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Esther N. Goody
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Introduction

This is a book about parenthood and socialization which takes West Africa as its special focus. It is mainly concerned not with the early years of infancy and childhood, fascinating as these are, but rather with the years of later childhood and adolescence. It sees parents as confronted with a set of tasks that take the same general form in all societies: begetting and bearing, endowment with birth-status identity, nurturance, training and finally sponsorship into full adult status. Somehow these tasks must be performed if there is to be a succession of generations of socially accredited adults. Yet the actual structure of a particular society – its political system, economy, settlement pattern, population density, patterns of inheritance and succession to office, all these will affect the manner in which the tasks of parenthood can be accomplished. Therefore the way in which parenthood is institutionalized must vary between societies – as indeed it does. If the tasks of parenthood are realized through different institutionalized forms, then the experiences of the child along the route to adulthood will inevitably also be different.

The central theme of the studies that are brought together here is the question of how parent roles and patterns of socialization are articulated with other aspects of a society. This is a question which has become increasingly apparent to me since the beginning of these studies in 1956. Thus it is implicit in the earlier chapters, becoming clearer in the later studies. My first fieldwork was among the Gonja of central Gonja (1956–7) and later in the divisional capitals of Kpembe (eastern Gonja, 1964), Bole (western Gonja, 1965) and Daboya (northern Gonja, 1974). In the Gonja work I looked at parenthood and socialization in detail, in one particular society. But Gonja parental institutions are quite strikingly different from those which had previously been described for West Africa, particularly in Fortes' classic account of socialization among the Tallensi (1970). It was this contrast which generated the theoretical paradigm that frames all these studies (Chapter 1).

At first my concern was to document the Gonja pattern, particularly the institution of kinship fosterage whereby many children are reared not by their own parents but by relatives (1961, 1970, 1973). Chapter 2 describes the institution of kinship fosterage in Gonja and asks whether the experience of being

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fostered – reared – by a relative rather than in the parental household had a detrimental effect on the lives and careers of Gonja adults. This problem led to a detailed comparison between children being fostered and those growing up with their own parents which I carried out in Kpembe, in eastern Gonja (Chapter 3). The study of the social matrix of Gonja fostering, and its consequences both for other institutions and for the children themselves, forms the focus of Part I of this volume.

Part II is concerned with the prevalence of the delegation of parent roles elsewhere in West Africa. Once alerted to the practice of fostering children with kin, I began to look for references to apparently similar or related institutions in other West African societies. But at this time there was no detailed documentation of fostering apart from that in Gonja.[1] It became imperative to discover whether the sending of children to grow up away from their own parents was rare – a unique adaptation to the special circumstances in Gonja – or on the contrary was a common response to some general feature of life in West Africa. A survey of available ethnographies on northern Ghana (J. and E. Goody 1967 and Chapter 4) showed that the other states had patterns of sending children away from the natal home to be reared which were analogous to those found in Gonja. These centralized societies in the savannah area were also ones that placed little emphasis on unilineal descent groups, that is, on clans and lineages. On the other hand, in the segmentary societies which lie interspersed among these kingdoms, such descent groups play a very important role not only in kinship but in political, religious and economic affairs. And in these segmentary societies there was no institutionalized delegation of rearing roles. There appeared to be something about segmentary unilineal descent systems which promoted a unitary parent role and which we attempted to link to patterns of residence for women and to the stability of marriage.

The other side of the question is: 'What is there about states that leads to the delegation of parent roles'? In order to explore this further, in Chapter 5 I consider the data available on four savannah kingdoms. Two of these, the Dagomba and the Mossi, are similar to the Gonja in having only a limited division of labour with a few non-farming occupations; their political systems, though based on the rule of an invading group over the indigenes, did not have elaborate hierarchies of office or complex systems of taxation of individual production. The other states, the Hausa emirates and Bornu, already had an elaborate division of labour in pre-colonial times with most adults having one or more by-occupations in addition to farming; as well as wage labour, there was also taxation of individual production and an elaborate political hierarchy related to taxation. Chapter 5 seeks to describe the delegation of parent roles in these traditional kingdoms, and to relate this to economic and political complexity.

Thus far the picture is one of segmentary unilineal descent societies in which parental rearing roles are not delegated, and of traditional state systems in which delegation is institutionalized. But a perusal of contemporary Ghanaian literature

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indicated that the rearing of children away from home was a frequent practice in the modern, cosmopolitan world of the south. In an effort to explore and document this practice, short, focussed studies were made in three small towns each belonging to one of the major ethnic groups in southern Ghana: the Ewe, the Fanti and the Krobo. Together with Gladys Azu's work on the Ga (1974) these investigations, made in 1964 and 1965, make it clear that various forms of fostering are regularly practised in these coastal societies (Chapter 6). A new complexity is introduced here by the fact that both matrilineal and patrilineal descent groups coexist with institutionalized fostering in these societies. So it cannot be the existence of unilineal descent groups in themselves which is responsible for the unitary parent role in the segmentary societies examined in Chapter 4. However the southern societies differ from the northern ones in two important ways. First, the southern societies are not segmentary in a political sense; they have a governmental structure based on the town, constituting what I have termed 'town-states'. Further, these town-states have long been involved in the world economy mediated by centuries of trade, and more recently by the colonial administration. Both politically and economically the southern societies are more complex than the segmentary systems of northern Ghana.

The detailed analysis of the states in Chapter 5 revealed two models for the delegation of parent roles. In the simple differentiated states of Gonja and Dagomba, fostering was nearly always done by kin. In the more complex hierarchical states (Hausa and Kanuri), many children went to unrelated pro-parents. Drawing on this analysis, it seemed probable that the delegation of parent roles was related not merely to the absence of strong unilineal descent groups which marks most of the states, but more positively to the economic and political complexity of these kingdoms. If this were so, then parallel levels of political and economic complexity in southern Ghanaian societies could be expected to generate forms of delegation of parent roles analogous to those found in the northern states. The data from the southern Ghana surveys in Chapter 6 relates to comparatively rural communities within the southern societies traditionally based on town-states.

Chapters 8 and 9 consider two more specialized forms of training for older children and adolescents that have emerged in the urban centres of coastal West Africa. These are modern apprenticeship, as found in the southern cities of Ghana and Nigeria, and the institution of 'wardship' in the Creole cities of Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Chapter 8 the proliferation of informal apprenticeship is related to the adoption of a highly elaborate division of labour characteristic of modernizing societies. In Chapter 9 socio-economic stratification and the emergence of a political elite are related to wardship as a basis for continuing patron–client relations among adults.

Anthropologists are always on the lookout for natural experimental situations. In the third major section of the book, the nature of the structure of parent roles is further explored by looking at the adaptation of West African

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families to living in London (Chapter 10). This study provided an opportunity to see what happened to traditional patterns of parenthood under radically changed circumstances. The very striking finding here was that half of a sample of nearly three hundred families had sent their young children to live with English foster-parents. This study also indicated that traditional fostering in West Africa was not limited to Ghanaian peoples. For the great majority of the families were from Nigeria, mainly Yoruba, and many of the parents had been fostered as children at home in Nigeria. To add to the complexity of the picture, another Nigerian group, the Ibo, who traditionally did not practise fostering, placed their children with English foster-parents when living in that country. It seems clear that we are dealing with a very general paradigm of West African culture.

But how general is it? As a further probe, a pilot study was done on parent roles among West Indians in London. As immigrants, whose ancestors were African, this group encountered many of the same problems that led the West African couples to seek English foster-parents. Although they make complicated arrangements for the daily care of their children, West Indian parents reject the idea of placing them with English foster-parents. Chapter 11 discusses this material and seeks to explain this striking difference between the two sets of immigrant families.

Looking back over the range of descriptive and comparative material on traditional and contemporary patterning of West African parent roles, it is apparent that a simple dichotomy between unitary parental rearing and fostering is too crude. The concluding chapter seeks to examine the many different forms in which parent roles are delegated in relation to two quite different processes. The first is the very long-term progression from egalitarian segmentary societies through simple states with rudimentary social and economic differentiation to more complex hierarchical states based on trade and an elaborate division of labour. This progression appears to parallel a shift from parental rearing, first to fostering by kin, then to the placing of children with strangers in various forms of apprenticeship, wardship, and so on. The emphasis here is on the identification of the mechanisms which seem to produce the changes in parent-role model. And these are seen as anchored to the way in which different types of social structure determine what are the effective strategies for fulfilling the tasks attached to parent roles. Thus the key question becomes: 'What are the circumstances which make parental rearing adaptive, and what are those in which it is no longer adaptive?' The next question becomes: 'What are the circumstances which make fostering by kin adaptive?' And finally: 'What are the circumstances which lead to the rearing of children by strangers being more adaptive than either parental rearing or rearing by kin?' The distribution of West African societies between those which restrict parent roles to the parents themselves, and those in which their delegation is institutionalized, fits remarkably well with the pattern produced in the answers to these questions. By framing questions in terms of changes in parent-role strategies in response to the changing

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social structure, it also becomes possible to understand the close parallels between the traditional states with complex hierarchies and the modern urban centres. Although the two sets of societies differ in their political and economic institutions, both are hierarchical and economically stratified, and thus pose similar problems for fulfilling the tasks attached to parent roles: in both, the major problem is how to secure for children the skills and resources necessary for differentiated and specialized adult roles. The proliferation of forms of delegation of parent roles in these complex systems allows maximum mobility; it does not restrict the children to the skills and resources controlled directly by their parents. Viewed in this light, the high incidence of fostering with English foster-parents by West Africans in this country becomes an extreme case of seeking to utilize the delegation of educational and nurturant aspects of the parent role in the interests of social mobility and of the attainment of advantageous, high status, adult roles. This is a different form of the institution of wardship in the Creole centres of Freetown and Monrovia where people from the rural areas place a child with an educated member of the elite in the city.

A second process occurs within the family itself. This is the dynamic - the balance of tensions and bonds, of ties and cleavages - which is generated in the course of carrying out the various tasks. As parent roles are differently allocated in different societies, so the tensions and ties will affect different actors. It is a central theme of the analysis that these role dynamics, systematically replicated, feed back into and become part of the wider social structure.

This concluding chapter returns to another theme from the initial analysis of the nature of parent roles. This is the critical nature of birth-status identity in systems in which parent rearing roles are delegated. Transactions in parenthood have a different meaning where birth-status identity is fixed and immutable, for they are then concerned with rearing and sponsorship and not with jural status. With this fact in mind, the attempt is made to confront the question as to whether this special West African attitude towards the delegation of parent roles is to be seen as a sort of cultural paradigm, consistently applied across a wide range of different situations, or whether it is better viewed as a pragmatic response, within the constraints as they are perceived, to problems presented in the fulfilment of parent roles.

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A framework for the analysis of parent roles

Anthropological accounts of parenthood have tended either to concentrate on formal institutions – the transfer of bridewealth as securing rights in children, initiation rituals – or to concern the character of early emotional and 'care-taking' relationships and the learning of impulse control. Not only are these areas of special interest to the psychologist but, clearly, with the learning of language and the basic cultural repertoire of custom, gesture, and idiom, this period is a vital one for the formation of adult character in a given society. If, however, we are concerned with the technical skills and role structure of this same society, we must give more emphasis to the context of learning in later childhood and adolescence. Moreover, it seems clear that the pattern of expectations governing interpersonal relationships is not established once and for all during early childhood. In later years relations between parents and children are no longer dominated by physical dependency; these and the relations with peers only then begin to take the form which they will retain in adulthood. And it is during adolescence, with emerging self-awareness, that the individual's position in the wider kin group and the community comes to take shape.

All these elements must be included in any framework for analysing the nature of parent roles in West Africa. The difficulty in finding such a framework is to agree on a suitable theoretical basis for its derivation. I propose to resolve this by asking simply: 'What are the critical tasks which have to be dealt with in producing a society's new members, and rearing them so that they can effectively assume adult roles in society?' What, in very broad terms, must parents *do*? It is immediately obvious that there are many tasks which have to be done, but which in our society are carried out not by parents but by nurseries, schools, industry, the state, or even by the new recruits themselves. And it could be argued that tasks which are not performed by parents in our own society are not properly parental tasks. Logically this is a perfectly correct position, but I think it more fruitful theoretically to take the opposite view, and consider that the full range of problems involved in reproducing a new generation be treated together. If we find that in certain societies some of these tasks are carried out in the family, while others are the concern of wider groups or are left to the

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maturing individual, then this tells us something important about the society concerned. In short, we must see parenthood as divisible into several different roles, each concerned with a different prerequisite for social replacement. It then becomes possible to see how these tasks are linked or distributed in different societies. What is of particular theoretical interest is the ways in which institutions external to the kinship system itself affect the allocation of parent roles.

Parent roles

Anthropologists have traditionally defined roles in terms of the rights and duties associated with them. This has the clear advantage of focussing attention on the interactive aspect of roles, for one person's rights are another's obligations. There have been some attempts to see parenthood in these terms, notably a paper, 'Transactions in parenthood', in which W. H. Goodenough acknowledges that physiological parenthood and what he calls 'psychic parenthood' have some significance, but proceeds to outline a framework for analysis which is limited to 'transactions in the rights, duties, privileges and powers of jural parenthood' (1970a:398). He suggests that an analysis must deal with *succession* to jural parenthood as a result of incapacity or death of parents; with *exercise* by others of *overriding rights* in the child; with *delegation* without actual surrender of jural rights; and with arrangements by the jural parents for *sharing* of some or all of their rights; and outright *transfer* of rights in the child (1970a:409). However, Goodenough considers that it is not possible to discuss the *content* of parental rights comparatively; this can only be meaningful in the context of a particular culture. In order to construct a definition of jural 'father' and 'mother' which will be applicable in all societies he defines motherhood in physiological terms (the jural mother is the woman who bore the child) while the jural father is the man married to the jural mother. The limitation of this approach, apart from its formality,[1] is that it seems to leave aside certain important features of parenthood. While jural rights in, and duties with respect to, children are clearly important, the affective ties between parents and their children, parents' role in socialization and education, and the claims which can be made in the name of morality are also highly significant, and they are certainly subject to a wide range of transactions.

I therefore suggest that content be restored to the relationship between parents and children by seeing parenthood as concerned with fulfilling the tasks involved in bearing and rearing children, and establishing them in their turn as effective adults. Parenthood is about social replacement. Such an approach includes transactions in jural rights, but is not limited to these. Viewed in this way we need not expect to find that a single distinctive feature (physiological paternity, marriage to the mother, jural authority) will always coincide with a particular relationship. The tasks of parenthood must be carried out somehow,

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but not necessarily by a single set of 'parents'. Significantly, what I have called the tasks of parenthood appear to receive social recognition, as well as a patterned, institutionalized response, in all societies. For the present the clear candidates for universal problems of social replacement appear to be: i. bearing and begetting, ii. endowment with civil and kinship status, iii. nurturance, iv. training and v. sponsorship into adulthood. Each of these aspects of parenthood can, individually, be split off from the rest and made the object of one or more of Goodenough's transactions – delegation, sharing, succession, pre-emption and transfer. Such familiar institutions as ritual Godparenthood (*compadrazgo*), the wet nurse, the nanny, Roman adrogation, and fosterage can all be seen as institutionalized transactions concerning one or other responsibility usually associated with the parent role; as institutionalized transactions which may, but need not, concern jural rights and duties with respect to the children.

If we do look at the various tasks suggested as underlying parent roles, the question of how to define rights and duties, and how to decide whether they are shared, delegated or transferred is also simplified. For it is immediately apparent that it makes no sense to speak of all five areas as subject to the same *kinds* of rights and duties, which will become clear as each of the tasks of parenthood is considered in turn.

Bearing and begetting

Bearing and begetting are physiological facts which may be culturally endowed with different meanings, but which always seem to carry an irreducible connotation.[2] While it is possible to transact about the *consequences* of bearing and begetting by defining birth-status identity separately, or allocating responsibilities of rearing to others, the fact of physiological parenthood cannot be altered once conception has taken place. In most societies the correspondence of physical paternity and birth-status identity is considered desirable, and often a lack of correspondence affects assumption of full birth-status rights in adulthood. But begetting and bearing as physiological acts seem to have a significance of their own. Among the Tallensi of northern Ghana, for whom birth-status identity depends on the transfer of bridewealth cattle, there is no formal disability or stigma attached to a child begotten by another man before the mother's marriage, and subsequently legitimized as the child of the husband by the transfer of bridewealth. But still, Fortes writes, the Tallensi feel that the child's genitor ought to bring the cow of rearing to the step-father and the cow of redemption to the mother's lineage elders in order to secure social paternity of his child so that begetting and birth-status identity coincide (Fortes 1949b:27, 136). The transaction cannot be run the other way. That is, it is impossible to transfer the role of begetter to the mother's husband. In this sense there is no way to transact about – to socially manipulate – begetting and bearing. They are once-and-for-all physiological facts. The best that can be done is to transact about the

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socially constructed rights and duties linked to birth-status identity, to bring these into line with the physiological facts.

Some societies, like the Gonja and the Lozi, refuse to see any distinction between physiological paternity (which they perceive as an obvious process) and social paternity (which conveys full birth-status identity to the child). Thus the civic and kinship status of a Gonja child derives from his genitor and never from a mother's husband who did not beget him. However under certain circumstances the mother's husband could insist on retaining control over the person and labour of his wife's adulterine child. He justifies this by his prescriptive rights in the mother's sexuality (as his wife) and as his due for rearing the child. This situation is seriously out of balance from the child's point of view (he must accept the authority of the mother's husband, and work for him, but receives in return no civil identity or rights through him and indeed would always occupy a disadvantaged status in the household); it was recognized to depend on the superior power of the mother's husband. That is, it was chiefs and other powerful men who could succeed in controlling an adulterine child in this way. The son, on the other hand, was expected to abscond to his genitor as soon as he was old enough to escape, and could expect to be welcomed and receive full birth-status rights once recognized by him. Although defended by the proverb 'A thief does not own the thing he steals', the control of the mother's husband over an adulterine child was likened to a form of slavery, as both depended on force. The problem arises in Gonja because jural rights depend on physiological paternity, and there is no way that this can be *socially* manipulated.

It is of course possible to construct special meanings for the physiological facts of bearing and begetting, in the realm of ideas. The Ashanti say that a mother and her children are 'of one blood' while the father and his offspring share a spiritual force, the *ntoro.* The Gonja share with many other peoples the conviction that the child is built up from the father's semen, while the mother holds and feeds the foetus, but does not contribute directly to its physical formation. The Trobrianders take an extreme view in recognizing the possibility of resemblance between father and child but denying that it could be due to any physical link between them. In nearly all societies there are culturally elaborated expressions of the physical link between parents and children. It is particularly interesting that despite the intimacy of the link between mother and infant, there are cultures in which the physiological nature of this link is not given ideological recognition. The Zulu, who liken the mother to a field in which seed is planted by the father, are strongly patrilineal, and it might be supposed that such a denial of the mother's physiological role was an expression of patrilineal ideology. However the Gonja, who describe the mother as 'like a basket, simply holding the baby', are not strongly patrilineal, and indeed have certain beliefs and institutions which are characteristic of matrilineal societies, such as the over-right of the mother's brother to sell a child into slavery, regardless of the father's wishes. However estate membership, and with it rights to political

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and ritual office, is transmitted from a genitor to his children, and perhaps it is this fact that is reflected in the way conception is perceived. It seems more likely that the conceptualization of the mother's contribution to creating an infant in terms of holding it safely, and feeding it, are drawn from two other sources; on the one hand, the foetus grows within her and emerges linked by a chord to the placenta, which is often likened to congealed menses; and on the other hand, her role during infancy and childhood is that of nurse and source of nurturance. (And indeed a woman's continued role is as preparer – and often provider – of food.) The social structure is clearly one source of models for explaining how babies are created; but observation of parent roles also can play a part, as can observation of animals. And, as the Gonja ideas indicate, the resulting models can conflict with other apects of the social structure.

A number of societies seem to have split beliefs about paternity into beliefs about spiritual and physical paternity, the former being the task of gods or spirits, and the latter the province of human males (e.g. the Murngin of Arnhemland). Significantly, when this happens it is usually civic and kinship statuses that are determined by (or determine) spirit paternity, with the rights and obligations of physiological paternity being linked to the rearing relationship. Occasionally spirit paternity is reserved for rare cases of beings that are wholly or in part supernatural, as in the theologies of ancient Greece, Christianity and Hinduism. In these cases, in order to validate the supernatural character of the offspring – their difference from normal human beings – physiological paternity by a human father *is* denied.

In attempting to tease apart the component elements of parenthood it is analytically preferable to treat begetting and bearing as physiological facts which may be given different social recognition (denied, linked with spirits, linked exclusively to the genitor). Once conception has occurred, transactions concerning bearing and begetting are limited to the realm of ideas; they are essentially cultural rather than social. In terms of Goodenough's transaction series, it is impossible to delegate, share, succeed to, or transfer physiological parenthood,[3] for this is an accomplished fact. It is of course possible to manipulate socially the *consequences* of this fact, that is, to transact about rights and duties held by and in respect to the child. The distinction may seem an unnecessarily fine one, but it is nevertheless of great significance, as shown by the strenuous efforts made by adopted children in Western societies to discover their 'real' (i.e. physiological) parents, despite having full jural status through adoption.

Status entitlements and rearing reciprocities

The remaining four aspects of parenthood can be divided into two sets. On the one hand are those in which reciprocal rights and duties are conditional on or arise from performance of the role obligation (nurturance, training and sponsorship). Of an entirely different nature is endowment with civil status which in

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