
DIGITAL ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP AT HARVARD
DASH.HARVARD.EDU

HARVARD LIBRARY


Ties that Bound: Slave Concubines/Wives and the End of Slavery in the Gold Coast, c.1874-1900

Citation
Akyeampong, Emmanuel. 2012. "Ties that Bound: Slave Concubines/Wives and the End of Slavery in the Gold Coast, c.1874-1900." In Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo at 70: A reader in African cultural studies, ed. Anne V. Adams, 231-240. Banbury, Oxfordshire, UK: Ayebia.

Link
http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:33085696

Terms of use
This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Open Access Policy Articles (OAP), as set forth at
https://harvardwiki.atlassian.net/wiki/external/NGY5NDE4ZjgzNTc5NDQzMGIzZWZhMGFlOWI2M2EwYTg

Accessibility
https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/digital-accessibility-policy

Share Your Story
The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story

Ties that Bound: Slave Concubines/Wives and the End of Slavery in the Gold Coast, c.1874-1900

Emmanuel Akyeampong (Harvard University)

In Anne V. Adams, ed., *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo* (Oxfordshire, 2012), 231-40.

Introduction

Strong young women that made life choices often in conflict with societal norms or expectations have been an important theme in Ama Ata Aidoo's plays and novels.[1] In this chapter I examine similar choices made by strong women in the last quarter of the 19th century with the abolition of slavery or emancipation in the Gold Coast. I use court cases in Anlo in southeastern Gold Coast between 1874 and 1900 to discuss slave wives and concubines who, despite British reluctance to interfere in slave marriages and local intimidation in what were small communities, opted for freedom or to redefine their place and identity in Anlo society. It has been established historically that the majority of slaves in Africa were women, valued for production and reproduction.[2] Claude Meillassoux has cautioned us not to privilege sexuality and reproduction as the basis of the African preference for female slaves, and that theoretically slaves were "sexless" and female slaves in Africa were valued above all else as laborers.[3] That notwithstanding, it is also important to remember that not all slaves were acquired for productive purposes, and social and political reasons for acquiring slaves were equally important in precolonial Africa, where wealth was considered in people. Female slaves were acquired strategically as wives and concubines to expand the ranks of patrilineages and matrilineages in precolonial Africa. Kinless outsiders, their offspring belonged to the lineage of the owner.[4]

---

[1] Anowa in the historical play *Anowa* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2003 [1969]); and Esi in *Changes* (Essex: Heinemann, 1991).
[2] Claire Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).
[3] Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: Womb of Iron and Gold* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
[4] See Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, "Introduction", in Miers and Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 3-81; and Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga, "Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa," *Journal of African History*, 36: 1 (1995), 91-120.

The 19th century witnessed a phenomenal expansion in plantation slavery in Africa or the commercial production of cash crops based on slave labor. In this century, even adult males, previously unwanted and thus exported through the Atlantic slave trade, became valuable as laborers. Agricultural slave villages proliferated with slave families, as slave owners considered that slave marriages and children gave slaves a vested interest in the community and reduced the incentive for flight. Case studies of slave plantations in West Africa exist for northern Nigeria and southwest Mali among other places.[5] It is ironic that this expansion in plantation slavery within Africa had been promoted in part by the European abolition of the export slave trade at the beginning of the 19th century and the introduction of trade in cash crops ("legitimate trade") as a substitute, which had generated a need for agricultural labor and for porters to carry produce to coastal traders.

In Anlo, the case study for this chapter, the export slave trade persisted until the 1860s, encouraged by the scarcity of land, especially fertile land. The lagoons and creeks that stretched inland across Anlo country provided excellent facilities for smuggling. Export slave trade in Anlo facilitated an increase in internal slavery. The Anlo exhibited a preference for young women and children as slaves. Slave women were often married to men in the owner's lineage, and slave children – and slave offspring – grew up as junior "kinsmen".[6] A master controlled his slave wife or concubine and offspring to a degree not possible in a marriage to a free Anlo woman. Trading families used slaves in the processing of fish and salt, which were sent into the interior with European goods. These slaves also served as porters, carrying goods to trade marts.[7] Slaves were also used individually or in small numbers on farms, and absent was the pattern of large numbers of slaves toiling on land belonging to "big men" or chiefs west of the Volta River. Anlo lands were owned by clans and wealthy individuals and there were no stool lands, making chiefs dependent on court fines and gifts from resident traders. Effective British

[5] Paul E. Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: the Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Richard L. Roberts, "Ideology, Slavery and State Formation: The Evolution of Maraka Slavery in the Middle Niger Valley," in Paul Lovejoy, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981), 170-99.
[6] On the assimilation of slaves in Africa using the ideology and discourse of "kinship," see Miers and Kopytoff, "Introduction."
[7] Sandra E. Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996), 38-9.

presence after the transfer of Danish spheres of influence, including Anlo and Ada, in 1850, finally curtailed the export slave trade in Anlo. By the mid-1860s, many Anlo traders had switched to trade in palm oil, as Krobo producers, the center of palm oil production then, directed their produce to the Anlo coast.

The timing of British emancipation in 1874-5 was particularly painful for the Anlo, not only because slaves as elsewhere in the Gold Coast constituted the most important form of moveable wealth, but also because of an onset of global economic depression in the later quarter of the 19th century and a glut in the global market for fats and oils. Indebtedness and social insecurity was rife in Anlo, encouraging pawnship and the outright sale of people, especially women. It was in this context that some slave concubines and wives in Anlo made difficult decisions to oppose their masters/husbands and their adopted lineages, to opt out of forced "marriages", to claim their children, and to form new unions of their choice. They faced the opposition, often violent, of their masters, and the indifference of the colonial administration, which sought to minimize the potential social disruption that could result from emancipation. Though historical evidence has substantiated that most slaves on emancipation chose to remain with their masters and renegotiate their relations, the court cases cited in this chapter provides a different window on emancipation, unearthing the voices and perspectives of a few brave women who dared to imagine a different social reality for themselves.[8]

The Abolition of Slavery in Colonial Gold Coast

British defeat of Asante in 1874 paved the way for the declaration of a Gold Coast Colony south of Asante. Anlo's alliance with Akwamu and Asante had been demonstrated in Anlo's support for Asante and Akwamu in the Krepi War of 1869, when Asante invaded the northern Ewe. To prevent Anlo from joining Asante in the 1874 war, a British military force invaded and subjugated Anlo before the main British army advanced against Asante. Thus Anlo became a part of the British colony in 1874. To galvanize domestic support for imperialism, official rhetoric in Britain advocated how the imposition of colonial rule would end slave trade and slavery in British colonies in

[8] Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, eds., *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988). The court cases in this chapter are drawn from the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), Accra, Ghana.

Africa. But as British officers in the colonies in Africa testified to the pervasiveness of slavery and how slaves constituted a vital part of the wealth and social capital of chiefs, the British government became reluctant to move against domestic slavery in Africa.

The British Aborigines Protection Society drew public attention to the persistence of slave dealing even within the proximity of British forts in the Gold Coast, compelling an embarrassed British government to act.[9] Unwilling to stir chiefly opposition or pay compensation for the emancipation of slaves, Britain opted for the "Indian model" of abolition. It abolished the "legal status" of slavery, though it did not outlaw slavery. As Miers explains: "Theoretically, those slaves who wished to do so could remain with their masters, but those who left could not be legally forced to return or to work or their owners."[10] Slave trading was outlawed with the assumption that deprived of new recruits slavery would die a natural death. There was however an important departure from the Indian model in the Gold Coast: all children born in or entering the protectorate after January 1, 1875 were to be considered free. Both the British and the French colonial governments in Africa, pressed by similar considerations, abolished the legal status of slavery but chose not to publicize this fact. On Maraka plantations in the French Soudan in 1905-6, thousands of slaves left the slave agricultural villages when word reached them that the French had abolished the legal status of slavery since 1902. As most of these slaves had been recently captured in the wars and raids of Samory Touré, Tieba of Sikasso and others, they knew where home was, and the imposition of French colonial peace in that larger region encouraged the exodus of 1905-6. It is estimated that by the end of the exodus in 1908, about 200,000-500,000 had abandoned their masters.[11] Nothing this sensational took place in the Gold Coast or in Anlo, where the records suggest that the majority of ex-slaves chose to remain with their former masters.[12]

---

[9] Raymond Dumett and Marion Johnson, "Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in the Gold Coast, Ashanti and the Northern Territories," in Miers and Roberts, *End of Slavery*, 79-80. Two ordinances were gazetted in March 1875: Ordinance No. 1 of 1874 ("To Provide for the Abolition of Slave Dealing") and Ordinance No. 2 of 1874 ("To Provide for the Emancipation of Persons Holden in Slavery").

[10] Suzanne Miers, "Slavery to Freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa: Expectations and Reality," *Slavery and Abolition*, 21:2 (2000), 239.

[11] Roberts, "Maraka Slavery in the Middle Niger Valley"; Miers, "Slavery to Freedom," 253.

[12] Akosua Adoma Perbi.,*A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004), 172.

The smuggling of women and children in the Gold Coast would continue into the 20th century. Dumett and Johnson point to a considerable trade in slaves down the Volta River in the 1880s and 1890s.[13] In terms of emancipation, the greatest obstacles were faced by women. Miers again highlights how colonial rulers tended to see female slaves as women and wives, placing their conflicts with their masters in the domestic domain and not in the sphere of slaves versus masters. That the patriarchal attitude of colonial officials and the men who usually dominated native and Muslim courts often meant that the rights of females were ignored.[14] Unless a slave lodged a complaint for cruel treatment with a district commissioner or a magistrate or sought legal assistance to be liberated, colonial officials were warned to refrain from interfering in existing relations between masters and slaves. Thus, the climate was not particularly supportive for slave wives and concubines in Anlo who sought to revise their status.

Breaking Bonds: Contesting Slave Marriage and Family in Anlo

Masters in Anlo either incorporated their female slaves into their lineage through marriage or found them slave husbands to root them in the community. Female slaves had to succumb to such arrangements, and some will choose the early years of emancipation to insist on their choice of partners and to revoke the earlier arrangements of their slave masters. In 1889, Buafo [Boafo], an Akan slave from either the northern part of Eweland with its history of Akan immigrants or Akanland west of the Volta, sued Quaccoe [Kwaku] Duah for seducing his wife. Seduction of a wife in Anlo attracted an adultery fee of about £1-16 for commoners. Beyond the monetary compensation, pacification in adultery underscored a man's exclusive rights to the sexuality of his wife – that he had customarily married his wife -- and the community's endorsement of that monopoly. Buafo explained the situation to the court:

> My wife Arkuah [Akua] and I were slaves to a certain man, long since dead. The defendant about 8 years ago came to Jella Coffee [Dzelukope] where we live and seduced my wife. I sent a man named Patchow to defendant and he admitted having had connection with her. I claimed the amount of £1-16-0 but plaintiff soon after left the district. Lately I saw the defendant but as it was so long since the former offence I said nothing. About 7 days ago my wife, who had been living

[13] Dumett and Johnson, "Suppression of Slavery," 83; Perbi, *Indigenous Slavery*, 182-3.
[14] Miers, "Slavery to Freedom," 255-6.

> with me continuously, suddenly left me and claimed protection in the court from slavery. I heard that defendant had taken her and was hiding her in the house of a countryman in Housa [Hausa] camp. Sergeant Awudu Kaba told me this.[15]

Since adultery was considered a case between men, a point on which patriarchal British and Gold Coast societies seemed to agree, Arkuah's testimony was not solicited by district commissioner (DC) Francis Lamb of Kwitta [Keta]. Quaccoe Duah claimed not to know her whereabouts, and it does not appear the court tried to find Arkuah. In his defense, Quaccoe Duah argued that:

> I have met the plaintiff's wife about 9 years ago, but have not met her to speak to since. I do not know where the woman is now. When I met her 9 years ago, I had connection with her, and she told me that she had no *real husband*, but a man who was a slave with her *was called such* [emphasis mine].

What can be inferred from Duah's defense, if he was being truthful, is that Arkuah had no emotional ties to the slave compatriot her master had married her to, and for her the marriage was not "real", in spite the endorsement of the slaveholder's community. The district commissioner dismissed the case.

Miers points out the complexity of "freedom" in African contexts, and how colonial officials were puzzled that the slaves they proclaimed free and issued freedom certificates to did not see themselves as free nor consider themselves free in the eyes of their former masters and the communities they lived in. These slaves would insist on paying the ransom amount for their liberation, for it was such an act that emancipated them in their eyes and those of the host community. Likewise slave wives did not consider themselves free or their marriages legitimate despite colonial endorsement, cognizant that as slave wives no bride wealth had been paid to them for their union.[16] For Arkuah in our Anlo case, colonial emancipation provided the opportunity to reject her former marriage to her slave husband and to seek a union of her choice. For Buafo, the aggrieved slave husband, a successful suit and the payment of the adultery fee would have elevated him to the status of a free man, whose marriage was attended by the sanctions prescribed for free born marriages. As a slave couple, it is very unlikely that any bride wealth had been exchanged, as both were the property of their master. It was

[15] PRAAD, Accra, ADM 41/4/2. Civil Record Book 1885-1890. Buafo vs Quaccoe Duah, October 29, 1889.
[16] Miers, "Slavery to Freedom," 258.

the payment of bride wealth that legitimated a marriage and necessitated the payment of the adultery fee if the sanctity of the marriage was breached.

Indeed, the passage of colonial laws ending slave dealing witnessed a last spurt in the sale of women and children, and many were brought from northern markets down the Volta River to Ada, and from there eastwards to Anlo. On the frontier of Gold Coast colony, many Anlo acted as if they were beyond colonial jurisdiction. Slave owners avoided Keta, the district headquarters of the colonial administration, and relocated their slaves to outlying regions. They continued to acquire slaves, creating slave families through marriages with the intent of expanding their network of dependents, a strategy that was particularly important to chiefs throughout the Gold Coast. Chief Amagashie of Aferingba (Afiadenyigba) and Quitta (Keta) fell foul of the colonial government in this regard. He was brought to court for slave dealing in 1886 over a Mossi slave he had originally purchased in 1880, long after the declaration of the Gold Coast colony. In his defense, he argued that colonial presence was ephemeral in Anlo in 1880, and that many owned slaves. It is clear from his evidence that he quit Keta in order to avoid freeing his slaves.

> The law abolishing slavery is hardly yet in force on the other side of the lagoon many people there still hold slaves. When I was [at] Quitta and the abolition took place any slaves I held were free to go or stay. When I moved to Afianba, I often saw slaves brought along from the interior and out of pity for some I redeemed some of them and gave some of them wives. They did little odd jobs about the farm or house. With reference to Kwasi Moshi, I bought him at Afiangba about 6 years ago. The English law was hardly then in force there and many were brought down. There seem to be many in Moshi and the interior people buy them for salt and bring them down. Many Ada people did this. The boy Moshie I treated well. I gave him a wife and a gun. He went on badly at last and contracted many debts. He asked some of his companions to pay his debts but they would not and in the end they took him away and sold him to pay his debts. I did not know he was taken away at the time. …. …. I heard the two men Kwasi and Daku were employed by the creditors to sell prosecutor K. Moshi.[17]

In spite of Chief Amagashi's claim that he knew nothing of the sale of Kwasi Moshi for debt, the judge, C. Dudley, agreed with the complainant Moshi that a slave cannot be sold without the consent of the owner. Chief Amagashi was fined £20 for slave dealing. In the

[17] PRAAD, Accra, ADM 41/4/21. Criminal Record Book. Regina per K. Moshi versus Chief Amagashi of Aferingba and Quitta. DC's Court, Quittah, February 4, 1886.

process of transforming his slaves into social dependents that he could still retain under colonial rule, Chief Amagashi "gave some of them wives". But the threat of sale remained as a sanction for slaves, as slavery and slave trade co-exist in a necessary and complementary relationship. Even in slave systems were violence was minimal, the market and the possibility of sale acted as a veiled glove that kept slaves and people of servile origins quiescent. Even in the face-to-face communities of Anlo, the presence of a market in slaves was a daily reality for servile peoples.

Slave wives or concubines were not mistaken in their position that their unions were lowly esteemed compared to that between free born. Lacking protective kinsmen, as slaves are outsiders, they suffered abuse in relationships, and their children were sometimes not even secure from their slave masters/fathers. And the colonial government persisted in its position that these were domestic matters it could not intervene in. Gbedashi's case against Yabua [Yeboah] of Accra from 1886 illustrates this predicament.[18]

> I am a native of Agbosomeh town. My family sold me to the prisoner about twenty years ago and I lived with him until 1877 and bore him a daughter the first year he bought me. In 1877 he sold me to a man named Toffa living at Kedje [Kedzi] and the year after he took my daughter named Odofoley away and sold her to a man named Kpo of Akeyfey about 18 miles from Addafia. I lost sight of the girl until two years ago when she sent a message to me that she had been sold by her father the prisoner, and that was how I knew. I sent to try and get her back, but the buyer wanted 32 bags of cowries which he said he had paid for her. I could not get so much money and so a few days ago I sent for the prisoner and told him what I had heard, he got up in a rage and said that it was his own daughter and if he sold her, he sold her. So I applied for a warrant against him.

District commissioner R. E. Firminger adjourned the case for a day, and on the following day Yabua presented his defense.

> About 20 years ago I bought the prosecutrix from her family. She was my slave and concubine. No English Government was here at that time. It was when the English and Accras came here and fought the Awwoonahs [Anlos, probably in 1874] that I took my daughter away and gave her in pawn to a man named Kpo for money I lost during the war and which I had borrowed from him. It is true what the prosecutrix says that I sold her the year before I pawned my daughter both the events were before the British Government came here and there was no law then against my doing so.

[18] PRAAD, Accra, ADM 41/4/21. Criminal Record Book. DC's Court, Quittah, January 11, 12, and 14, 1886.

The case was adjourned for another two days to enable Toffah, who had bought Gbedashi from Yabua, to give testimony. Toffah confirmed that:

> I bought the woman Gbedashi from her husband the prisoner long before the English came here it was about 1864. After she lived with me three days she went off and I have never seen her since.

DC Firminger dismissed the case, obviously seeing this as a domestic matter and following the government's directive not to intervene in such situations. This is in sharp contrast to the case cited above between Kwasi Moshi and Chief Amagashi, a matter involving two men, which the colonial officer viewed as a straightforward case of slave dealing. This was despite the accused admitting to both the sale of his wife and to pawning his daughter, even though the law that abolished slave dealing had also outlawed pawnage.

The abolition of slavery occasioned a rise in pawning, especially of women. Dumett and Johnson comment that:

> The antislavery ordinances of 1874-1875 had no diminishing effect whatsoever on the transfer of individuals from one household to another as security for debts. On the contrary, the laws appear to have sparked a trend in the opposite direction, as well-to-do merchants, heads of farming families, and kings and chiefs turned to pawnage as a way of continuing to add domestic servants and dependents to their households as a substitute for "slavery."[19]

For Asante, Gareth Austin has noted the feminization of pawnship between 1800 and 1950, a trend that was paralleled in the Gold Coast colony.[20] It is striking how Yabua and Toffa sought to predate their ownership of slaves and pawns before the commencement of British rule, contending that their actions could not be made illegal retroactively. Gbedashi, on the contrary, dated her sale and that of her daughter to 1877 and 1878, well after the commencement of British colonialism in 1874, and hence illegal. Gbedashi's interpretation of her slave marriage to her owner as lacking emotional ties and security are borne out by Yabua's testimony, framed in the language of property rights and not kinship. He owned his slave concubine and the offspring of that relationship; both women

[19] Dumett and Johnson, "Suppression of Slavery," 94. On pawnage in Africa, see Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

[20] Gareth Austin, "Human Pawning in Asante, 1800-1950: Markets and Coercion, Gender and Cocoa," in Falola and Lovejoy, *Pawnship in Africa*, 119-59.

constituted wealth to Yabua.[21] It is likely that Gbedashi's date for her resale to Toffa (1877) is accurate, and probably aware that colonial rule had made illegal the status of slavery, she boldly walked out of her second slave marriage to Toffah after only three days. Toffa, perhaps also aware of the tenuousness of the marriage, did not pursue Gbedashi. Almost a decade later, Gbedashi would use the colonial courts to try and reunite with her daughter, the only affective relationship that held meaning for her.

It is unfortunate that even after colonial rule had commenced in the Gold Coast, husbands could use the threat of sale to keep even their free wives in line. Adedie was married to Fiato as a young girl. In her own words, "I was compelled to marry him." It is not clear whether there was a debt involved, and Adedie was given in marriage as part of the arrangements between her family and Fiato. That Adedie did not love Fiato is clear: they quarreled often and Adedie refused to live with him. For three years between 1883 and 1886, Fiato insisted on the return of Adedie to their marital home or her payment of £12, which could have been bride wealth or a debt Fiato paid on behalf of Adedie's family. Adedie's position was not negotiable": "I refused to live with him and he threatened to catch me and sell me."[22]

Even slave wives who were treated with consideration by their masters/husbands could not set aside the fact that their marriages were irregular and involuntary. In January 1892 Husunuyor, a farmer at Echi, brought Begyie to the DC's court in Keta for seizing his niece Agagey and selling her. One Milebah bought the niece from Begyie and she became his slave wife. Husunuyor also sued Milebah for slave dealing for having bought his niece. It seems the sale, from both the accounts of Agagey and Milebah, took place between 1880 and 1884. Agagey's testimony ends our discussion of slave marriages and families, and it is instructive on how the women involved in even secure relations considered their involuntary unions.

> I think it was 12 years ago since I was seized by Begyie. Begyie was no relation of mine he stole me and sold me to the accused. I do not know how much he got. I have lived with the accused all the time. He treated me well. I live with him as a

[21] This conforms to the distinction Miers and Kopytoff make between slaves "belonging to" the kin group, while free born kin members "belong in" the kin group. Miers and Kopytoff, "Introduction."
[22] PRAAD, Accra, ADM 41/4/21. Adedie versus Fiato. DC's Court Quittah, December 12, 1886.

> slave wife. As I am a slave to him, I wish to go to my family, then perhaps if the prisoner likes I will join him again and be his wife.[23]

Agagey found comfort and emotional security in her forced marriage. The marriage had produced children. She wanted the marriage to be consensual, and to have the dignity of his husband approaching her family for her hand. DC A. M. Kirkham in the circumstances decided to be lenient with Milebah, and sentenced Milebah to one month in prison with hard labor. It is likely that Milebah and Agagey were reunited on terms Agagey found affirming.

Concluding Remarks

In patriarchal precolonial societies where marriages were treated as mechanisms for reproducing kin groups and strategies for cementing social alliances, the emotional needs of young women and their expectations in marriages often tended to be discounted. Since young women were usually married to men much older than them, they tended to be widowed while still of child-bearing age, and were pressured by family to remarry. Jean Allman and Victoria Tahsjian point out how menopause was welcomed by Asante women for it freed them from the burden of remarriages when widowed, enabling women to focus on trade, accumulation and building female social networks.[24] For precolonial Asante, Thomas McCaskie tells the life story of the Oyoko royal of Kumasi, Amma Sewaa, sister of Asantehene Osei Kwame (1777-1803). After an early marriage to Apaw Panin, a son of Asantehene Kusi Obodom (1750-64), which produced six children, Amma Sewaa was widowed in her twenties. She decided on a love marriage for her second relationship, marrying Nkwantananhene Boakye Yam Kuma, someone whose ancestry "was impeccably sound rather than exalted or even especially distinguished," sometime in the late 1780s or early 1790s. From the perspective of her royal lineage, she had married beneath her station and this was an unorthodox marriage.[25] For Amma Sewaa, this was an emotionally satisfying marriage.

---

[23] PRAAD, Accra, ADM 41/4/24. Keta Criminal Record Book, 1891-92. Regina per Husunuyo vs Begyie, and Husunuyor vs Milebah.
[24] Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian, *"I will not eat stone": A Women's History of Colonial Asante* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000).
[25] T. C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 182.

Women in the Gold Coast and Asante have historically sought to define marriage and family on terms that met their emotional needs. Moving from parental and lineage control to that of husbands' and the kinsmen of husbands, women's pursuit of independence and accumulation have been in the context of their relationships with men. While marriage has always been valued culturally in the Gold Coast and Asante, women found marriage as defined by men emotionally limiting. So in the 1920s and 1930s, when colonial trade and cocoa farming opened up independent means for accumulating wealth and thus becoming financially independent for women in the Gold Coast Colony and Asante, many opted not to marry. In Sefwi Wiawso and parts of Asante this was perceived by men as a moral crisis. In both places, spinsters were rounded up by chiefs, who ordered them to choose a husband and marry within the shortest possible time.[26] From the onset of colonial rule, the establishment of a dual legal system with native or customary courts and British common law courts would also provide women with opportunities to approach colonial courts for redress in domestic disputes, the maintenance of children and alimony.[27] This chapter has examined how slave wives and concubines in the early decades of colonial availed themselves of colonial courts and the abolition of slavery to sever involuntary marriages, to renegotiate the terms of marriage, and to reunite with children begotten in slavery and separated by masters. Using case studies from Anlo, the chapter underscores the major obstacles women had to overcome -- in small face-to-face Anlo communities, without the support of kinsmen, and often with the direct opposition of colonial officials -- to gain their freedom. The chapter sheds light on the meaning of freedom, marriage and family for dependent women at the end of the 19th century.

[26] Penelope Roberts, "The State and the Regulation of Marriage: Sefwi Wiawso (Ghana), 1900-1940," in Helh Afshah, ed., *Women, State and Ideology: Studies form Africa and Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 48-69; and Jean Allman, "Rounding up Spinsters: Gender Chaos and Unmarried Women in Colonial Asante," *Journal of African History*, 37:2 (1996), 195-214.

[27] See, for example, Roger Gocking, 'Competing Systems of Inheritance before the British Courts of the Gold Coast," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 23:4 (1990), 601-18.