



A Decolonial History of African Female Education and Training in Colonial Asante, 1920-1960

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Abstract

This paper is a decolonial exploration of the intersection of colonialism, education, and gender in the Asante (Ashanti) region of colonial Ghana in tropical West Africa between 1920 and 1960. Despite the atrocities of the colonial period, Western education provided a system of change for African women. However, the colonial period also deprived female leaders of their authority and perpetuated traditional gender roles, which were reinforced by the education system. While some schools and centres were opened for the training of girls, there was still limited access to education and opportunities for women. This study relies on primary and secondary sources, including archival sources, books, and articles, to uncover the complex history of Asante women's colonial encounters and female education. Using a decolonial lens, the paper challenges dominant narratives and uncovers hidden histories, highlighting the systemic exclusion of women from power and the perpetuation of colonial power relations.

Keywords: decolonial history, female colonial education, Asante history, African women's empowerment, colonial Ghana, tropical West Africa

Introduction: Asante Education through a Decolonial Lens

The introduction of formal Western education into Asante (also misspelled as Ashanti) is closely linked to the arrival of Europeans in the region known by colonists as the Gold Coast. Counter to the perception that education arrived in Africa via colonization, Seroto (2011) has argued that before the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous forms of education existed in various African societies and were organized for both males and females. Such indigenous education aimed to provide social roles for both genders. According to Scanlon (1964, p. 3), pre-colonial African education aimed at equipping individuals with skills and knowledge necessary to fulfill their roles and responsibilities in their communities, including their homes and villages. In the same light, Fafunwa (1974) identifies seven fundamental objectives of indigenous education in Africa. These include fostering the development of the child's physical abilities, character, intellectual skills, and respect for authority figures. It also includes acquiring vocational training and promoting the cultural heritage of the community. These objectives underscore the comprehensive and significant role education played in pre-colonial African societies.

Research on education and training in the Asante Region of what is now part of the state of Ghana, comes in various forms. The seminal work on education in Ghana by Graham (1971), *History of Education in Ghana*, offers a comprehensive and illuminating account of the earliest educational practices in this region of tropical West Africa. He presents evidence demonstrating how Chiefs and the colonial administration worked together to establish schools. Antwi (1992) builds on Graham's earlier research and delves deeper into the different missionary activities related to education in the region. The Basel Mission, an historical Protestant church, for instance, carved the Akropong-Akuapem hills as their area of operation, whilst the Wesleyans operated along the coast. Additional works which provide a background for the current study include Allman, who explores Asante women's colonial encounters and expressions. Her works broaden our understanding of how African women interacted within the colonial economy. Such works include the edited volume of *Women in African Colonial Histories* by Geiger, Allman and Musisi (2002); *I Will Not Eat Stone: A Women's History of Colonial Asante* Allman and Tashjian (2000); as well as further works by Allman (1994, 1996, 1997), Roberts (1987), Grier (1992), and Clark (1994).

This paper contributes to Asante women's colonial encounters, seeking to challenge the prevailing narrative that portrays colonialism as the sole source of opportunity for women. Rather, we argue that colonialism, in its economic and social dimensions, simultaneously disrupted traditional social roles and created new opportunities for women's empowerment. However, these opportunities were often limited by colonial

structures of power that favored Western forms of knowledge and perpetuated gendered inequalities. In this paper, we provide a historical analysis of women's education and training in Asante, exploring how it differed from what was introduced in the coastal states, and how it impacted Asante women's lives from the 1920s to the 1960s. We also examine how Asante women adapted to these changes, navigating the tensions between traditional gender roles and new opportunities for economic and social agency. Ultimately, our goal is to critically engage with the colonial legacy and explore the possibilities for a more decolonial understanding of women's dis/empowerment in Asante.

Our search for literature on women's education in Ghana, specifically in the colonial period, led us to the regional office of the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) in Kumase. We deliberately chose the Kumase regional archive due to the abundance of data on the subject matter, Kumase is the main city of the Asante Region of present-day Ghana, and previously was the commercial and cultural capital of the Asante Empire. However, despite the availability of data, information on female schools in Asante during the colonial period was scarce. To supplement our research, we turned to the national archives (PRAAD) in Accra (the capital of Ghana), where we found a wealth of information on female education. The preservation of records on education in Ghana is kept at the National Archive, and this proved immensely beneficial to our research. Our archival research exposed us to previously unavailable documents, including records on various girls' schools in Asante. In addition, the Manhyia Archives at the residence of the *Asantehene* (King of Asante) back in Kumase provided us with interesting insights into the period under review. Even though this archive lacked any specific information on colonial education, notably, the Asantehene's court had tried and adjudicated several cases on gender issues during the period, further enriching our understanding of the topic.

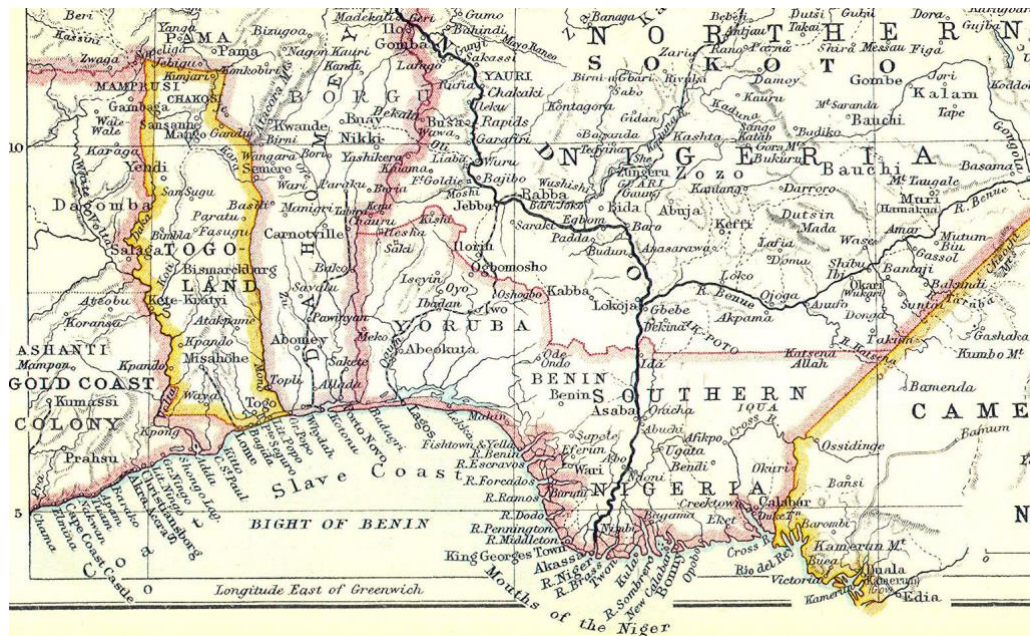
The following discussion of these elements of colonialism, education, and gender, is divided into four sections. The first section introduces readers to colonialism in this part of tropical West Africa. The second section discusses the Indigenous education and the Western education that was introduced into Asante. The third section looks at contestations around gendered perspectives of education due to the impact of colonization. The fourth section takes a critical look at women's responses to the new developments in Asante within the period 1920-1960.

Colonialism in Tropical West Africa Regions of the Slave Coast

The advent of colonialism in tropical West Africa and by extension the Asante Region of the state of Ghana, disrupted not only the traditional political systems but also caused deep social upheaval in marriages and conjugal relations, as well as education. Within the political space, women leaders were completely cut off from

political authority. Several examples from the tropical West Africa areas of the former Slave Coast in the Gulf of Guinea demonstrate this point.

Figure 1. A 1914 map showing the Slave Coast



John Bartholomew & Co. Edinburgh. Public Domain.

In the Kingdom of Dahomey, women ministers, adept in various forms of spirit media, also had political authority. With colonization this was minimized in some cases, and completely lost in others. As documented by oral historian Awé, in pre-colonial Yoruba society, the position of *Ìyálóde* (mother of external affairs) was a Chief in her own right with her own insignia of office and had control over substantial economic resources. In the modern administrative structure, inherited from the colonial period, she is not a member of any local government councils, including that of the market which had previously been under her jurisdiction (Awe, 1997). In Igboland, where a ‘dual-sex system’ of administering village affairs had been in place before colonial rule, the ‘Chief’ of the men was given a stipend by the British and the ‘Chief’ of the women was ignored (Okonjo, 1976). The case was no different in matrilineal Asante society where queen mothers were ignored within the colonial system. In precolonial Asante society, the queen mother held a position of great power, with the right to advise, counsel, and be stern with the King in public. She was solely responsible for nominating a candidate for the Golden Stool, the royal and divine throne of the kings, and ensuring the sustainability of the royal lineage by finding suitable men for young girls in the family. Moreover, the queen mother could assume full authority of the state in the absence of a candidate for the throne. The prosperity and stability of the state largely depended on the relationship between the king and the queen mother, with the latter being responsible for making and unmaking war and peace. This great responsibility and

power for female traditional authority became dormant during colonial rule where women in political positions were marginalized and their basic responsibilities were difficult to execute due to colonial interference in the enstoolment and destoolment of kings and chiefs (Wilks, 2000). The European introduction of a changing political system altered the traditional roles and functions of women in the Asante political system, resulting in the loss of their political power.

Despite the political marginalization of female authority and rulership, and the general disruption in social life, Asante women negotiated their encounters within the colonial economy by participating in agencies which were relevant to them and thus to some extent evaded the dominance of British colonial administration. Within these colonial encounters, we argue that Asante women leveraged on the by-products of colonialism to accumulate wealth and control their reproductive and productive labour, among other acts. Thus, the 1920s and 1930s have been agreed by scholars as a crucial and transformative period for women in the Gold Coast, especially in Asante (Roberts, 1987; Allman & Tashjian, 2000; Austin, 2005). The 1920s saw the shift from women's subordination and dependency on husbands and uncles to exercising their free will in their productivity and production. Historically, men had exerted control over women by means of marriage, and child rearing was primarily delegated to women as a means to reinforce their adherence to traditional family values. During puberty, girls were initiated into womanhood and subjected to social regulations aimed at promoting morality in society. However, these mechanisms served to restrict women's sexuality, labour, and childbirth. Additionally, the societal stigma attached to divorce discouraged women from leaving abusive marriages (McCaskie, 1981, 1983; Wilks, 1993).

Against the backdrop of this sociocultural milieu, the introduction of formal Western education brought about a certain measure of emancipation for women, who subsequently began to agitate for equitable compensation for their labour, accrue wealth, exert greater autonomy in the selection of spouses, and control over their reproductive capacities (McCaskie, 1981, 1983; Wilks, 1993). The colonial period marked a turning point for women in the Gold Coast, providing them with an unprecedented opportunity to challenge traditional gender roles and assert agency over their lives. By the 1920s the massively expanding cash economies as a result of the introduction of cocoa trees and production of the cocoa bean (which had become more productive than gold) offered women the leverage needed to take control of their labour, accumulate wealth, and make decisions about their reproductive labour. The weakening of traditional political structures, including the authority of chiefs and men, created openings for new forms of social interaction among women (Clark, 1994; Akyeampong, 1997). Women who had previously worked alongside their husbands on cocoa farms began to demand land for their own farms, recognizing that the proceeds from cocoa sales often went exclusively to male landowners. These developments coincided with the arrival of migrant sex workers from diverse ethnic backgrounds,

who represented a new model of female wealth accumulation, independence, and glamour (Allman, 1994, 1996). As women's horizons broadened, married women raised their expectations of their husbands, while unmarried women ventured into cocoa production, foodstuff trading, and prostitution. These transformations disrupted traditional social order, with many women refusing to marry and causing consternation among local chiefs, such as those in Effiduase, Bekwai, and Manso Nkwanta (traditional areas all within Asante). In response, chiefs implemented policies such as rounding up unmarried women and holding them until suitable suitors could be found at a cost of five shillings per head. The history of these women provides a compelling illustration of how colonialism deeply influenced gender relations in the Gold Coast. The introduction of colonialism presented a mixed bag of opportunities and challenges for women seeking empowerment and autonomy.

In the wake of the emergent social changes, missionaries became the forerunners who controlled the "uncontrollable" women. Methodist Women Missionaries were brought to Asante to establish schools, including child welfare centres and clinics for women. In the area of establishing schools, the Mmofraturo, a training college for women, and the Wesley Girls boarding school, were set up to train women in native cooking, laundry work, needle work, and gardening. The impact of colonialism on Asante women manifested in two ways. Firstly, it addressed the issue of idleness among unmarried women by providing them with education through schools, thereby encouraging them to adhere to the traditional practice of sticking to their husbands (Allman, 1994); and secondly, in a countermove, Asante women sought empowerment to make independent choices regarding childbearing, even outside of the institution of marriage (Allman, 1994).

Western versus Indigenous Educational Systems

The introduction of formal western education into Asante can be attributed to two important developments which took place in the region. The changing political system, accompanied by the evolving economic landscape contributed to this change. Politically, Asante had suffered defeat in her War of Independence against the British in 1902, resulting in the establishment of a colonial administration in Kumase and the subsequent establishment of Christian missions. Prior to this feat by the British, several European powers, had traded in slaves and other 'commodities.' The Portuguese, Danish, Swedish, Prussian and the Dutch, had tried to establish residency in Kumase but failed. As early as the 1770's, a Dutch Huydecoper was sent to Asante to negotiate trade and receive a Dutch residency. This was followed by the French; Bonnat, Bowdich, and Dupuis, among others, but it was turned down. With the success of the British, the incorporation of Asante into the Gold Coast colony meant the introduction of Western education into the region. Furthermore, the evolving economic landscape, brought about by the introduction of cocoa by migrant farmers

from the Akuapem and Krobo districts in 1902-03 laid the foundation for the cash crop economy which was to follow. It was within this political atmosphere and changing economic landscape that formal western education was introduced into Asante.

The introduction of formal western education was spearheaded by missionaries and supported by the British colonial government. The kind of education introduced was geared towards literacy and numeracy that manifested in a curriculum, which had the propensity to displace indigenous education in the process (Aissat & Djafri, 2011). Indigenous education has been conceptualized in various forms by its proponents. Nakashima, Prott, and Bridgewater (2000) have argued that throughout history, societies developed valuable bodies of knowledge that were deeply tied to their local environments, which allowed them to survive and in numerous instances, thrive. Armstrong (1987) further contends that indigenous education is an integral part of daily life and practices, serving to preserve cultural traditions and knowledge across generations. The Asante people are a notable example of a society that developed a complex educational system intertwined with their social, economic, religious, and cultural beliefs. Education permeated every aspect of their social structure, which aimed at meeting the economic, social, and aesthetic needs of the community.

Two distinct forms of education were prevalent in pre-colonial Asante society; socialization and initiation rites/apprenticeship (Hlatshwayo, 2000, p. 28). The former was referred to as informal education, while the latter was viewed as formal education. Informal education can be defined as an ongoing process by which individuals acquire and accumulate information, skills, attitudes, and insights through daily encounters and exposure to their environment (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974, p. 8). Informal education therefore was expressed in Asante society through various means such as language learning, art education, initiation rites, music and dance. These were integral aspects of day-to-day learning experiences that shaped the socialization of individuals. Within the indigenous formal education structure, young men and women underwent training for a period of time. It should be noted that men and women were trained to fit into traditional gender roles. Young women, for example, were trained in the art of bead making, cloth weaving (kente weaving is mostly done by men), and other female economic trades; young men ventured into artisanal professions such as brick laying and masonry, as well as hunting, among other vocations.

Similarly, within the Asante healthcare system, there were complex regulations that governed practitioners and apprentices. Novices underwent rigorous training for a minimum of three years to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to provide holistic healthcare services to the community. Twumasi (2005) discusses this training in his work 'Medical Systems in Ghana,' emphasizing the importance of traditional medical practitioners' professional training. Kennedy (1999) highlights the training of traditional birth attendants for a minimum of three to five years. Furthermore, Osseo-Asare

(2016) provides evidence in 'Writing Medical Authority: The Rise of Literate Healers in Ghana, 1930-70' that indigenous healers such as herbalists, traditional birth attendants, and bonesetters underwent formal training before being entrusted with community healthcare responsibilities.

The craft industry in Asante was a prominent sector that not only met the economic needs of the community but also communicated the deep-seated realities of the people through a combination of aesthetics and philosophy. This industry consisted of various sub-sectors, including gold and silver industries, blacksmithing, brass working, cloth weaving and dyeing, umbrella making, sandal making, and woodworking (Arhin, 1974). Craft villages were located in several areas, including Amofo, Asumengya, and Datiaso for cloth weaving; Dompase, was famous for its bead, pot, and cloth industries; and Breman, Tafo, Ahwiaa, and Pankrono for blacksmithing, woodworking, and stool-carving industries. Women were active partners in the supply chain business that followed. They traded these items in markets and other trading centres.

Women's traditional education in Asante began at puberty when girls were ushered into womanhood. Sarpong's (1977) detailed account of the nubility rite (*bragoro*) highlights the crucial initiation of girls into womanhood in Asante. This rite, spanning seven days, encompasses an array of feminine teachings that instil qualities of a good wife and mother such as obedience, faithfulness, hard work, and helpfulness. Additionally, the ceremony imparts practical skills such as laundry work, sewing, knitting, weaving, and home management, all of which were integral components of the indigenous education system that existed in pre-colonial Asante.

Africanists argue that formal Western education on the African continent served three main purposes: to provide literacy for a certain section of the population (mulattoes and the children of chiefs and wealthy merchants/traders); to teach Africans to read the Bible and convert them to Christianity; and, in the case of males, to produce an English-speaking African servant class who could work as clerks in the colonial administration and as technicians in commercial houses (Aissat & Djafri, 2011). Rodney (1972) succinctly argued that the primary purpose of the colonial school system was this training of Africans to fill the lowest ranks of local administration and the staffing of private firms owned by Europeans. This was likewise the case for western education in the Gold Coast Colony (Southern Ghana), which emphasized arithmetic, geography, and English language proficiency. The Western form of education introduced into the inland Asante Region differed from the coastal model. Asante chiefs demanded schools that would address the social and economic needs of their people, while Asante women negotiated their colonial encounter by demanding the modelling of western education on traditional educational principles of home management. In this process of negotiation, women navigated their own spaces of empowerment and reclaimed control of their labour and reproductivity.

The establishment of mission schools was a direct response to a gender crisis that emerged in the 1920s and '30s as the economic landscape changed due to colonialism and the introduction of cocoa trees that thrived in the tropical climate. However, it should be noted that the missionaries, not the colonial administration, were the pioneers of the school establishment. Between the 1920s and 1950s, the missionaries established 17 schools, compared to the 11 set up by the colonial administration, which began only after the 1940s.

During the period of social upheaval in the 1920s and 1930s, Asante women challenged matrilineal inheritance, renegotiated conjugal obligations, avoided marriage altogether, and engaged in extramarital affairs, including adultery among married women. The Manhyia Archives of Ghana in Kumase document 98 cases of marriage, adultery, and divorce from the 1930s to the 1960s, with 70 of them involving adultery. It is worth noting that the report covers only cases brought before the Asantehene's court, ignoring those heard by the various paramountcies, divisions, and village chiefs. Each Asante polity is subdivided into paramountcies, towns, and villages, with local courts hearing cases that can be appealed to higher courts, culminating in the Asantehene's court. Therefore, the cases reviewed at the Manhyia Archives represent only a fraction of the overall cases heard. Furthermore, ethnicity did not play a role in the cases heard by the Asantehene's court, as litigants from various ethnic groups had access to it.

Another reason which accounted for the establishment of schools in Asante in the period under review was the need for experimentation of cocoa plantations in other parts of the region. Here, the Mampong Trade Training Centre provides a deeper understanding of the situation. The Trade School established to provide experimental training in soil analysis, soil science and other agricultural subjects, and the feasibility of replicating the successes made elsewhere in the Mampong-Edwira area in terms of cocoa plantations. The changing economic environment was welcomed by both the chiefs and ruling class as well as the ordinary people. In this regard, the Mampong Trade Training Centre received support from traditional authorities who needed their wards to have some sort of economic training, which the schools provided. In addition to this, the establishment of schools in Asante was to produce what Manuh calls 'better wives' for the rising elite class (Manuh, 1991).

Contestations around Gendered perspectives in Education

The social landscape of Asante society in the twentieth century was characterized by the creation of schools throughout the region. This educational system was introduced to Asante by missionaries and supplemented by the colonial government and some Asante Native Authority Councils. Four types of schools existed in Asante: mission

schools, government schools, self-supporting schools established by Native Authorities, and experimental and trade schools. However, despite this initiative to spearhead education across the region, women's education was under-emphasized and did not measure up to that of their male counterparts. Many female students in the Gold Coast only attended the first cycle of education (PRAAD, Accra, DPL/LC2437.F63). Fletcher observed that, "many children both boys and girls who attend the infant and junior school, did not continue their education to the senior primary stage." Parents faced significant challenges in obtaining the funds to pay for their daughters' education and also expected them to provide a financial return in the form of a higher marriage dowry from their suitors. Thus, it can be inferred that many parents viewed investing in their daughter's education as a way to secure future financial gains (PRAAD, Accra, DPL/LC2437.F63). However, aspects of the culture and the general notion at the time was a contributory factor that impeded the progress of women's education in Asante. In fact, Grier (1992) has argued that the people of the Gold Coast, particularly Asante, held the belief that a woman's role in society was to manage household affairs. However, this narrow and oppressive belief regarding Asante women is erroneous. Throughout history, and in the pages of this article, we have highlighted the significant role played by women in Asante society where matriarchal relations are strong. The Asante woman in pre-colonial society was not a domicile body who was relegated solely to domestic duties.

Based on archival data, during a youth club meeting held in Accra, a young man highlighted the issue of intense poverty faced by parents and the risk associated with educating their daughters without the parent's expectations being met. This perception hindered the progress of female education in Ghana. However, it also resulted in a new social change in Asante, where parents started viewing female education as an investment that could provide future returns in the form of good paying jobs and marriages. As a result, many females were motivated to strive for better opportunities and achieve success in their professional and personal lives. The limited access to education for females also had an impact on their ability to participate in politics, particularly in nationalist activities of the time. In 1943, the number of male students who took part in the primary leaving certificate examination was 2771 while in 1944, 3549 males took part in the examination (PRAAD, Accra, DPL/LC2437.F63). Unfortunately, the data does not provide us with the number of females who partook in the examination.

Remarkably, the primary responsibility for female education in the Gold Coast and Asante was shouldered by various missionary societies. Fletcher indicated that "the missions are mainly responsible for girls' school education." The colonial administration's prioritization of women's empowerment through education is dubious, as their political landscape aimed to sideline women leaders and prevent their

participation in governance. Hence, education and training of women will prove the assumptions of producing wives for the colonial economy. Women's education in Asante was primarily limited to vocational training in specific fields, with Christian missions playing a key role in its establishment. Boarding schools were set up by these missions to train girls, while the medical department provided vocational training in nursing, midwifery, health-visiting, and dispensing. Furthermore, mission training colleges were responsible for offering post-secondary courses to train girls to become professional teachers. The Presbyterian mission school in Agogo played a significant role in promoting female education in Asante.

The chiefly class in Asante accepted and supported the goal of promoting literacy and numeracy. Prior to the introduction of formal education in the twentieth century, an Asante chief sent 14 boys and girls to receive formal education at the Castle school. Additionally, two Asante *ahenema* (princes), Owusu Ansa (son of Asantehene Osei Bonsu) and Nkwantabisa (son of the then Asantehene, Osei Yaw Akoto), were sent to the coast to receive Western formal education as part of McClean's Tripartite Treaty of 1831, (Cruikshank, 1853).

In 1930, *Mmofraturu* ('Children's Garden' in Asante Twi dialect) was established as the first girls' school. Allman argues that women's education served as a social framework for addressing the gender crisis in Asante society during the 1920s. This suggests that the motive behind women's education was to control those seeking opportunities in the cash crop economy to assert their independence and empowerment. Instead of training women to contribute to the economy, education became a means of enforcing traditional gender roles and European perceptions of women as second-class citizens. Sister Persis Beer was appointed the principal to ensure the collaboration and participation of girls in the school. Interest in women's education in Asante was to help control the 'uncontrollable' women. A year after the establishment of *Mmofraturu*, in 1931, a training college for women was added to *Mmofraturu's* programme, with women taking some courses at the neighbouring Wesley College.

From 1930 to 1950, only a meager seven schools and training centres were added to the *Mmofraturu* and the Women's Training Centre (both run by the Wesleyans), which is a dismal reflection of the colonial administration's lack of commitment to female education. These schools included Agogo Girls' Boarding School and Hospital, Presbyterian Girls' School Bantama, Girls School in Asokore, St. Monica's Secondary School and Teaching College Mampong-Asante, Kumase Division Senior Girls' School, Bekwai Girls' School, and the Roman Catholic Girls' Boarding School in Obuasi (PRAAD, Kumase). Despite this, the number of girls who took the primary leaving certificate examination rose to 529 in 1943, with 339 passing. The next year, 546 out of 721 girls who sat for the exam passed, and in 1945, 561 female students

passed out of the 841 girls who took the exams. Clearly, this shows that there was a gradual increase in female enrollment in education in the Gold Coast, and Asante in particular.

Decolonizing Gender Norms in Twentieth Century Asante Society

In the preceding sections, we examined the introduction of formal Western education into Asante and how it relegated indigenous education to the background as well as the contestations surrounding gendered perspectives in education during the colonial period. In this section, as we delve deeper into efforts and initiatives undertaken by Asante women to decolonize gender norms within their own community, it becomes imperative to explore the broader historical context in which these dynamics unfolded. To further explore the broader implications of colonialism and its impact on gender norms in colonial Asante, it is crucial to recognize the interconnectedness between imperialist narratives and the sexualization of marginalized groups. The narrative of New World imperialism, as exemplified by the rhetoric and practices of European colonizers, often contained elements of sexualization and feminization, which defined western notions of 'womanness' (Holmes, 2016). By challenging traditional expectations and embracing agency, Asante women played a vital role in reshaping gender dynamics and dismantling oppressive structures.

During the turn of the nineteenth century, the Asante society was predominantly rural, agrarian, and subsistence-based, although trade played a significant role in its economy. However, a century later, the society had undergone significant transformation to become an essential region in the Gold Coast where farming became commercialized. This transformation was largely due to the introduction of cocoa into Asante by commercial farmers from the Akuapem and Krobo districts in 1902-03. Cocoa production had quickly become a significant cash crop for export and monetized the economy, shaping the Asante economic landscape of the twentieth century. As a result, the cocoa growing areas became a hub for ethnic migrants seeking opportunities. Although monetization of the economy had existed in Asante before colonial rule, Arhin argues that it was an important feature of British colonial rule in the twentieth century (Arhin, 1995). During this period, traditional leaders lost control of the production, distribution, and use of money. With the full implementation of colonial rule on the territory that is now known as Ghana and the abolishment of slavery and pawning in Asante, legitimate trade and paid labour emerged. Cocoa was the answer to the economic vacuum created, and it revolutionized the Asante economy by benefiting both the farmers and the colonial administration. By the second decade of the twentieth century, between 1910 and 1914, Ghana had become a leading exporter of cocoa (Kolavalli & Vigneri, 2011, p. 2).

Within the changing economic landscape of Asante society, the social relations and organization began to adapt to the sweeping changes that occurred in the region. The gendered roles in Asante, as well as in Africa in general, were understood in terms of the distinction between the public and private spheres (Mikell, 1997). Men primarily occupied the public sphere, while women assumed responsibility for the private sphere. However, this division was not always universal, particularly in matrilineal societies such as Asante where political power and influence were tied to maternal relations. In pre-colonial society, men cleared land for cultivation, engaged in hunting, and participated in long-distance trade. Women were responsible for food cultivation, fetching firewood and water, and overall family care (Duncan, 2010).

With the emergence of the colonial cash-crop and monetary economy, the presence of farm settlements in the forest regions of Asante and Bono led to significant migration of people, primarily men, into these areas as labourers. As a result, women's responsibilities multiplied as they had to balance domestic work while also assisting their husbands and fathers on their cocoa farms (Rouch, 1954; Metcalfe, 1964). The social dynamics between men and women in pre-colonial Asante society were reflected in conjugal relationships, family life, and participation in community affairs. The economic changes during this period resulted in what historians describe as social chaos. This social crisis prompted women to demand financial compensation for their labour, disrupting the established social order (Allman, 1996). Conversely, it also provided women with opportunities to accumulate wealth and assert themselves.

Furthermore, within this shifting social landscape, the status of women experienced a decline due to the colonial cash economy, which stripped them of their access and rights to land. As a result, women were burdened with a double responsibility, engaging in domestic work while also providing labour for the expanding cocoa economy. The emerging cocoa industry offered alternative opportunities for men who previously may have resorted to being pawned as indentured labour in payment of a debt; now they could work as paid casual labourers, or become cocoa farmers themselves (Rouch, 1954; Metcalfe, 1964). Consequently, wife pawns became necessary in order to reduce labour costs, as they provided free labour by planting food crops such as plantain to provide shade for the young cocoa plants and offering transportation services when the young trees matured into cocoa beans (Austin, 2005).

Wives began demanding cocoa farms as a form of return for their invested labour, while others sought opportunities in foodstuff trading. Divorce became a prominent issue during this period, with two contrasting narratives regarding its occurrence. According to Allman (1996), the high increase in divorce was a consequence of the social chaos in Asante. However, Roberts (1987) argued earlier that divorce during this period was not a result of the social chaos but rather an age-old phenomenon.

The peculiarity of divorce during this time was the monetary gains associated with it. The social chaos extended beyond marital matters to include the commercialization of sex, leading to the rampant spread of venereal diseases such as gonorrhoea. In matrilineal societies like Asante, the introduction of the cash crop economy brought about changes in the political economy of women, despite their political status being downgraded by the colonial administration. Duncan (2010) asserts that matrilineal societies foster women's empowerment. The introduction of cocoa provided women with opportunities to inherit and acquire more cocoa plantations, thereby changing their economic status in these societies, including Asante. Significantly, these changes made women in Asante society more influential in all spheres of life. It was during this period that women's education began to rise, as mothers took on the responsibility of financing their daughters' education, often at the expense of their uncles or fathers' care (Duncan, 2010).

The economic changes brought about a reduction in the status of women, while simultaneously presenting new opportunities for them. In the pre-capitalist/pre-colonial African societies, including Asante, there existed a clear division of labour between men and women (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1997). These societies were characterized by abundant land, scarcity of labour and technology, as well as the ongoing struggle to control labour power, which formed the basis of their social and political organization (Grier, 1992; Terray, 1973). Village elders utilized various political-judicial, religious, and ideological mechanisms to reinforce their dominance over other groups within local society. Their primary objective was to gain and maintain access to and control over the labour power of women, male youths, and slaves (Grier, 1992).

Women constituted a significant source of unpaid labour, particularly as migrant labourers who often worked seasonally. According to Roberts (1987), in pre-colonial and pre-capitalist Asante society, a woman's labour power was initially under the control of her father and uncles, and later transferred to her husband through conjugal duties. However, this perspective is challenged by scholars like Rattray, who argued that a man's rights over his wife were limited to sexual favors, with *ayeri fa* (adultery fees) as compensation (Rattray, 1929). In Rattray's analysis, only women who were pawns were obligated to provide labour services to their husbands. The abolition of slavery and pawnship placed a heavy burden of labour on wives, especially as their unpaid labour was no longer compensated. Allman (1997) explains that in the pre-colonial era, wives' unpaid labour was offset by their involvement in food crop cultivation. However, with the emphasis on cocoa production, wives lost this means of compensation, leading to a growing demand for recognition of their labour rights. The introduction of cocoa into the region had diverse economic implications and opportunities, as well as consequences for women in various areas. For example, the introduction of cocoa in Sefwi Wiawso district had a significant impact on women who were previously involved in trades such as snails, oil, bark-cloth, soap, and rubber

collection. With the arrival of cocoa, these women found themselves investing their labour power in their husbands' cocoa-related activities, often without receiving adequate compensation or remuneration (Roberts, 1987).

In the context of the social chaos during the 1920's and 1930's, a notable shift in women's behavior can be observed, including their active engagement in contesting matrilineal inheritance, renegotiating conjugal obligations, and even avoiding marriage altogether, often resorting to committing adultery (MAG/10/2/25; MAG/10/2/26; MAG/10/2/25). This is evident in the extensive review of marriage, adultery, and divorce cases at the Manhyia Archives in Kumase, where out of 98 cases examined spanning the 1930s to the 1960s, a staggering 70 cases were solely focused on adultery. The remaining 28 cases encompassed various other marital issues, such as breaches of promise to marry, dowry repayment disputes, divorce claims, marriage expenses, unlawful detention of another man's wife, disputes over children, disputes related to stool marriage (disputes related to marriages heard in the court of the Asantehene), lack of maintenance fees, and prevention of inheriting a wife. While the actual number of divorce cases was relatively low; four in number, the breakdown suggests a moral decay within 20th century Asante society, with adultery becoming rampant. In response to this social turmoil, Asantehene (King) Prempeh II deemed it necessary to legally establish "The Wives Fidelity Association" in 1949 (Manhyia Archives, Kumase. MAG 1/192). The declaration stated among other things that, "it shall be the duty of every woman, when so required by her husband in accordance with native custom, to make a declaration upon oath concerning her fidelity". Such measures, including the actions taken by Asante chiefs, were aimed at exerting control over women's sexuality and curbing the perceived societal disruption (Allman, 1996).

The Methodist mission's choice to prioritize home training over equipping girls with literacy and numeracy skills that would enable effective participation in the colonial economy reflects a deliberate agenda to mold women into subservient and domesticated roles. By relegating them to the confines of the domestic sphere, colonial education not only limited their opportunities for advancement but also reinforced patriarchal power structures that perpetuated the commodification of their bodies. These oppressive narratives were deeply intertwined with the wider colonial project, as discussed by Benard (2016) in her "Colonizing Black Female Bodies Within Patriarchal Capitalism: Feminist and Human Rights Perspectives." It becomes evident that the Methodist mission's educational approach was part of a broader strategy aimed at controlling and shaping the lives of black women, denying them agency and relegating them to roles that served the interests of the colonial powers. In essence, these girl's schools replaced the traditional role of the queen mother to groom girls during the nobility rites. Girls were therefore taught skills such as native cooking, laundry work, needlework, and gardening, with instruction conducted in the Asante language (Allman, 1994). To cater to the needs of mothers, a training centre with a

focus on nutrition was established in Kwadaso (PRAAD, Kumase, ARG/1/13/1/40). The Training Centre aimed to equip women, particularly mothers, with knowledge and skills in food habits and nutrition. Additionally, it provided guidance on optimal farming practices for different soil types, strategies to enhance economic status through trading activities, and the creation and use of nature crafts. It is believed that the vision behind these efforts was to empower women, enabling them to play active roles in their households and communities, a position which is dissimilar from our earlier allusion.

Allman (1994) argues that formal Western education had a transformative effect on Asante women between 1920 and 1960. These effects are exemplified by the stories of Mary Anokye and Ama Dapaah. Mary Anokye emerged as a model wife, embodying the ideals propagated by Allman, while Ama Dapaah's story epitomized the broader societal changes that swept through 20th century Asante. Together, these accounts reflect the experiences of two women whose lives were shaped by the prevailing social structure in which Western education emerged as a catalyst for social change. The introduction of education in Asante brought about a restructuring of gender relations, manifested in two distinct ways. Firstly, education, coupled with the influence of Christianity, instilled in women the virtues of being a dutiful wife and adhering to Christian morals, thereby reinforcing the ideal of women's loyalty to their husbands. Secondly, education empowered women, instilling in them newfound confidence in making choices that challenged traditional conjugal obligations, such as opting for informal relationships. Allman further emphasizes the significant impact of early missionary education, as seen in Mary Anokye's life. This education profoundly influenced the next generation of Asante mothers, resulting in a cohort of young women who embraced monogamous marriages, stayed at home rather than engaging in trading or farming activities, and shouldered sole responsibility for childcare without relying on others. Ama Dapaah's life took a different path. She attended a Methodist school in Tafo but left at age twelve due to her mother's belief that education hindered fertility. She had children with different fathers but didn't marry them as trust allowed them to forgo marriage rituals. Ama supported her children as a trader, living in her family house while her mother cared for the kids. She never cohabited with any of her husbands. Over all, the narratives of Mary Anokye and Ama Dapaah underscore the power of education in reshaping the lives and roles of Asante women, highlighting the profound changes that Colonial education brought to the socio-cultural fabric of Asante society.

Conclusion: Challenging Education Stories

In this paper, we have attempted to provide a historical context for the introduction of Western education in Asante. The introduction of Western education in Asante during the twentieth century was closely linked to developments on the coastal regions. While

the coastal areas had already established Castle Schools by the Dutch, British, and Danes, Asante received its first school in the twentieth century. It is evident from our discussion that women's education in Asante served dual purposes. Firstly, the introduction of formal Western education was a deliberate strategy to address the so-called social crisis that arose alongside the expansion of cocoa production. More efficiently, education became a social mechanism to 'tame' Asante women from leveraging on the opportunities of the growing economic sphere to empower themselves, accumulate wealth and control their reproductive and productive labour.

Secondly, parents invested their financial resources in their daughters' education with the expectation of future financial returns. Formal education became an active catalyst for social change, driven by missionaries and supported by the colonial government. The nature of formal education in Asante differed in terms of teaching methods, language of instruction, and subjects covered, owing to the unique circumstances surrounding its implementation. Prior to the introduction of formal western education, children in Asante society received training focused on developing their physical skills, character, and intellectual abilities. However, with the establishment of schools managed by missionaries, girls were specifically trained to become suitable and respectable wives for their husbands who were educated as clerks and catechists, as well as to assimilate into colonial society. Training in laundry and native cooking received particular attention in this regard.

The examination of formal Western education in Asante highlights the need to critically evaluate and challenge the colonial legacies that continue to shape knowledge production and educational systems in post-colonial societies, and is part of the contemporary decolonial call for *Epistemic Freedom in Africa* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Recognizing the historical forces at play in the introduction of education in Asante, prompts us to reexamine and redefine knowledge systems in ways that empower diverse perspectives and challenge the entrenched Eurocentric narratives that have dominated academic discourses, including discourses of the history of education in Asante in tropical Africa.

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Acknowledgements

We appreciate the relevant feedback from reviewers and the editors. Their feedback has really strengthened our contribution.

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