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CONTEXTS OF KINSHIP:
AN ESSAY IN THE FAMILY SOCIOLOGY OF
THE GONJA OF NORTHERN GHANA

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An Essay in the Family Sociology of
the Gonja of Northern Ghana

ESTHER N. GOODY

Fellow of New Hall, Cambridge



CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1973

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521085830

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First published 1973

This digitally printed first paperback version 2005

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 72-78892

ISBN-13 978-0-521-08583-0 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-08583-7 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-01720-6 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-01720-3 paperback

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Preface

This book is the result of fieldwork I carried out in central Gonja from July 1956 to March 1957 and again from July to December 1957. Since that time, I have worked in eastern Gonja (Kpembe, April to September 1964) and in western Gonja (Bole, July to October 1965). In addition some time was spent at the administrative capital in Damongo. The observations made and numerical material collected in other regions of Gonja broadly confirm the data presented here, and for a few key problems extracts of this later material are given in the Appendices. Otherwise I have tried to restrict the present study to central Gonja where language, population density, and some aspects of the economy produce a particular set of background conditions only partially shared by other regions.

This study of central Gonja kinship was first written up as a doctoral dissertation for the University of Cambridge. But until I had been able to work in other parts of the Gonja state I felt that its publication would be premature. Although very little material from these later field trips actually appears here, it provides boundaries to the analysis of central Gonja which would otherwise have been lacking. The original thesis has now been extensively rewritten using in particular a deepened understanding of the relational idioms, but keeping to the field data from central Gonja.

I am indebted to others for many kinds of assistance in the planning, fieldwork and analysis which have led to this volume. The introduction to modern sociology provided by the seminars of Everett Wilson and Alvin Gouldner at Antioch College set me off on the systematic search for 'social facts'. As a graduate student in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, I found that while the subject matter had shifted to small-scale societies, the concern with an interaction between social, psychological and cultural levels of analysis was still important, and for me more accessible. I must thank the members of the social anthropology research seminar¹ who have

¹ I am particularly grateful for Edmund Leach's persistent incredulity that Gonja men should be willing to support elderly female kin, for I had come to take this as self-evident.

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listened patiently, and commented pertinently on various versions of much of what follows. These thanks are due in a very special way to Professor Fortes, whose writings on the Tallensi and the Ashanti have been a constant source of ideas, questions, and comparative material. Indeed the work of Professor Fortes and of my husband, Jack Goody, provides such a fundamental basis, both conceptual and ethnographic, for any study of northern Ghana that I am sure that I have often 'borrowed' from them without acknowledgement. I am delighted to be able to take this opportunity to express my debt to them both.

Assistance of a different kind made possible the fieldwork in northern Ghana. The first period of research, on which this study is mainly based, was financed by the Ford Foundation's Foreign Area Training Fellowship programme which generously allowed me both an initial period in the field and a return trip the following year. The Bartle Frere Fund of the University of Cambridge also made a grant towards this first research. Later periods of field work were sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation of New York, and by a grant from the Child Development Research Unit of the University of Ghana. Equally vital support came from the hospitality of Jim and Catherine Panton, and the engineers of the Gonja Development Corporation, and from Father Vachon and Father Herity of the White Fathers' Mission in Damongo, whose welcome never failed, whatever the hour.

I have not space to thank individually all those whose interest and patience made fieldwork in central Gonja so rewarding. My field assistants, Adamu Dari, Kofi Mahama, James Salifu, and in particular Mahama Katangi, deserve special mention, as do my closest friends among the women of all three social estates, Bumunana, the Damba Yiri Wuritche, the Supini Wuritche, Grunshi and Adisa. The Busunu Akurma, Nyiwuledji, the KabiasiWura and the MankpaWura gave particularly freely of their time. Many are no longer living, and others will never see this book, yet without them it would never have been possible.

Cambridge
2 January 1972

E. N. G.

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


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Symbols used in the text

- △ indicates living male
- ▲ indicates dead male
- indicates living female
- indicates dead female
- ⊖ indicates male or female
-  indicates full siblings
-  indicates half-siblings
-  indicates classificatory siblings ('siblings')
- =△ indicates marriage
- ≠△ indicates divorce
- △## indicates multiple divorce
- △≈○ indicates lover (*jipo*) relationship
-  indicates fostering relationship

Village name in parentheses – (Mankpa) – indicates village of father or village with which person is identified.