Writing the National Man

Masculinity and Kinship in Nation-Building from Colonial to Postcolonial Ghana

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01. Introduction

My research examines how ideas of masculinity in Ghana transformed between the late colonial period and the rise of nationalism, with a focus on the language used in newspapers and political texts. By comparing pre-colonial Ghanaian press materials to speeches and manifestos from the Convention People's Party (CPP) during the nationalist movement, I explore how masculinity was strategically reshaped to serve emerging political ideologies.

In this project, I analyze how this shift impacted the transmission of ideas of masculinity within family units, and how the marginalizing of maternal figures within nuclear structures may have served the CPP's political goals. Ultimately, I argue that colonial and postcolonial institutions redefined masculinity to align with state-building objectives, constructing the ideal "national man" and limiting alternative expressions of male identity rooted in Ghana's kinship past.

02. Objective

My objective with this research was to study ideas of masculinity at the intersection of race and how colonialism complicates this relationship. My research led me to further include the movement of nationalism and anti-colonialism into these questions. Ultimately, I wanted to study social constructions of masculinity within Africa and how they transformed, particularly how they transformed within the construction of familial units.

Foundational Secondary Sources

- **Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities** – Nations as socially constructed; print capitalism shapes collective belonging. Provides framework for analyzing Ghanaian newspapers as tools for remaking kinship and masculinity.
- **Stephan F. Miescher, "The Challenges of Presbyterian Masculinity in Colonial Ghana"** – Basel Mission's model of monogamous, nuclear, Christian masculinity challenged matrilineal Akan ideals, creating contested masculine identities.
- **Theresah Ennin, "The Making of Akan Men"** – Through Aidoo's Anowa and Armah's The Healers, critiques colonial and hegemonic masculinities and imagines alternative, liberatory models.
- **Adu Boahen, The Roots of Ghanaian Nationalism –** Highlights early political awakenings and the role of local newspapers in shaping nationalist consciousness.
- **Jeffrey Ahlman, "Road to Ghana"** – Examines CPP's nationalist and pan-African strategies, situating masculinity within political activism.

03. Methodology

My Methodology combines:

- **Archival Analysis**
- **Discourse Analysis**
- **Qualitative Coding through NVivo Software**

I collected primary sources from the pre-colonial newspaper the Gold Coast Leader, alongside the most popular colonial CPP-controlled paper, The Evening News. Through comparing matrimonial advertisements, I observed a striking shift: The Leader grouped women together in marriage ads—reflecting matrilineal practices where alliances across households secured dowries, land, and kinship ties—whereas CPP papers presented women singularly, promoting monogamy. Using NVivo, I mapped thematic codes such as "monogamy," "kinship authority," and "national family" across textual data, tracing how language reflected political ideology. This was paired with secondary sources on masculinity, nationalism, and kinship systems to contextualize findings. The combination of close reading and digital mapping allows me to identify not only patterns of representation but also their alignment with the CPP's broader nationalist vision.

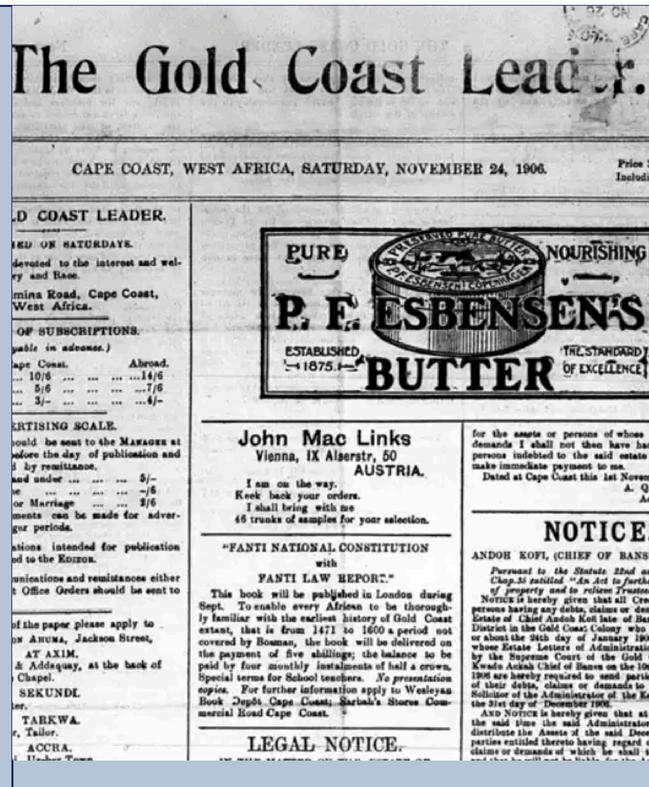
04. Results/Findings

The comparison of matrimonial advertisements across Ghanaian newspapers revealed a striking ideological transformation in how kinship and masculinity were framed. The Gold Coast Leader, published from 1902 to the late 1930s, reflected the concerns of an educated elite operating within colonial structures. In its matrimonial sections, women were frequently advertised in groups of three or four, emphasizing the collective benefits of marriage—dowries, land, housing, and extended kin alliances. This practice mirrored matrilineal systems in which masculinity was relational and distributed: men were evaluated not only by their ability to provide for a wife and children but also by their capacity to support wider kin networks, especially sisters, nieces, and nephews. Masculine authority was diffuse, shared between fathers, maternal uncles, and lineage elders.

By contrast, the Evening News, established in 1948 as the official mouthpiece of Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP), presented a markedly different vision of family life. Matrimonial ads shifted dramatically in both form and tone: women were advertised singularly as individual "ideal wives," not as part of a collective set of strategic kinship ties. This discursive change reflected the CPP's deliberate effort to normalize monogamy and nuclear households as the moral and modern ideal. Masculinity in these portrayals was no longer collective or mediated by maternal kin but centered instead on the authority of the individual husband-father as sole provider and moral guide.

This shift carried both symbolic and political weight. The CPP promoted monogamy as progressive, egalitarian, and rational—supporting state economic planning, social stability, and the creation of disciplined citizens—while implicitly discrediting polygamy and matrilineal caregiving as "backward" or inefficient. In reframing matrimonial advertisements to naturalize the nuclear family, the Evening News embedded the CPP's vision of the "national man" into everyday domestic life.

The results therefore demonstrate that the marginalization of maternal figures, collective caregiving, and polygynous practices was not accidental but a deliberate political strategy. By the 1950s, as independence approached, masculinity was reconstructed as a form of loyalty: to the nuclear family, to the CPP, and ultimately to the Ghanaian nation. The temporal contrast between the Gold Coast Leader and the Evening News thus reveals how print culture operated as both a mirror of changing kinship structures and a tool for embedding political authority into private life.



The Gold Coast Leader.

CAPE COAST, WEST AFRICA, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1906.

D COAST LEADER.

ED ON SATURDAYS.

devoted to the interest and wel-ry and Race.

mina Road, Cape Coast, West Africa.

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Dated at Cape Coast this 1st Novem A. Q. A.

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ANDOH KOFI, (CHIEF OF BANS

Pursuant to the Statute 22nd o Chap.35 entitled "An Act to furth of property and to relieve Trustee

NOTICE is hereby given that all Cre persons having any debts, claims or de Estate of Chief Andoh Kofi late of Ba District in the Gold Coast Colony who or about the 26th day of January 190 whose Estate Letters of Administratio by the Supreme Court of the Gold Kwadu Asikuh Chief of Banso on the 10 1906 are hereby required to send parti of their debts, claims or demands to Solicitor of the Administrator of the Es the 31st day of December 1906.

AND NOTICE is hereby given that at the said time the said Administrator distribute the Assets of the said Dece parties entitled thereto having regard claims or demands of which he shall

05. Analysis

Placing these findings in a historical context highlights how masculinity in Ghana was deliberately restructured across different temporal phases of print culture. During the early 20th century, the Gold Coast Leader (1902–1930s) reflected elite colonial discourse that still accommodated matrilineal norms. Its grouped matrimonial advertisements pointed to masculinity as a distributed authority—shared among fathers, maternal uncles, and elders—where marriage was about consolidating networks of wealth, land, and kinship. Masculinity here functioned relationally, embedded in clan structures rather than concentrated in one man.

By mid-century, the CPP's Evening News (founded in 1948) radically reoriented this framework. The singularization of women in advertisements represented more than a preference for monogamy: it embodied the CPP's project of disciplining kinship to discipline the nation. Drawing from Benedict Anderson, we can see these newspapers as tools of "imagined community," teaching Ghanaians to imagine not only the nation but also the family in ways that aligned with secular nationalism.

The shift also illustrates Stephan Miescher's argument that colonial Presbyterian ideals of masculinity—monogamous, industrious, nuclear—were never uncontested but became selectively appropriated. In the CPP's hands, these ideals were recast as modern, secular, and socialist, stripped of overt religious language yet echoing Basel Mission values.

IT WAS THE BIGGEST DEMONSTRATION EVER!

THE PARTY'S STRENGTH RETURNS IN FULL FORCE!!

KWAME NKRUMAH OF AFRICA SEVERELY WARNS THE TRAITORS

EVENING NEWS

Forward to Socialism and African Freedom and Unity

Spirit of revival

At the same time, the CPP's framing reveals what Theresah Ennin identifies as hegemonic masculinity: a narrowing of acceptable masculine roles that excluded collective or matrilineal expressions of manhood. By privileging the nuclear household, the state centralized masculine authority in the figure of the father, simultaneously marginalizing maternal kin and suppressing older forms of masculine identity tied to clan responsibility and polygynous provision.

Thus, the contrast between the Gold Coast Leader and the Evening News is not just chronological but ideological: newspapers were active agents in redefining kinship, embedding the CPP's secular-nationalist masculinity into everyday life. This analysis underscores how shifts in media discourse are mapped directly onto shifts in political power, making masculinity a site of nation-building itself.

06. Conclusion

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For my future research, I aim to further explore the history of kinship structures in Ghana and how they vary across regions inhabited by particular religious communities. I also intend to conduct a comparative analysis between Africa and the wider diaspora, particularly the Caribbean. As someone of Caribbean heritage, I notice striking differences in how masculinity is imagined and performed across African and Caribbean contexts. I want to investigate how ideas of masculinity were transformed under nationalist movements, and whether dominant political parties strategically used or manipulated kinship structures to propagate certain ideals of masculinity at the national level.

In my second Laidlaw summer, I hope to employ praxis in my work by collaborating with non-profits or NGOs dedicated to rebuilding matriarchal lineages and kinship structures in a postcolonial world. I would like to contribute to this broader project of postcolonial world-making as well as to anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and anti-civilizational initiatives that imagine alternative futures.