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FATHERING, MOTHERING AND MAKING SENSE OF *NTAMOBA*: REFLECTIONS ON THE ECONOMY OF CHILD-REARING IN COLONIAL ASANTE

Jean Allman

INTRODUCTION: THE CASE

In 1992, as part of a broader study of gender and social change in colonial Asante, I found myself ploughing through volumes of customary court cases at Manhyia Record Office—the archive attached to the Asantehene's (king's) palace in Kumasi (Ghana). Only four or five volumes in that rich collection antedate the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance of 1924—the British colonial statute which sought to systematise and regulate so-called 'native tribunals' as part of the implementation of indirect rule.¹ In one of those rare early volumes I came across *Kojo Asamoah v. Kojo Kyere*—a rather puzzling case between a matrilineal uncle, acting as head of family, and his niece's husband—heard before the Native Tribunal of Bompata, Ashanti Akyem, on 18 February 1921 (Native Tribunal of Bompata, 1921).² This was an oath case³ in which the plaintiff, Asamoah, charged the defendant, Kyere, with having 'falsely accused Plaintiff of depriving [him, the defendant, of] his two children'. According to Asamoah, his niece, Abena Esien, was married to the defendant and had two children with him. One day the niece complained that the defendant was not treating the children properly. The next morning one of the children came with a message from the father that he was claiming *ntamoba* fee. The uncle replied that he was not claiming the children, and the husband swore that he was.

In his opening statement the husband, as defendant, testified that his wife had earlier complained that he was depriving her of the children and that he had replied, 'They are my children, and the only work I am getting from them is my water for my bath.' A few days later, according to Kyere, the uncle came to his house and asked if he were claiming *ntamoba*. The uncle agreed 'to pay including any other expenses', if he were. Kyere decided to make a claim, but testified that he did not receive any compensation. According to his account, the plaintiff swore that he was 'not claiming the children and I swore that he is claiming them.' The Kyeres' son supported his father's testimony by stating that his uncle 'claimed back the children and Abena Esien to his people and he is the head. Plaintiff afterwards swore that he is not claiming the children, and my father the Defendant swore that he is claiming them.' Unfortunately, the court reporter did not record, as in many other cases in the volume, the tribunal's justifications for its finding. The case concludes abruptly with the tribunal having 'entered judgement for Defendant with costs hereunder assessed for depriving Defendant of his children.'

What struck me immediately about this case was the word *ntamoba*, which was obviously central to the claims being put forth. It appears that, if

the matrikin were claiming back their own, the father had the right to demand *ntamoba*, a sort of compensation for the loss of his children and their services. If such were the case, not only would *ntamoba* be central to the criss-crossing web of obligations, responsibilities and rights which bound a matrilineage (*abusua*) to the husbands/fathers of its members, but it would be singularly important in defining a father's responsibilities toward and rights in his children *vis-à-vis* the matrikin. There was, however, a hitch here, and it was a big one. At the time I found this case I had been working for nearly a year on the changing dynamics of mothering in colonial Asante and I had never once come across the term *ntamoba*. How could it have been so crucial in mediating these primary social relations and yet have left so few traces in the historical record? Although I had only fragments of evidence in hand, it seemed an issue worth pursuing. If, as I hypothesised, *ntamoba* was central to defining and mediating the economy of child-rearing in pre-colonial Asante, it had, by all indications, disappeared in the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, perhaps earlier. Its disappearance just might provide clues to the ways in which family economy in Asante was transformed over the past century.

The article which follows is very much a work-in-process. Though it has been over three years since I came across the Bompata case, and though I have pursued *ntamoba* with all the tenacity I can muster, I am still identifying the pieces of the puzzle and have only begun to consider the ways in which those pieces may fit together in some sort of a coherent whole. Part of the problem has been trying to ascertain precisely what kind of puzzle it is. My original hypothesis assumes that it is an historical puzzle, that *ntamoba*'s disappearance can be explained by fundamental changes in Asante society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But I am not yet prepared to rule out the possibility that the puzzle may also be one of place; that *ntamoba*, as understood from the Bompata case, was limited geographically to a very small area of Asante, and thus only rarely appears in the historical record. While it is difficult and often risky to build a hypothesis, much less an historical argument, when the sources are so slim and further digging seems only to turn up confusing and contradictory testimony, sometimes fragmentary evidence is all the social historian has to work with. An investigation of *ntamoba* seemed well worth the risk.

SOME CONTRADICTORY PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

Since discovering the Bompata case I have looked through a host of written sources, from mission and government reports to early twentieth-century ethnographic works, and I have incorporated questions about *ntamoba* in life histories collected in several Asante towns, including Kumasi, Tafo, Effiduasi, Asokore and Agogo. Most written sources, primary and secondary, including the works of R. S. Rattray, make no mention of the term (Rattray, 1923, 1927; Fortes, 1950). Of the hundred or so Asantes I have interviewed in past years between the ages of 68 and 100+, a good many could provide no definition of *ntamoba* at all. Those who could, offered many and contradictory meanings and only a handful of these seemed applicable to the original Bompata case.

Fortunately, among the few written sources there is some consensus on meaning. The second edition of Christaller's *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language* defines *tammoba* as 'indemnification to parents for a child that refuses to stay with them and runs away to the relations, *to be paid by the latter*' (1933: 493).⁴ This definition obviously works in the Bompata case, although the father was the only parent being 'indemnified'. Danquah (1928) provides a more elaborate but similar definition. It warrants fuller quotation:

A father has right of use over his children, but the true ownership is vested in their maternal family. The tie between mother and child can scarcely be broken; but the relationship between father and child can be destroyed by a customary process. This is the process involved in 'Tamboba'. It not infrequently happens that a father has to part with his 'right of use' over his children in favour of their maternal relations. This demand is generally made by the wife's family . . . For the father to part with his life interest in the children our customary law provides that a sum of money fixed by law and called Tamboba should be paid to him in respect of each child so taken away by its maternal relations. [Danquah, 1928: 189]⁵

Danquah's explanation of *ntamoba*,⁶ though derived from his experience in the neighbouring Akan state of Akyem Abuakwa, obviously resonates strongly with the details of the Bompata case in suggesting that a father's rights in his children could be terminated by the payment of compensation known as *tamboba* by the maternal family. So far, so good. But what of the oral sources?

Here is where the difficulties begin. Of those older Asantes with whom I have spoken in recent years, a majority did not recognise the term at all. Of those who recognised *ntamoba* and spoke with some confidence as they defined it, most remembered it as a marriage payment of one sort or another. A few, like Grace Amfum of Tafo, remember *ntamoba* as a payment by the husband-to-be to the future wife's matrilineal family (Amfum interview). Others recall a marriage payment either to the mother or to the father of the future wife. 'The parents give birth to a child,' explained Yaa Abrebese,

and they raise the child up. . . . In the course of raising up the child, the child might urinate on them, do all sorts of terrible things. Therefore, to compensate for that, you give *ntamoba* to either of the parents to compensate them for the trouble they have taken in bringing the child up. [Abebese interview]

That the father of the wife-to-be was the sole recipient of this payment is the more common response among those who recall *ntamoba* as a part of the rites of marrying. It is a response I found to be particularly common in Kumasi, especially around the *ahemfie* (palace) at Manhyia, where the reminiscences of many echo those of Akosua Mansah:

If a man wants to marry a woman he goes to see the mother, and the mother says he should go and see the father. The father will ask that you pay the *ntamoba*. . . . It is the father who receives *ntamoba*. That is to let him know that he has a daughter who is married to someone. [Mansah interview]

The recollections of Nana Kyeame Owusu Banahene, one of the Asantehene's senior linguists, provide additional detail:

The one who begets the woman is called *banintan* [father; parent]. Now this man, whether he begets a girl or a boy, will be nursing the baby while the woman is cooking. Some time, that child will be urinating on him. When the child grows up, and someone wants to marry her . . . that pain that he endured . . . means the man was really *banintan paa* [a good parent]. The money, you call *boba*. So when the man is now coming to take the daughter, he has to pay for the pain. That is called *ntamoba*. It is for the girl's father . . . [and] if anything happens in the family, he [the father] will know that the man has really married his daughter. [Banahene interview]⁷

Nana Baffuor Osei Akoto, another of the Asantehene's senior linguists and, at age 92, widely regarded as a leading authority on custom and tradition, also associates *ntamoba* with marriage and the payment of a fee by the husband-to-be to his future father-in-law (Akoto interview).

But other older Asantes, many of them outside of Kumasi proper, connect *ntamoba* not with rites of marriage but with rites of birth. Yaa Dufie of Effiduasi explains that 'when you give birth to a child and you are going to name the child, the things that the father brings to the child after the naming are called *ntamoba*' (Dufie interview). Efua Tebiaa of Agogo provides a similar definition, along with some etymological detail. She suggests that the term comes from the phrase *tan a wo ba* (the father who has given birth to a child) and that, in order for a man to be recognised as *tan a wo ba*, he must meet certain financial obligations: '. . . if the father gives birth to a child and he doesn't look after the child, and the child grows, and he wants to go for the child, he will be asked to pay all the expenses that the woman incurred in looking after the child' (A. Sewaa interview).

While Efua Tebiaa's definition of *ntamoba* seems to bear some relation to the kind of exchange being acted out in the Bompata case, the two concepts are certainly not identical. One is related to the establishing of rights in a child and the other is related to the termination of those rights. I have so far encountered only three oral accounts of *ntamoba* which parallel the meaning implicit in the Bompata case. In 1992 Ama Nyarko of Kumasi explained that if a man married a woman, had children with her, and did not take care of those children, the woman's family could remove the children from him. If the man then swore that the children should not attend his funeral, that is, that he was severing all connection with them, it was called *ntamoba*. Ama Nyarko did not link the term with any specific payment, just to the severing of a father's rights (Nyarko interview). Thomas E. Kyei, an Asante educator who worked with Meyer Fortes on the Ashanti Social Survey,⁸ remembers *ntamoba* in much the same way as Danquah reported it in 1928, as a sum 'paid by the family to the father to signify that the father has been relieved of all the fatherhood responsibilities.' Kyei recalls only one such case from his childhood in Agogo. 'There have to be extraordinary circumstances,' he explains, 'for a father's rights in his children to be totally severed' (Kyei interview).⁹

In the summer of 1995 I finally stumbled upon someone whose definition of *ntamoba* not only paralleled the meaning implicit in the Bompata case but

derived from personal experience. Kwame Nkansah, a 90 year old man living in Agogo, explained; 'You have given birth to a son. You have raised him and then he says he will not serve you. Then you have to get *ntamoba*. You will get it from his family.' He recalled being told as a child that *ntamoba* was demanded of his family. His grandmother had given birth to his mother and an uncle. Instead of serving their father, the two went to stay with their uncle in Akyem. 'When they came back,' he recalled, 'the father said, no, he would not respond, and they asked why. He said now they know where they come from, and he will demand *ntamoba*. He demanded [from the family] £3 for each of them' (Nkansah interview).

ABERRATION OR ARTEFACT: HISTORICISING THE CONFLICTING FRAGMENTS

So what is one to make of these conflicting and contradictory definitions—*ntamoba* as any number of marriage payments, *ntamoba* as a rite connected with birthing and naming, and *ntamoba* as marking the termination of a father's rights in his offspring? That the definition of *ntamoba* as a marriage payment to the wife's father was widespread in Kumasi, especially around the Asantehene's court, and that the definitions closest to the Bompata case seem to derive, like the Bompata material, either from Asante Akyem or from Akyem itself, may suggest that the inconsistencies here are simply geographical. This simple formulation, however, would not explain why many older, long-time inhabitants of Agogo (Asante Akyem) unequivocally define *ntamoba* as a marriage payment, or why the informants in M. J. Field's 1938 study in Akyem offered similar testimony. The problem may, indeed, be one not simply of location but of time and of social rank. What happens if, rather than dismissing the 1921 Bompata case as local aberration, we investigate it as historical artefact?

First of all, we should recognise that the multiple definitions emerging in both oral and written sources are not entirely disconnected. They all seem to share an underlying concern for a husband/father's reciprocal obligations and rights *vis-à-vis* his wife's and/or his children's family, or *abusua*. All these definitions situate *ntamoba* as a mechanism through which an *abusua*'s relationship with the husbands/fathers of its members is mediated. That the connections among definitions may be quite close—indeed, that they may begin to collapse one upon the other with closer inspection—is suggested by Akua Senti's remarks:

You see, normally they do the [marriage] rites twice—once for the uncle and once for the father. In fact, the one for the father is called *ntamoba*. In the olden days, about a week after a child is born, a father will name the child. If a girl, he will give her a cloth to lie on. It is called *ntam*. So when it is time for the girl to get married, and the man is doing the rites, the man will pay back the father's *ntam*, that which the father paid when he was naming the child, his daughter. [Senti interview]¹⁰

For Senti, all of *ntamoba*'s definitions seem to simmer down into one transactive meaning. Indeed, it may be useful for the moment to take this sort

of generic notion of *ntamoba* and situate it among the bits of evidence we have regarding a father's rights in and obligations toward his children in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods. This process may provide at least some clues to the disappearance of *ntamoba* from the historical record.

And what do we know of fathering in pre-colonial Asante? Unfortunately, the record is scant and uneven, our best sources still being the works of the anthropologist R. S. Rattray. Admittedly, Rattray paints a picture of the 'Ashanti father' in a rather normative, unchanging world. However, his early twentieth-century informants do open an important window into the last half of the nineteenth century. Much of Rattray's presentation on the 'status and position of the Ashanti father', as he terms it, consists of quotes from 'fathers and mothers and uncles themselves' and those individuals were drawing on experience from the last decades before colonial rule (Rattray, 1929). From them we learn that, while it was expected that children, especially sons, would live with their father once they passed infancy,¹¹ a father by no means owned his children. He could not pawn them, and they could be removed from his care by the uncle, should the father be 'too poor to bring up the child properly'. One informant reported, 'A father has no real [legal?] power over his grown-up children. If they wish to go to their *abusua* [blood] he cannot prevent them' (Rattray, 1929: 8–10). While a man passed on his *ntoro* (spirit) to his children, was responsible for naming them¹² and, at the other end of the life cycle, his children were responsible for providing a coffin upon his death, obligations and rights over the intervening years were not rooted in notions of absolute ownership or final authority (Kyei, 1992; Fortes, 1950). In short, a father was expected to raise his children, to discipline them and to train them; in turn, he could expect to be served by them, but under no circumstances did he own them.

Ntamoba in its generic form makes complete sense in the late nineteenth/early twentieth-century framework sketched above, particularly if life cycles are drawn into the picture. It seems to articulate the kind of exchange in marriage and parenting whereby a husband/father and an *abusua* entered into an ongoing process of transacting duties for rights of use. We can see, for example, that a father's right of access to his children was initiated with his completion of the rites of naming.¹³ As a result of naming his child, the father accepted the responsibility for training her/him. He now had certain legitimate duties toward and claims upon the child which the child's mother and her *abusua* were bound to recognise. If, after the child had reached an age when he/she should be serving the father and did not, the father could demand the return of *ntamoba* in compensation, because he had met his obligations but was being denied his rights of use, either by the child's behaviour or by a decision of the *abusua*. Paternal obligations and rights, therefore—the father's connection with his child's *abusua*—could be terminated by the father demanding and receiving *ntamoba* or by the mother's family offering and the father accepting *ntamoba* as indemnification.¹⁴ Finally, we can see *ntamoba* mediating the relationship between a father and the man his daughter intended to marry. This may be seen as the penultimate manifestation of *ntamoba* in the life cycle of a father/daughter relationship, the final one being the daughter's obligation to contribute to the cost of her father's coffin. In this context the father as *banintan a wo ba*, as

the one who parented this girl child, was compensated by the husband-to-be and, in turn, was now released from any obligation to his daughter. The primary reciprocal relationship (obligations in exchange for rights of use) involving the daughter would now be between her *abusua* and her new husband (who in some senses replaced the father). Of course, what is particularly interesting about this transaction is its gender specificity. There was nothing similar to mark a transformation in the father's responsibilities toward and rights of use in his grown son. Indeed, much of the evidence we have suggests that a father's reciprocal relationship with his son and his son's family was far more enduring than that with his daughter.¹⁵ A father, according to Rattray, was supposed to find a wife for his son and

pay the 'headmoney' for him. The father will give his son a *dampon* (sleeping room) . . . and a *pato* . . . in which the wife will cook. He will stay with his father until his father dies, and then may go to his own uncle. [Rattray, 1929: 9]¹⁶

In other words, a father's active reciprocal relationship with his son/son's *abusua* was maintained throughout the father's lifetime.¹⁷ That with his daughter and her *abusua* virtually ended with the daughter's marriage, the only remaining service due being the daughter's obligation to help pay for her father's coffin.

The generic *ntamoba* that I have interpolated into Rattray's early twentieth-century evidence gives us some sense, normative though it may be, that ownership of children in Asante was supposed to rest firmly with their *abusua*. A father's rights in his children were supposed to be rights of use only, despite the fact that a child, particularly a male child, might spend his entire life in his father's house. That a father's rights of use were so defined is best evidenced by the fact that a father could not pawn his children, though he could receive them in pawn (Austin, 1994: 193).¹⁸ That his rights, moreover, were temporally circumscribed is evidenced in the role of *ntamoba* in his daughter's marriage. Over the course of a life cycle, a father's rights of use in and his duties and obligations toward his children changed according to the children's age and gender. *Ntamoba*, we can hypothesise, may have been transacted in many forms, but its basic role as definer and mediator of paternal obligations and rights of use appears remarkably consistent, from naming to marrying. Indeed, these dynamic and complex processes of exchange seem much less confusing when one recalls the proverb *Gyadua si abontene ne hi wo fi* (Rattray, 1929: 19). We are reminded, quite simply, that in a normative world 'the *gyadua* [tree] stands in the street, but its roots are in the house'.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF NTAMOBA AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE FAMILY ECONOMY OF CHILD-REARING

And so what happened? How and why may this notion of *ntamoba* have disappeared from the historical record? Unfortunately, Rattray provides us with few clues. Though he gives us a late nineteenth/early-twentieth century canvas from which to speculate, the picture he paints has no historical dimension and conveys little sense of place—social or geographical. It

is worth noting briefly, moreover, that, of all the roles and relationships Rattray investigated during his time in Asante, fatherhood and fathering were among the most troublesome for him, and he ended up relying far more on direct testimony than on his own observations and analysis when he put together his chapter on 'Father and children' in *Ashanti Law and Constitution*.¹⁹ It is clear that Rattray had a very difficult time getting past his own notions of the 'natural' father and the 'natural' affinity between fathers and their children in this section of his work. For him, matrilineal affiliations were 'man-made', while a father's role was original, essential. This is particularly evident in the last paragraphs of his discussion:

Patria potestas in Ashanti dwindle to rather vague unsubstantial claims, based on the natural, no less than the supernatural, forces at work in his favour, but opposed by all the man-made customary laws of the tribe. . . .

. . . It would perhaps not be far from the mark to suggest that an Ashanti passes through two distinct periods in his life: childhood and youth, which are spent with the natural father, to whom he gives a natural obedience and affection; these are later to be weakened by the materialistic and kindred considerations which are to draw him ever farther from his natural parent and towards his uncle . . . [1929: 16–17]

It is not implausible that Rattray may have missed the mark here. *Ntamoba*, already declining in social importance, may not have been visible to him or to his European contemporaries because their understanding of fatherhood was rooted so firmly in essentialised notions of natural rights and affinities, of natural ownership eroded by materialist matrikin.

But if we can, for the moment, accept the basic premise that *ntamoba* existed at some time in some parts of Asante (but that European writers, for whatever reasons, could not always 'see' it), then how may we begin to explain, historically, its disappearance from certain parts of the social fabric? I would like to propose here a two-stage hypothesis that attempts to foreground time and social place/status as key variables in explaining the disappearance of *ntamoba*. The first stage is based on the postulation that *ntamoba* is of great antiquity, that as a mechanism for mediating the relationship between a man and his wife/children's *abusua* it may very well date back to the creation, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, of the great Akan matriclans. Ivor Wilks has argued, quite convincingly, that we can associate the emergence of the *abusua-kese* (big lineage) with the clearing of the forest and the development of food crop cultivation. The matriclans, quite simply, served to 'facilitate the assimilation of strangers and . . . of the unfree labour being drawn into the forest country'. Yet the labour necessary during peak periods in the cycle of cultivation (the felling of large trees, for example, or the clearing of land) required co-operation among several domestic groups. That co-operation, Wilks argues, was 'the most common between groups linked by marriage: that is, that a man obtains the help of his wife's brother (and thereby often procures the services of his own grown son)' (Wilks, 1993b: 41–90, esp. 62 and 81). *Ntamoba*, I would suggest, makes complete sense in this framework as a way of mediating and articulating a father's access to the labour of his wife, his children and their *abusua*.

But does *ntamoba* continue to make sense, as we move from Asante's immediate protohistorical period (*firi tetemu*) to the historical? The answer is—for some, yes, but for others, no. The emergence of the Akan state (*ɔman*) coincided with the emergence of specific social groups or classes for whom *ntamoba* would have made little sense. Again, Wilks's work on Asante's early history provides some important clues. In 'Founding the political kingdom' he argues for the critical role of entrepreneurs ('big men' or *aberempɔn*) in the founding of the early Akan state. 'Those who controlled the production and sale of gold,' he proposes,

were those able to procure a supply of unfree labor. Those who procured unfree labor were those able to create arable land within the forest. Those who created the arable were those who founded the numerous Akan polities. We see, in other words, a class of Akan entrepreneurs emerging: a class of those able to use the strength of the world bullion market, and the availability of labor locally (whether through Wangara or Portuguese suppliers), in such a way as to create the new agrarian system. [1993a: 96]

The descendants of these early developers became the nobility, the *adehyee*, of the state, and were distinguished from both free settlers (*ɔmanmufo*) and from the unfree. Many from among this latter group, Wilks hypothesises, were incorporated into Akan society as members of the *gyaasefo* ('the people of the hearth') who were the servants of the nobility. Certainly, for the nobility and for the unfree, *ntamoba* could not mediate transactions surrounding marriage and child-rearing in the same way it did for free-born commoners. For example, the slave wives of an *oberempɔn* gave birth to children who were incorporated into their father's lineage, not into the lineage of their mother, who was considered kinless. While *ntamoba* as a marriage payment to the *oberempɔn* father may make sense here, little else does, for the father and his royal lineage quite clearly owned such children and had rights over them that a male commoner married to a female commoner simply did not.²⁰ The meaning of patrilineality, in other words, had to become class/rank-specific. I would like to suggest, therefore, that the first stage in *ntamoba*'s fracturing and eventual disappearance coincided with the emergence of the state in the Akan forest.²¹ While *ntamoba* could continue to articulate the ongoing exchange between a common man and the *abusua* of his free wives and children, it was obsolete in the realm of power, wealth and privilege in which both *oberempɔn* and *gyaasefo* operated. In that world, trees might stand in the street but—the Akan proverb notwithstanding—the roots of some of them could be found there, as well.

Certainly *ntamoba* would not have been the only social transaction reconfigured or even undermined by the emergence of the Akan state. Adultery (*ayerefɛ*) may provide an interesting parallel. We know from our very earliest sources that, among commoners, when a man's wife had a sexual connection with another man, the husband was entitled to a small compensation (*ayefare*). The case was considered a domestic matter (*efiesem*). To have a connection with the wife of an officeholder, however, was a crime against the state (*ɔman akyiwadie*) and compensation was awarded based upon the rank of the man whose sexual rights in his wife had

been violated. Compensation could range from a substantial quantity of gold to capital punishment for the offender, the wife and members of her family (Bowdich, 1824: 259; McCaskie, 1981; Allman, 1997). Adultery compensation came to reflect and articulate power relations within the Asante state. *Ntamoba* may have been reconfigured in similar ways. For those with power, it seems to have become a simple marriage payment, but for commoners it probably continued as an important mechanism for transacting exchanges between a husband and his wife/children's *abusua* well into the nineteenth century. That the meaning of *ntamoba* may have been class/rank-specific for a very long time could very well explain why those so close to the Asante court today (including Akyeam Nana Owusu Banahene and Nana Baffuor Akoto) insist on *ntamoba*'s exclusive rendering as a marriage payment,²² while those further from the court, both in physical distance and in terms of social identity, seem more likely to posit a range of definitions, including the one so central to the 1921 Bompata case.

But, that particular case notwithstanding, by the time we reach the restoration of the Asante Confederacy Council in 1935, if not decades before, *ntamoba* clearly exists only in a rare, vestigial form and primarily as a type of marriage payment. Even among commoners we have only scant evidence of its existence. Why? It is my speculation that *ntamoba* vanishes among commoners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for the same reason it was reconfigured among Asante's ruling classes hundreds of years before. To put it quite simply, *ntamoba* no longer made sense for anyone—rulers or ruled, noble or commoner. And it no longer made sense because a commoner father's rights in his children, like an *oberempon*'s rights over his non-free children, had become inalienable. His role *vis-à-vis* his children had been transformed from one of rights of use bound to reciprocal obligations to one of outright ownership. His relationship to his offspring was no longer part of a complex process of exchange with their *abusua*. It stood alone as fact; it no longer worked as process. In this new configuration, how could a father be compensated for the loss of use rights in his children when those rights had been transformed into rights of ownership that were, at once, inalienable?

The forces behind this more recent transformation were undoubtedly many and multivalent and a full account would require a detailed social history of Asante's late nineteenth and early twentieth-century past. This is not the place to undertake such a monumental project, though it is long overdue.²³ What we can do at this stage is identify areas worthy of investigation on the basis of existing evidence—evidence gathered primarily from customary court records, missionary and government documentation and personal narratives. These sources suggest that we should look closely at (1) the impact of cocoa and cash on Asante family economy, (2) the ideological influence of missions on Asante conceptions of marriage and family, and (3) the specific effects of schools and school fees on family economy. These areas of investigation are far from discrete; they overlap and are mutually constitutive. However, for the sake of clarity and organisation in this brief discussion, it may be useful to treat them separately.

That cocoa and the broad-based exchange economy that followed in its wake upset the 'old order of economic relations between wife and husband',

as K. Abu has written, would be disputed by few (Abu, 1983: 160; Allman, 1996; Austin, 1987; Dunn and Robertson, 1973; Grier, 1992; Hill, 1963; Mikell, 1989; Okali, 1983; Vellenga, 1986). The relations of production in cocoa seemed to erode, though certainly not destroy, Asante notions of matrilineal inheritance and to lend primacy to economic relations among members of the conjugal family. As Austin and others have shown, the labour necessary for the initial expansion of cocoa into Asante came 'very largely from established, non-capitalist sources', including 'farmowners themselves, their families, their slaves and pawns, co-operative groups of neighbours and, in the case of chiefs, *corvée* labour provided by their subjects' (Austin, 1987: 260–2; Grier, 1992: 314; Austin, 1994: 137–45). After the abolition of slavery and of pawning in 1908, wives' and children's labour became increasingly important, particularly for the establishment of farms on the cocoa frontier. By the end of World War I there was little land available for cocoa cultivation around Kumasi or to its south and east, so the industry began to spread westward, and in these frontier areas, particularly when farmers had little access to cash, there was heavy reliance on the labour of wives and offspring (Adomako-Sarfoh, 1974; Okali, 1983). Quite early, therefore, the conjugal-centred nature of the labour process on the cocoa frontier pitted wives and children against their husband's/father's matrikin. The labour invested in a husband/father's cocoa farm could yield no long-term security, since the husband owned the farm and product, fully controlled the proceeds, and members of his matrilineal family, by Asante customs of inheritance, were to succeed to the property.

Throughout the first decades of the twentieth century wives, children and, at times, even husbands challenged matrilineal inheritance on the grounds that wives' and children's labour investment in a cocoa farm contributed to the husband/father's wealth.²⁴ Many argued for the right of wives and children to inherit at least a portion of the estate.²⁵ At times, husbands willed cocoa farmers to their wives or children to prevent their matrikin from inheriting the property and in acknowledgement of the labour invested by their conjugal family. Many women and children were not so fortunate, however, and their experiences mirror those of Akua-Addae of Tafo, who, with their daughters, assisted her husband on his cocoa farm for many years. When he continually refused to give them even a portion of the farm, or to include such provision in his will, Akua divorced him. 'I would not continue to marry him,' she recalled (Addae interview). Personal reminiscences like these make it abundantly clear that cocoa and the exchange economy did not automatically lead to the destruction of matrilineal inheritance, and Okali (1983: 169) is certainly right to argue that much in 'male–female interactions [is] still determined by matrilineal kinship ideology and practices'. But surely something was fundamentally transformed *within* the conjugal family economy when joint labour produced a cash crop for sale and not food for consumption! A woman's labour (not to mention that of her children), as Roberts (1987: 54) suggests, was now compensated 'only in the continued obligation of her husband to provide part of her subsistence from his own earnings'. The reproduction of the family was now based in production *and* exchange, and the husband/father became the central, mediating figure through whom the value of wives' and children's labour was realised.²⁶

Most European social scientists in the mid-twentieth century recognised that cocoa had done much to alter the family in Asante. Meyer Fortes, after completing work on the Ashanti Social Survey of 1945–46, argued that cocoa, among other things, fuelled the tendency ‘to leave property to children instead of nephews and nieces’. But Fortes, like Danquah in discussions of Akyem Abuakwa, believed that ideological forces were at work as well, that missionary activity was as important a force for change in inheritance patterns as cash cropping (Danquah, 1928; Fortes, 1948).²⁷ Although we are only beginning to understand the complex and conflicting ways in which missionary activity impacted on Asante life (and Asantes, in turn, shaped mission efforts²⁸) few would deny that most missionaries came with clear ideas about the importance of the conjugal unit and of the centrality of the father to that unit. All mission groups active in Asante in the early twentieth century encouraged their members to marry under government ordinance,²⁹ which limited a husband to one wife, made divorce much more difficult and entitled a wife to one-third of her husband’s estate and children to one-third of their father’s estate. (The matrikin were left with one-third.) Most missionaries seem to have shared the views of the Rev. K. Horn, who wrote in 1931:

Some . . . feel that . . . Christians . . . have no quarrel with the matriarchal system. They would maintain that the father–mother–children group is European rather than specifically Christian, and urge that it has as many disadvantages as the matriarchal system. I feel myself that the guardianship of children belongs inherently in Christian marriage to their parents, and the inclination of thoughtful Ashantes seems to be definitely in this direction. In other words, on almost every count the Ashanti and Christian ideals of marriage and the family are opposed. [WMMS, 1931a]

The Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society, one of the more active in the region, reported in 1931 that all its African ministers were married under the ordinance, as well as all its trained catechists and most of its teachers and circuit agents (WMMS, 1931b). Yet how to encourage ordinary members of the Church to marry under the ordinance remained a difficult task, and much of the Methodist mission effort in the early 1930s seems to have been devoted to facilitating this process.³⁰ C. Eddy, who taught at Wesley College in Kumasi, pleaded with mission headquarters in the late 1930s for permission to bring his wife and young twins to Kumasi. He argued that their presence would serve as an example ‘that we hope to set to our staff and students of Christian family life’ and that it would provide a place where students from the neighbouring girls’ school (Mmofraturu) could receive training (WMMS, 1938).

Eddy’s remarks highlight the importance of education in the missionaries’ ideological battle against Asante marriage. The success or not of that battle is very much an open question, although the evidence I have encountered suggests that missions were not particularly effective in their struggle against Asante customs of marriage (Allman, 1994, 1996). But what did reach from the mission school right into the web of crisscrossing obligations and rights within the family was school fees.³¹ Although a much more narrowly

defined field of investigation than cocoa or missionary ideology, school fees, I would argue, cut right to the heart of daily negotiations over child-rearing. Indeed, nearly every older Asante to whom I have spoken over the past four years has mentioned school fees—for boys and for girls—as a never-ending source of conflict between mothers and fathers. A focus on this new family expenditure, therefore, can lend important insight into transformations within family economy, particularly in the changing rights and obligations of fathers. As mentioned above, before the advent of mission schools in Asante, a father was responsible for the training of his children, particularly his sons. It is not surprising, therefore, that, when mission schools and fees entered the picture in the early twentieth century, most understood the fees to be the responsibility of the father. But a father's cash expenditure on education could not simply replace a father teaching a son, for example, to farm or to hunt. It brought with it an assumption of greater rights of use in, and perhaps even ownership of, children. In other words, cash investment in a child's education transformed a father's role within his conjugal family. We can catch glimpses of this process in a 1936 case heard before the Asantehene's Divisional Court B. Kwasi Quansah filed suit against R. A. Mensah for £100 damages. He claimed that his daughter, Mary Quansah, while engaged to another man, was impregnated by Mr Mensah, a teacher at his daughter's school in Kumasi. The future husband subsequently refused to marry Quansah's daughter. The £100, according to the plaintiff, represented the expenses he had incurred as a result of supporting his daughter through her pregnancy and after the birth. They also reflected the fact that the defendant had 'spoiled my daughter's school time', thus adversely affecting her future economic well-being (Asantehene's Divisional Court B, 1936). In many ways the facts of this case are telling. Mr Quansah filed the suit alone; no representatives of Mary's matrikin were present. None, apparently, assisted her during her pregnancy. Moreover, unlike the daughter in Rattray's account, who was trained in her father's house, served him and then went off to marry, Quansah's daughter went to school. Quansah had invested heavily in her education and appeared to exercise full rights of ownership over her. As a result of the pregnancy, his cash investment in her future had been jeopardised, so he sought legal recourse.

Kwasi Quansah was certainly not alone. Colonial era documentation, from customary court records to district commissioner diaries, is replete with stories of individuals seeking recompense or satisfaction amidst the chaos and conflict generated by the factors highlighted here: by cocoa, mission ideology or the simple introduction of school fees. The testimony recorded in those cases provides invaluable insight into the ways in which broad social forces could play out in an individual's life. The judgements, moreover, allow us to look for trends, for changes in so-called 'customary law' in colonial Asante. For our purposes here, they provide an important, though still tentative, index of social change. The work I have done with cases over the past six years,³² for example, suggests a gradual trend in the kinds of judgements rendered in child custody/child support cases—a trend away from insisting on the reciprocity of a father's rights and a father's obligations to the recognition of paternal rights independent of the fulfilment of any obligations toward wife and/or children. The very earliest of these recorded

cases (before 1910) were heard before colonial officials who seemed to be utterly confused. They understood that children 'belonged to the mother's family', but were in complete disagreement among themselves over what that meant in terms of a father's rights. An incident in 1906–07 in which the Adansi *ɔmanhene* claimed the child of a deceased Adansi woman on behalf of her family demonstrates the depths of misunderstanding and discord among British officials. The woman had been married to an Assin man, and the man refused to give up the child. The Adansihene demanded the child's return. For months colonial officials forwarded reports and traded minutes on Asante 'customary law' regarding ownership of children. Virtually no one agreed with anyone else. ('Ashanti—Native Laws and Customs, n.d.; Ashanti Regional Administration, 1905, 1907). Unfortunately the case disappears from the historical record before a judgement was rendered.

After 1924 and the implementation of the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance in Asante, colonial administrators empowered chiefs and their councillors to rule on 'custom',³³ so it is after 1924 with the establishment of native tribunals throughout the region that we encounter a wide range of customary court documentation that allows us to chart changes in so-called 'customary law'. Certainly, from the very beginning of this period, we see numerous cases in which native tribunals rule on inheritance cases in favour, at least partially, of a wife's and/or children's claim on a husband's/father's estate (Native Tribunal of the Kumasihene, 1927a, b). These cases reflect a growing social tendency, I would argue, to recognise an inalienable connection between fathers and children. In child custody/child maintenance cases, however, a noticeable change in judgements occurs more slowly and less dramatically. Many of the judgements from cases of the late 1920s and early 1930s seem to echo what we know of rights in and obligations toward children in the pre-colonial period. In these cases reciprocity was upheld. For example, in *Kwadjo Safo v. Kwame Antwi et al.* (Native Tribunal of the Kumasihene, 1929b), the plaintiff claimed £100 in damages from his wife's family because, as he testified, 'they had deprived me of my children'. When subsequent testimony proved that the father had not supported his children over the years, the plaintiff was nonsuited with costs 'in that his action is inconsistent with Native Customary Law'.

Other cases, particularly as we move into the Second World War, were less likely to enforce reciprocity and therefore more likely to uphold paternal rights independent of paternal duties. *Ama Manu v. Kwasi Buo* (Asantehene's Divisional Court B, 1940) is a case in point. Here Ama Manu claimed £8 5s 0d in maintenance and subsistence from her ex-husband. She testified that she had been married to the defendant's brother, but that the brother had gotten quite sick and was unable to support her and their children. She asked for a divorce, but his family asked her to wait. When her husband died, his brother agreed to take her as his wife. 'Nine months passed,' Ama testified, 'and nobody subsisted me and so some man had sexual connection with me.' Kwasi Buo then demanded that she name the offender, so he could collect an adultery payment. In his defence Kwasi Buo argued that he was 'not liable to pay any subsistence or maintenance fee to her, especially as her husband was sick and she was misconducting herself with other men'. The court ruled against the plaintiff, finding that her

'behaviour toward her sick husband' meant she was 'customarily not entitled to any subsistence by the defendant'. The judgement in this case is particularly telling because the reciprocity in earlier cases is simply not enforced here or, from another perspective, is enforced but in one direction only. Ama's and her children's right to subsistence was made dependent upon Ama's fidelity. Paternal rights, however, stood alone. They did not rest on the ability or the willingness of either her first husband or his brother (second husband) to provide Ama and her children, with subsistence.

In cases like this, and countless others, *ntamoba* makes absolutely no sense, because paternal rights were, at once, severed from paternal duties and transformed from rights of use to inalienable rights of ownership. Indeed, a father's relation to his child and to his wife's children's *abusua* resembled nothing less than the relations which prevailed in pre-colonial and early colonial times, when a father held his child as a pawn—a practice technically outlawed by the British in 1908.³⁴ As Rattray wrote, a father could not pawn his child, but he could receive the child as a pawn from the child's *abusua*. When this occurred, a different set of rights and duties was conferred upon the father. He was now entitled to half of any profits made by the child and he had a 'legal right [inalienable right?] to the child's services and . . . might take him away without asking the permission of the *abusua*'. In the case of a pawned daughter, the father's role in any marriage arrangements became paramount. He received the largest share of the *aseda* [thank-you offering] and retained 'more control over the daughter than either the husband or the woman's *abusua*' after the marriage (Rattray, 1929: 24, 51). A father also became responsible for half his child/pawn's debts. A father was not liable for the debts of his free child (*adehye wo*). These points are particularly important because we begin to see customary courts of the post-1924 period rendering judgements which uphold, in quite specific and explicit ways, the sorts of rights and duties which were associated with fathers and pawn-children—but long after the abolition of pawnage, when all children, at least in the eyes of the law, were free-born. For example, in the 1929 case between Akosua Adae and Kwaku Ahindwa (Native Tribunal of the Kumashene, 1929a), the plaintiff complained that her ex-husband was not paying the debts incurred by their children. The court ultimately ruled that Ahindwa could have no 'right of commanding his children' until he paid half the debts incurred by his children. While the judgement in this case upheld some sort of reciprocity, it was the reciprocity of a father/pawn-child relationship, not that of a father and a free-born child.

That pawnage, rather than being effectively abolished, became hidden within a changing family economy is certainly evident in the recent, path-breaking works of G. Austin and B. Grier. Both scholars explore the ways in which pawnage became a means of mobilising the labour of children and wives in the rapidly expanding cocoa economy of the early twentieth century. Indeed, Austin writes of the 'feminisation' of pawning in Asante and Grier of a 'coercive and exploitative precapitalist relationship . . . [becoming] re-legitimised and harnessed to . . . accumulation' (Austin, 1994; 137; Grier, 1992: 182).³⁵ Both, moreover, explore in some detail the payment of *tiri sika*—a marriage payment by which a husband loaned his wife's *abusua* a given sum of money. It was the payment of the *tiri sika* in

the period before 1908 which rendered a free-born wife essentially a pawn-wife. After 1908 the payment continued as one of a variety of marriage payments, but at least one missionary observer in the early 1930s reported that it was being increasingly emphasised in all marriage ceremonies as the 'essential ceremony in a native marriage contract' (WMMS, 1931c).³⁶ Such an emphasis surely suggests that pawning and marrying were becoming overlapping systems of exchange, as were pawning and fathering.

But what were the long-term implications of this overlap? What did it mean for fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, daughters and sons, that pawning was rearticulated in colonial family relationships? Because Austin and Grier trace pawnage as labour acquisition, they are not concerned, in the long run, with the ways in which marriage and parenting, broadly speaking, were impacted. But the repercussions here, I would argue, were tremendous and enduring. As pawnage was collapsed into the categories of son, daughter and wife, rights, duties and obligations in Asante were broadly recast. The rights of the colonial father/husband became the rights of the nineteenth-century pawn-holder. And those rights, in turn, became increasingly detached from reciprocal obligations and duties. We need to connect the final disappearance of *ntamoba* in Asante, therefore, with the conflation of subordinant categories or, more specifically, with wife/pawn, daughter/pawn, son/pawn.³⁷ That *ntamoba* survived in Asante only in a vestigial form, as a marriage payment from son-in-law to father-in-law, makes sense in this context. Only in this form did *ntamoba* not challenge or undercut the inalienable rights of ownership of the colonial Asante father. As a one-way marriage payment from son-in-law to father-in-law, it was given in recognition of all that the father had endured in raising the child and marked the moment wherein (certainly not the *process* whereby) the daughter/pawn became wife/pawn, as well.³⁸

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: MATRILINY, PATRILINY AND WHAT GETS LOST IN BETWEEN

Some of the social processes described in this article have been treated elsewhere, largely by anthropologists, who have tended to frame the discussion in terms of an inevitable, ongoing battle between matrilineal and patrilineal tendencies in Asante society. Rattray ruminated on the *ntoro* (spirit) inherited from one's father v. the *mogya* (blood) one inherited from the mother.³⁹ Fortes described a 'submerged descent line' and cast the matri-v. patri-battle in terms of continued efforts to 'adjust the jural and moral claims and bonds arising out of marriage and fatherhood to those imposed by matrilineal kinship' (Fortes, 1963; 1950). But, 'left to itself', Field (1948: 118) predicted for Akyem, matrilineality would 'die a natural death'. What these sorts of discussion have in common is a tendency to view social forces or social power as part of a zero-sum game, with patrilineal forces of the twentieth century counterbalancing matrilineal success. In other words, if matrilineality and avuncular power eroded or diminished, then patrilineality and the power of the father must have increased by precisely the amount the other decreased. This equation does not get us very far and obscures much that is going on. The evidence we have surrounding the disappearance of

ntamoba in fact suggests that a society like Asante can be tenaciously matrilineal and *at the same time* display an increasing degree of patriarchal power—and I use ‘patriarchal’ here in its most literal sense as ‘rule by the father’.

That matriliney could accommodate growing patriarchal power should come as no surprise. Anthropologists and historians alike have long understood the incredible flexibility of matrilineal organisations. Wilks, in particular, makes a convincing case (1993b) for locating the very origins of matrilineality in an Akan agrarian revolution that required a flexible mechanism for mobilising and incorporating vast numbers of unfree labourers into an expanding agricultural society. The subsequent emergence of the Akan state (*ɔman*) and increased social differentiation based on wealth and political power did not render matrilineal organisation obsolete. Indeed, Douglas’s 1969 conclusion that matriliney is not necessarily doomed by increasing wealth still seems to hold more than a quarter of a century later. ‘Matriliney would be capable of flourishing in market economies,’ Douglas wrote,

whenever the demand for men is higher than the demand for things. Because of the scope it gives for personal unasccribed achievement of leadership, matrilineal kinship could have advantages in an expanding market economy. On my view the enemy of matriliney is not the cow as such, not wealth as such, not economic development as such, but economic restriction. [Douglas, 1971: 123–37]

But the flexibility or adaptability highlighted by Douglas and others requires historicising. We must not mistake the durability of matriliney in Asante for immutability. For example, when we try to make sense of *ntamoba* in the context of a domestic economy of child-rearing in colonial Asante, we see fundamental transformations occurring in the power of husbands/fathers *vis-à-vis* their wives/children. These transformations occurred without undermining the basic structures of matrilineal kinship. This was no zero-sum game.⁴⁰

As a father’s rights grew increasingly inalienable in colonial Asante, they were detached from any reciprocal obligations to his children. A father owned his children whether he provided them with subsistence or not. This transformation occurred at a time when the economic cost of rearing children, particularly as a result of school fees, was rising dramatically. That cost would not be integrated into an ongoing system of exchange between a father and his children’s mother and their *abusua*. A father would not be obliged to meet them in order to retain his rights of use in his children. Indeed, there were increasingly fewer ways to encourage/force/persuade a father to view those costs as his obligation, because none of his actions or inactions could threaten his ownership of the children. Fatherhood was now a *position* endowed with inalienable rights; it was not something you *did*, that you negotiated via extended processes of exchange involving rights and service.⁴¹

The implications of these developments were obviously far-reaching and even a brief consideration would take me well beyond the bounds of this article. It is, however, important to note in concluding that much of the

burden of these profound transformations in the domestic economy of child-rearing fell quite squarely on the shoulders of Asante mothers. While some women were fortunate in that the father of their children assumed responsibility for school fees, provided funds for clothing and feeding those children and cared for them in their mother's absence, others were certainly not so lucky. The fathers of their children did not contribute to subsistence, much less to school fees, yet what recourse was there? What pressure could be brought to bear? The obligation to parent (*-tan*) and to sustain children was now a woman's alone. Thus the final disappearance of *ntamoba*—even with the sketchy bits of evidence we have—tells us much about the ways mothering in colonial Asante was transformed alongside fatherhood. Though by appearances Asante mothers were doing much what they had done in the nineteenth century—feeding, bathing and clothing their children—they were doing it in a world in which there were far fewer safety nets for them or for their children. It was a world in which more was expected but less was obliged. As 80 year old Efua Sewaa of Tafo recently remarked, 'You begot the child. You delivered that child. It is the duty of the mother, whether she likes it or not, to look after the child. An uncle, or aunt, or father, or anyone else, they just look after a child when they feel like it' (E. Sewaa interview). Trying to make sense of *ntamoba*, if it achieves nothing more, should at least make us stop and reflect on statements like these. Are they mere essentialist ponderings on the inevitable and eternal burdens of motherhood, or have they been historically constructed in ways we should now begin to untangle?

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NOTES

¹ A system of native tribunals or courts was officially recognised by the 1924 Ashanti Native Jurisdiction Ordinance. The system was revised as part of the restoration of the Ashanti Confederacy Council by the Native Courts Ordinance No. 2 of 1935. For a summary of the organisation of Asante's customary courts see Hailey (1951: 243–47) and Tordoff (1965).

² 'Akim' and 'Akyem' reflect two different orthographies. The 'ky' (pronounced 'ch') more accurately captures speech patterns and is more commonly used today. I use 'Akim' only when it appears in the title of a reference, as it does here.

³ For a discussion of the origins and the uses of oaths in bringing about court cases see Rattray (1927, 1929). Briefly, to swear an oath (*ntam*) is to make public reference to some specific disaster in the past in order to underscore the gravity of a particular situation. To swear an oath in a household dispute (*efiesem*) was to raise that dispute immediately to the level of a crime against the state (*ɔman akyiwadie*) which required a hearing before the central authority.

⁴ Interestingly, *tammoba* does not appear in the first (1881) edition of the dictionary. The revisions of the main text are discussed in a general way in the 1933 preface by J. Schweizer,

but there are no clues regarding the source—written or oral—from which the main entry was derived. In the 1933 edition *tammoba* appears not only in the main text but as *tamboba* in appendix F. Appendix F draws heavily from Danquah (1928). The differences in spelling reflect the Akan tendency in speech to render the ‘mb’ or ‘nb’ consonant combination as ‘mm’.

⁵ In a footnote Danquah proposes a brief etymology of the term. He states that it is derived from ‘‘*tam*’’—uterus, ‘‘*boba*’’—small stone. Hence a small weight of money payable when emancipating an offspring of marriage.’ Danquah was very closely tied to the court in Akyem Abuakwa. He was the half-brother of the Okyenhene Nana Ofori Atta and his information on ‘custom’ would have come from observing and participating in the tribunals of Kyebi, the capital, and from talks with the state’s *akyeame* (linguists). For a recent and exciting account of custom and politics in Akyem see Rathbone (1993).

⁶ The point that Danquah makes regarding matrilineal ownership of children v. a father’s rights of use in children is strikingly similar to the distinction between land ownership and land use among the Akan. As an Akan maxim puts it, ‘the farm is mine, the land belongs to the king’. Cited in Wilks (1993a: 99).

⁷ See also Gyimah interview. M. J. Field, an anthropologist hired by the Gold Coast government in 1938 to investigate the ‘native state’ of Akim Kotoku, one of Asante’s Akan neighbours, found a similar meaning for *ntamoba*. Her informant reported, ‘‘When the praising-money is sent you also send the girl’s father tamoba money because his daughter often soiled his cloth when she was a baby and sat on his knee’’ (1948: 107).

⁸ For some of the published results of the survey see Fortes (1948) and Fortes *et al.* (1947). Also see Kyei (1992).

⁹ It is quite possible that Kyei’s definition of *ntamoba* came from his reading of Danquah. However, in our numerous conversations around this issue he never mentioned Danquah’s work and drew explicitly on what he cast as a reminiscence of childhood.

¹⁰ For an early twentieth-century description of the naming ceremony see Rattray (1927: 60–4).

¹¹ That children were to be raised in the father’s house is evidenced in the oft cited Asante proverb *Wo yere nko mma mmra*—‘Your wife may go, but your children come’. Cited in Rattray (1929: 11).

¹² On *ntoro* see especially Rattray (1923: 44–76) and, more recently, McCaskie (1995a, b: 166–99). McCaskie provides a fascinating discussion of paternity and *ntoro* in the dynastic history of Asante. On naming see also Fortes (1950: 266).

¹³ This formulation also coincides with the few extant definitions of *ntamoba* as a rite of birth and naming.

¹⁴ Evidence of this manifestation of *ntamoba* is present in the Bompata case and in Kwame Nkansah’s narrative discussed above. It is also the basis of Danquah’s explanation.

¹⁵ Rattray attributes the longevity of the father/son bond to the fact that certain offices in Asante pass from father to son. In an accompanying footnote he also points to the bond created by the *ntoro*. Presumably what he is referring to here is the fact that a son will pass on the same *ntoro* that his father passed to him. In contrast, his daughter’s children will inherit not his *ntoro* but that of their own father (1927: 102).

¹⁶ Both Danquah (1928: 193) and Fortes (1950: 269) underscore the moral authority that a father wields over his son.

¹⁷ Cross-cousin marriage, a fairly common practice in the past, may also go some distance toward explaining the longevity of a father’s relationship with his son. When a son married his father’s sister’s daughter (the niece) the offspring of the union were, of course, members of the man’s *abusua*. The next generation ensured the longevity, as it were, of the father/son bond, as the son became the father of his own father’s nieces and nephews. In contrast, no matter to whom the father’s daughter was married, the grandchildren could not be of his matrilineal family. The father’s reciprocal relationship with his daughter and/or her *abusua*, therefore, could not be extended by marriage or by the birth of the next generation. For the implications of cross-cousin marriage for dynastic succession in Asante see McCaskie (1995a: 376–8).

¹⁸ While there are a few early twentieth-century cases of fathers pawning their own children, they tell us more about the chaos of the early colonial years and individuals’ attempts to take advantage of British confusion over various customs than they do about definitions. As Austin convincingly argues, virtually all of our nineteenth and early twentieth-century sources state that fathers could not pawn their children, and the few that suggest they could state that a father’s pawning of his children was always subject to the approval of the child’s matrikin.

¹⁹ Some may argue that Rattray begins this chapter betraying his uncertainty: 'The exact status and position of an Ashanti father (in a literal sense) is somewhat difficult to understand' (1929: 8).

²⁰ It should also be noted here that any wealth accumulated by members of the *gyaasefo* was inherited by their masters or mistresses. Their status, moreover, was inherited patrilineally (Wilks, 1993a: 99).

²¹ Again, for a recent and quite enlightening discussion of how paternity figured into the construction of royal status in Asante see McCaskie (1995a: esp. 376–8).

²² But, even as a marriage payment, *ntamoba* must have been exceedingly rare, even in Kumasi, by the turn of the century. There is a rather vague reference to it in a 1949 file of the Asante Confederacy Council which includes correspondence and notes regarding destoolment of chiefs. In a section on marriage (the connection is not clear) it is written that 'the existing formalities about marriage should be retained but payment of Tambuba, Anyame Dwan, Danta and Abubomdie should cease . . .' (Asante Confederacy Council, 1949). Many thanks to Ivor Wilks for providing this reference.

²³ Despite a historiography for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries unparalleled in sub-Saharan Africa for its richness and detail, twentieth-century Asante, as McCaskie lamented in 1986, does not 'yet possess even [a] . . . skeletal social history . . . [W]e find ourselves enmeshed in dense thickets of trees where no one as yet has defined the topography of the wood' (McCaskie, 1986: 2 and n. 4). Unfortunately the picture has not changed dramatically in the years since McCaskie published these remarks.

²⁴ Victoria Tashjian has just completed a fascinating exploration of marriage in rural Asante which includes important sections on divorce, widowhood and inheritance (1995: esp. 144–93, 314–43).

²⁵ As the cocoa economy's transformation of conjugal obligations made questions of inheritance all the more pressing, the Asante Confederacy Council debated the issue in 1938 and considered whether or not to rule on it. The Drobobene was able to convince the council to table the discussion on inheritance largely by encouraging members' fears that wives would simply murder their husbands if, by law, they could inherit from them. 'I think you will all agree with me,' he argued, 'that the women of these days have no character. Some keep concubines apart from the husbands and some also are wicked; they even go so far as to take the lives of their husbands by means of noxious juju; this is very common in Ashanti and I tell you that a wife can easily poison her husband since she is responsible for his chop.' Not until 1948 did the council finally rule on the issue of wives inheriting from their husbands, but it was a ruling with no legislative effect. See Asante Confederacy Council (1938), Matson (1951) and Allman (1991: 184–185).

²⁶ It is highly probable that these changes in family economy occurred in some areas of Asante long before the advent of cocoa. The rubber trade of the last quarter of the nineteenth century or even the kola trade of earlier decades may have already begun to transform domestic relations of production and exchange. We certainly have evidence of the ways in which pawning (including of wives and children) was impacted by the expansion of the kola and then the rubber trade (Austin, 1994: 134 and n. 110). Also see Arhin (1965; 1972) and Dumett (1971).

²⁷ An early case from Bompata demonstrates the ways in which both inheritance (of a cocoa farm) and the missionary presence could factor into a divorce and child custody case. On 23 October 1920 Afua Ntumkrum sued her 'adopted' husband (her deceased first husband's nephew) for forcing her and her children out and refusing to give them any of the first husband's estate. Afua claimed that her first husband was a Christian and that she and her children were entitled to two-thirds of her husband's estate. The tribunal ultimately ruled that both the first and the second marriages were under 'native custom' and that mission inheritance rules did not apply. The wife was allowed to keep only the one cocoa farm her husband had given her before his death. See Native Tribunal of the Omanhene of Bompata (1920).

²⁸ See Allman (1994). For comparative material see especially the wonderful collection of essays brought together by Hansen (1992).

²⁹ The 1884 Gold Coast Colonial Marriage Ordinance was extended to Ashanti with the implementation of the Ashanti Administration Ordinance No. 6 of 1919.

³⁰ A conference on marriage in West Africa was held at the Methodist Mission headquarters in London in 1931. There was significant participation by Gold Coast missionaries. See documents collected in WMMS (1931a, b, c). Eventually the mission would institute a process

by which individuals could marry according to custom but then have their union blessed by the Church. This method was far cheaper and allowed far more flexibility than marrying under the ordinance. J. C. DeGraft-Johnson (1928) argued for such an alternative.

³¹ Certainly the impact of school fees was uneven, and many families had no children in school during the period in question. Yet school fees consistently appear as a source of conflict in the life histories I have collected. Schools came late to Asante but, once there, spread rapidly. In 1905 education in Asante was entirely in the hands of the Basle and Wesleyan missionaries, who had a total combined attendance in all their schools of approximately 400. Two decades later there were four primary government schools, twenty-nine mission schools that were assisted by the government and 155 non-assisted schools. The total student enrolment in the government and assisted schools was 3,966 and in the unassisted schools 3,604 for a total of 7,570. By 1947 there were 857 schools in the region and the total student enrolment from the infant class I to standard 7 was 46,116. Unfortunately the overall population figures which would provide a context for understanding the educational data for this period are extremely unreliable. The best estimate we have comes from the 1931 census, which places Asante's population at roughly 578,078 (*Annual Report on Ashanti*, 1905; Hailey, 1948). The 1931 census is outlined and its quality discussed in some detail in Engman (1986). The original census appeared as Gold Coast Government (1932). The slightly more reliable 1948 census put the population in Asante at 817,782 (Gold Coast Government, 1949).

³² At the Manhyia Record Office there are over 600 volumes of court record books. I began working through them in 1989 and completed a first run-through in 1993. Since then I have found myself going back through certain series and discovering all sorts of new material.

³³ Asante's Chief Commissioner signed all Proclamations of Native Custom. One gets a fairly good sense of the 'making of customary law' with the proclamations' introduction: 'Whereas, I . . . Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, am satisfied that such Head Chief and Councillors are in substantial agreement as to the terms and tenor of such alleged customary law and that such statement truly and accurately records such alleged native customary law, and that such alleged native customary law is not repugnant to natural justice, equity or good conscience, or incompatible either directly or indirectly or by necessary implication with any law, Ordinance or Statute in force in Ashanti, now therefore under and by virtue of the provisions of section 76 of the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance, 1924, I . . . do hereby declare that the herein before recited statement is a true and accurate statement of the native customary law purporting to be recorded therein . . .' ('Ashanti Native Laws', n.d.). For comparative discussions of customary law see Mann and Roberts (1991). In many parts of the African continent, and particularly in colonial settler states, native courts and customary law were quite clearly colonial inventions. See especially Hay and Wright (1982) and Chanock (1985). The Asante colonial material is far more ambiguous. We have a much clearer sense of precolonial laws in Asante than we do for many places and the continuities between that law and customary law in the twentieth century are often quite striking (Allman, 1991, 1997).

³⁴ Austin (1994: 137–45) provides a fascinating discussion of the ways in which pawnage continued long after abolition.

³⁵ Both Grier and Austin show the ways in which pawning continued to operate after its abolition in 1908. Austin has located numerous cases of pawning (in fact, if not always in name) after 1908 and my current work has turned up additional cases, many from the early 1920s. In Native Tribunal of the Omanhene of Bompata (1920b) the defendant claimed that she had tried to get her husband to 'take his own son in pledge' but he refused. Sometimes pawning appeared in strange, mutated forms as part of the confusion of the early decades of colonial rule. The Kumasi District Commissioner heard a case in 1920 (Kumasi District Commissioner's Court, 1920) in which Amba Pombaa demanded that the defendant, Kwamin Boatin, her former husband, return their daughter to her. Pombaa maintained that Boatin had taken her daughter to Cape Coast and pawned her there to cover the father's expenses in maintaining the daughter. In his defence the father stated that in the 'olden days, the plaintiff and her family all served me'. This suggests that the wife's family may have been owned by Boatin's family and he was thus claiming the right to pawn the daughter. Unfortunately the case evaporates from the record after December 1920.

³⁶ There are numerous cases in the colonial period which show *tiri sika* or marriage fees as a loan for the payment of a debt of the wife's family. Indeed, the case of Kwamin Wusu v. Afua Sei discussed above is one such example. Afua Sei ended up giving her daughter in marriage 'to pay the debt' after the girl's father had refused to give her £4 and take his son in pledge.

Citing Fortes as her source, Grier (1992: 181–2) portrays *tiri sika* as a colonial invention. Austin (1994: 125–6 and n. 44) argues that we have no evidence in Fortes's work or elsewhere to suggest that *tiri sika* is of recent origin. Much of Fortes's data was gathered by T. E. Kyei, and Kyei's work (1992: 34–6, 168) certainly confirms Austin's interpretation that *tiri sika* was around long before the advent of colonial rule.

³⁷ I am not ruling out here that the abolition of slavery may also have been implicated in this process of rearticulation.

³⁸ *Ntamoba* as static marriage payment rather than processual exchange recalls similar developments in southern Africa with the transformation of *lobola* from ongoing exchange between two families to the payment of a single 'bride-price' in the late nineteenth century. See Walker (1990: 184–5).

³⁹ An important recent exception by an historian of the nineteenth century is McCaskie (1995a).

⁴⁰ In one sense inheritance may be construed as a zero-sum game. If a father gave two-thirds of his estate to his wife and children, of necessity his matrikin could receive only one-third. They could not continue to get three-thirds!

⁴¹ For a discussion of the ways in which Asante marriage was transformed from negotiated process to state of being see Allman (1996, 1997). Vellenga (1986) and Clark (1994: 344–8) explore fluidity in contemporary Ghanaian marriages.

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Interviews

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the changing dynamics of child-rearing in Asante (Ghana) through the problematic concept of *ntamoba*. In the historical record, and in popular memory, *ntamoba* has survived in a number of forms—as a marriage payment, as a rite connected with birthing and naming and as an indemnification paid to a father by a child's matrikin to signify the termination of a father's rights in that child. This article seeks to historicise and explain the multiplicity of meanings and the eventual disappearance of *ntamoba* by examining the ways in which a father's rights of use in his children were transformed into rights of ownership. It foregrounds time and social place/status as key variables in its investigation, demonstrating how the disappearance of *ntamoba* was connected with the conflation of subordinate social categories in twentieth-century Asante.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore les dynamiques en transition dans l'éducation des enfants à Asante (au Ghana) à travers le concept problématique de *ntamoba*. Dans les records historiques et dans la mémoire populaire, *ntamoba* a survécu sous un certain nombre de formes—en tant que paiement de mariage, en tant que rite lié à la naissance et à l'appellation de l'enfant et en tant qu'indemnité payée au père par la lignée maternelle afin de signifier la terminaison des droits qu'a le père sur cet enfant. Cet article cherche à donner une perspective historique et à expliquer la manière dont les droits du père de se servir de ses enfants avait été transformé en des droits de propriété. Cet article met au premier plan le temps et la place sociale/le statut en tant que des variables clés dans cette enquête, démontrant comment la disparition de *ntamoba* était liée à la résurgence des catégories sociales subalternes en Asante au vingtième siècle.