independence, the reach of

⁴⁶ Jean Allman, "Rounding Up Spinsters: Gender Chaos and Unmarried Women in Colonial Asante," *Journal of African History* 37, (1996): 205.

⁴⁷ Jean Allman, "Rounding Up Spinsters: Gender Chaos and Unmarried Women in Colonial Asante," *Journal of African History* 37, (1996): 207.

colonial influence was loosening, allowing women to seek out new ways to assert their right to reproductive and economic autonomy. In doing so, women safeguarded *abusua* inheritance, allowing for its continuance into modernity.

The aforementioned ease of customary marriages was in fact, not easy, as Ghana moved further into the 20th century. For instance, on April 14th, 1956, the *Daily Graphic* reported that the Federation of Gold Coast Women “decided to set up marriage councils to advise couples intending to marry.”⁴⁸ The article, entitled “Scheme to Set Up Marriage Councils,” explains that the councils were being formed as an attempt to legalize native customary marriages and help mitigate marital disputes. Why then, would legitimization be necessary if customary marriages were so fluid? To explain, reporter Ernest Gregory explains the primary goal of legitimization, is to create a better home environment for the children. As a demonstration of the changes in household dynamics, Gregory states, “[the council] endeavors to work with any child in need or difficulty in order to strengthen the family tie and improve conditions rather than remove the child from his or her natural home.”⁴⁹ This statement attests to a shift in familial structure, setting up the parents as the head of the home and removing the mothers *abusua*.

The next argument in favor of the legalization of customary marriages, was documented in an interview entitled, “Our Women are on the War-Path,” between Moses Danquah and Henry Ofori. Published by the *Daily Graphic* as though conversing with one another, Danquah asks Ofori, “What do you think were the factors which have so suddenly sent our women on the war path?”⁵⁰ In response, Ofori explains that men have used customary marriage to take advantage of their

⁴⁸ Ernest Gogrey, “Scheme to Set Up Marriage Councils,” *Daily Graphic*, April 14, 1956.

⁴⁹ Ernest Gogrey, “Women Told: Fight to Legalize Customary Marriages,” April 14, 1956. Center feature goes by a different name than the cover story, which touches on customary marriage but does not identify it as being a primary motivator.

⁵⁰ Moses Danquah and Henry Ofori, “Our Women Are on the War-Path,” *Daily Graphic*, June 15, 1956.

wives, “[in] this otherwise very sensible and practical form of marriage to make pawns of some of our women.”⁵¹ Pawnage, was a non-monetary exchange between a husband and his in-laws.⁵² While not a formally considered slavery, a pawned wife was essentially reduced to a form of collateral allowing the husband with greater control and potential exploitation of his wife’s labor.⁵³ Since *abusua* inheritance relies on women’s economic autonomy, pawn marriages were detrimental to matrilineal wealth as it put women and their labor entirely under the control of her husband.⁵⁴ Similarly, Sean Hawkins explains, “that because [women’s] rights were seen as a commercial exchange, women were necessarily, if unintentionally, interpreted as property” in colonial courts.⁵⁵

Consequently, Claire Robertson comes to a similar conclusion, as western influence placed men as the head of the household, women were reduced to household tasks, losing social value and lacking in what Robertson calls, *productive potential*.⁵⁶ Robertson, asserts that despite the assumption that women could only gain personal autonomy when they were unmarried, women did, in fact, reap “differential rewards [from] economic activities outside of the home.”⁵⁷ As an example, Dorothy Vellenga’s research on changes in social class amongst Ghanaian women, confirms that women matrilineal inheritance structures were more successful at obtaining land through their own efforts, versus those that followed a patrilineal structure.⁵⁸ Furthermore, women

⁵¹ Moses Danquah and Henry Ofori, “Our Women Are on the War-Path,” *Daily Graphic*, June 15, 1956.

⁵² Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian, “*I Will Not Eat Stone*” *A Woman’s History of Colonial Asante*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), 51.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁴ Dorothy Dee Vellenga, “Matriliny, Patriliney, and Class Formation Among Women Cocoa Farmers in Two Rural Area’s of Ghana,” *Women and Class in Africa*, (Great Britain: Holmes and Meier, 1986), 64.

⁵⁵ Sean Hawkins, “‘The Woman in Question’: Marriage and Identity in the Colonial Courts of Northern Ghana, 1907-1954,” in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. Jean Allman et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 120

⁵⁶ Claire Robertson, “Women and Socioeconomic Change,” *Sharing the Same Bowl*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁸ Vellenga, *Women and Class in Africa*, 73. 43% of matrilineal women acquired farms through their own efforts, but only 34% of patrilineal women were able to acquire farms.

in matrilineal structures appear more determined in their strategies for profit, generating wealth through farm expansion or market sales.⁵⁹ This evidence demonstrates the ways in which women were able to yield their desired outcome in spite of a gendered system that worked against them. While these efforts may appear trivial on the surface, it was in this manner, that women continued to accumulate *abusua* wealth.

Conclusion

Ghanaian women were at near-constant odds with western influence. In their interview, Danquah and Ofori identify western influence as a potential catalyst for marital discourse. Specifically, Danquah concludes that prior to western influence, husbands and wives, “lived reasonably happy and contended lives.” Only after the introduction of western marriage, did “the idea that the Christian form of marriage afforded greater security and respectability to the wives.”⁶⁰ The reach of western influence affected the perceived obligations of women within a marriage, including expectations in childcare, household marital roles, and subsequently impacted women’s potential for financial autonomy. By examining the ways in which scholarly history aligns with articles from the *Daily Graphic*, we can see the ways in which women faced adversity in various areas of their lives. In order to better understand the impact of women’s efforts towards personal autonomy, we must consider how Ghana’s *Daily Graphic* presented information about husbands, wives, and the *abusua* to their readers. As such, the contradictory information published contributed to marital discourse, concern for children, and even changes under the law. Even when not explicitly mentioned or discussed, *abusua* inheritance serves as the underlying factor in each of these facets in Ghanaian life. Thus, the examination of *abusua* inheritance and marital

⁵⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁶⁰ Moses Danquah and Henry Ofori, “Our Women Are on the War-Path,” *Daily Graphic*, June 15, 1956.

complications through the lens of *Daily Graphic* reporters can help us to better understand how Ghanaians navigated martial and household changes in the early years of independence.