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## Family and Family Planning in Southern Ghana'

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Even critics seem to hold a rather optimistic view of family planning as a means of enhancing women's control over their own lives. In this chapter, it will be argued that in Ghana, among the Akan-speaking people of the south, and more specifically in Kwahu, where the data on which this discussion is based were collected, family planning is not 'correctly presented' and as a result does not contribute to women's emancipation, freedom, family well-being and health. It is argued that the main reasons for this failure are the Eurocentric and male-centred bias in the family planning policy, which mistakenly assumes that the reproduction and socialisation of children take place in a well-defined Western-type of conjugal family in which the father/husband is the only or main 'breadwinner' with a dependent wife and children. Data will be discussed to show that in fact the contexts of procreation and socialisation are rather varied in form and changeable depending, to a large extent, on the different and altering economic roles of women and men as well as cultural expectations and environmental constraints. Perhaps three kinds of family organisation could be distinguished: the matrilineage (*abusua*), the conjugal family, and the matrifocal family.

The two contexts which are neglected by family planning organisations will be described, and emphasis will be placed on the often tense relationship between conjugal family and matrilineage. Subsequently, the central position of women in families where husbands play only a marginal part, or no part at all, will be examined.

This chapter is based on anthropological field work conducted in the seventies in Ayere, a rural community of about 4,000 inhabitants, situated on the Kwahu Plateau. The people of the area belong to the Twi-speaking group of the Akan, whose society is characterised by matrilineal descent reckoning. Most Kwahu are peasants growing food crops such as yam, cocoyam, cassava, plantain and vegetables. Many of them, mainly the men, are cocoa farmers and some are traders.

### *The Kwahu 'Family'*

The Kwahu family differs sharply from the Euro-American concept of the conjugal family, which appears to have been the assumed model in the philosophy

of the Ghana family planning programme in the seventies. To begin with, use of the English term 'family' is confusing in the Ghanaian context. In the Twi language there is no single term to denote the nuclear or conjugal family. The Twi word *abusua*, which is often translated as 'family', refers to the matrilineal descent group, a group of people who can trace their descent from an ancestress one or more generations back. *Abusua* can also refer to a much larger group of people, the matriclan, those who believe themselves related through women to a distant mythical ancestress. These matriclans, which are spread over the whole of Akanland, number not more than eight.

The *abusua*, the matrilineal descent group with a depth of about four generations, is the most significant social group in Kwahu society. Its important functions include establishing personal status as royal, commoner or slave and supporting claims to political office or citizenship as well as to use of lineage land and houses. Its members form a unified group, sharing rights and responsibilities relating to people and property. The lineage disposes of dead members, the head supervising the rites. Beliefs about life after death among the lineage ancestors indicate its spiritual continuity. Recent developments have caused some cracks in the lineage structure, but as a whole it still stands. Indeed, the lineage is the great, permanent and fundamental institution which permeates every aspect of life. Marriage and conjugal family, on the other hand, have a temporary character and are subordinate to the lineage. The lineage needs marriage for procreation but it sees to it that the loyalty of the marriage partners stays with their respective lineages. When lineage loyalties are endangered, lineage members often try to disturb the conjugal relationship till divorce has been achieved. If the lineage does not succeed in restoring the 'right order' by bringing about a cleavage between the two partners, it holds the trump card—death. It is the lineage who buries its members. Those who flout the authority of the lineage should know that the lineage may refuse them this last service. Such a refusal is the greatest shame that can befall someone. It is also lineage members who inherit each others' property so that it is not uncommon for a woman who has worked closely with her husband to be left with virtually nothing when he dies. The matrilineal rule of inheritance prescribes that the man's property goes to the lineage member who is selected as his heir, usually a younger brother. If, however, a man has received considerable help from his wife and children, it is possible for him to give a portion of his privately acquired property to them.

Lineage and conjugal family are therefore in some kind of competition with one another. The intriguing thing, however, is that most actors in this competitive game play a double role. As members of a lineage, they try to advance the interests of their lineage; as members of a conjugal family, they fight the interests of the lineage (to which they do not belong). On the whole, however, the lineage has the better cards. In the ensuing discussion we shall see how this competition takes place on the different fronts of family life.

Marriage has always been something of secondary importance among the Akan, and especially among the Kwahu. The same applies to the natural outcome of marriage, the conjugal family. A woman, her husband and their children are of course distinguished as a group linked by biological ties, but their functioning as a social group is less clearly recognisable, certainly in comparison with the European concept of the conjugal family. Households or residential domestic groups cannot simply be identified with conjugal families. Indeed, various students of Akan family life have found themselves at a loss when they have had to define a

'household'.<sup>2</sup> The confusion about who constitutes the basic group for domestic interaction of several kinds reflects the fluidity of domestic family arrangements in Kwahu and more generally in Akan society. The biological connection of father, mother and offspring does not necessarily determine the composition of a clearly defined basic social group. The residential factor probably has decisive consequences for many social activities. As a rule the conjugal family is not the most effective social unit. Many decisions are taken on the level of the lineage, some are taken on the conjugal family level, and many again are taken on a still lower level.

It is necessary to distinguish between the residence of marriage partners and that of their children. Marital residence among the Akan is either duo-local (the separate residence of spouses), which seems to have decreased during the past 50 years, or the spouses live together. There is evidence that a married couple tend to live separately when they stay near the wife's lineage home. Continued residence with the respective lineages is preferred, if that is possible without interrupting the basic prerequisites of marriage: regular nocturnal access, and the wife preparing meals for the husband. If the lineage homes of both partners are within reasonable walking distance of each other this can be done. In all other circumstances the spouses have to take up common residence. These other circumstances are mainly of three kinds: migration to an urban centre, a stay in a hamlet or on a farm, and marriage between two people from different home towns. With the increase in geographical mobility, separate conjugal residence will therefore diminish.

Children's residence patterns are also very fluid. The most important factors seem to be conjugal residence, migration, schooling, divorce and fostering.<sup>3</sup> Some children live with both parents, some with their father, and some with their mother and/or her kin, but the residentially intact conjugal family appears to be the exception rather than the rule. Most children grow up in situations which are very varied and changing all the time.<sup>4</sup>

### *Marriage, Divorce and Non-Marital Relations*

The marriage ceremony has little social significance.<sup>5</sup> For girls, reaching physical maturity used to require extensive rituals which marked a woman's physiological ability to become a mother. Social sanctions around sex and pregnancy were linked chiefly to this initiation rite and not to marriage. Sex before initiation was strongly disapproved of and punished, and required a ritual cleansing. Some sources claim that sex and pregnancy before initiation (*Kyiribra*) used to be punishable by death. The sanction which is most commonly remembered by old people is ostracism of the couple in conjunction with sacrifices, purification, and shameful exposure (Sarpong, 1977. pp. 49-52). The implication seems clear: the social condition for sex and pregnancy was not in marriage but socially recognised maturity; put differently, the condition did not lie in the conjugal but in the matrilineal domain.<sup>6</sup> In a certain sense, marriage among the Akan could, and still can, be regarded as superfluous. Children born outside marriage are not labelled illegitimate, as they are full members of their mother's lineage. In fact, there is nothing that can be uniquely obtained through marriage. An elaborate marriage ceremony, the Christian wedding, has developed recently, but it is largely an urban elite affair, mainly because of its costliness, and affects only a small minority of the urban population.

Divorce among the Akan is easy and frequent; it is a normal occurrence which is likely to befall anyone at least once, probably twice. In spite of its normality, however, people are critical of it and prefer the idea of a stable and lifelong marriage.

As already noted, however, marriage must serve the interests of the lineage. Whatever people may say about their preference for stable marriage, in practice lineage stability comes before marriage stability. Security is found in the lineage rather than in marriage, and it would be foolish to invest too much in marriage. In a time of crisis the lineage offers the most, except when one finds a spouse who is well-to-do. Only such a marriage partner can take over from the lineage. In conclusion, divorce often does not change the lives of the people concerned very much for the high degree of conjugal segregation during marriage may come close to a *de facto* separation. As we have seen, there is nothing which can be obtained uniquely through marriage: sex, having children, bringing them up, earning a living, belonging to a social group—nothing belongs exclusively to marriage. Advantages one might expect from marriage, such as loving companionship, romance, shared parenthood and financial support, are seldom realised. It is no wonder that older people say ‘they grow tired’ of marriage and that young people shy away from it.

Three types of non-marital sexual relationship are distinguishable: free marriage, lover relationships and prostitution. Free marriage (*mpena awadee*) is not customarily ratified (or only partly so) but enjoys normal public recognition. The couple openly behave as partners, for example through sleeping together, the birth of children, and daily cooking by the woman for the man. In fact, there is little outward difference between a customary marriage and a free marriage. In the lineage studied, about 15 per cent of the members had a free marriage partner. A lover relationship differs from a free marriage in so far as it is a secret relationship. When the relationship becomes publicly known it usually breaks up, but it may also develop into a free marriage or customary marriage. The most frequent cause of publicity is an unwanted pregnancy.

The borderline between a lover relationship and prostitution is vague. Most so-called lover relationships have a ‘commercial’ component, and affection may characterise a relationship categorised as prostitution.<sup>7</sup> Temporary sexual relationships for reward seem to be quite common in Ayere, but in the urban centres with a high influx of unmarried men its occurrence is naturally more prominent and relationships tend to be more purely commercial. Out of a total of 27 adult women below the age of 40 years in the lineage studied, at least six were earning a living from sexual transactions in Accra. They often came back to Ayere and might then stay for several months. Most of them had children left in the care of relatives in Ayere. At home they were called ‘the Accra girls’, and although some people might look somewhat askance at them, they were not at all outcasts. On the contrary, most people regarded them as successful migrants, especially when they showed off in their best clothes.

One type of non-marital relationship should be mentioned here: the extra-marital relationship, by which I primarily mean a lover relationship between a married man and an unmarried woman. Extra-marital relationships involving married women are less common, though they certainly do occur. The secrecy around them is tighter, however, because ‘public opinion’ is much more lenient towards men’s extra-marital relationships than those of women.

We can distinguish roughly two kinds of male extra-marital relationship. One takes place during the post-partum period, when spouses are supposed to abstain from sexual intercourse. This period lasts about six months in Kwahu (Bleek, 1976b, p. 227).<sup>8</sup> Male informants assured me that it was a normal practice for a man during that period to ‘take a *mpena*’ (lover) because, as one said, ‘a man

cannot live without a *mpena'*. This kind of short-lived relationship shades easily into prostitution. Polygynous husbands are of course in a different position.

The second kind is a lover relationship alongside the legal marital relationship. This too is quite normal. Many women suspect their husbands of having lovers. As long as a man can hide the affair, and particularly the identity of the lover, from his wife, no problems arise. When the affair is disclosed, however, the honour of the wife is at stake, and in most cases the man will either have to break off the relationship or marry the lover. So even though extra-marital relationships are quite common, there are strong reasons for keeping them secret.

The existence of non-marital unions is nothing new in Kwahu, but the reluctance of people (especially the young) to enter marriage is certainly a new development. This postponement of marriage appears to be connected with modern education. The completion of one's education is an essential step if one wants to make progress in life, whereas marriage offers few such prospects. Marriage often constitutes a threat to a girl's school career, because a pregnancy and subsequent marriage may well mean the end of education (see Chapter 10 of this volume). A connected factor is the increasing disenchantment with marriage. Two reasons for this are apparent. In the first place the relative economic contribution of men to their marriages has decreased over the last few decades with the worsening of the general economic situation. Women 'profit' less from their marriages than before, and men find it more difficult to satisfy the 'excessive' demands of women in marriage. Meanwhile expectations of marriage have risen. Young people in Kwahu thus have a somewhat paradoxical attitude to marriage: they hope for too much and expect but little.

### *Mothers, Sisters and Wives*

As we have seen, a woman does not sever the bond with her lineage when she marries. The lineage's interest in its female member rather increases at the moment she marries because it is through the marriage that the lineage hopes to augment its number. We have seen that the lineage keeps a watchful eye on the marriage and promptly interferes when it thinks its interests are threatened. Examples of such threats are infertility or low fertility, and the giving of priority to conjugal rather than lineage affairs. The interference may ultimately lead to divorce.

The lasting association of women with their lineage provides them with a strong 'solidarity group' which cuts right through their conjugal bond. Kwahu women do not stand alone in confronting their husbands, but are supported by their lineage. The fact that the lineage is not a '*female solidarity group*' (Sanday, 1974) but a group which, particularly in the formal domain, is dominated by men certainly makes a difference—in that women may not always feel themselves supported in their activities but rather caught between two male dominated loyalty groups. On the other hand, the fact that the lineage's support often has an unconditional character should not be ignored. This primordial support greatly strengthens the woman's autonomy in marital affairs. An exception should be made for marriages in which the husband, because of his solid economic position, is able to wield considerably more power over his wife, whose material position is thus improved while her conjugal autonomy is reduced (e.g. Oppong (1982b).

Among Kwahu couples there is generally a strict sexual division of activities and responsibilities, but variations due to time, place, residence, economic status and probably other less well-defined factors must certainly be taken into account. The

participation of fathers in activities regarding their conjugal families may have been more intensive in the past than it is now (Fortes, 1950, p. 268). Paying for children's schooling is still seen as the least equivocal duty of Kwahu fathers, but there is no information available as to how often it is in fact carried out. (A survey in middle and secondary schools and teacher training colleges over the whole country suggests that about 70 per cent of fathers pay school fees—Ghana Teaching Service, p. 15). Observation would indicate that other contributions by husbands to their conjugal family are less common.

The residence factor seems crucial. Where husband and wife do not live together the husband's contribution to running the house tends to decrease or disappear. Because marriage partners often remain near the woman's lineage home, and because divorce occurs frequently, marriages characterised by a lasting co-residence of parents and their children are exceptions. Household arrangements are fluid and flexible and the chances that fathers' participation in conjugal family affairs will diminish are large indeed (e.g. Woodford-Berger, 1981). Again, divorced women who remarry and co-reside with their second husband are usually solely responsible for the children of the first marriage.

Official norms prescribe that husbands should take substantial responsibility in the domestic sphere, but in reality husbands often fail to do so due to factors which alienate them from their conjugal families. At the same time, official norms prescribe considerable role segregation between husbands and wives. Even in the case of co-residence husbands are not supposed to assist their wives with household chores because these are regarded as women's and children's work. Men returning from farmwork usually let women carry the loads, and at meals they do not eat with their wives. In many other ways, men publicly show that the men's world differs from that of the women, and that the men's world is superior. Men rarely walk with their wives, and they are not supposed to show affection for them.

These are the rules for public behaviour. In private, things may differ considerably, but what is 'private'? In the rural home-towns, people live together in large living units and there is very little privacy. It rarely happens that a couple is not observed by others. Segregated conjugal roles therefore predominate. When a couple stays together in a farming settlement (*akuraa*), or migrates to an urban centre where no other relatives or co-villages are around, conjugal roles may be more joint.

The most incisive segregation, however, is brought about by, and reflected in, the financial independence of women. Couples hardly ever pool their resources. They may sometimes contribute to a common good, the upkeep of their children, or they may farm together, or the husband may give his wife a sum to start trading, but ultimately their income and property are kept apart carefully. Even in educated urban families, spouses prefer to keep their money separate in order to avoid conflicts (e.g. Oppong, 1982b). This financial arrangement reflects the dominant view of marriage, namely that a husband and wife are not one but two. Within marriage there is no lasting security because the interests of the two partners rarely coincide fully.

Children are deemed essential for a woman's happiness in Akan society. It is not only that children bring companionship and help. Children constitute the meaning of a woman's life. In the Akan view, a woman without children is incomplete, useless. She is, as one school pupil wrote, 'a pen without ink' (Bleek, 1976a, p. 172). A woman without, or with very few, children is even suspected of being a

witch (*obayifo*) and killing the children, or of being a prostitute and having a venereal disease, and thus experiences extreme social pressure. It is therefore no surprise that infertility and other problems related to bearing children seem to be the most common reasons for visiting traditional shrines or healing prophets (Field, 1960, pp. 105–106; Bleek, 1976a, p. 180). To become a 'woman', a woman need not be married, but she must have children. Only a *mother* is a true woman. The pitiful plight of the childless woman is expressed in proverbs and songs (e.g. Asare Opoku, 1977, p. 108).

### *Matrifocal Tendencies*

In Kwahu both tradition and recent socio-economic developments promote matrifocal tendencies and female-headed households are common. Tradition emphasises the father's importance and his responsibilities and yet at the same time undermines his position. There can be no doubt, however, that in spite of some paternal role rhetoric, the cultural tradition tends to marginalise fathers with respect to their conjugal families.

Marginalisation of the father/husband does not necessarily imply matrifocality, however, the focus in family affairs can also lie with men in their position as brother or uncle, as may happen in corporate lineage groups. Among the Kwahu, men in the lineage certainly take a dominant position with respect to female members, but this dominance is largely limited to formal and public affairs. In the more informal domestic domain, women run their own affairs. The lineage offers little help with concrete problems regarding bringing up children and daily subsistence. A woman who does not receive sufficient support from her husband has to bear the brunt of it herself, even if she stays with matrikin in the same house. Widowed and divorced women often get no help from their brothers in paying for their children's education or meeting daily expenses. Substantial assistance from the lineage in these matters is rare. This may seem to contradict previous statements stressing the importance of the lineage. The lineage derives its authority not so much from tangible economic services, however, as from its vigorous social sanctions and traditional sentiments of solidarity, which have strongly emotional overtones. Lineage members do, of course, offer each other services, but they are largely of a social character, much less often financial.

There is therefore justification for speaking of a tradition-based matrifocality. But we must at the same time emphasise that recent developments have greatly increased this matrifocal tendency. The three most important factors seem to be the worsening financial position of men due, among other things, to the overall crisis of the Ghanaian economy, the increased mobility of people, and the spread of education.

In the period of subsistence economic production, the contribution by husbands to their conjugal family was probably quite stable and regular. Rules about co-operation and task division in farming by husbands and wives guaranteed a relatively steady support by husbands for their children. The introduction of cocoa and other cash crops, coupled with the ethnocentric bias of the colonial authorities towards men as breadwinners, improved the position of husbands, who became the first to have access to cash money. Those men who profited by the cocoa industry enhanced their role as husbands and fathers. They were able to build houses for their wives and children, they sent their children to school, and they attempted—often successfully—to circumvent a number of matrilineal dictates

regarding property and its disposal after death, and social loyalties.

This involvement in the international market had a profound impact on life, in the rural home-towns and villages too, but not everybody was able to profit from it. Socio-economic inequality thus increased, giving some men a position close to a *pater familias* and diminishing the ability of others to fulfil the demands of the conjugal role. When international and internal problems began to affect the cocoa industry and the entire Ghanaian economy, the latter category grew. The fact that more men than women are employed in the formal sector of the economy explains why men have lost the most. Women who, usually against their will, were forced to restrict their activities to subsistence food growing and small-scale informal trading were less affected, at least during the 1970s, by the economic crisis. It is exactly their position outside the formal economy which gives them greater resilience. The result is that many men have lost their superior position vis-à-vis women and are no longer able to support their children. Women increasingly run their families with little or no support from their husbands, and men have therefore become more and more marginal as husbands and fathers.

Increased mobility is another factor contributing to matrifocality. Formerly, spouses who divorced were more likely to remain in each other's vicinity, and as a consequence the observance of paternal obligations was more likely to continue than it is nowadays. At present, men often disappear completely after divorce, or the disappearance itself constitutes a *de facto* separation. In the lineage of Ayere studied, the reasons for 93 divorces were analysed. In nine of them it was simply said that 'the partner travelled and left me behind' (Bleek, 1975a, p. 212). Since in most cases children remain with the mother, women then tend to be burdened with the exclusive maintenance of the children. If a woman remarries, the new husband will most probably contribute nothing to the upkeep of the children who are not his.

Greater mobility does not always increase matrifocality, however; in some instances it may actually reduce it. This happens when mobility involves migration of both husband and wife. In that case, as we have seen before, common conjugal residence is likely, which encourages the participation of the husband in domestic affairs such as financial support and decision-making. But divorce, unemployment, or other economic problems are likely to present themselves one day, and this will then curtail the husband's contribution.

The third factor leading to matrifocality is the importance attached to school education. A school diploma is a *sine qua non* for making 'progress' in life. The higher the diploma, the more one may potentially gain from it. Young people therefore attempt to get as much education as possible and to prevent any premature interruption of their education. A frequent reason for interruption is pregnancy, as Akuffo describes in Chapter 10. The school, however, which makes postponement of child-bearing desirable, at the same time stimulates early sexual contacts. It brings youngsters of both sexes together outside the social control of the lineage and organises activities which seem particularly conducive to love affairs, such as sporting events and 'evening studies'. The school building is itself an important place for rendezvous between youngsters, as sexual activity in the farms or the forest is taboo.

In Kwahu, pregnancy proves to be a common reason for girls leaving school. Male pupils rarely have to interrupt school when they have made a female pupil pregnant. This inequality seems roughly in accordance with the ideas of the pupils themselves, boys in particular, but to a lesser extent, the girls too. Table 8.1



**Table 8.1** *Opinions about pregnancy and dismissal from school, by school pupils from the whole of Ghana (percentages)*

School level		Girls who become pregnant should be removed from school		Boys who cause pregnancy should be removed from school		N
		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	
Elementary school middle form 3	M	80.8	19.1	61.4	38.5	291
	F	81.3	18.7	75.0	25.0	191
Secondary school form 3	M	74.2	25.8	44.1	55.9	367
	F	79.0	21.0	68.0	32.0	317
Secondary school form 5	M	69.6	30.4	30.2	69.8	172
	F	70.1	29.9	62.7	37.3	167
Teacher training college	M	69.6	30.4	20.7	79.3	228
	F	46.0	54.0	40.8	59.2	98

*Source* Ghana Teaching Service, 1975, p. 52.

presents the responses of school pupils from the whole of Ghana in a survey organised by the Ministry of Education.

This situation puts many young women in a position where they have to bear the responsibility for a child without the support of a husband.<sup>9</sup> Personal histories collected at the Kwahu town of Ayere show that a woman's first pregnancy tends to be the least desired, and that very often the father of the first child is not the same person as the father of the subsequent children. Frequently, too, the father of the first child disappears. Bartle (1978, p. 527) observed the same in another Kwahu town. Matrilocality, therefore, is particularly common after the birth of a woman's first child.

Matrilocality occurs then in two different situations: it may entail marginality of a husband/father, who is still legally married to the mother of his children, or it may imply complete absence of the father, who has no legal bond with the mother, either because they are divorced or because they never married. Both types of matrilocal families exist in Kwahu.

A last factor leading to matrilocality is the virtual disappearance of widow inheritance. Formerly a man's heir inherited his widow with his property. It meant that he took over the deceased's responsibility and care for his wife and children. It seems that Christian objections to polygyny and, more importantly, financial considerations account for the fact that this old institution of 'widow and orphan security' has largely died out. Widows with children to care for are much more likely to be left on their own now than 50 years ago.

### *The Consequences for Family Planning*

Modern family planning in Ghana began in the early 1960s when the Christian Council set up centres in Accra, Kumasi and Ho to advise married couples on how they could regulate their fertility. In 1967, Ghana became the first black African country to sign the United Nations declaration on population. Family planning became the country's official policy. The content of the declaration had a neo-

Malthusian tenor: the population problem was seen as a significant barrier to development. In the 1969 document (Government of Ghana, 1969c, p. 19) it was thus stated:

A population policy and programme are viewed as integral parts of efforts toward social and economic development, improvement of health and nutrition, elevation of quality and extension of the scope of education, wider employment opportunities, and better development and use of human resources in the interests of a more abundant life.

In 1971 Ghana played host to the first African Population Conference and then Prime Minister Busia said plainly in his opening address:

The Malthusian theory . . . is now being treated with more respect than was accorded to it some years back. In certain parts of the world the squalor and poverty predicted by Malthus is already in evidence (quoted by Bondestam, 1980, p. 1).

In 1970 the government approved the Ghana National Family Planning Programme, which had as its target the recruitment of about 200,000 contraceptive users within five years, but by 1975 the total number of new acceptors was only 142,000. It was not always clear, however, whether or not so-called 'new acceptors' meant users who continued for some time. In an evaluation of the Family Planning Programme, for example, it is reported that by 1975-76 there were about 53,000 current users and 192 family planning clinics (Armar and David, 1977). Family planning services were more readily available to urban women than to rural women and considerably more used by the former. Two non-governmental organisations, the Christian Council of Ghana and the Planned Parenthood Association also promoted family planning.<sup>10</sup>

In the early seventies the various family planning programmes in Ghana showed little awareness of the complex nature of family organisation and the matrifocal tendency in the rearing of children, in both the economic and the emotional spheres. The approach was almost exclusively oriented to conjugal families as they were believed to exist in Europe or in the ideals of Christian teaching on marriage. The Ghanaian Family Planning Programme thus assumed the marital union to be stable and the only context of reproduction. The widely known incidence of pre-marital and extra-marital sex and pregnancies was ignored. It further neglected certain cultural features of family organisation which are not familiar in the European countries from which it had borrowed its model, but which are quite common in Akan society. The most important of these features are the custom of fostering and the influence of the matrilineage on marriage affairs.

The approach was male-centred in that it was assumed that fathers are heads of their families, breadwinners who take full responsibility for their children. The fact that women often have to support their families alone and under difficult conditions was largely ignored. In an official document stating the government's policy, the impression is given that women in Ghana are housewives who should be encouraged to participate in 'gainful employment' with the help of family planning facilities (Government of Ghana, 1969c, p. 21). This picture clearly applies to many West European countries where extra-domestic work is mainly a man's affair, but certainly not to Ghana where practically all women engage in some kind of work to earn—or to share in earning—a living for their children. In the 1970 population census only 11 per cent of rural women called themselves 'housewives', and the real percentage would probably be still lower if we took 'housewife' to mean only working in the house (Addo and Goody, n.d., p. 20).

What are the consequences of such a Eurocentric and male-centred view of the family? They can be summarised in two points: the most important target population, rural married women, is hardly affected by the family planning programme, while those who need birth control most, the young unmarried women, have very difficult access to it.

### *Married Women and Family Planning*

A pamphlet distributed by the Ghana National Family Planning Programme reads: 'The National Family Planning Programme makes it easier for couples to get the information and services they need to space the frequency of births and/or limit the size of their families when necessary.' On the same page it says: 'Family Planning can help you and your family to a better life.' The pictures show an extremely well dressed couple with three children: they look happy, and one picture allows us a look into their well furnished home, flowers on the table and a television in the centre. The designers of the pamphlet seem to suggest that such prosperity will come to people if they adopt family planning—but more probably people will take it that family planning is for the élite and none of their business. One impression is, however, unequivocal: family planning is for married couples.

In the light of the ambiguous position of marriage and the matrifocal tendency of domestic groups, it will surprise no one that such 'family planning' appeals little to ordinary married women living in rural areas. It will appeal even less to their husbands or sexual partners. A large proportion of women do not find themselves in a marital union which has any similarity with the picture drawn by the family planning organisations. And the remaining women who do have a more or less stable conjugal relationship are well aware of the vicissitudes of married life and the possibility that their marriage may break down in the future. 'Having children', both in the sense of bearing them and in the plain sense of supporting them, is mainly a woman's affair. As we have seen, Akan men often do not really support their children. For them, planning their families is not relevant if they have little to do with the result of the planning (Oppong and Bleek, 1982).

Why do rural Akan women rarely plan the number of their children? The answer is twofold—first because the uncertainty of their situation allows for little planning. The context in which women give birth to children and bring them up is subject to so many vicissitudes and their conjugal situation is so uncertain that their ability to foresee their future is extremely limited. For a woman, it is extremely hard to estimate the pros and cons of having a few or many children. It depends on how long her marriage will last; how many times she will marry; the financial position of her husband(s); what conjugal responsibilities her husband(s) or lover(s) will accept; how many of her children will be staying with her; how many children of others will be put in her care; how much help her lineage will give; how successful she will be in earning her own income; how much help her children will offer; how successful her children will be at school and in achieving a good economic position; how healthy her children will be, and how many of them will survive to adulthood. Of course, some of these uncertainties are universal, but it should be taken into account that in the relatively rich industrialised societies at least the worst of the economic pressures resulting from misfortune have been greatly reduced by social security and insurance measures. In Akan society such measures hardly exist. The greatest unknown there, as in many other Third World societies, is that children can become factors of social insurance as well as factors of social risk. The aggre-

gate 'decision' in such a complex and contradictory situation is most likely inertia. Inertia is also brought about by the strong traditional norm of high fertility. Children are the *raison d'être* of marriage. Kwahu people engage on the uncertain course of marriage because they want children. So to stop or to limit fertility while married seems contradictory and has a tinge of absurdity.

This leads to the second reason why many married women do not actively plan the number of children they have. Family planning programmes fail to convey a meaningful message to most married women simply because their message does not apply to them. The domestic level reasons for family planning suggested by these organisations refer to a type of family and family life which is often not part of the women's experience. As we have seen, their propaganda makes many incorrect assumptions about family organisation. This inevitably alienates rural women from the purposes and means of family planning and makes them think that family planning is an affair for the urban educated élite but not for them. Their everyday problems hardly appear in family planning propaganda.

### *Unmarried Women and Family Planning*

There is another criticism that is sometimes made of family planning, though it is seldom discussed and appears improbable: that family planning, in the way it is often promoted, actually helps to curtail the freedom and socio-economic perspectives of women. This may sound provocative, because in spite of all criticism it is widely acknowledged that family planning does enhance the control of women over their own lives. How, then, may such a contention be understood in the case of Ghana?

Women in Ghana, particularly rural Akan women, have a great degree of independence. This independence, as we have seen, derives among other things from their involvement in extra-domestic economic activities. It is also true, however, that the economic opportunities of women have been systematically reduced by the fact that they have less access to education, professional training, and formal employment than men (Oppong et al., 1975). Apart from a few famous examples, most women carry out their activities on the margins of economy, in the informal sector. The unequal chances of women in the economy are related to their unequal chances in education. But why do women not have the same opportunities as men to receive education? No doubt this is partly explained by the existence of cultural beliefs in the superiority of men. There is also a more concrete reason, however, which contributes to the imbalance in education between the sexes: women drop out of school because they become pregnant and, more importantly, parents discourage the education of their daughters in anticipation of their dropping out (cf. Bukh, 1979, p. 66; Bleek, 1981; and Chapter 9 below). Education is seen as an investment; if the investment looks too risky, it is left.

It is not only lack of formal education which curtails the career prospects of women. An early pregnancy in itself tends to have unfavourable consequences for a young woman. The fact that she is burdened with a baby at a young age but does not yet have a stable partner—which is the usual pattern—diminishes her chances of finding an attractive marriage partner who will be likely to contribute to the upkeep of her children.

From observations in Ayere it would appear that most first pregnancies are undesired. This admittedly impressionistic statement is supported by the high frequency of induced abortions and still higher frequency of attempted induced

*Table 8.2 Marital status and age of lineage members involved in induced abortions (percentages in brackets) (N = 26)*

Marital status	Under 25	25-39	Total
Legal marriage	—	3 (27)	3 (12)
Free marriage*	1 (7)	3 (27)	4 (15)
Lover relationship*	14 (93)	5 (45)	19 (73)**
Total	15 (100)	11 (99)	26 (100)

\* For definitions see p. 234-235.

\*\* Three unclear cases are excluded.

Source Bleek, 1978b, p. 113.

abortions in the lineage studied (Bleek, 1976a, pp. 210-219). Abortion is induced using dangerous means, and it is generally known that young women frequently die or become sterile as a result of such abortions. Moreover, abortion is against the law and one risks prosecution when performing it, while public opinion strongly disapproves of abortion. The fact that it is practised nonetheless underlines the extremely strong motivation to get rid of an untimely pregnancy. About half of the 19 adult women in the lineage in our study had experienced an induced abortion, and out of the 91 pregnancies of these women, 16 had been terminated by abortion. The most common reason given for abortion was the woman wanting to complete education.

Table 8.2, covering all abortion cases in which male and female members of the lineage were involved, clearly shows that most abortions involve young people in a pre-marital sexual relationship.

The high incidence of abortion outside marriage indicates the need for family planning advice and services for unmarried women. In fact, unmarried youngsters showed a keen interest in contraceptive devices and did use them. In the lineage of Ayere, birth control was practised about five times more frequently outside marriage than in it.<sup>11</sup> The problem, however, was that the family planning organisations did not seem to offer their services to these young people. The effective and safe contraceptives distributed through such organisations hardly reached the unmarried generation. In the lineage we studied, no young people ever visited a family planning representative, although a family planning clinic existed in the nearby town of Nkawkaw and there was a family planning fieldworker in Ayere itself. The only contraceptives which reached the young were condoms and pressurised foams (spermicides), which the government distributes through commercial outlets. The most common methods of birth control used in Ayere were, however, various kinds of obscure pills (e.g. Alophen and Apiol and Steel<sup>12</sup>), which were often wrongly believed to be contraceptives, and to induce abortion.

It is not the birth of many children which deprives an Akan woman of the possibility of finding gainful employment outside her home. A large number of children is in many ways self-supporting. Older children help take care of younger ones and may also assist the mother in external economic activities such as farming and trading, although school attendance has of course diminished this considerably. It is, however, still true that a mother with eight children does not experience significantly greater obstacles to working outside the home than a mother of two.

This applies even to women in salaried state employment who are granted maternity leave, for example, teachers and nurses.

What does, however, diminish a woman's economic prospects is the birth of her *first child*. A family planning programme which is intended to enhance the position of women but delays its action till women are married thereby misses the opportunity to achieve such enhancement. In present day Ghana family planning programmes need to concentrate on the young. The fact that organisations fail to do so contributes to the continuation of sexual inequality in training and employment prospects in Ghanaian society. Ability to control the timing of births, and in particular to postpone the first birth, is a prerequisite if women are to complete their education, contract attractive marriages and engage in profitable economic activities outside the home, and is thus essential for the improvement of the position of women in Akan society.

A final point to be taken into account is that the absence of effective family planning for young women leads both to the use of dubious contraceptives and to undesired pregnancies. Consequently, young women often resort to ineffective and/or highly dangerous abortion techniques, which may result in serious medical complications such as sterility and even death.

Family planning does not seem to have contributed sufficiently to women's emancipation, individual freedom, family well being and health. It therefore seems warranted to call for a more realistic assessment by Ghanaian family planning organisations of the socio-economic contexts of reproduction.<sup>13</sup> If they want to respond to the needs of rural women, they should make their messages more relevant to those women and should make their services much more readily available to young women.

## Notes

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- 1 The research for this chapter was made possible by a grant from the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana. The first writing up period of the data was sponsored by the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research. I am grateful to Dr. C. Opong, Mrs. M. Dijkema and Mrs. J.J. Kossen, who contributed to the final draft of this article. People and places in the text have been given pseudonyms.
- 2 The concept of 'household' which fitted the 'familial individualism' (Laslett, 1972, p. 49) of European observers proved problematic in the more fluid and communal Akan society. See, for example, the problems encountered by P. Hill (1963, p. 24) among Akan cocoa farmers; Vercrujse et al. (1974) among the Fanti; Bartle (1977) among the Kwahu; and Woodford-Berger (1981, p. 32) who worked in Ahafo. For a general discussion of the concept in the Ghanaian literature see Opong (1976). Meanwhile some researchers have simply ignored the problem, e.g. Dutta-Roy (1969), whose Household Budget Survey does not define this key concept. Others have used varied definitions: Caldwell (1967a, p. 63) remarks that in the 1960 population census, 'the concept of what constitute a house or compound varied sometimes from enumerator to enumerator'.
- 3 See, for example, Bartle (1977) regarding migration and child dispersal in Obo, and Esther Goody (1978, p. 227; 1982) who, in writing about West Africa in general, notes a striking contradiction in the concept of parenthood. On the one hand, a tremendous emphasis is placed on parent-child relations, which is reflected in the strong desire for

children. On the other hand there is a wide variety of practices delegating parental roles to others. She points out (1978, p. 229) that the explanation must not be sought in the cultural definition of parenthood but in the specific conditions which lead to the delegation of parental roles. Brydon (1979), in her study of a non-Akan community in Ghana, remarks that fostering has increased as a result of the community's incorporation into a wider economy which has led to migration, both of men and women, and a drift away from the stable conjugal family pattern.

- 4 The situation is beautifully illustrated by the following observation by Bartle (1977, p. 239): 'In the Obo compound where I lived, and many others I visited, the girls would say, lets play *Mame ne mame* (mother and mother) or *Mame ne nana* (mother and grandmother). The adults these children emulated were their mothers and their mothers' sisters (same word in Twi for Mo or Mo-Si: *eno* or *mame*), the most important people to them in their hometown residence unit. Their socialization took place in a matrilineal rather than bilateral kinship system'.
- 5 During the one and a half years I spent at Ayere I never succeeded in attending such a ceremony. Although I blame myself for the omission, I cannot help blaming also the insignificance and subsequent invisibility of the custom. The ceremony, which mainly consists of the payment of a modest sum of money, the giving of gifts, and a libation, need not be described here. Elaborate descriptions can be found elsewhere (Rattray, 1923, 1927, 1929, pp. 24-27; Fortes, 1950, pp. 278-281).
- 6 It is therefore somewhat misleading that Sarpong (1977) refers to this ceremony by the English term 'nubility rites', as if the rites were concerned with *nuptiae*, which means both marriage and wedding ceremony. Sarpong's own description strongly suggests that the rites should be seen as 'maturity or maternity rites', allowing a girl to bring forth, to become a mother. It is significant, for example, that after the rites the girl is dressed as a mother (*eno*) (Sarpong, 1977, p. 75).
- 7 Pellow (1977, p. 208) in her study of women in the capital of Accra, noted: 'no self-respecting woman would remain in a "friendship" without material recompense.'
- 8 Fortes (1954, p. 265) recorded the same duration in Asante in 1945, but a slightly longer period (eight months) has recently been mentioned by Gaisie (1981, p. 246). Warren (1974, p. 42) reports that among the Bono of Techiman, another Akan group, the abstinence period after a first child lasts at least six months but that 'after succeeding births a 40 day period is deemed sufficient'.
- 9 It should be noted, though, that making a schoolgirl pregnant may involve another heavy sanction for the man in question. As the pregnancy is believed to have spoiled the girl's education, some parents claim indemnification for the loss suffered. In Kwahu I came across amounts from 50 cedis (£20) to 260 cedis (£104) but much higher sums have been demanded elsewhere. It is rumoured that some parents encourage their school-going daughters to engage in sex in order to secure an attractive sum of money.
- 10 All these activities were supported with foreign funds, mostly from the United States (David and Armar, 1978). At the same time grants were given to the University of Ghana to establish a teaching department for demography and population research programmes (Bingen, 1972, p. 81). The most ambitious and most expensive programme was without doubt the Danfa Project (1979).
- 11 In the Final Report of the Danfa Project (1979, pp. 8-37) it says: 'around 66 per cent of married male acceptors reported that they used the contraceptive method only with their wife, 20 per cent said they used it exclusively with another partner, and 12 per cent used it with both their wife and other partners.' I do not think this contradicts my findings at Ayere, for three reasons. In the first place, a survey such as was carried out in the Danfa Project is not suitable for questions about extra-marital relationships. The report makes no mention of unmarried youngsters. I suspect that they have been excluded from the experiment. It is highly unlikely that church authorities, education officers and other defenders of public morality would have permitted school girls to take part in this family planning pilot project. The third reason is that the community

involved in the Danfa Project, by its very status as a *project* constituted an exceptional community. The presence of so many doctors, students, nurses and other personnel and the delivery of so many services made the community sample totally unrepresentative of the Ghanaian population as a whole. The conclusion of the Report (pp. 8-34) that the typical female acceptor of family planning is married, 28 years old, has three to four children, farms, and accepts the pill, is a research artefact and probably, point by point, the reverse of the typical female 'acceptor of birth control' in Ghana as a whole.

- 12 Alophen, containing phenolphthalein, is a purgative, but is commonly used both as a contraceptive and to induce abortion. It is sold in drugstores. In 1973 it was used as a contraceptive everywhere from rural villages to university campuses. Apiol and Steel is a dubious drug freely obtainable in drugstores. Again, it is used both as a contraceptive and to induce abortion but exactly how it works is unclear. Martindale's Extra Pharmacopoeia reports on Apiol that it is used as an emmenagogue but that its therapeutic value is doubtful. Severe toxic effects, including nephrosis, have resulted from its use.
- 13 It must be emphasised that the research on which this article is based dates from 1973. cursory information (e.g. De Nie, 1977, p. 35) suggests that the availability of effective contraceptives among secondary school students subsequently improved somewhat and that dismissal of pregnant pupils from school decreased. Representatives of the National Family Planning Programme further claimed in the late seventies that their organisation was becoming directed towards the unmarried. The only published statement I know is a short letter by the Director of Information and Education of the National Family Planning Programme in *The Mirror*, a Ghanaian weekly, of 30 July 1976. The letter was a reaction to a series of articles by me in which I criticised the Programme for barring unmarried youngsters from their services. The writer, Mr. Henry Ofori, stated, 'It is only the Christian Council of Ghana which limits its family planning services to married couples.' It seems we have to distinguish between a formal and informal policy of the Programme. It may be true that family planning agents seldom or never actively refuse unmarried people, but it is clear that they do not formally conduct a policy directed towards the unmarried. The reluctance of official institutions to take pre-marital pregnancy and contraception seriously is also demonstrated by a report of the Ghana Teaching Service (1975, pp. 51-52). Although pre-marital pregnancy during school training is recognised as a problem, and although around 50 per cent of students think that contraceptives should be made freely available in schools, the curriculum makers have in the past usually tended to avoid this topic altogether.