

CHAPTER 6

MIGRANT ASANTE COCOA FARMERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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Any traveller through contemporary Asante is likely to come across many imposing modern concrete buildings in certain well-laid out quarters of several Asante towns and villages. In places such new quarters are given local names which reflect attributes of the people owning such buildings. For instance, in Kumasi, the name 'Asikafo amma ntem' (richmen were late) is given to the predominantly Asante residential quarters with characteristic big and imposing concrete storey-buildings. But in a place such as Kumasi, it is not so much the imposing nature of the buildings that arouses interest as the people who own them. From my own observation, many of such buildings are owned by cocoa farmers, who after years of hard toil on their cocoa farms, return to either Kumasi or their home towns or villages to utilize the money that accrued from their farms to put up those new houses.

To many an Asante farmer, a person's place in the family and the community never becomes complete unless he can boast of an immovable property, especially a building or a cocoa farm. Indeed in the estimation of many, the ownership of cocoa farms is paramount, since it is felt that from incomes accruing from farms, a person may easily build a house. Furthermore, a cocoa farmer with a reasonable annual income can be sure of a comfortable living when he is too old to work; it also gives the hope that he can be sure of getting a befitting burial and funeral obsequies after his death. Bearing in mind these possible advantages, the establishment of cocoa farms has become very popular with many Asantes from the time the crop was accepted as the main cash crop.

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By the end of World War I, land for the development of new cocoa farms was becoming short in the immediate vicinity of Kumasi and parts of eastern and southern Asante where cocoa had been introduced earlier on. Following its introduction into Asante in about nineteen hundred and its acceptance by the people soon afterwards, there was considerable interest to put more land under cultivation. Thus when the farmers in the old settled areas were hard pressed for more arable land, they moved out to virgin forest lands of western Asante including part of the present Brong Ahafo Region. In fact the Ahafo part of Brong-Ahafo Region is strictly speaking Asante. It was made part of the new region in 1959. Incidentally, the movement took pace at the time when the Kumasi-Goaso motor road was nearing completion; it served to ease the problem of transport which the migrant farmers would have faced.

This was the beginning of the Asante migrant cocoa farmers. At first they settled and acquired land in western Asante (mainly in the present day Ahafo Ano and Ahafo). (See Fig. I.) Indeed of all the migrant 'stranger' groups of cocoa farmers to be met in the area, the Asante group exceeds by far all others. It is evident that the process of moving to new virgin forest has not yet come to an end; for during the past few years, there has been the tendency for a number of these first generation Asante migrants to move further afield in search of new cultivable land. In the process most of them have gone to either Sefwi or Wassaw, all in the Western Region of Ghana. This, as observed by Polly Hill 'is natural for certain farmers to indulge in a continuous process of acquiring land in other parts of the country' (1963:18). For most of the Asante cocoa farmers, the need to acquire more new land nowadays has been further necessitated by the need to develop more farms in different areas, so as to make it possible to transfer portions of such farms to favoured relations and yet leave enough for themselves. In this connection, care is usually taken to ensure that wives and children, who assist the farmers, are given farms, before it is too late to do this. To the Asante cocoa farmer, this is a



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departure from the traditional arrangement, whereby wives and children were customarily left out in such matters.

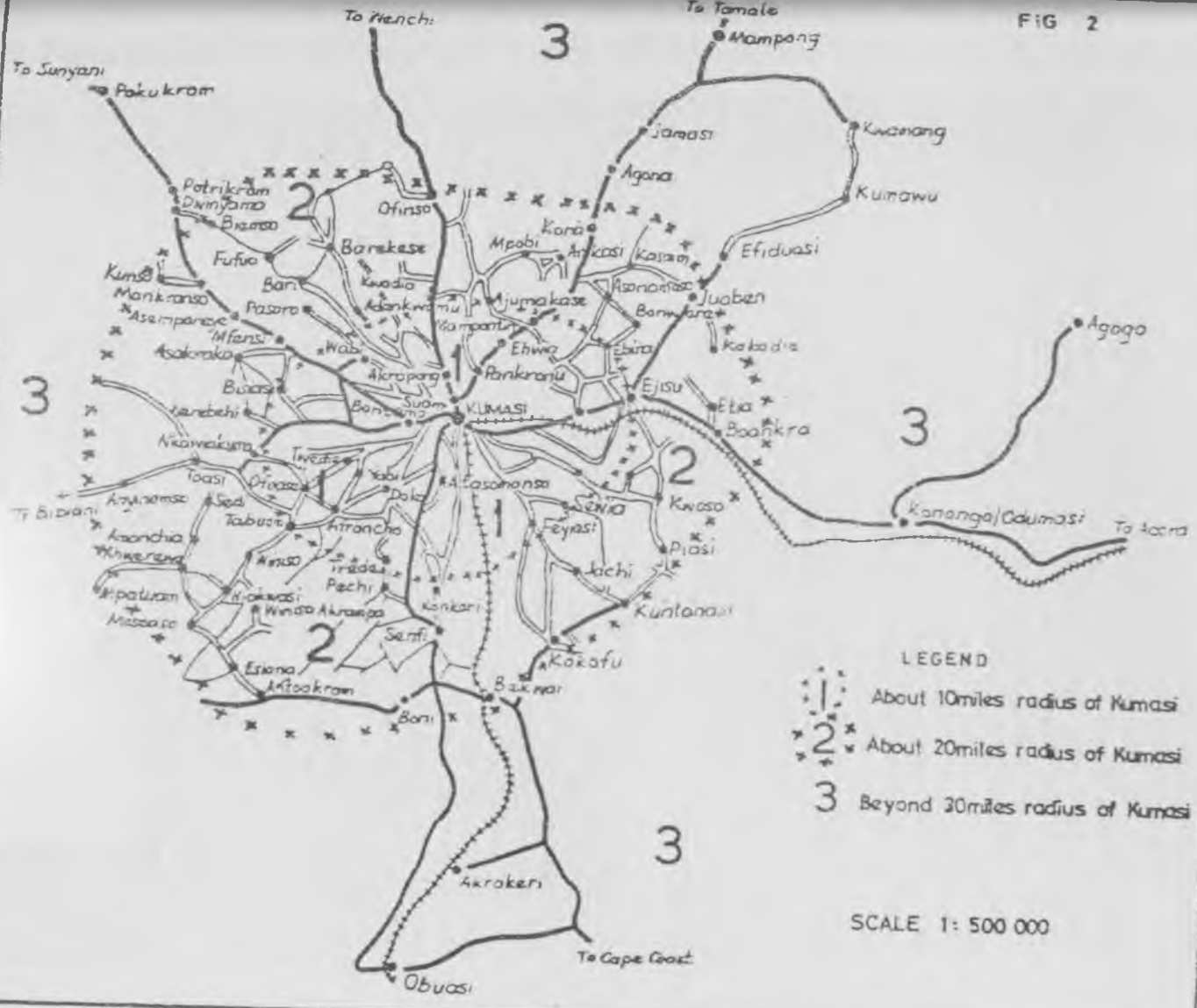
The Asante farmers now live close by farmers of different tribes with different rule of inheritance. For instance most of the farmers who have come to live and work in the same areas are from such patrilineal groups as the Ga, Akuapem and Krobo.

While some of the changes, especially those concerning the transfer of farms to wives and children, have been well received by the matrikin, thanks also to the spread of education, in other cases, there has been open opposition. In the absence of farmers through death, conflicts over claims to certain farms have arisen. Examples abound of cases where the two parties have gone to court for settlement. An attempt will be made in this paper to highlight some of the difficulties encountered as transfers of cocoa farms and other property are made.

Acquiring the Land

As indicated earlier, by the late 1920's, almost all suitable land for cocoa cultivation had been taken up around the Asante capital, Kumasi. This was partly the result of the widespread interest in cocoa farming, resulting from the riches it brought to the peasant cocoa farmers, and partly, under bush fallow in the face of the increasing population, the need for land for the cultivation of the local food crops. Thus the first Asante cocoa farmers to acquire new land for cocoa cultivation in western Asante and the Ahafo district of the Brong Ahafo Region, migrated from the immediate vicinity of Kumasi. Most of them came from within about a ten mile radius of Kumasi and they included farmers from such places as Antoa, Yabi, Sawua, Ampabame, Abirem, Asokore-Mampong, Kumasi itself etc. (See Fig. 2). Since the means of transport was on foot, many of the early farmers settled on the nearest virgin lands and these included lands around Mankranso, Bredi, Potrikurom

FIG 2



Pokukurom and Kunso.

The second group of migrant farmers started moving westward soon after World War II. By this time virgin land of the immediate approach had been taken up. It therefore became necessary for the group to move further westward, most of them settled around Bechem, Tepa, Akyerensua, Hwidem; Nkasaam, Kenyasi, Ntotoroso, Goaso etc. (See Fig.2). The farmers came from about the thirty miles radius of Kumasi from places such as Bekwai, Kokofu, Essumeja, Ejisu, Kwaso Akyenakurom, Juaben, Effiduasi, Banko, Jamasi and Boamang.

The existence of vast unclaimed stool lands and the relative ease with which parcels of such land could be acquired aided this widespread movement. The local chiefs, as custodians of the land, exercised control over all unclaimed land and it was to them that all requests for the granting of usufruct rights were directed.

Every request was supported by customary consideration money or salutation fee, which varied from one locality to another. The first Asante migrants approached the land owners through certain people, who might be well-known migrants themselves but had settled there earlier on. Led by these go-betweens, the farmers were first introduced to the chiefs and their elders, followed later by the offer of drinks and the salutation fee. My inquiries show that for many of the early migrants, the fee charged was usually small. Two main reasons seem to explain this; first the need to attract many willing farmers to work on the land and thereby help the local landowners to establish claims to land and thus stop encroachment from other landowners, with whom they shared common boundaries was great; secondly, strict adherence to the "clan association" for as has been noted elsewhere - the clan creates feelings of solidarity and of spontaneous good-will (Busia, 1951:85). Thus many of the migrant cocoa farmers chose to acquire land in areas where the stool occupants were members of their clan. In these areas, the newly arrived farmers claimed and received hospitality on the strength of their membership of the same clan. An interesting

effect of this today, is the grouping of members of the same clan from parts of Asante in places in Ahafo where the same clan happens to be the land owning group. As an illustration, there are many members of the Oyoko clan from Kumasi and Kokofu and their surrounding villages with farms on the Goaso stool land since the stool is of the Oyoko clan.

The significance of this clan association lies in the fact that very little fee was paid in order to acquire land. Inquiries show that besides a bottle or two of either schnapps or gin or rum, the actual amount paid never exceeded twelve new cedis: In places such as Kunso, it was about N¢4.00, while at Akyerensua in 1935 it was about N¢6.00. But after World War II, and following the arrival of many migrants from parts of Southern Ghana, the fee was increased. This became necessary so that the landowners could control this influx and also increase the revenue accruing to them from the granting of usufruct rights to farmers. But even during this time, the Asantes among the migrants paid less than those from the south. An informant at Tepa alleged that an initial down payment of about N¢30.00 for the Asante and N¢50.00 for his counterpart from Southern Ghana was fixed in about 1943. By 1951, this had gone up considerably.

It is evident that the right to cultivate a given parcel of land was granted after a certain sum of money had been spent. While it is true that some farmers utilized money saved earlier on, others used money earned from a family property, such as a cocoa farm or a building inherited: still others received financial support from some working members of their matrikin. Land thus acquired became family land and cocoa farms developed could not be regarded as individual properties.

Who assist in establishing Farms?

It is not an uncommon practice for migrating farmers in Asante to leave their wives and children behind when going to start work on newly acquired land. This is usually necessary so as to allow the

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farmer to arrange for accommodation and to grow food crops, more of which are needed as soon as these dependents join him. In the absence of these people, some migrants are accompanied by a willing brother, nephew or frequently by an annual labourer. But informants allege that very often relatives decline to accompany them and where an annual labourer is not available, the farmer has to go alone. This has been the case even until now.

It is the wives and children, once they join the farmers, who assist in undertaking the various tasks on the farm and endure all the hardships in the respective localities. Few migrants give the impression that their wives and children have never assisted them. A few however have relied mainly on their own strength, since even hired labour is scarce. As a result the early farms tended to be relatively small, usually ranging in size from less than two to three acres. But the position changed as soon as more labourers, willing to work in cocoa farms in various capacities, arrived from parts of Northern Ghana and elsewhere. Some of these were engaged as annual, casual and contract labourers to assist in establishing the farms. During his period of service the annual labourer is provided with free food, accommodation and clothing, in addition to being supplied with the necessary farming implements.

In view of the expense involved in keeping these labourers, many farmers usually make sure that they employ only those without families. Since it is the farmer's responsibility to provide accommodation for his labourers and dependents, most migrants set up their own settlements after the first one or two years work on a farm. The set up may consist of two or three rooms, one of which may be reserved for the casual or contract labourers whom he may engage on specific tasks from time to time. When, in a later stage, the farms come to the fruiting stages 'abusa' labourers are employed mainly to pluck the farms. Farmers do not discriminate against those with or without families. As far as this group of labourers are concerned, it is only accommodation that has to be provided free, they take charge of all other

expenses themselves.

At present, it is becoming difficult to recruit many abusa men to work on farms. This is due to scarcity of foodstuffs. It is usual for farmers to allow their abusa men to grow food crops on reserve land; but in most places, all land is put under cocoa cultivation. The result is that a number of the labourers interviewed at Mim, Ntotoroso, Kenyasi Nos. 1 and 2, etc. complained bitterly of the high cost of food crops. Indeed, according to their allegations, most of them spend the majority of their earnings on food, far more than they ought to do in such farming areas.

Patterns of Inheritance

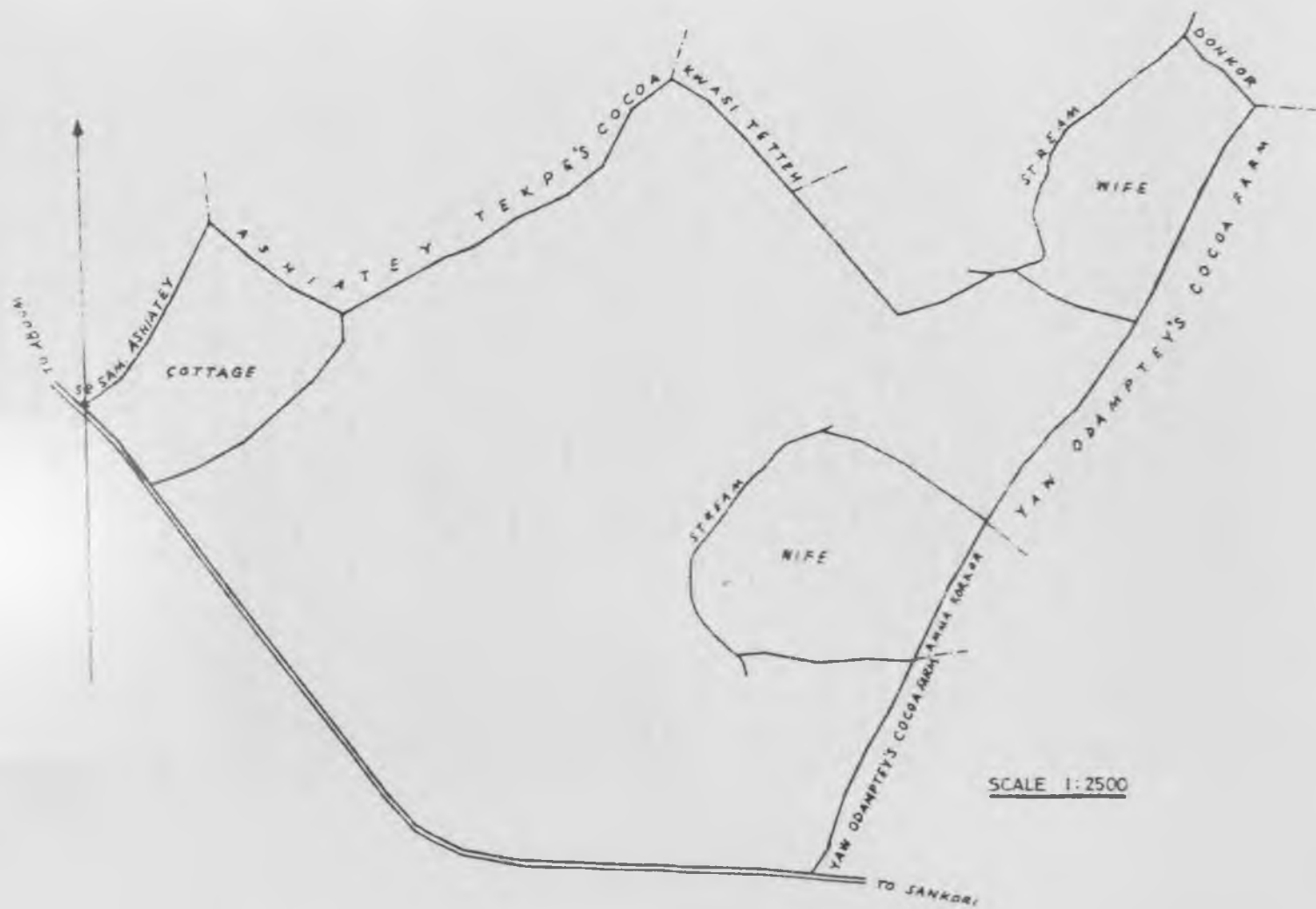
By custom, the matrilineal rules of inheritance operate in Asante. Accordingly, on the death of a person, it is usual for a brother, preferably a younger one to succeed him. When this is not possible, the son of one of the deceased's sisters that is, the wofase, takes over the control of the dead person's property. Such an inheritor takes over obligations and duties towards his kinsmen; he also has obligations to take charge of the dead man's wife/wives and children. For years, these rules have remained in force though in many instances, the obligation towards the wife/wives and children have been only very temporary. Experience has shown that the fact that cocoa farmers rely on their wives and children to establish their farms does not give them any rights to earnings from the farms once the farmer is no more. One result of this has been the discarding of wives and children who had lived and worked with a husband as soon as he is dead.

While these rules remain unchanged among the Asantes, many of the migrant farmers transfer parts of their farms to either their wives and/or children. It is even now usual for a building or part of it, which has been put up with money accruing from Cocoa farms established with the active assistance from a wife, to be transferred to either the wife or children during the life time of such a farmer. An important factor responsible for these social changes among the migrant farmers appears to be a realisation on the part of the

wives and children of their rights and the pressure usually brought on the farmers to transfer part of farms to them. Indeed, there are instances where wives have been advised against joining their husbands in their farming villages, if no efforts are made to assign part of the newly acquired land to them. Throughout western Asante and Ahafo, two arrangements seem to have been made in response to the increasing pressure from the wives and/or children, and possibly the influence of other groups of farmers with different inheritance rules. Under the first arrangement, some of the farmers allow their wives to start developing part of the land from the opposite end. (See Fig.3). The husband assists in this by providing direct labour and at times financing part of the undertaking. According to an elderly informant, a farmer near Kenyasi No.2, it is easier to part with an undeveloped land than a fruiting cocoa farm. The logic behind this, seems to be the fact that matrikinsmen will be less offended if they think that the wives developed the farms themselves. In fact in the case of Kofi Asamoah, all his three wives had acquired sizeable farms under this arrangement, all known to some members of his family.

The second arrangement concerns transferring part of a developed farm to the wife/wives and/or the children, as soon as the farms have come up to the fruiting stage. In some cases, the transfer is effected and the necessary arrangements completed. In others, the intention to transfer a particular part of the farm is made known to the intended donee and to ensure that no disputes arises, this intention is made know to either one of the farmer's matrikinsmen or where none is available to the local chief, so that when necessary he may testify to its correctness. Frequently disputes arise on the death of the farmer. A case of this nature happened at a village near Tepa, where in 1968, a one-time Sanitary Inspector, informed the local chief that he wanted to transfer part of his farm to his wife and children. Soon after his death, his heir, a sister, in this particular case, refused to honour what her late brother had ordered. The excuse she gave was that the section of the farm given out was better than hers. After much

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persuasion, the sister agreed to release that farm only after cropping it for four years; this action according to her was to enable her settle debts allegedly incurred during the man's funeral. It is doubtful if without pressure from the chief the heir would have released the farm.

As a safeguard against possible opposition, once a farm has been transferred, the donee has to appear before some members of the donor's kin with the 'aseda', the thanks drink and money. The drink may be palm wine and or schnapps or gin; and the amount may vary from eight to sixty new cedis, depending, of course, on the size and condition of the farm transferred. The 'aseda' may be accepted to signify the recognition of the transfer of property: a rejection may mean a total non-recognition.

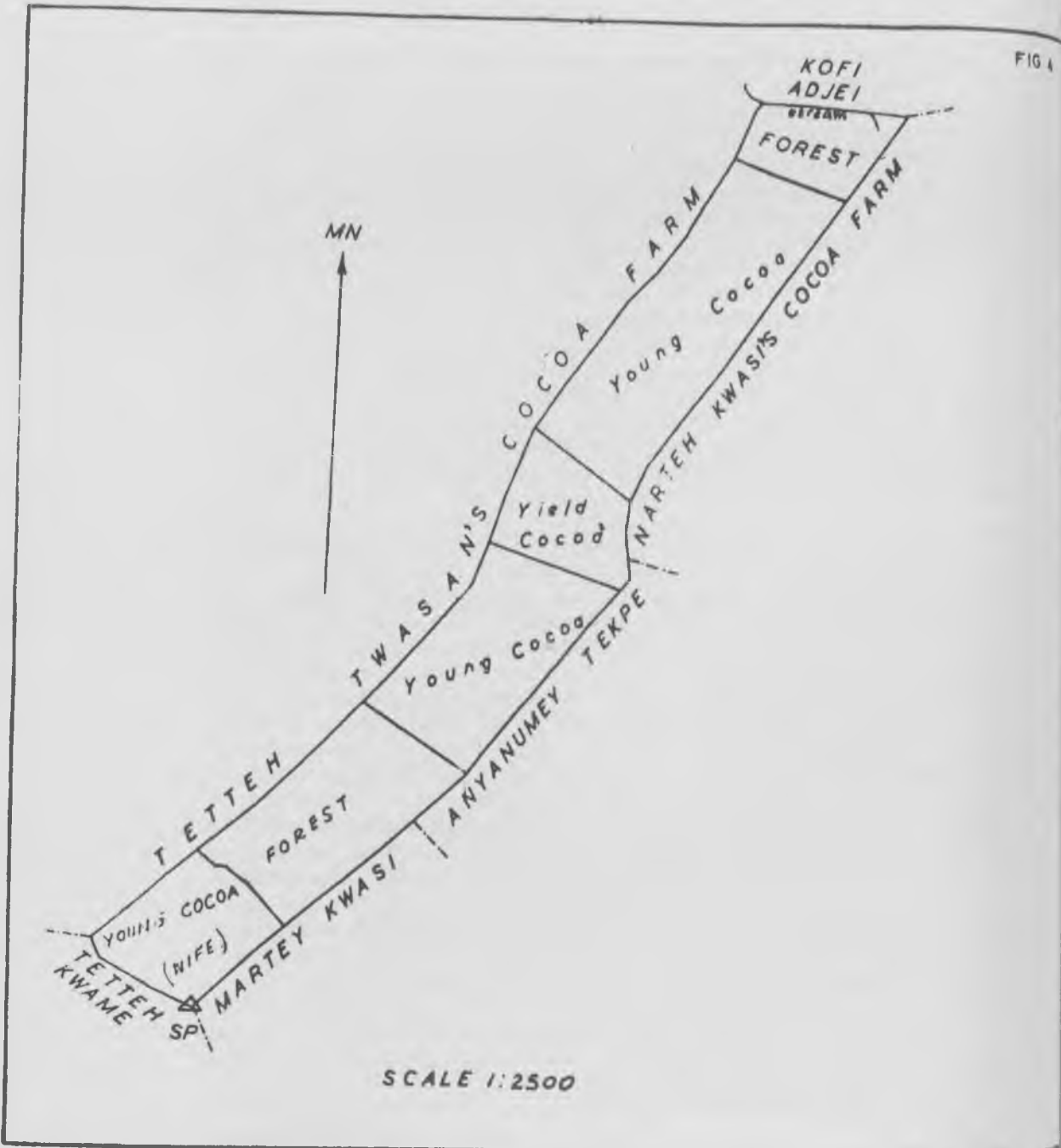
In a particular case at Twabidi No.1, in which the author was a principal witness in July 1970, an objection was raised on the grounds that before parting with the farm, the farmer never first consulted a maternal nephew - an agricultural Field Assistant, alleged to have financed the work in the initial stages. Later the farmer had to render an apology although he was only parting with a small part of the farm he had developed. But even this was not enough to convince the kinsmen to accept the 'aseda'. In the end the woman was asked to tender it at another time when the nephew would be present.

It may be necessary to state that the nature of the relationship existing between the wife/wives and the kinsmen of the husband can be very vital in the acceptance or non-acceptance of the 'aseda'. When the kinsmen have grounds for disliking a wife, she could be greatly embarrassed. From my own recent observations, it is erroneous for anyone to think that disputes arising from the transfer of property to wife/wives and or children are dying out now in Asante. Indeed, the courts at Kumasi and Sunyani are full of cases pending judgement. Besides, the local chiefs and their elders are often engaged in trying to establish the truth of conflicting claims that come before them. One of such cases observed concerned one of the widows of

a man from a village near Kumasi who established farms near Pokukurom. While alive, the farmer promised to transfer part of one of his farms to a wife whose first farm had been destroyed by fire, but this was not done before his death. Unfortunately none of the man's relatives was informed of his intention. Thus when the wife voiced this claim, the heir rejected it out-right. Later the heir even refused to appear before a Kumasi chief to hear a will alleged to have been written by the deceased, contending that only a legally constituted court could read out such a will. Up to October 1970, the will had not been produced, but the wife went to the abusa labourers and instructed them not to give out proceeds from the farm to the heir. In another instance, the wife collected the cocoa beans as they were being dried. The matter was reported to the police and the case was taken to court.

It is obvious from observation that kinsmen do not often object to transfers where the farmer established the farms with his own efforts. Similarly no conflicts arise where a farmer transfers all his farms to his wife/wives and children when he knows he has no direct successors. This often happens in the case of farmers without sisters and therefore no 'wofase'. Such donors only make sure that they have something to live on and that they made proper arrangements for their burial. For while his relatives may not object to the transfer, most of them would not be very willing to waste their money on him, mainly as a result of such a transfer. And as long as he lived, such a person should be aware that his kinsmen would not be of much help to him, if the wife/wives and children to whom he might have transferred his farms were to suddenly fail him in time of need. At a village near Kunso, the author came across one farmer from Boamang near Offinso, who had given all his farms to his wife developed with her active support. Upon inquiry, it was established that the farmer had no sisters and therefore no 'wofase'. He is one of three brothers all of whom have established sizeable farms. As far as my information goes none of the brothers objected to the transfer.

Besides the transfer of cocoa farms to wife/wives



and children, another recent feature among many Asante migrant cocoa farmers is the willingness to assist a wife/wives or children to build their own houses. Normally money for such projects comes from profits accruing from cocoa farming. A farmer may not necessarily build a house and hand it over to a wife or a child; but he may encourage any of them to start and then complete the project. There are others who transfer part of a building to a wife or children. Thus it is common for those who put up storey-building to give one floor to a trusted wife or a helpful child.

As in the case of the transfer of cocoa farms, the recipient has to acknowledge the award by presenting the 'aseda' before a group of elders including some of the donor's kinsmen. In more modern times, documents are prepared to seal the transfer. In addition to transfer of farms or buildings, children of migrant cocoa farmers in Asante nowadays receive better attention from their fathers than they used to in the past. It is common to find children of cocoa farmers receiving education at all levels. Sometimes, the mothers' matrikin may be responsible for their up keep in schools, but today more and more of them are cared for by their fathers. The farmers take great interest in seeing to the education of their children. All these are changes one notices among the migrant cocoa farmers encountered in western Asante and Ahafo. They are changes to be seen in the social organisation of cocoa farming today. As more and more of the Asantes move further afield to acquire land to embark on cocoa cultivation and as they are exposed to different aspects of property holding and continue to depend more and more on their wives for support and assistance, the greater the chances of these changing conditions being perpetuated.

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