

PART III

COMPARATIVE STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

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The papers of the conference reveal a fascinating situation for those interested in comparative work. Firstly there is the obvious contrast between matrilineal Akan and 'patrilineal' Ewe. The patrilineality of the Ewe requires some qualification for it appears that both sons and daughters inherit their father's property, though Professor de Graft Johnson's figures show no cases of a man's successor being his sister or daughter. However the Ewe do constitute a departure from Bosman's observation about homogeneous inheritance (man to man, woman to woman) which predominates in Africa.

Earlier matrilineal and patrilineal patterns of social organisation clearly affect contemporary behaviour in domestic contexts. Indeed in certain ways the incorporation of custom in legal decisions in the manner described by Dr. Woodman may well have inhibited attempts to change the system. But the differences manifest them in other ways too. Is it accidental that Mrs. Jones-Quartey's survey showed matrilineal fathers as being less inclined to make payments to separated wives than in the Ewe case? The possibility is there, recognized by the actors. For Dr. Oppong points out that "husbands and wives were noted to refer with emotion to the effects of matrilineal inheritance upon domestic life among educated urban dwellers." Feelings of financial insecurity were felt by wives and children, which was one reason given for the way that Akan wives persistently maintained their economic independence in the city (though in fact not all matrilineal wives were so affected and the patrilineal wives were also independent). Dr. Oppong finds that her data supports the conclusion (and it is similar to that I reached in comparing the LoDagaba and the LoWiili) that matrilineal couples practised a somewhat less 'joint' form of domestic budgeting in saving and using resources than their patrilineal counterparts. This conclusion receives further support from the fact that among the matrilineal couples themselves 'jointness' is inversely

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related to the help given to clansfolk.

The differences between matrilineal and patrilineal groups may also be reflected in household structure. In his survey of households in South-eastern Ghana, Dr. Addo reports a size of 3.5 in towns and 4.8 in the country. 27% of urban households were headed by women and these tended to be larger than those headed by men (4.1 as against 3.3). He suggests that these female-headed households are largely matrilineal, and hence draw on a wider range of kin.

These papers emphasize the key role of property in relation to kinship. In his concluding remarks Professor Ottenberg suggests that the emphasis may be an aspect of the changing situation, from kinship to property. I myself have stressed, on the other hand, the importance of this relationship in traditional systems. In his introductory remarks, Professor Fortes queries the stress on "property as a determinant of descent group structure," and gives more weight to descent groups as "on-going juristic personalities." I accept his point about the most inclusive descent groups, although we must not underestimate their role as holders of reserves of land essential in shifting cultivation. My point is that the distribution of property rights influences relationships between close kin, especially those falling within smaller descent groups (e.g. minimal lineages). Where the modes of calculating inheritance and reckoning eligibility to descent groups are 'harmonic', I speak of 'corporate' descent groups, because otherwise I find the concept of corporation too vague to handle and partly because, combined in this way, the modes of inheritance and descent become useful predictions of interpersonal behaviour. From my standpoint the relevance of property in the contemporary situation is nothing new, and I found the rural LoDagaba as concerned about these issues as Dr. Oppong finds the urban Akan.

There is another wider aspect of comparative work that is raised in these papers. The implied contrast between Africa and Europe is also of considerable interest. Throughout traditional Ghana we have the effective exclusion of the widow from her husband's property; and among the matrilineal Akan, the exclusion of the children. These particular principles of customary law are undergoing a measure of revision as the result of some recent decisions. As Dr. Woodman points out, marriage under the Ordinance entails the application of (earlier) English rules and indeed even

brings a man's other customary unions within the scope of these legal provisions, so strong is the African desire to avoid discrimination between the wives and offspring of one man, whatever the contractual base of the union.

In a somewhat roundabout way, this point is connected with that made by Dr. Ekow Daniels when he writes: whereas "in the marriage laws of the 'Western and Eastern world' marriage may be said to be the basis of the family," in Ghana, "marriage is rather an offshoot of the family system" (i.e. the abusua, or descent group). This remark brings us very close to recent attempts to establish critical differences in the domestic institutions of Africa and Eurasia. It not only touches upon differences of theoretical approach as between 'alliance' and 'descent theorists' (wrongly seen in Buchler and Selby's recent book, Kinship and Social Organisation, as alternative approaches to the same data); it is also of profound significance for the development of the law and social services in contemporary Africa.

NOTES

1. I have outlined these in a paper (Goody L.R. 1969).

REFERENCES

- Buchler I.R. & Selby M.A. 1968 Kinship and Social Organisation. An Introduction to Theory & Method. The Macmillan Co. New York.
- Goody J.R. 1969 Inheritance, Property and Marriage in Africa and Eurasia. Sociology 3. 55-76.



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