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CONTEXTS OF KINSHIP:

**AN ESSAY IN THE FAMILY SOCIOLOGY OF THE GONJA
OF NORTHERN GHANA. E. N. GOODY. CAMBRIDGE
STUDIES IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY NO. 7 CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS. 1973 PP. 335. PRICE £6 20
IN UNITED KINGDOM**

IT is with much pleasure that we welcome the first of Dr. Esther Goody's Volumes on the Gonja social system. Her previous articles dealing with Gonja marriage and divorce, fostering, witchcraft and so on had already given us a fore-taste of what was to come and now we have another worthy contribution to the sociology of northern Ghana from a Cambridge Anthropologist. This contribution is particularly welcome for it gives us a rich insight into domestic and political institutions in a "bilateral kinship system".

The basic problems Dr. Esther Goody sets out to solve are those of tracing the interrelationships between political and domestic institutions and of documenting the working of a "largely bilateral system." She achieves her aims by studying the roles and norms that are the bases of marriage and kinship and by examining in some detail four idioms of relationships which are the stuff of everyday life in the Gonja state. These include the complex of greeting and begging behaviour; the sharing of cooked food; the control and direction of mystical forces and the links between man and the supernatural, controlled with the help of diviners, shrines and propitiating acts.

The book, which is the result of field work carried out in Central Gonja in 1956 and 1957, supplemented by data collected in the East and West of the state in 1964 and 1965, is divided into four sections. The first deals with the contexts and problems of the study. The second deals with marriage, including courtship, the conjugal relationship and divorce. The third section is about kinship, in particular filial and sibling ties. Section four looks at residence patterns and the developmental cycle of the domestic group. Four appendices provide rich quantitative evidence supporting the discussions in the text.

Much of the data discussed will prove to be extremely important in future comparative studies of partner-choice, marriage, parent-child relations and indeed the whole complex of relations within the conjugal family. For much of what she describes is not "typical" of Africa, at least from what has hitherto been described in the major descriptive monographs. The marriage tie is based upon a personal relationship formed during courtship (only a minority of marriages are arranged by the parental generation) and there is little stress on intermediaries or extended negotiations. The conjugal relationship is essentially based upon mutual attraction and personal choice. The corollary of this is that divorce is easy and frequent. Given in addition a situation in which a considerable minority of children are reared by kin, we discover that not only are there no distinguishable bounded descent groups in Gonja society (neither unilineal nor non-unilineal) but the conjugal family itself of husband wife and children is not an enduring coresidential group nor is it a domestic group. We are informed that "there is no single clearly defined group which stays together over time" (p. 169). We are given a description of a fluid system characterised by a considerable amount of social and spatial mobility. This is not to say however that kinship ties between parents and children or between siblings or conjugal ties do not persist over space

and through time. In fact they do and it is Dr Esther Goody's accomplishment to describe how and why this continuity occurs. For she states "The fact that people united by these strong primary bonds of siblingship and parenthood are often living in widely separated villages and that such ties tend to be maintained regardless of intervening distances is one of the main features of Gonja social structure" (p. 170). Because of frequent dissolution of marriage and what she calls terminal separation of marriage many young people must of necessity relate to their parents separately. Indeed many children are fostered by kin as a direct result of the dissolution of their family of orientation (p. 192). Another basic question raised by her materials is that of how to define divorce in the Gonja situation (pp. 140-141).

The student of comparative family sociology will be compelled by Dr. Esther Goody's material and definitions and analysis to look more closely at his categorizations of kinship and marriage systems and domestic phenomena. And from now onwards, it will be increasingly difficult for anthropology students, lawyers and others to talk as if all Ghanaian social systems had a lineage base! In addition the Ghanaian home scientist, who so far suffers from a lack of basic documentation of Ghanaian home management practices, has been offered a wealth of detail regarding such matters as the sharing of cooked food, the division of domestic labour between co-wives, and control and use of basic resources. The specialist in child development has been given an insight into fostering, an important child rearing institution in an African context, about which I believe more is to come.

The only thing which one seriously regrets about this important book is its prohibitively high price. A paper-backed student edition at a much lower price would be most welcome!

C. Oppong:

Institute of African Studies,
University of Ghana,
Legon

(THIRD INTERDISCIPLINARY FAMILY SEMINAR HELD JOINTLY WITH HOME SCIENCE DEPARTMENT)

FROM March 9-11, a seminar on aspects of Family Welfare and Planning took place at the Institute of African Studies, the third in a series of interdisciplinary family research seminars. It was held in conjunction with the Home Science Department. Seventeen papers were presented on a variety of topics by members of several departments and Institutes of the University of Ghana and of the Department of Social Welfare, Accra.

The papers dealt with a number of themes including family welfare and planning programmes; factors affecting family size and birth control, the care, health and nutritional status of children in the several kinds of domestic and institutional settings; women's roles in the home and at work; and the effects of conjugal family organisation and break down upon members welfare.

An important theme which constantly received attention was that of the woman's triple roles as mother, worker and wife and the burdens imposed upon her by simultaneous child-bearing and child-care and the task of earning a major part of the family living. The strains imposed by these multiple duties made it imperative to examine her possible sources of moral and material support in carrying out the important task of caring for the emotional and physical needs of the younger generation. At least two papers revealed situations in which adequate help from husbands and fathers was not forthcoming, while several papers explored the actual and potential roles played by Institutions such as Orphanages, Day Care Centres, the School Welfare Services and Nutrition Education Programmes in the task of assisting mother or assuming their responsibilities in part or fully. One paper raised the important question of the extent to which fostering of children by non-parental kin is common in Accra.

These discussions of child-care were complemented by those concerning family limitation the situations in which parents see fit to limit family size. The cases of clerks teachers and nurses in Accra were discussed in some details and put into a wider historical framework by the discussion on birth control movements and women power.

Important questions were raised with regard both to future research in these areas and to the organization of relevant and adequate welfare programmes and services.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY COLONIAL RECORDS PROJECT

The project completed its task at the end of last year, but work continues on the preparation of guides to the larger collections of papers. Over eighty of these guides have so far been produced, as well as material of general Commonwealth interest; they describe papers concerned with specific territories—East, West and Central Africa, the Middle and Far East, West Indies, Pacific and other areas. Copies of guides concerning a particular region can be obtained from The Librarian, Rhodes House Library, Oxford, where the collections are housed. There is no charge, but refund of postage is welcomed.

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COMMUNICATION

SEMINAR ON THE BRONG PEOPLE

An interdisciplinary seminar on the Brong people of central Ghana has been held at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon at the week-end, March 16—18.

The seminar, aimed at reaching conclusions on the bases for distinguishing the Brong from the other Akan sub-groups, and discussed the following papers:

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| Prof. M. Posnansky: | Archaeological aspects of the Brong Ahafo Region |
| Mr. E. K. Agorsa: | The pre-history of the Begho area. |
| Dr. Kwame Arhin: | Asante Security Posts in the Northwest. |
| Mr. K. A. Britwum: | Kwadwo Adinkra of Gyaman: A study of the relations between the Brong Kingdom of Gyaman and Asante. 1800—1818 |
| Dr. Florence Dolphyne: | Brong (Bono) Dialects. |
| Mr. K. O. Odoom: | Islam in the Brong Region |
| Dr. Kwame Daaku: | Politics among the Eastern Brong. |
| Mr. Kwasi Boateng: | Economic Geography of the Brong area. |
| Nana Kwakye Ameyaw:
(Takyimanhene) | The origin and extent of the Bono-Manso Kingdom. |

The archaeologist, Prof. Posnansky and E. K. Agorsa of the department of Archaeology, Legon, reviewed current archaeological work and findings at the famous ancient trading centre of Begho in north-western Ashanti, now the Brong Ahafo Region

Three historical papers, (Arhin, Agyeman and Daaku) examined aspects of Ashanti's relations with her conquered territories in the northwest and northeast and the light these relations throw on the political definition of 'Brong'. An interview by Arhin with Nana Kwakye Ameyaw, the present Takyimanthene, dealt with the origin and extent of the Bono-Manso Kingdom its defeat by Ashanti, and the fortunes of Techiman, her successor-state: The chief thought modern 'Brong' is derived from 'Bono' the first arrivals in the area, who established the Bono-Manso state.

Mr. K. Boateng of the Department of Geography, Legon, outlined the traditional and modern economies of the Brong-Ahafo Region. Mr Odoom of the Institute of African Studies spoke of the coming of Islam with the establishment of the Mande trading-post at Begho. Dr. F. Dolphyne of the Department of Linguistics, Legon, spoke of differences within the Brong dialect cluster and between Brong and the other Akan dialect clusters.

It is hoped that the papers read and discussed will form the basis of an interdisciplinary publication on the Brong peoples.

Kwame Arhin,

19th March, 1973.

