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Abolition, Economic Transition, Gender and Slavery: The Expansion of Women's Slaveholding in Ghana, 1807–1874[1]

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The British withdrawal from the Atlantic Slave Trade fostered the expansion, rather than retrenchment of slavery within Africa. It also spurred a shift in the pre-nineteenth-century gendered pattern of slaveholding. This paper examines the extent to which radical economic changes altered the gendered structure of slaveholding in post-abolition Ghana. It argues that the British prohibition liberalised slaveholding conditions and resulted in a reconceptualisation of the value of slaves which breached the tradition of restricted female proprietorship of slaves, and also led to increased women's earning capacity, slave acquisition and use, as well as the scale of their holdings.

Introduction

Great Britain's formal disengagement from the transatlantic slave commerce in 1807 and her subsequent attempts at suppressing and eventually ending the trade altogether was envisaged as a measure with the greatest potential of destroying the institution of slavery in Africa.[2] This was mainly because Britain had been the leading slave-trading nation with her slave ships carrying at least 40% of all slaves exported from Africa to the Americas in the eighteenth century. However, the outcome of British abolition contradicted expectations. As the British had obviously anticipated, abolition would lead to a contraction of the international slave market, proximately induce a reduction in slave production and supply and, eventually, result in a total closure of the international slave trade. A continuing decline in export slave demand and decreasing production of slaves presupposed the decay and ultimate demise of the institution of slavery within Africa. However, abolition failed to destroy slavery in Africa. The

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institution remained thriving into the twentieth century. In West Africa, abolition gave rise to a significant expansion rather than retrenchment of slavery.[3]

The expansion of slavery brought a significant increase in the number of both slaves and slaveholders in West Africa. Particularly remarkable was the manifestation of this expansion in women's slave ownership in some West African societies.[4] The Gold Coast (the maritime area of modern Ghana west of the Volta River) was one such society. A rapidly growing, mass participating, 'free trade' regime offered favourable conditions for independent slave acquisition by large numbers of Gold Coast women. This development gained a fillip from the 1830s on when a chaotic, unstable political atmosphere generated by the interstate wars of 1807–1826 stabilised.

This paper interrogates the gendered dimension of slavery in the Gold Coast within the broader context of the remarkable expansion of slavery in post-1807 West Africa. The paper examines the increased slave acquisition and use by women in nineteenth-century coastal Ghana. It focuses specifically on the central section of the coast, occupied by the Fante-speaking subgroup of the Akan ethnic collectivity.[5] The coastal Fante area was the main centre of export slave shipment in Ghana from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries and is undoubtedly ideal for a post-abolition study of slavery in Ghana. The main Fante ports, Elmina, Komenda, Anomabo, and Cape Coast, were the points of embarkation of most of the slaves exported from Ghana to the Americas. Anomabo and Cape Coast alone accounted for 76% of all slave departures.[6] The paper argues that post-1807 coastal Fante women demonstrated an enhanced ability to acquire and profitably use large numbers of slaves and that this reflected their increased capacity for agency and economic autonomy in the context of a changing economic order in West Africa. It proposes that the women, who, as Kwabena Akurang-Parry rightly notes, enjoyed the privilege to mobilise resources within the powerful matrilineal network, at the same time, profitably exploited the post-abolition commercial opportunities through their multiple interracial relationships with European residents and that the articulation of these opportunities enabled them to obtain the means to acquire slaves and increase their slave use.[7]

Gendered pattern of the control of the slave trade

In relative gender terms and time perspective, increased women's acquisition and use in nineteenth-century coastal Fante was unprecedented. In previous centuries, widespread or large-scale women's slave acquisition had been impossible. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for instance, female access to slaves and participation in slave trading had been strictly circumscribed by political regulation. Pieter de Marees, a late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century visitor to the Gold Coast, noted that widespread poverty put slave ownership beyond the means of the majority of Gold Coasters. He suggests that only upper-class men (rulers and wealthy nobles, *abirempong*, sing-*obirempong*) enjoyed this privilege.[8] Nobility was usually acquired by purchase and involved a huge outlay which very few could afford. Consequently, a small minority became ennobled and obtained royal authority to hold, buy, and sell slaves. Patrick Manning echoes de Marees' observation by asserting that monarchs

used slaves to produce for the palace but 'few other Africans had the wealth to sustain ... slaves'.[9] Women were obviously excluded from ennoblement, although some gained access to slave labour, mainly as users of the slaves of their ennobled spouses and fathers.

Other factors prevented most women from acquiring their own slaves. As Gareth Austin asserts, the economic opportunity cost favoured the export of slaves rather than their employment in pre-abolition Ghana.[10] Manning suggests that the difficulty of finding purchasers for 'slave-produced produce' was a disincentive for slave-labour-based production. According to him, Africa had the least developed technology in agriculture in which labour was the primary producer of value in the early modern world. Referring to Jack Goody's universal, agricultural technology classification describing peoples with high and low returns to agricultural labour as 'peoples of the plow' and 'peoples of the hoe', respectively, Manning argues that sub-Saharan Africans, as 'peoples of the hoe', had very low agricultural productivity. This was mainly the result of major technical problems such as the difficulty in using draft animals due to tsetse fly infestation and lateritic tropical soils easily leached and poorly responsive to the plough. Consequently, African labour tended to be more productive in the New World than in Africa. Owing to the constriction of African agriculture by the hoe and the 'entrapment of productivity below that of Europeans, European merchants were able to consistently pay more than the value of an African person's value at home'. This, Manning suggests, was a major reason why Africans were willing to sell their fellow Africans as slaves to foreign lands instead of employing them at home.[11]

Restricted female slave acquisition was grounded in the fact that slave trading was both oligopolistic and oligopsonic. It was capital-intensive and an exclusively male business controlled by powerful male rulers and a few wealthy men.[12] By the early half of the eighteenth century, however, some women, usually sexual allies of resident European traders, had begun to circumvent the existing restrictions on female slaveholding to acquire their own slaves, but these were very few when compared with women slaveholders of the nineteenth century. A notable example was an Elmina woman known as Coffiba who appears in Dutch records as a wealthy woman slaveholder in the 1740s. Coffiba's contemporary female slave owners were Maij Accoma and Betje Hamilton, also Elmina women, and Afodoa of the Apam area.[13] These examples signified the growth of a transforming influence of European presence on gender relations and social mobility in coastal Fante. The increasing nineteenth-century women's slave acquisition, thus, represented the furtherance of this growth process.

Coastal Fante women and economic restructuring

Coastal Fante women remarkably exploited favourable social, economic, and political conditions in the post-abolition period. Large numbers of them, therefore, participated in the export crop and imported European manufactures distribution trade. These activities 'enriched' many women and empowered them to knock down the barriers to slave acquisition.

A redefinition of the role of the slave in the context of post-abolition economic restructuring in Ghana was a stimulating factor in the expansion of slavery. Slaves became vital to the internal commodity distribution trade, as well as export crop production and haulage. They assumed a central place in production, processing, transportation, and commodity vending. The purpose of slave acquisition thus shifted from the commodification of the persons of slaves to the commercialisation of their labour power for surplus value. Theoretically, then, the property rights of post-abolition slaveholders came to reside in the labour power rather than persons of slaves.

The dictates and patronage of local rulers and the few powerful, rich men increasingly ceased to be of importance to the post-1807 imported commodity trading system. European merchants were the sole importers and purveyors of the commodities that drove the system. A close relationship with these merchants was therefore a source of great advantage, and many coastal Fante women secured such privileges through filial and conjugal relationships.[14] Increased commercial opportunities led to open competition and social status came to depend on personal efforts and wealth rather than hereditary rank and 'royal patronage'.[15] By the mid-nineteenth century, a new wealthy commercial class had come into existence in Ghana. This class came to supersede the traditional aristocracy in power and social influence and it included a visible segment of women. Prior to this development, the few women who gained access to slaves had mainly used them for leisure and conspicuous social consumption.

The concurrence of increased female access to slaves and commercial opportunities changed the pattern and motive of women's slaveholding in Ghana after 1807. In an era and area of no infrastructure for mechanised or pack animal haulage of goods, women slaveholders re-evaluated slavery in the light of the increasing demand for slave labour. The vital importance of slaves in commerce became increasingly evident since the concept of free wage labour, as an alternative form of labour, did not exist in nineteenth-century West Africa, particularly in the agricultural sector.[16] This fact challenges Anthony Hopkins' thesis that 'slaves were preferred because the cost of acquiring and maintaining them was less than hiring labour'.[17] Generally, female slaveholders of post-abolition Ghana no longer regarded slaves as constituting just a means of escape from drudgery, but an important source of financial profit. Thus, apart from the traditional perception of slaves as a status symbol or mark of conspicuous consumption, a means of obtaining leisure, and store of value, coastal Fante women also came to recognise the slave as valuable human capital. The increasing indispensability of slaves in commerce encouraged increased female slave acquisition and, by the early 1870s, numerous coastal Fante women had become slaveholders and users. Some of them even ranked with the leading slave owners in Ghana.

Significant female involvement in the acquisition and use of slaves also characterised the period following the 1874 slave emancipation proclamation in Ghana, as Claire Robertson found in her study on women in Accra on the eastern seaboard. According to Robertson, many Accra women tried to defy the emancipation laws prohibiting slave trading and new acquisitions to acquire slaves for various activities. Unlike men, many of whose need for slaves had diminished greatly because their access to

western education and vocational training had created clerical and artisanal employment openings for them, women, marginalised in the emerging colonial occupational structure, still needed slaves for their 'labour intensive tasks'. They thus bought slaves illegally for use in 'productive activities like trading, farming and home processing of food for sale'.[18] However, women of late nineteenth-century Accra found themselves in a less enabling situation to increase their slave acquisitions than those of coastal Fante earlier in the century. At all events, unlike previously, slave acquisition after 1874 was criminal and entailed risks of arrest and prosecution. Court records documenting the prosecution of many offenders (including several women) for slave dealing testify to this.[19]

Studies on post-abolition slave expansion

Examining nineteenth-century expansion of slavery anywhere in West Africa requires some authentication. It may be apposite to begin by referring and adding another dimension to the thesis of Walter Rodney, generalising from his study of Upper Guinea coast, that 'many of the forms of slavery and subjection present in Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and considered indigenous to that continent were in reality engendered by the Atlantic slave trade'.[20] To Rodney's thesis, one may add that the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade induced a greater expansion in slavery in West Africa than did the growth of the trade itself. It modified the purpose of slave acquisition and reshaped the gender pattern in slave ownership. Certainly, the Atlantic slave trade profoundly affected the structure and functions of the economic, social, and political institutions of the African societies which were engaged in it and necessitated the restructuring of those institutions.

The issue of the impact of the cessation of the Atlantic slave trade on West Africa has been well studied. Scholars such as Robin Law, Paul Lovejoy, and David Richardson, Gareth Austin, Ray Kea, Kristin Mann, and others have undertaken research on post-slave-trade West Africa for various areas and from various perspectives including that of gender. These scholars generally share the view that the coincidence of abolition and development of an agricultural produce export regime, which they called 'legitimate' trade, galvanised the expansion of slavery and incentivised the increasing use of slaves for agricultural crop production and commodity haulage. Robin Law's work on gender relations in palm oil production in Yoruba land and Dahomey, in the context of the emerging 'legitimate' trade economy, is a classic gendered study on post-abolition economic restructuring. The work makes the important assertion that women's ability to appropriate the proceeds of their own commercial activities or retain the right to their increased earnings in the marketplace impliedly enriched and empowered them.[21] This paper contributes to the literature on the gender aspect of the scholarship on post-abolition slavery by analysing the relationship between increased coastal Fante women's earning capacity and their slave acquisition and use.

Although women's agency in slave acquisition is not neglected in the scholarship on slavery in Africa, studies on it are comparatively limited. Law notes that this is attributable, to some extent, to the lack of relevant data, but the tendency of scholars to

extrapolate from contemporary ethnography to reconstruct pre-colonial society on the basis of 'assumptions of social stasis', as he puts it, also plays a part.[22] One needs to draw attention to the problem of acute lack of statistical data on slavery in West Africa. Scholars who study the same theme on the other side of the Atlantic are better positioned in this respect. Owing to this limitation, this paper does much inferential analysis, using fragments of primary information and a synthesis of information from relevant published sources. To appreciate the trend of its arguments, the paper provides some portrait of the sharp decline of the external slave trade, drawing, to a great extent, on Paul Lovejoy's recent tabular constructions of slave statistics, which essentially is a synthesis of data from various sources including the Du Bois database for the Atlantic slave trade and the updated calculations of David Eltis and David Richardson, Stephen Behrendt, and others.

The restructuring of the post-abolition Ghanaian economy represented a transitional process which prepared the ground for the emergence of the colonial economy. The transition, as elsewhere in West Africa, involved the adaptation of the infrastructure inherited from the Atlantic slave trade to a non-slave-trading economy. Such adaptation stimulated the expansion of internal slavery in West Africa. The expansion affected the various West African coastal societies differently, but also in many respects in the same ways. Ghana had been one of the main centres of the Atlantic slave traffic up to 1807, but the territory witnessed the earliest cessation of slave exports to the Americas after that date.[23]

Expansion and contraction in slave exports

Recent studies by David Eltis and David Richardson, Stephen Behrendt, and Paul Lovejoy show that slave exports from Africa during the eighteenth century alone were more than treble those of all other previous centuries put together; but the figures also show that the closing years of the same century marked the beginning of a decline in the trade. In West Africa, annual slave exports had peaked at 47,000 per year during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, but this volume fell to about 27,000 during the 1810s. The total number of slaves exported between 1767 and 1807 fell by approximately 25% from 1,312,000 to 986,000 between 1807 and 1847.[24]

From Gold Coast ports, a total of 881,200 slaves were embarked for export to the Americas between 1701 and 1800.[25] From 69,100 slaves during the first decade of the century, the volume of Gold Coast slave exports increased generally steadily until it peaked at 111,900 in the 1780s. From 1791–1800, however, the Gold Coast exports began to decline and never recovered from this.[26] During that decade, slave exports from Gold Coast ports fell by 19.3% to 90,300. Behrendt attributes this and the general drop in West African slave exports during the 1790s largely to European wars which posed 'foreign threats to British shipping'.[27] The consequences of these threats had a big impact on the volume of slave exports as a whole, since the British were the largest carriers of slaves from Africa.

In the nineteenth century, the total volume of Gold Coast slave exports fell more drastically. Throughout the entire century, 68,600 slaves were exported from the area. All 68,600 slaves, according to Lovejoy, were exported during the first decade of the century. This is a revision of Lovejoy and Richardson's earlier suggestion that slave exports from the Gold Coast to the Americas stopped in the late 1830s or early 1840s.[28] The total volume of Gold Coast slave exports for the nineteenth century represented only 7.8% of that of the previous century.

part from the British and United States abolitions of 1807 and 1808 respectively, the sharp decline in Gold Coast slave exports to the Americas by 1810 made the retrenchment in Gold Coast slave trade exceptional. While slave exports from the Gold Coast to the Americas had ceased, transatlantic slave trading in substantial volumes in other West African source regions, notably the Bights of Benin and Biafra, continued until the 1850s or 1860s. Lovejoy and Richardson attribute the stoppage of Gold Coast slave trading to a crisis in Asante relating to low slave prices but, to a very large extent, British dominance or strong political presence in the Gold Coast also counted for much of this.

Although slave exports from West Africa generally persisted, the British were successful, to a great extent, in ending slave exports from the Gold Coast. The British had accounted for 81% of the Gold Coast slave trade and their withdrawal from the Atlantic slave trade meant a very significant reduction in slave exports.

The Danish, who had also been involved in slave trading on the Gold Coast, withdrew from the trade even before the British did. They closed their forts in West Africa to the slave trade in 1803. From the 1780s they had adopted the policy of setting up plantations in West Africa, using African labour for cultivation. In explaining this policy, one Danish official, Captain P.E. Isert, noted:

> the creation of plantations on the west coast of Africa similar to those in the West Indies would reduce, if not completely eliminate, the traffic in slaves, while at the same time enrich [sic] and strengthen [sic] the African establishments.[29]

The Dutch continued trading after 1807 but the British managed to exact abolition from them in 1814 through diplomatic pressure.[30] In the course of the century, however, the Dutch illegally exported some slaves. They sent many of these to their East Indian colonies under the guise of the military recruitment of free persons.[31] This enlistment, often criticised by the British as a ploy for continued Dutch slave trading, began in 1831 and continued until 1872.[32] During that period, the Dutch recruited a total of 3,080 men for Java. This represented 3.5% of the approximately 88,000 they exported from the Gold Coast in the eighteenth century.[33]

Coastal Fante and the slave trade in the eighteenth century

The necessity to restructure the post-abolition economy was more strongly felt in coastal Fante, where the overwhelming majority of all slave exports from the country had taken place.[34] The area had come to depend heavily for its livelihood on the Atlantic slave trade. Local merchants played the role of middlemen in the

slave supply business and with time, there emerged a wealthy class of African merchants who made their fortune mainly through slave trading. These became more powerful and influential in society than the hereditary political leaders.

The slave trade marginally transformed agriculture and fishing to cater for the needs of slaves and slave traders.[35] Canoe men also prosecuted a brisk business in stevedoring at the slave embarkation ports while some women made an occupation of processing food for feeding slaves awaiting shipment. [36]

Transition from abolition

The heavy dependence of coastal Fante inhabitants on the slave trade for their livelihood meant that abolition brought severe economic hardships, as James Swanzy, a British trader on the Gold Coast, noted in 1807. They critically needed a survival strategy.[37] European traders saw the promotion of 'legitimate' commerce as a way out of the situation and the production and export of palm oil soon became an important activity on the Gold Coast.[38] However, the Fante area was not as important for palm oil production as the eastern district of the Gold Coast.[39] The economy of coastal Fante rather came to hinge on the trade in the distribution of imported commodities and the area soon became the hub of this trade in the country. By 1840, the volume and value of imported commodities in the area had become substantial. These were over six times those of the eastern section of the Gold Coast. In 1840, imports worth £423,170 passed through Cape Coast whereas Accra, the main port of eastern Gold Coast, received goods valued at £65,000.[40]

The new commercial order required slave labour and this necessitated the adaptation of 'the social, political, and economic structures inherited from the era of the export slave trade', to the new system.[41] The critical importance of slave labour at this time meant that internal slavery expanded in response to the demands of the restructured economic regime.

The slave price mechanism

A significant effect of the fall in the demand for export slaves was the sharp drop in slave prices after 1807. This made slaves available to a broader section of Africans at lower prices. As Patrick Manning suggests, cheaper slave prices became reflected in a significant expansion in slaveholding on the continent.[42] Lovejoy and Richardson describe the sharp post-1807 drop in slave prices as a 'price collapse'.[43] Manning claims that the price of slaves in the coastal areas of Africa dropped by 50% 'sometime between 1780 and 1850'.[44] But Lovejoy and Richardson paint a gloomier picture, asserting that coastal West African slave prices dropped sharply after 1807 to a quarter of its level in 1803–1807 and note that the decline and fluctuation in slave prices were more pronounced in the Gold Coast.[45]

Lovejoy provides a clear picture of the trend in the post-abolition slave price decline in the Gold Coast. This is very helpful in this analysis. According to him, the price of a male slave on the Gold Coast 'dropped from 12 ounces 4 ackies (£45.0) in May 1789 to 9

ounces (£32.40) in about 1803 to 7 ounces (£25.20) in about 1807 to 3 ounces (£10.80) in 1815'.[46] This consistent price depression reflected the interaction of the forces of supply and demand. As Manning asserts, 'the mechanism of slave supply remained in place' even after abolition.[47] The undiminished production of slaves resulted in an excess of the slave supply over demand, at least up to the 1820s because the situation created something of a glut on the internal African slave markets.[48] Consequently, large numbers of surplus slaves remained within the internal market supply circuit.[49] Lovejoy and Richardson observe that after 1810 'there were excessive numbers of slaves available within parts of West Africa', at least for more than a decade.[50]

The situation in Asante provides an illustration of a slave glut. T.E. Bowdich, a British peace commissioner to Asante in 1817, reported that the interior slave markets were generally full of slaves.[51] During the same 1817 peace mission, the *Asantehene*, king of, Osei Bonsu, reportedly told Hutchinson, another British peace negotiator, that the slave trade needed to continue because there was a large concentration of war captives in his country and that this situation posed a threat to public safety. According to John Beecham, a Methodist missionary, the king's advocacy for the resumption of the slave trade was 'not only for pecuniary gain, but also an outlet for redundant slave labour'.[52]

The redundancy of slave labour was, however, only temporary. Law, Lovejoy and Richardson, Austin, and Kea agree that adjustment to the transition to a new economic regime soon created avenues for the profitable use of slave labour. Later, there was a recovery in slave prices, but this indicates pressure of the internal West African and the trans-Saharan slave markets on the slave supply mechanism.[53]

Redirecting slave labour power

The demand for labour to meet the needs of various economic activities led to an increased demand for slaves.[54] In Asante, for instance, slave labour was redeployed for gold mining and kola nut production and carriage as a post-abolition adjustment strategy. In the Gold Coast, such labour was channelled to palm oil production and internal commerce.[55]

Continuing Asante involvement in imperial wars and the inflow of slaves as tribute from its subordinate states made available large numbers of slaves to meet the demand for slaves in the Gold Coast.[56] In the mid-1850s, therefore, Brodie Cruickshank, a British official at Cape Coast, was able to report that 'immense numbers of. . .slaves were being annually imported' into the Gold Coast from Asante.[57] The result of the disequilibrium in demand and supply was the availability of large numbers of slaves at cheaper prices. Due to this market situation, Manning says, 'slaves came within the purchasing power' of many African buyers.[58]

Expansion of women's slaveholding

An important point emerging from this discussion is that the availability of large numbers of slaves at relatively low prices after 1807 made it possible for large

numbers of coastal Ghanaian women to become slaveholders. Indeed, some women became large-scale slaveholders. In spite of the unavailability of statistics for constructing a complete pattern of the expansion of Coastal Fante women's slaveholding, an inferential analysis based on specific examples will be useful in substantiating the argument. The analysis again draws on Lovejoy's slave price figures referred to earlier. Cruickshank's contemporary observation will also be helpful in this analysis.[59] One particular example provides a clear picture based on comparative slave prices in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In 1853 a wealthy Cape Coast woman, Mary Barnes, received eighteen slaves from Quow Ashon and paid two ounces of gold (about £8) for each person to Ashon in a single transaction. At two ounces of gold per person, Mary Barnes paid a total amount of thirty-six ounces or £144 for the eighteen slaves.[60] This transaction can be placed in a comparative perspective to show the implication of lowering slave prices for the expansion of post-1807 Gold Coast women's slaveholding. Assuming that the real value of commodity prices remained stable over long periods, a slave buyer, at the cost of £45 sterling per slave, would have required the vast amount of £810 (nearly six times the amount Mary Barnes paid in 1853) for 18 slaves in 1789. This calculation assumes a uniform price for both male and female slaves.[61] At any rate, Manning observes that the difference between the prices of male and female slaves on the West African coast was usually minimal and that men sometimes paid higher prices for young female slaves than males. Viewed from another angle, the £144 Mary Barnes spent in the transaction could have acquired only three slaves in 1789. In 1807 when slave prices had fallen to £25.2, a buyer of 18 slaves would have required an amount of £453.6, over three times the £144 Mary Barnes paid.[62] At that time, £144 would have fetched fewer than six slaves. In the late eighteenth century and early 1800s, therefore, very few women in the predominantly slave-trading economy would have been in a position to acquire slaves, much less to become large-scale slaveholders. There is no doubt that the drastic fall in slave prices from an average of £33.2 (1790s-1807) to £8.5 between 1815 and 1825, brought slaves well within the means of a large number of women, particularly with the disappearance of the pre-nineteenth-century political restrictions. Moreover, increased women's capacity to earn had given Ghanaian women the financial power to take advantage of falling slave prices.

Trade and expansion of women's slaveholding

The expansion in Gold Coast trade from the 1830s necessitated the expansion of the slaveholdings of women traders, particularly those who succeeded in building large trading enterprises with wide distribution networks. As Robert Madden, her Majesty's commissioner to West Africa, observed in 1841, 'great competition and overabundance of goods dumped on local mercantile agents on the coast necessitated the employment of native hawkers and pedlars who carried their goods into the interior'.[63]

By the early 1840s, many women owned slaves. Most large-scale female slaveholders seemed to have been of Euro-African descent. In a petition dated 29 March 1841

protesting the attempt by Madden forcibly to emancipate slaves on the Gold Coast, seven women styling themselves as 'Principal Mulatto Women' demanded that the British authorities suspend the proposed emancipation or pay them compensation for the loss of their property.[64] These women and many others used their slaves mainly for trading. One of them, Elizabeth Swanzy, for instance, sent her slaves as far inland as Kumase to trade on her behalf.

From the mid-1850s other Euro-African women such as Catherine Swanzy and Mary Barnes, who emerged as more prominent traders and as both wholesalers and retailers, depended heavily on the use of slave labour for the success of their businesses. Their extensive trading networks necessitated the ownership of large numbers of slaves. In 1874 a British journalist and author, G.A. Henty, gave an account of the substantial slave possessions of such women, mentioning specifically, Mrs Barnes, Mrs Jackson and Catherine Swanzy. These women sent hundreds of slaves to help in the 1873–1874 British military campaign against Asante, mainly as carriers. Mrs Swanzy alone provided at least 80 such carriers. In normal times, she used her slaves for an extensive network of commercial business which linked her home, Cape Coast, to Accra in the east and several towns to the west of Cape Coast. She also maintained commercial contacts with the interior.

There were also many African women such as Adjuah Ashon of Cape Coast and Eccoah Obee of Anomabo who acquired considerable holdings of slaves for inland and palm oil trading, respectively. Amba Danquah, Queen of Assin, and Abinaba Coomba of the royal house of Cape Coast acquired many slaves for susbsistence agricultural production, trade, and for use as attendants to match their status.[65] Elizabeth Adelaide Kendall was also a substantial slaveholder. She used her slaves in household service, trade, and foodstuff and oil palm cultivation at Ayefoa, a farming village she had established by the mid-1870s.[66] These show the correlation between the scales of women's trading enterprises and size of their slaveholdings. It further reveals that slaveholding by Gold Coast women was generally widespread and that women increasingly used slaves for trading and other purposes including conspicuous social consumption.

Like the big traders, medium and small-scale female retailers used slaves for their activities, and there were numerous such traders by mid-nineteenth century.[67] They acquired small numbers of slaves for hawking within the coastal area in nearby towns or villages. There are numerous accounts of such small-scale retailers who used slaves to vend commodities particularly between Cape Coast and Elmina.

Keeping voluntary slaves became a widespread practice among women of coastal Fante. This development was partly attributable to the protracted violence of the early three decades of the nineteenth century which made many destitute. According to Henty, the wealthy women took more protégés of warfare and poverty than even the males of the ruling houses.[68] But the purchase of children by women for small amounts was widespread and there could have been hundreds of such cases.

Coastal Fante women also exploited their sexual unions with European slave traders to their advantage. The liaisons contributed significantly to the expansion of their slaveholdings. This came largely through European residents' delivery of their holdings

of slaves to their local sexual partners as a safe means of disposing of their slaves. This became a common practice after the passage of the 1833 British slave Emancipation Act, which prohibited British subjects from holding slaves in the Crown Colonies, plantations and possessions abroad.[69]

Surrogate slave proprietorship and the expansion of women's slaveholding

The intersection of the interests of European and some coastal Ghanaian women slaveholders worked to deliver more slaves to those women. While British residents were compelled to obey the Emancipation Act, the law did not bind their African sexual partners. In this regard, the European men saw in their relationships with local women an avenue for continued slaveholding while evading punishment. Madden observed that British resident slaveholders handed over their slaves to local women, with whom they were in relationships 'called country marriages'. He states:

> These women are usually possessed of slaves; whatever property they acquire is invested in slaves and houses and very frequently whatever property they inherit is in slaves. In many instances the household slaves of Europeans are held in their names: and in many instances which came to my own knowledge, when the proclamation against slavery was promulgated, slaves that would have been purchased by a British subject as property, it was arranged, were to be bought and held in the name of one of the native women I have alluded to.[70]

Obviously, these were concealed arrangements without documentation which we can verify. As an adherent of abolitionism, Madden was certainly biased against the resident Europeans, but his observations are useful for this discussion. Describing how the Europeans maintained the slaves of the subrogated women slaveholders, he stated, 'these slaves were fed in the house or allowed a certain quantity of goods monthly for their support'.[71] The women benefited in various ways from the labour of the surrogate slaves who went to swell their slaveholdings because many of them were already substantial slave owners, as Madden noted.

It is difficult to determine how widespread coastal women's access to extra slaves through surrogate slaveholding was, but one may say that a considerable number of women might have been involved. As Margaret Priestly asserts, few resident European traders did not have sexual liaisons with local women by the nineteenth century.[72] Since virtually all pre-abolition European residents on the Gold Coast were slave traders and slaveholders, one can suggest that a significant number of women benefited from the surrogate slaveholding arrangements. Possibly, some of the beneficiaries of the arrangement were not the spouses of European men at all.[73]

African husbands also sometimes gave their wives slaves as gifts. For example, in the 1810s the chief of Ajumako, Appiah, gave four slaves to his wife Fiadoah. Similarly, James Swanzy Parker of Anomabo left an unspecified number of slaves to his wife Fosua in a will in 1847.[74] These and the inheritance of the slaves of mothers, sisters, and even uncles, were all sources of slaves for women and contributed greatly to the expansion of women's slavery in terms of the number of women holders and the size of holdings.

British non-interference and the expansion of women's slaveholding

Apart from obtaining slaves from multiple sources, the British attitude towards slavery also seemed to have aided the expansion of coastal Fante women's slaveholding. A deliberate policy of the British – whose jurisdiction in the Gold Coast had been growing apace from 1831 – to avoid meddling in domestic slavery favoured the expansion of women's slaveholding in coastal Fante. In a sense, it strengthened mistresses' control over their slaves in the context of mistress–slave power relations.

British officials' policy of limited interference in slavery was basically designed to ameliorate the harsh aspects of slaveholders' treatment of their slaves.[75] However, many mistresses often had their hands rather strengthened in the control of slaves under the policy. This meant that increasing British power, to some extent, protected coastal Fante women's slaveholding, thereby safeguarding their investments and savings in slaves. It also provided slave mistresses with some security against the threat of rebellion, particularly by male slaves. These favoured the expansion of women's slaveholding. A few examples help to illustrate this argument. In 1844, George Maclean, the Judicial Assessor, sentenced a male slave called Eboo to 60 days' imprisonment for 'neglect of duty and insolence to his mistress'.[76] Eboo's attitude might have been prejudicial to the security of his mistress. In a similar case in 1872, a male slave, Barcoon, who threatened to harm his mistress, Effuah Yammuwah, was incarcerated for six months.[77] These cases, involving criminal behaviour on the part of slaves, indicate that coastal Fante slave mistresses had access to the means of controlling violent slave behaviour.

In non-criminal instances such as the refusal to serve or the desertion of a mistress, British judicial officers still gave mistresses firmer hold over their slaves. In 1847, the Judicial Assessor confined the male slave Tanfasafel for one month with hard labour for 'absconding from his mistress,' Ambah Seymoah 'without just or lawful cause'. The Judicial Assessor also decided that Tanfasafel should return to his mistress after his release from confinement.[78] In 1854, the slave girl, Ade Gamiahmow, who had deserted her mistress, Elizabeth Graves, was ordered back to the service of the mistress.[79] In one case, a mistress appeared to have cruelly abused her slave, but the British judicial officer who handled the matter refused to liberate the victim. The slave concerned, Anteh, complained that her mistress, Ambah Adamah, had pinioned her and shut her up in a kitchen for about 13 hours without food or water and that she was appealing to the magistrate for her freedom. Witnesses corroborated Anteh's story, but the magistrate, Robert Clarke, decided after examining the evidence that the charge of cruelty had not been satisfactorily proved against the mistress. Nonetheless, Clark acknowledged that Ambah 'is a woman of violent temper'. He only bonded Ambah over to refrain from treating her slave cruelly for 12 months.[80]

Some visible show of force was usually displayed in carrying out judicial orders for the return of slaves to the service of their mistresses. According to one British official, the services of constables were normally employed to enforce such orders.[81] By making it difficult for slaves to obtain manumission on the basis of claims of cruelty by their owners, these judicial decisions were apparently intended to maintain order in the

existing social relations between mistresses and slaves in the Gold Coast. The use of constables in enforcing judicial orders was perhaps also intended to deter slaves from making frivolous charges against their mistresses and to help maintain the established social order. These and numerous other cases were favourable to the expansion of Gold Coast women's slaveholdings.

These decisions showed the inconsistency of the British regarding the destruction of slavery within Africa. While some British officials in the Colonial Office and on the Gold Coast such as Benjamin Pine wanted a strong and quick action against all forms of bondage, others including Maclean and even Lord Russell thought that any forced and immediate action aimed at destroying slavery in any African society would destabilise the social order and cause a serious upheaval.

It was not in all cases, however, that British officials returned slaves who complained of cruelty to their mistresses. There were a number of cases in which mistresses were found to have been outrageously cruel to their slaves. In such cases, the British manumitted the victims.[82] In 1844, Maclean freed Buabinmah, because there was ample evidence that her mistress, Eccoah Ahimah, had severely abused her.[83] In another case in 1874, Mamah Sarrafee obtained manumission from her mistress, Harriet Watts, under similar circumstances.[84] Notwithstanding these cases of intervention for slaves, it can be argued that British policy towards slavery on the Gold Coast during the pre-colonial nineteenth century was generally favourable for the protection of women's slave ownership and thereby promoted the expansion of their holdings. Thus, women slaveholders in coastal Fante were encouraged to profitably exploit slave labour in a period when the extraction of surplus value from such labour had become a central purpose of slave ownership.

Conclusion

This paper has complemented the studies of Lovejoy and Richardson, Law, Manning, and others which concur in the view that abolition and the development of 'legitimate' commerce stimulated the expansion of slavery in West Africa but also increased the profitable use of slave labour for agricultural production for export. Adopting a gender perspective to this argument, the paper argues that, unlike previously, large numbers of women in nineteenth-century coastal Fante came to exercise remarkable agency in terms of increased participation in the acquisition and use of slaves within the general context of the post-abolition expansion of slavery and intensified profitable exploitation of slave labour.

The process of accelerated decline in the export slave trade in West Africa, resulting mainly from the formal British withdrawal from the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, manifested earlier and became more pronounced in the Gold Coast where slave exports to the Americas had become insignificant by the 1810s. The contraction of the export slave market, however, failed to induce a progressive shrinkage of the internal West African slave market to set the stage for an organically destructive decline and eventual destruction of slavery, as envisaged. Instead, slavery in West Africa underwent a significant expansion largely through a 'supply-driven' mechanism. There was oversupply

due to undiminished levels of slave production which, by the normal workings of the market mechanism, depressed slave prices and made slaves affordable and widely available to most social classes and without gender restrictions. The elasticity of the internal slave market and unchanged volume levels of the trans-Saharan slave traffic made possible the absorption of any excess slave supplies. The internal slave market derived its elasticity mainly from the expanding productive capacity of the export crop economy of the post-abolition period which increasingly became labour intensive.

Slavery in coastal Fante remained important in the context of the process of adjustment of the West African economy to the transition from export slave trading to 'legitimate' trade. Generally, slaves became available to all, with large numbers of women, partly drawing on a combination of privileges deriving from kinship and bi-racial sexual relationships and mostly responding to a rapidly changing economic environment, exercising remarkable agency in slave acquisition and use. In specific terms, it was a general increase in the earning capacity of coastal Ghanaian women, resulting mainly from the liberalisation of the economic order favouring their unrestricted participation in commerce, which enabled them increasingly to acquire slaves and share in the benefits of the post-abolition expansion of slavery in West Africa. Thus, increased coastal Fante women's slave acquisition, to a much greater extent, corresponded to their increased commercial activity, since slave labour, without a viable alternative, was critical to the success of commercial entrepreneurship. As the expansion of internal slavery in coastal Ghana aided the female defiance of the pre-nineteenth-century gender pattern in which slaveholding had been overwhelmingly a male practice, it became possible for all categories of women to increasingly acquire slaves, with the more privileged ones becoming large-scale slaveholders.

Women in coastal Fante primarily and ordinarily acquired their slaves by purchase, but many of them augmented their slave ownership from other sources. These other sources included settlement of slaves on married women and slaveholding by surrogation. However, the capacity of slaveholding women to deal with the threats of invasive anti-slavery forces enabled them to retain their holdings and those with greater means to enlarge theirs.

Generally, the expansion of post-abolition slaveholding was closely bound with the transportation demands of the commercial system. The acute lack of non-manual forms of transport infrastructure in coastal Fante left traders there with no option but to use slaves as transporters of merchandise. The growth of 'legitimate' trade and the internal commerce in imported commodities therefore necessitated the demand for greater supplies of slaves, since free wage labour was generally unavailable.

With large numbers of women engaging in unrestricted commercial activities, slave acquisition became a priority for them and a correspondence came to exist between female slave acquisition and their commercial undertakings. The changing emphases in production and exchange in both the domestic and external markets and their implications for labour demands gave rise to a re-conceptualisation of the functions and value of the slave. The increasing profitability of 'legitimate' trade alternatives to the slave trade presupposed the greater profitability for slaveholders to use their

slaves in production or the conduct of trade. To this extent, the increased women's slave use in coastal Fante society in the nineteenth century was, to a great extent, related to an increase in their slave ownership. The availability of greater commercial opportunities to women meant increased acquisition of slaves if those opportunities were to be fully exploited. Coupled with women's use of slaves for other purposes, then, the increase in female slaveholding in nineteenth-century coastal Fante came to be reflected in their increased slave use.

Notes

[1] I am indebted to Dr S.Y. Boadi-Siaw of the Department of History, University of Cape Coast, who read my manuscript and made important comments and suggestions which helped to improve the quality of this paper.

[2] The terms slavery and slave(s) as used in this paper refer to various conditions of unfree labour particularly those relating to the chattel slave, the voluntary servant or client and pawn (extensively discussed in *Pawnship in Africa* edited by Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy). Slaveholding thus encompasses the control of all or any of these forms of labour. Slave and slavery are used in the paper to encapsulate the sense of all forms of servitude for the sake of convenience.

[3] Akurang-Parry, 'We Shall Rejoice', 41.

[4] In Saint Louis and Goree in Senegal, women constituted the majority of slaveholders and household heads even before the nineteenth century.

[5] Hereafter, coastal Fante is used as the unit focusing the study. The Gold Coast and Ghana are used in appropriate contexts to refer to issues relating to a much larger area than the coastal area of Fante.

[6] Eltis and Richardson, 'West Africa and the Transatlantic Slave Trade', 47.

[7] Akurang-Parry, 'Aspects of Elite Women's Activism', 469.

[8] Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities*, 98–106.

[9] Manning, 'Why Africans?, 36.

[10] Austin, 'Between Abolition and Jihad', 101.

[11] Austin, 36.

[12] Dantzig, 'Effects of the Atlantic Slave Trade', 197.

[13] Cited in Feinberg, 'Elmina, Ghana', 142.

[14] Akurang-Parry, 'A Smattering of Education', 50.

[15] Adu-Boahen, 'Reshaping their Fortunes', 104.

[16] Hill, 'Problems of A.G. Hopkins', 129.

[17] Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman, 1973), 25.

[18] Robertson, 'Post-Proclamation Slavery in Accra', 221–225.

[19] Robertson, 223–229.

[20] Rodney, 'African Slavery and Other Forms of Social Oppression', 73.

[21] Law, ' "Legitimate" Trade and Gender Relations', 208.

[22] Law, 195.

[23] Law, 34–36,

[24] Law, 37.

[25] The other source regions were Senegambia, Upper Guinea, Windward Coast, Bight of Benin, Bight of Biafra, West-Central Africa, and South-East Africa.

[26] Eltis, 'Precolonial Western Africa and the Atlantic Economy,' 104.

[27] Stephen Behrendt, 'Annual Volume and Regional Distribution' 197–199. Earlier, in the late 1770s, the volume of slave exports had fallen and remained so for six years due to 'wartime risk during the North American War of Independence'.

[28] Lovejoy and Richardson, 'Initial "Crisis of Adaptation"', 36–37.

[29] Kea, 'Plantations and Labour in South-East Gold Coast', 126.
[30] Kea.
[31] Kea.
[32] CO 96/59, 546; ADM 5/3/5, 52; Larry W. Yarak, 'New Sources for the Study of Akan Slavery' 35–60.
[33] Yarak, 35–60. Kusruri, 'Reminiscences of African Community in Purworejo', 141; Eltis and Richardson, 45.
[34] David Eltis and David Richardson, 'West Africa and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade', 47.
[35] Adu-Boahen, 'Reshaping their Fortunes', 276.
[36] Gutkind, 'The Canoemen of the Gold Coast (Ghana)', 339–376.
[37] T 70/35E, 34–35.
[38] By the 1830s the Akuapem and Krobo areas were important palm oil producing areas. Haenger, *Slaves and Slave Holders on the Gold Coast*', 24–28. *The Times*, 26 October 1861, 6.
[39] SC 7/20; SCT 5/4/26, 108–112; ADM 5/3/3, 11.
[40] ADM 5/3/3.
[41] Inikori, 'Introduction', 44.
[42] Manning, 'Contours of Slavery', 853.
[43] Lovejoy and Richardson, 34.
[44] Manning, 853.
[45] Lovejoy and Richardson, 34–36; Idem, 'Competing Markets for Male and Female Slaves', 280–281; Manning, 'Contours of Slavery', 841, 843.
[46] Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*', 143. As Manning argues, the difference between male and female slave prices on the Atlantic coast was minimal and that sometimes men were even prepared to pay higher prices for young female slaves suitable for marriage.
[47] Inter-state wars in the interior often involving Asante continued to produce thousands of captives.
[48] Manning, 'Contours', 843.
[49] Manning; ADM 5/3/5 52; CO 96/ 59, 546; CO 96/28, 159, 241. Yarak, 36–51.
[50] Lovejoy and Richardson, 50.
[51] Bowdich, *Mission From Cape Coast Castle*, 333.
[52] Beecham, *Ashantee and the Gold Coast*, 118.
[53] Beecham, 51.
[54] Austin, 103–105.
[55] Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 173; Austin, 101–102; Kea, 'Plantations', 136.
[56] Cruickshank *Eighteen Years*, 2: 244.
[57] Cruickshank.
[58] Manning, 'Contours of Slavery', 853.
[59] Cruickshank, 2: 244.
[60] CO 96/28, 254–255.
[61] Lovejoy does not provide parallel prices for female slaves in his description on declining slave prices referred to earlier.
[62] Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 143.
[63] ADM 5/3/3, 31.
[64] ADM, 38. These women included Fanny Smith, Mary Jackson, Elizabeth Swanzy, Mary Hutton, Sarah Crosby, Catherine Bannerman, and Helen Colliver.
[65] Adu-Boahen, 210, 222, 240–241, 246.
[66] SCT 5/4/99, 266–272.
[67] Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change*, 80–81.
[68] Henty, 205–207.
[69] CO 96/57, 559–560; ADM 5/3/3, 29.
[70] ADM, 31.

[71] ADM.
[72] Priestly, West African Trade, 86; CO 96/11, 65. In 1846, there were only three women out of the white population of 37 in the British-dominated area of the Gold Coast.
[73] ADM 5/3/3/, 31. Madden observed that disputes often arose over slaves that some Europeans gave to people. These could have included women who were not their spouses.
[74] Adu-Boahen, 208–209.
[75] Adu-Boahen, ADM 5/3/3 144–145. This was similar to the policy adopted for Cape slavery in South Africa between 1823 and 1834. Scully, *Liberating the Family?*, 34–35.
[76] ADM 1/1/2, 160–161.
[77] SCT, 5/4/44, 120–121.
[78] SCT, 5/4/3, 111.
[79] SCT 5/4/5, 391.
[80] SCT 5/4/35, 202–209; SCT 5/4/7, 196.
[81] CO 96/58, 623–624.
[82] ADM 5/3/3, 144; SCT 5/1/8, Judicial No. 197; CO 96/2, 49–51.
[83] SCT 5/4/2, 149.
[84] SCT 5/4/44, 402–403.

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