EPILOGUE

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS IN FAMILY RESEARCH

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In his introductory remarks Professor Fortes said that social anthropologists have been concerned with "how things hang together in traditional social systems." This conference has been, by and large, regarding how things hang together in changing social systems, in this case the family. And the situation of change appears to be very fluid and open; it is difficult to know how to go about research intelligently. But the papers clearly reflect a greater emphasis on the facts, behaviour, the details of social relations and a lesser one on norms and beliefs, than do studies of more traditional Ghanaian societies. The social rules and beliefs of yesteryear are in general not so clear today; individuals apply conflicting and differing ones in specific family situations. Behavioural patterns have to be extremely carefully worked out by the researcher. In the past, in questions of disagreement or of litigation, it was often a matter of the proper interpretation of agreed-upon norms or of which commonly held norms were most applicable to the situation. But the study of the Ghanaian family today reveals frequent disagreement among spouses, and also with children and other kin, over the rule to be followed, and the presence of a continual process of negotiation, adjustment, and readjustment, as individuals experience family issues and conflicts. This is evident in Dr. Oppong's paper as well as in others. In this context the study of what persons actually do has become, for the time being , the focal point, as reflected in most of the papers here, and not what the normative elements might be.

I believe that this point is increasingly relevant for rural areas as well as urban ones, for a number of papers, including those of Mr. Adomako-Sarfoh and Mrs. Hardiman, indicate the considerable extent to which change in rural family life is also occuring today.

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The conference papers reveal a strong emphasis on property and economic matters in the family, in fact this is the main thrust of the meeting. Rights of inheritance, who shall pay for the maintenance of wives and children, the economic relationship of husbands and wives to one another and to their children, the economic ties of family members to their respective descent groupings, and the problem of who shall have access to the wealth and property of persons acquired in their lifetime, all are matters which have been discussed again and again at this conference.

Professor Fortes has also mentioned his feeling that the basis of the understanding of Ghanaian society lies through the study of kinship and kin relations, and he has suggested that the popular emphasis on property as the key factor may be misplaced, or at least should not draw one away from the proper study of kinship factors. I am not really sure where the land lies today. I am reminded of a student from an American university who was sent to carry out research on a west African society by his professor, a society undergoing considerable change. His more or less assigned topic was "religion as the focus of the culture". He came back convinced that it was money and not religion that made the society go round!

I would like to suggest the following: in traditional society property and financial resources operate much within the network of kin; kinship and descent are the primary bases of allocating valuable and scarce resources. We can safely say that the kinship idiom is primary.. But under recent conditions I am not sure that this remains so. I wonder whether southern Ghanaian society is moving to a situation where the property and financial considerations, and the power relationships associated with these, are becoming primary, and the kinship idiom, as well as the ethnic idiom, are turning into mechanisms through which these are expressed as may be convenient. Kinship may be becoming less than primary today in terms of economic ties. This matter has not been fully examined but I think that it is of utmost importance; it may be a fundamental underlying feature of family change in Africa. The materialistic rather than the kinship or religious mode certainly seems

dominant in southern Ghana today.

Legal questions connected with the property rights of family members and their relations dominate many of the papers presented here. I note a strong interest in the courts and the modern legal processes in relationship to marriage, inheritance, and family life. This is an exciting area in which the skills of persons in several fields of research can be blended. There is rich material in the anthropology and sociology of law as well as in scholarship from the legal point of view that can be put to use. For example, it would seem to me of crucial importance as to how judges and courts arrive at decisions in the new areas where their judgments are really 'firsts' and where their conclusions may become important judicial precedents in a few years to come. We know that decisions have been arrived at but often have less understanding as to how they came about. Or, under what conditions are legal matters concerning the family, for example child maintenance, enforceable in the courts and under what situations are they not?

One of the crucial legal issues in family relationships seems to be the control and disposition upon death of the property acquired by a husband or a wife during his or her lifetime, be this money, houses, cocoa farms, or other forms of wealth. The increases in these kinds of property in recent years, as against property clearly held by lineages and other forms of corporate groups, has been very great and will continue to be so. Both customary courts and modern government courts are evidently having difficulties in dealing with this form of acquired property and are working out new rules as they go, as they are in cases of child maintenance. The attempt to apply rather arbitrarily past English law to these matters seems as unrealistic as an attempt to blindly follow traditional Ghanaian custom would be.

In terms of the specifics of legal matters I would comment that the papers show a lack of awareness of the very strong role often played by a man's brother or brothers in inheritance matters. They rather stress the position of the wife, the children, and the descent groups. But in both matrilineal and patrilineal systems the male sibling or siblings of a deceased man play a crucial role in the disposition of his property, whatever the legality of the matter may be. I believe that this is an area where some further

attention should be paid.

Also, in the papers on child maintenance, which is becoming an increasing problem in Ghana, I find it difficult to understand why fathers do not support their children. I do not feel that there is sufficient comprehension of the reasons for the father's position here; he is too easily made the villain of the piece. The real problem in the failure of child support may lie in the conflict of the child's parents, where revenge for one spouse over another is taken through action against the needs of the children, or where in a matrilineal setting the failure to maintain the children properly may be due to strong pressure to give priority to the support of sister's children. I frankly feel that understandings of these kinds would lead to the framing of clearer child maintenance and parental reconciliation procedures.

But the striking thing about the legal system in regard to family matters is how class-based it is. It is, after all, generally the elite, the wealthy, and the well-educated, who use the marriage ordinance, who sue for child maintenance in the modern court, who hire lawyers, and it is clearly only a small percentage of Ghanaians who employ the English derived legal system. The great majority of cases are still settled by the more traditional courts following customary law and procedures - courts used by the less wealthy and the less well-educated. The range is from traditional courts, where reconciliation is the basis of legal settlement and the flexible interpretation of more-or-less agreed upon norms is employed, to an emphasis in the 'modern' courts on who is in the right and who is in the wrong, and on punishment. Ghanaian family life is clearly bound up with a complex range of legal organizations employing different procedures and having different aims; these reflect different social and class interests. This may frankly seem messy to the legal purist, but it seems to be a strength of the legal system today rather than a weakness. An overpress for conformity of procedure and laws in family matters is dangerous and would be disadvantageous to the less wealthy and less educated today.

The question of child maintenance through the pressure of social agencies is a case in point. It clearly does not work because it is an attempt at reconciliation procedures within the modern legal system

which is so concerned with the right and the wrong of the matter in the background of punishment. It confuses moral judgments, usually against the husband who is seen as the offender, with attempts at reconciliation and adjustment. And if mothers are reluctant to make a claim in court for child maintenance, I suspect it is because more than time or money is involved. It may rather be because their own class and social experience makes them suspicious of the modern courts and its decision making processes, and that they may not be as interested in justice as in reconciliation of some sort, which the modern social agencies cannot arrive at in the manner of the more customary methods of litigation.

Miss Vellenga's paper reminds us that if law in the modern legal setting is what the courts decide, so is it also in the more traditional sphere. In the latter it is incorrect to see adjudication and law as static and as withering away under the impact of the modern legal system. Rather her paper points out how the more traditional courts are changing in procedures and decisions, as for example in the growth of the church courts. There is every reason to believe that the more traditional courts in southern Ghana are altering as they face new social conditions. They are, in fact, very much alive and a very important aspect of the Ghanaian legal system.

The conference papers clearly establish the value of quantitative data, the use of schedules and of demographic information, in the study of the family in Ghana - not that these really need justification nowadays. Some of these techniques have been employed before to some extent in the study of traditional Ghanaian society, for example, in the Ashanti Social Survey (Fortes, 1949, 1950; Fortes, Steel and Ady, 1948), but anthropologists have come late in the day to their appreciation of the quantitative. At the same time I believe the value of quantitative data is high only in the context of a richness of ethnographic information - be it traditional, transitional, or modern materials and I hope that some balance of these two types of research data will be maintained. Some papers here lean more to the quantitative and others to ethnographic description. I would suggest Long's recent book (Long, 1968) as an example of the successful combination of the two approaches in the study of social change in another area of Africa.

I note a healthy avoidance on the part of the participants at this conference of the "big words" of social science, the broad "ideal types", so commonly and fondly used in my intellectual homeland, and United States. Terms such as "urbanization", "modernization", "Westernization", "the decline of tradition", and the "pathology of urban life" are absent. There is a nice willingness to break data into components, to deal with analyzable behavioural categories without forcing the data into grand schemes. I sense that this is not a period in Ghanaian family research for the employment of macro-concepts, but one which is benefiting from smaller and more detailed studies such as those reported here. Books such as Caldwell's on Ghana's elite family life (Caldwell, 1958) are probably premature at this time.

At the same time I note a tendency for the stereotyping of past scholars and scholarly ideas in certain of the papers and in some of the conference discussion. No one, I am sure, has really suggested that most African societies are of the 'pure' patrilineal type than the Tallensi and Nuer represent. The fact is that most patrilineal societies in Africa are probably much closer to the Ewe, having cognatic and other elements to some degree, and the fact is that this has been known for years. The same is true of matrilineal societies. Even in urban studies a self-created stereotype has grown up that most social scientists saw urban life in terms of ethnic groups living in separate sections of the city, each with their welfare associations, and with little ethnic intermixing. It is true that some scholars had moved in this direction in West Africa particularly Kenneth Little (Little, 1965). But there have been others for many years, especially those working in East and South Central Africa, who never accepted this view of African urban life. Social science seems to advance intellectually by creating stereotypes of what past research has done, which it then knocks down by a burst of innovative energy, only to have other stereotypes created in their place. I am not sure that this killing of the elders is a necessary intellectual progression, although it seems a striking feature of social science today.

The pull of the conference towards the study of property and economic relations in the family and the related legal emphasis leaves other areas of family studies virtually untouched. For example, I would be interested in taking some of the categories that Dr. Apronti suggested in his literature paper and in seeing how they apply to changing family systems in Ghana : the view of children as disposable property, the strength of the wish to have children, the desire to provide for one's progeny, the 'liberal' methods of raising children as he refers to them and the question of parent-child discord. These are areas less easily subject to quantitative sociological analysis. Yet they seem important to me.

I also find it striking that at a conference on domestic rights and duties that there has been no reference to sexual matters. Such an omission, I am sure, would be most unlikely to occur in my home country, the United States. And I find it distressing here. It is perhaps a reflection of an English social science tradition, which is so less willing to deal with sexual questions than an American or a French one. It is also outwardly a reflection of a viewpoint that Ghanaians are not 'up-tight' about sexual matters, handling them with greater ease than in Western societies, and that husbands are expected to seek sexual relations other than with wives in the family, and that Ghanaians see this as 'natural.'

But I remain unconvinced that sex is unimportant to the topic of domestic rights and duties. I would ask the following: Are property disputes between spouses purely the reflection of external kin and other pressures and different past experiences of the spouses with property, or are they not in some manner a reflection of sexual problems and the disturbances of affective ties between husbands and wives? Do property disputes and sexual antagonisms or difficulties follow together? What is the difference in husband-wife relationships between the husband simply fulfilling his sexual duty to the wife's sexual 'rights' and both partners really enjoying the sexual relationship? To what extent are adulterous relationships on the part of wives-which does not seem as acceptable in Ghanaian society as that of husbands—the outgrowth of anger with the husband over property matters or some other financial disagreement? To what extent does the existence of a husband's

mistress claim property and resources that would otherwise be used by family members?

I would argue that until research of a detailed and convincing kind shows otherwise that it is better to consider that there are likely relationships between property and financial matters on the one hand, and sexual ties on the other, and that any intelligent understanding of the rights and duties of family matters should include sexual ones. I object strongly to the depersonalization of husbands and wives in family studies, to the point where they simply become persons 'playing' roles, fulfilling or failing to fulfill rights and duties and legal obligations. The affective content of family ties seems so important to me for an understanding of what is going on in the Ghanaian family today, yet it appears mainly in novels, plays, and short stories rather than in social science— a fact which is reflected at this conference.

Further, the use of biographical and autobiographical data, as in the very fine study of a Hausa woman (Smith, 1964) often throws considerable light on family relationships. Data would also be of interest on the question of how children today are socialized in the family, when their parents hold differing conceptions of its form and activities, and when these adults themselves are in the process of experimenting in family roles and adjusting to one another. Anthropoligists, in recent years, have benefited from viewing the family in cyclical development (Goody, 1958), through a series of stages of growth and decay, for unlike unilineal descent groups, the family is not a perpetual corporation. Yet the papers at the conference talk little about this cyclical nature, although it is readily tied to quantitative data, and the breakdown of such data by family stages often makes understanding of family groupings and relationships much more meaningful. For example, one might wish to inquire at what stage of the history of individual families does the greatest amount of tension over property matters arise and at what points do relations of descent have the greatest and the least claims on family members. Or one might argue that the modern Ghanaian, in reducing the claims of his descent groups at the expense of his family is acting as if he were trying to make the family a perpetual corporation which it is not by nature.

I see at this meeting a considerable willingness to contrast and compare elements of family life among

different southern Ghanaian ethnic groupings in particular Akan and Ewe, and particularly to make use of the very convenient matrilineal and patrilineal contrasts as a basis of analysis. This goes much beyond the earlier social science work in Ghana where each scholar did research on his own people, reporting on them, but was unwilling or unable to engage in genuine comparative research or even to use his own writings in contrast to other Ghanaian groupings. In this sense this conference reflects a major advance in social science procedure in Ghana. Here quantitative data as well as general descriptive materials on family life can be very useful (Goody, 1969). I am sure that future conferences on the family will deal with other regions of Ghana and thus broaden perspectives beyond what has been presented at this one, admittedly, deliberately restricted in scope to allow for greater depth in detail.

I also hope that there will be the increasing use of comparisons based upon other features than ethnicity; for example social class, wealth, education, geographical factors, and religion. There is mention of some of these in certain papers but they are less stressed than they might be. Dr. Addo's paper comparing demographic features of groups in southeastern Ghana suggests that other features than ethnicity are important as do several papers on child maintenance.

I also note at this conference a very great preoccupation with the internal features and social relationships of the family. It is mainly in the area of the ties of family members to descent groups that external matters have been considered. But family activities take place within the context of the larger society. However, with the exception of an occasional reference here and there, there has been little concern with family organization and behaviour in terms of political and economic power, social and religious roles in the community and so on. One hears talk everyday in Ghana of prominent families, and of generations of prominent families, and clearly Ghanaians have ideas concerning their relative power and influence in society. In so far as families can be seen as elements of economic and political influence, they need to be studied and analyzed in this context.

Another form of comparison employed at this conference has been to contrast traditional family forms,

especially Akan and Ewe, with modern and sometimes urban types. I think that this is a rewarding manner of operation. It has been more successful with the Akan groups, where the traditional features are pretty well understood, than the Ewe. The arguments that arose among the Ewe specialists over kinship terms growing out of Dr. Ansre's paper, and the disagreements as to the nature and interpretation of Ewe ethnographic data among Dr. Kludze, Mr. Kumekpor and Dr. Nukunya, suggest that there may be a great deal of variation in traditional Ewe family life from one region of Eweland to another, variation within a general pattern of patrilineality and extensive cognatic ties. Some of this may, however, be more apparent than real, more in the particular intellectual styles and interests of the Ewe experts than in the facts themselves. But at the moment it is extremely difficult to contrast successfully traditional Ewe family life with anything else with any sense of security. The problem is compounded, for further research on the rural Ewe today may not provide anything of a view of traditional Ewe family life, for there has been a long period of mission influence there, heavy outmigration to other parts of Ghana, and considerable internal movement within the Volta Region. But cooperative thinking and planned research should clear up many of the questions about Ewe society and provide a firmer basis for comparison with other family forms.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this conference has been the materials on Ghanaian households, both in terms of the data that have emerged and in the imaginative research techniques that have developed to collect it. The Ghanaian household is clearly difficult to define by any single concept. Dr. Addo's view of the household as being composed of persons who eat and sleep together has usefulness for world-wide comparisons, but it also clearly does not fit the households studied by Dr. Vercruijsse and his wife. This is an area where new concepts and analytical tools are being developed. The traditional terms for marriage residence, such as virilocal or neolocal do not seem to have much meaning when a man's wife lives in a separate household from him away from her natal home, which he visits and resides at from time to time, living elsewhere at other times, where the children may live at several residence, and where other persons stay with the household for varying periods of time. Household

patterns of great complexity exist, ones that do not fit Euro-American conceptions, where the household and the family generally are consistent with one another. But the Ghanaian data suggest that these two differ greatly here. An understanding of household composition goes a long way towards putting family relationships into a proper setting in Ghana, and here there is much exciting individual and comparative research to be done. A word of caution, though! Ethnographic data on such groups as the Fante (Christensen, 1954), Ashanti (Fortes, 1949, 1950), and the Ewe (Nukunya, 1969), suggest that traditional household compositions were also complex and variable. The change today is probably not from simplicity to complexity, but from certain types of complexities to other ones. It would be interesting to work these changes out in detail.

A like point might be made in the matter of the role of women in the changing family, so well described by Mrs. Hardiman and others. As many persons have pointed out adult females in the traditional southern Ghanaian family are active, independent and socially strong. Theirs' has not been a subservientand submissive role. This is true for patrilineal groups such as the Ga, Adangme and Ewe as well as for the matrilineal Akan. The question of modern change then refers not so much to the woman's rise in position in the family but to the changing economic, domestic and moral roles that she is playing. There is even a suggestion by Mrs. Hardiman that the absence of the husband from the family for periods of time for cocoa farming or other entrepreneurial activities has forced some wives to play a larger role in subsistence farming than previously, thus tying her more strongly to the domestic aspects of family life than in the past. The detailed working out of family roles in Mrs. Hardiman's and Dr. Oppong's papers are of considerable value in understanding the internal workings of this domestic group.

One is also struck by the complexities of descent and family structure in certain parts of traditional Ghana which emerge clearly from some of the papers read here. Simple descent lines of either a patrilineal or a matrilineal nature alone do not appear among the Fante (and the Efutu who were not discussed), some Akwapem peoples, and the Ewe. What we get is some sort of unilineal descent on one side and either descent or other

kinds of ties of considerable importance on the other parental side. With the exception of the Ga-Adangme, the whole south-central coastal and southeastern Ghana area seems to be one of considerable variation in descent and cognatic features. It is one where it would be profitable for a person today to try to pull together into a broad view the existing ethnographic and sociological data and to use this as a basis for the careful planning of research projects. Such a regional comparative study would necessarily have to consider the historical facts of the contact of patrilineal Ewe, Ga, and Adangme with the matrilineal Akan groups, but it could also explore whether such features as the economics and the social groupings of fishing as against those of horticulture have anything to do with the variant forms of family life found in the region.

I would like to suggest that the study of these ethnic groups can not only be profitably contrasted with the more ideal types of unilineal descent groups such as the Tallensi and the Ashanti, but that much could be gained by looking at contrasting societies exhibiting double descent. For example, there is a whole group of such societies in eastern Nigeria, which include the Yako (Forde, 1942), the Bembe (Harris, 1965), and the Eastern Igbo (Ottenberg, 1968), which may have arisen through similar historical conditions to the mixed descent and cognatic groups in southern Ghana. There is also the work of Goody on the LoWiili (Goody, 1956), that of Nadel on the Nuba (Nadel, 1947), and so on. In all of these cases the maternal and the paternal aspects of the family are both very strong.

It is of considerable interest to me that many of the matters discussed here are of practical as well as of intellectual importance. Laws concerning child maintenance, wife support, inheritance of family property, and property rights of family members, are in the process of being reworked or soon will be, as are related matters concerning the family, for example land ownership laws. The degree to which ethnicity is declining in family relationships is an important matter in relation to national goals of integration in Ghana. The question of family size and household composition are of significance in thinking about family planning strategies in Ghana. The extent of the economic independence of wives relates very much to the general nature of internal economic activities in Ghana. The

conference has made a start in the direction of practical matters in its inclusion of legal specialists and persons with social work backgrounds in its programme. I feel, however, that the connection between the research worker in the family area, and those concerned with practical matters at the university level, must be extended to involve those at the policy-making level, if the data of social scientists is to be fully used in forming policy (Smock, 1970). In this sense the legal specialists and those involved in social work and related fields are intermediaries between the more purely academic and the policy-oriented individuals and as such they can play a crucial role.

Finally, I find exciting the willingness of persons of diverse backgrounds to come together and to communicate with one another on common problems sociology, anthropology, linguistics, literature, and law, to name the major ones, have met and presented papers and talked in a surprisingly frank and open manner, without much of the usual oversensitivity to their own vested professional interests and without use of the protective jargons of their own disciplines. Personally, I find the growing common interests of legal minds and social scientists are very stimulating. The analysis of African literature clearly helps to reveal some of the non-measurable qualities of family life. The blending of sound sociological quantitative techniques with systematic anthropological work shows the closeness of these two fields. And I believe that the linguist can do much more than simply provide kinship terms in the study of family life, in so far as the linguist is willing to deal with the meanings of words as well as the structure of speech. Despite the apparent diversity of approach of conference members I find the presence of many basic underlying understandings.

The study of the Ghanaian family is clearly in a very rich and productive phase at this time, after a quiescence of some years. It is an exciting field of work with important theoretical and practical ends.

Many new suggestions for research and idea formulations have grown out of this conference and will, I am sure, continue to germinate among those who have taken part.

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