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FAMILY VALUES, LAND SALES AND AGRICULTURAL COMMODIFICATION IN SOUTH-EASTERN GHANA

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In the evolutionary theory of property rights, customary land tenure arrangements in Africa are seen as gradually evolving towards more individualized property rights and transactions of land on open markets, as population increases and land becomes scarce. This is seen as leading to the evolution of atomistic family farms, freely buying and selling land on markets according to their needs and changing resource endowments (Binswanger and Deininger 1993; Deininger 2003). The evolutionary theory of property rights tends to downplay political and power relations, and the extent to which dominant policies shape land relations. An effect of the policy discourse on transforming land relations is to present the interventions that dominant policy interests seek to initiate as natural, and as an integral part of the next stage in evolutionary development. This tends to present the story of those able to secure and alienate land in collusion with dominant political interests and policies, while it neglects the perspectives of the losers and their disillusionment with the contemporary world (Amanor 2008).

This article is concerned with the contestation of rights to land and labour and the construction of customary land tenure in the forest region of Ghana from the nineteenth century to present. It argues that the processes of commodification that underlie this contestation have resulted in a decline of 'family farms', in which farming is conducted by various combinations of husband, wives and children. There has been a corresponding emergence of individual farming in which farmers increasingly rely on hired labour, and in which sharecropping relations increasingly replace inheritance of land for a growing section of the population. This commodification of agriculture tends to undermine the moral economy of the family, which becomes increasingly fragmented and embroiled in disputes and contestation of what constitutes custom (Amanor 2007, 2001). These conflicts are overlooked within the evolutionary property rights school and the dominant neo-liberal land policies they inspire, since they assume and are predicated upon notions of a harmonious evolution to an unproblematic family farm.

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In Ghana, there has been no such clear linear evolution in property rights. Land sales preceded colonialism and arose in the context of frontier development of export crops for European markets from the 1830s. The mining boom of the late nineteenth century created a large demand for concessions and land speculation. This resulted in colonial interventions to control and regulate land sales. Working within the framework of Henry George's land reform proposals, a framework for colonial trusteeship over land was created. Attempts to vest land in the colonial state met with opposition from the Gold Coast elite organized in the Aborigines Rights Protection Society and from the European mercantile firms who opposed state interventions in the market. The eventual compromise was to place land under the authority of paramount chiefs, who were incorporated into the structure of colonial administration through the native authority system of indirect rule (Phillips 1989; Cowen and Shenton 1994; Amanor 1999). These transformations in land markets were not initiated by internal systemic factors such as population growth, but by pressures arising from external trade, capital investment and processes of capital accumulation.

The framework of indirect rule was instrumental in shaping notions of customary land tenure. Allodial rights to land were vested in paramount authorities, who were the only social groups with recognized rights to transact land. Other social groups could only acquire user rights in land. As a result of these strictures, rights to sell and purchase land became increasingly contested from the 1920s, and although various forms of land sales have taken places, sharecropping has become the dominant mode of transacting land between those without chiefly status. This has often taken the form of disguised land sales (Hill 1956).

The contested nature of land originates in particular policy interventions, and as land has become increasingly scarce its contested nature has become more acute, resulting in increasing difficulties in realizing land sales. Within a liberalized economy, based on notions of free markets, stable property rights and land transactions, this contestation of land rights needs to be resolved, but this cannot be done merely by promoting free markets in land. In Ghana the main state and donor-led initiatives in land reform, as embodied in the Land Administration Project, involve greater legal recognition of customary rights of chiefs and landholders to alienate and claim ownership over land (Ubink and Quan 2008). This disempowers other groups with user rights in land, who find that the land they work becomes alienated and transacted by customary authorities (Ubink 2008). However, these changes are being presented by their advocates in the Land Administration Project as part of a dynamic customary sector that adapts to changing evolutionary conditions.

While the investigation of policy influences on customary land and land markets lies beyond the scope of this article,[1] the central argument

[1] Policy issues in relation to the construction of customary tenure are addressed more fully in Amanor (2008).

here is that the dynamics of land relations are best understood within a framework that examines the commodification of land and labour, and the impact of these on social relations and the transmission of property and land. This includes intergenerational and gender relations within lineages; the impact of increasing social differentiation and capital accumulation on family relations; and the relationship between family, hired and migrant labour. Conflicts over rights in land and rights to labour service have often shaped the development of land markets and the ways in which land is transmitted from one generation to the next, and this has often transformed family relations and values.

The historical development of agrarian relations in Ghana has been influenced by the rise and decline of frontiers of export crop development. A significant literature on the development of the cocoa frontier in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire exists, which documents four historical phases in the development of pioneer frontiers (Amanor 1994, 2001, 2005; Boni 2005; Chauveau and Léonard 1996; Léonard 1997; Léonard and Oswald 1997; Colin and Ayouz 2006; Chauveau and Richards 2008). The rise and decline of frontiers affects the relationship between the availability of land and labour migrations; the valuation and commodification of land; the adaptation and reinvention of customary relations; and social conflicts between autochthones and migrants, chiefs and commoners, youth and elders, and between family members. While this frontier process begins with an influx of migrants who gain land on favourable terms and open up new areas to global markets, it ends with social conflicts, increasing inequality and economic insecurity. The four phases are characterized by the following developments:

1. In the initial phase, land is plentiful and labour scarce. Landowners and chiefs without labour to develop land are willing to sell large tracts of empty land to farmers with capital to invest in land and labour to create agricultural accumulation.
2. Land and labour become widely available. A large number of migrants are attracted to the zones of export production, and the landlords can now use migrant labour to work the land, create their own plantations, and realize capital through investment in export crop production rather than selling the land. Outright sales of land decline and are replaced with various leasing and sharecropping arrangements, which are often incorporated into the pantheon of customary relations and invented traditions.
3. The frontier declines, as does the option to accumulate capital by investing in new land and new plantations. Land becomes increasingly scarce and surplus labour exists within the ranks of labour migrants and among family youth. The chiefs and elders within families, who control land, can now play off migrant labour against the local youth, who constitute the main pool of family labour. Under the new conditions, the youth are increasingly dependent upon elders for land, since they cannot go out and clear virgin forests. However, the elders also compete with each other

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for control of land and family labour. Youth and women become the victims of the shortage of land and the competition between elders for land, and they are no longer guaranteed access to family land. This leads to conflicts and friction between local youth and migrants.

4 This eventually leads to a crisis, in which unfavourable terms for labour result in its retreat from the existing conditions of production (Amanor 2001). Migrant labourers move away to newer frontier areas where land is more available and labour scarce. The local youth also withdraw their labour services from family farms, since they are not guaranteed a share of the property they have created through their labour. They increasingly work as labourers and sharecroppers, outside of their family land, directly competing with migrant labourers (Amanor 2001, 2005). Increasingly farming becomes an individual pursuit and sharecropping replaces the transmission of land between family members. Eventually, with the increasing commodification of agricultural production, sharecropping arrangements impinge on lineage relations, and family farm relations become mediated by sharecropping relations.

This article expands on the dynamics of change in land relations in the oldest cocoa frontier area in Ghana, the south-east. It draws upon a number of data sources, including primary and secondary literature, archival sources, nineteenth-century accounts, oral traditions and newspaper reports. It uses the results of several field surveys and participatory observation field research I have conducted since 1983, including studies in the Krobo, New Suhum and Akyem Abuakwa areas of the Eastern Region in 1983, 1993, 1999 and 2000, some of which have been published (Amanor 1989, 1994, 1999, 2001; Amanor with Diderutuah 2001).

PHASE 1: PIONEER EXPORT CROP FRONTIER AND LAND SALES

Export crop production began in the early nineteenth century in south-east Ghana, among the Krobo and Akuapem people. The proximity of these people to the coast enabled them to engage in large-scale production of palm oil, which was either headloaded to Accra or transported down the Volta River. During the eighteenth century, the Krobo created a new military organization, which they used to seize land from neighbouring people in the forest ecotone. As the Krobo began to develop a successful oil palm industry the constant skirmishes with their neighbours over land became a major constraint on agricultural development. The Krobo sued for peace with their neighbours and offered to pay compensation for lands they had seized (Amanor 1994). By the 1860s, the Begoro division of Akyem Abuakwa had become the main vendors of land to the Krobo (Odonkor 1971; Amanor 1994).

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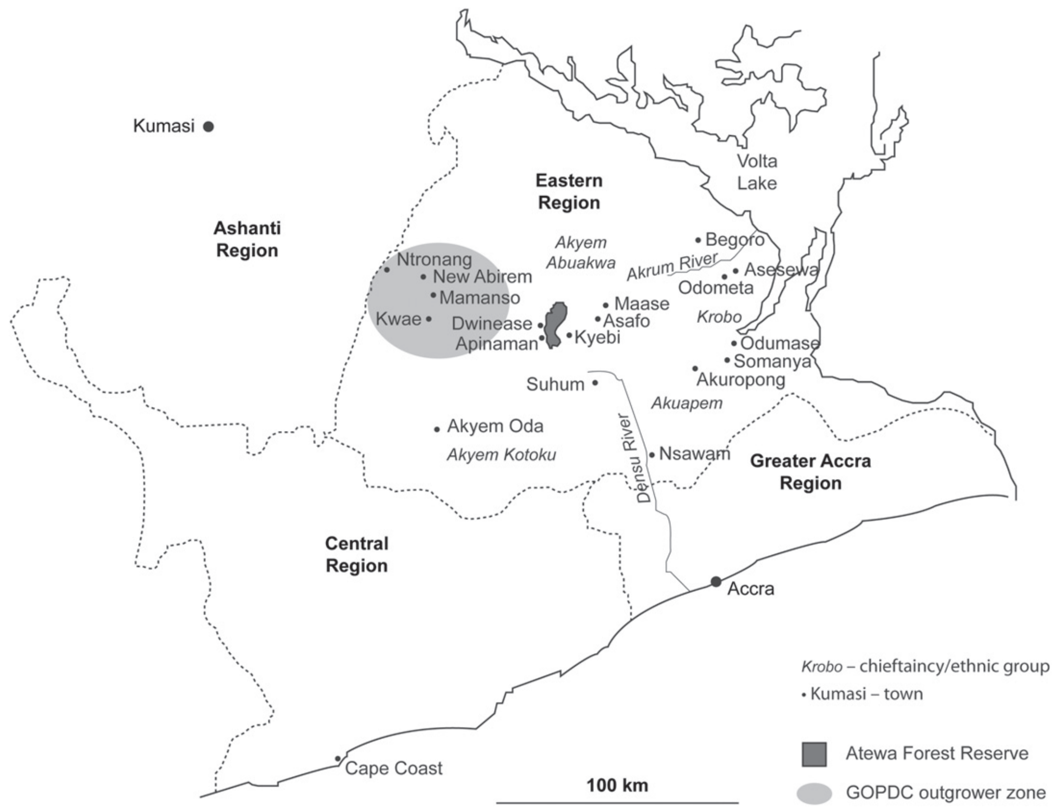

FIGURE 1 The Eastern Region of Ghana: old pioneer frontiers

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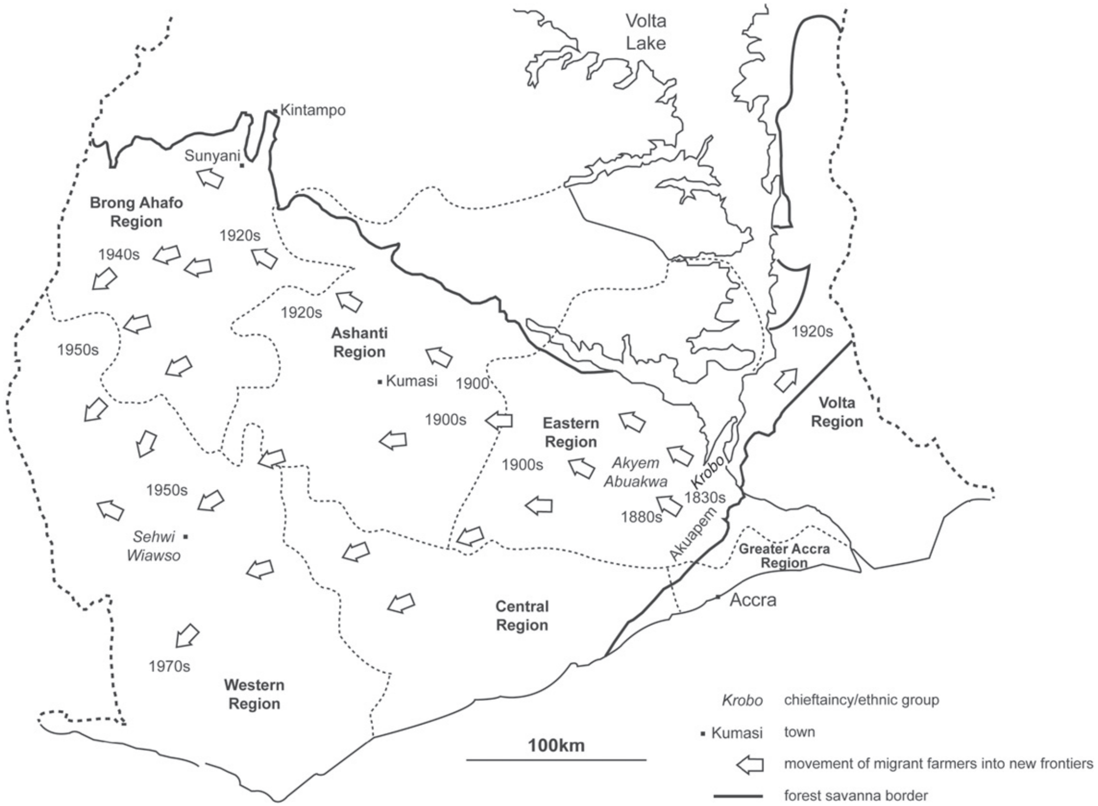

FIGURE 2 The frontier in the Ghanaian high forest zone

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By the mid-nineteenth century Akyem town chiefs were also selling land to the Akuapem farmers. An institutional framework for transacting land developed, which was based on a ceremony or contract known as *guaha* in the Twi language and *yibapomi* in Krobo. The potential buyers of land presented the sellers with rum and gave notice of their interest in purchasing land. The sellers identified suitable land and the two parties to the contract negotiated the price. After the conclusion of the contract, the sellers poured a libation on the land, during which they reiterated that the land had been sold outright to the buyers. The sellers then called on the ancestral spirits of the land to vacate the land and settle elsewhere. The ceremony was concluded with the aid of a leaf from a plant known as *Kesenekesene* (*Dracaena mannii*) or from a palm tree; this leaf was torn in half and given to witnesses for the two parties to retain as evidence of the transaction. In the case of a future dispute, the witnesses to the transaction would come forward and the two halves of the leaf would be pieced together as evidence of the transaction. Children were used as witnesses since they were likely to live longer (Opoku 1963).

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries land sales were witnessed with documents, written up in legal jargon. As in the *guaha* ceremony, the written document stressed the complete alienation of the land to the sellers and their descendants. For instance, one such document written in 1907 records:

> Know all men by these present that in consideration of the sum one hundred and seventy four pounds and three sheep paid to us and our Chief Gyamarah of Begoro we agreed and approved and sold Odumetta land to Konor E. Mate Kole of Odumase Eastern Krobo. . . . [I]t was unanimously agreed by ourselves being the Chief and Elders of Begoro, to confirm that the abovementioned land is henceforth for ever to be recognized as the property of Konor Mate Kole and his sons and heirs. And we further promised to help, defend, and assist the said Konor Mate Kole, his sons and heirs against any attempt to dispute their rights to or to disturb them in occupation, and use the said land which is their bonafide property.[2]

In the late nineteenth century, cocoa replaced oil palm as the dominant export crop in the Gold Coast. The conversion to cocoa resulted in a major shift of production towards wetter forests in Akyem, and Akuapem migrant farmers emerged as the major cocoa producers. They purchased lands from Akyem chiefs beyond the Densu River. The largest cocoa farmers in these early days were from the Aburi section of Akuapem (Hill 1963). The land purchasers had already accumulated considerable profits in their previous investments in oil palm and rubber, which they invested in cocoa production. They purchased large areas of lands usually situated in largely uninhabited wilderness areas, which were measured as portions of whole valleys and their slopes (Hill 1963).

[2] Ghana National Archives, ADM 11/457, Case No. 23 of 1913, Sale of Odometa, Begoro Native Affairs.

The Akuapem land purchasers frequently consisted of a small number of 'business associates', who clubbed together to purchase the land. These associates frequently married each other's sisters. Since in Akan matrilineal kinship the property of men is inherited by their sister's children, marriage to the sisters of associates would ensure the concentration of property and result in a narrow circle of the progeny of big cocoa farmers. This ensured that the class of rich propertied cocoa farmers were interlinked through marriage and kinship (Hill 1963). The lands were subsequently divided among their relatives, including their children and matrilineal kin. Sometimes labourers who had served them well in other areas were presented with small plots of land. However, the redistribution of land was not equitable. The associates retained the larger portion of the land for themselves and their close kin, and rewarded dependent matrilineal kin with small portions of land (Hill 1963).

In the early days of cocoa farming, labour was a major constraint. The opening up of a new frontier required major investments in labour in forest clearance and for creating the infrastructure of a new settlement. The large pool of indigent labour based on extended family relations provided a labour force that large land purchasers could use in developing their plantations. The gift of small plots of land would make the recipients obliged to help those who bestowed the land upon them. The large farmers could request help on their farms from those they had given land. The small plot farmers and their descendants would also be forced by economic necessity to supplement their income by hiring out their labour. Before the 1920s the dominant labour arrangement was wage labour (Austin 1987). The most prevalent form of labour contract was the *nkotokoano* (literally 'sack filled to the brim') system, in which the migrant cocoa labourer was paid a fixed sum for every bag of cocoa harvested at the end of the season (Hill 1956).

PHASE 2: THE COLONIAL COCOA ECONOMY

By the 1920s cocoa cultivation was flourishing and the Gold Coast emerged as the largest producer in the world. Colonial policies under indirect rule influenced cocoa production and land transactions. Paramount chiefs organized into Native Authorities carried out rural administration. An important role of the Native Authorities was to regulate social and economic life through customary law and Native Courts. The paramount chiefs were given considerable power in interpreting customary law and adapting it to modern conditions and sensibilities. They were also given coercive powers to enlist communal labour for public works, to raise revenues, and to control land. In an effort to control speculation in land and the development of private land markets, the colonial authority vested land in the paramount chiefs, who were recognized by the colonial authority as the only social group with the authority to sell land or transact concessions with foreign capital. This was buttressed by a theory of communal land tenure in which allodial title was vested in paramount chiefs, and user rights in local cultivators.

This framework for customary land management was frequently at variance with the conditions that had prevailed in the nineteenth century. Paramount chiefs used their new-found powers to establish controls over land. In the Akyem area, during the nineteenth century, land had been largely under the control of the various divisional or town chiefs. In 1732, the ruling dynasty in Akyem had led the conquest of the Akwamu, in the context of an internal civil war. Many of the towns in Akwamu had remained neutral when Akyem launched its invasion. Following the conquest, the Akyem had negotiated peace with many of the Akwamu chiefs, who retained much autonomy over their towns and lands (Wilks 1957). However, the Okyenhene (paramount chief of Akyem) failed to consolidate his hold over the old Akwamu Empire, since Asante forces defeated him in 1742. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was much resistance to Asante overrule and factional conflicts within Akyem (Addo-Fenning 1997). This reinforced the relative weakness of paramount authority and the considerable autonomy of the towns and divisions. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Okyenhene controlled little land in Abuakwa. However, with the creation of indirect rule, the Okyenhene attempted to use his new powers, conferred by the British, to create a centrist state and to rewrite the history of Akyem (Rathbone 1993, 1996). In the new version of tradition, land in Akyem Abuakwa came under the control of the Okyenhene after his conquest of Akwamu. This conquest gave the Okyenhene powers to transact land and exact taxes from the migrants. However, this attempt to build a strong centralized chieftaincy on the back of the Native Authority system met with considerable resistance among the town chiefs, commoners and migrants in Abuakwa. In the 1920s the chiefs of the old Akwamu towns of Akwatia and Asamankese, in which diamonds were found, attempted to secede from Abuakwa when the Okyenhene claimed rights to negotiate diamond concessions (Wilks 1957; Addo-Fenning 1975; Rathbone 1993). In 1931, popular discontent spread into a movement to depose the Okyenhene, which was only averted by the timely dispatch of colonial forces to protect him (Simensen 1975; Rathbone 1993).

Ownership and sale of land to migrants in Abuakwa were highly contested in the colonial period. Attempts by the town chiefs to sell land to migrants were challenged by the paramount chief, who claimed a share of the proceeds. Town chiefs disputed the rights of the paramount chief to control land and refused to comply with his directives. In his bid to control land, the Okyenhene attempted to create a land secretariat in the 1950s, which would register migrant land holding in Akyem. However, the town chiefs and migrant farmers refused to comply with these directives. Polly Hill (1963: 149) comments on the poor state of records on land maintained by the Okyenhene's land secretariat:

> The pathetic scrappiness of the lists at the time is the best proof that can be offered of the utter helplessness of the Omanhene [paramount chief or

Okyenhene] to impose his will (except as has been seen occasionally) on his sub-chiefs during the sixty years that have elapsed since the large-scale selling of land begun.

Colonial rule also created labour reserves. Within the labour reserves, taxation imposed on men forced them to migrate into the export-producing enclaves to gain wages to be able to pay their taxes. During the 1920s there was a large influx of migrants from northern Ghana, Haute Volta (Burkina Faso), Niger and Mali into the forest zone of the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast cocoa industry became an attractive destination for these migrants, since the remuneration for labour was often higher than in the French colonies (Skinner 1965). These migrants usually came for a minimum of a year before returning home. Others remained, working in the cocoa economy for many years. The growing availability of migrant labour during the 1920s transformed labour relations in the cocoa industry. The *nkotokoano* system of labouring was largely replaced by annual labourers and *abusa* (sharecrop) labourers. The annual labourer was paid a fixed amount at the end of the harvest season. During the farm season they were provided with land by the farm owner on which they could grow food, pocket money and clothes. In addition to farm work they carried out several errands around the house for the farmer, such as fetching water, pounding fufu and serving as messengers (Adomako-Sarfoh 1974; Addo 1972). The *abusa* caretakers or labourers usually spent a number of years working within the cocoa sector. They worked on existing cocoa plantations, which they weeded, maintained and harvested. In return, they were paid one third of the harvested cocoa or a third of the proceeds from its sale (Hill 1956).

A second system of sharecropping grew up around the creation of cocoa plantations. The early cocoa farmers who had purchased large tracts of land were followed by many migrants who acquired small plots, and who did not have sufficient capital to purchase large plots. The Akyem chiefs began to release land to them on sharecropping terms. The tenants were responsible for creating cocoa plantations with their own resources, including the purchase of seed and hiring of labour. The plantations were divided into two when they started to bear fruit. Two thirds of the plantation was taken by the chief and the other third became the property of the tenant (Hill 1956). This tenancy system arose in two contexts. First, it emerged as a disguised land sale, which enabled town chiefs to continue transacting land with migrants, without engaging in litigation with the paramount chief and the colonial authority over their rights to sell land. Second, in the context of the rising value of investment in cocoa, it enabled chiefs to gain access to cocoa plantations without expending capital on labour and seeds. The chiefs used *abusa* tenants to create plantations and then gave the plantations out to *abusa* caretakers to maintain. The transaction recognized the rights of migrants to the cocoa estate they created, without raising delicate political issues of land ownership and allodial rights. This arrangement was also used by family elders and owners of land in transactions with migrant farmers. It enabled the transfer of user rights in land for cocoa without referral to chiefs.

The rise of migrant labour in the cocoa belt facilitated the rapid alienation of land and accumulation of cocoa plantations. Migrant farmers reinvested their profits in farm expansion and the purchase of new land within the forest zone. The frontier swiftly moved throughout the high forest zone into Asante, the Ahafo area and the Western Region, until no new frontier districts remained. Land was rapidly alienated to migrant farmers and migrant sharecrop tenants and labourers. Hunter (1963) estimated that 98 per cent of the land in New Suhum District, Abuakwa was worked by migrant farmers who either had purchased the land or were working it on share tenancies. A similar phenomenon has been replicated in the Western Region where migrant cocoa farmers are dominant in the rural settlements (Boni 2005) and in Côte d'Ivoire (Chauveau 2006; Colin and Ayouz 2006).

The rapid expansion of cocoa farming and the availability of migrant labour have resulted in a distinct frontier process of capital accumulation and investment in cocoa plantation. The cocoa farm enterprise incorporated both family and migrant labour. Family heads deployed the family youth in the new frontier districts, where they were involved in the heavy work of converting forest into cocoa plantation. Wealthy cocoa farmers would place sons and nephews in these new frontier areas. For their efforts they would be rewarded with cocoa farms in the future. Nephews inherited from their uncles and fathers formally presented their own children with cocoa farms and land as 'gifts' (*akyedee*) at a meeting of the matrilineage. Cocoa farmers supplemented the labour of their kin with hired migrant labour. The old established plantations, where work was much less intensive, were placed under elderly *abusa* caretakers. The farmers concentrated their main family labour force in the new frontier zones, where they were establishing new cocoa plantations. The work of family youth was supplemented with hired labour when necessary. This strategy minimized the capital outlays of cocoa farmers in hiring labour for arduous tasks. It enabled profits to be rapidly reinvested in new land and the creation of new plantations.

Hill (1963) identifies migrant capitalist farmers as the dominant social force influencing the evolution of the cocoa industry. However, they were not the only type of cocoa farmers. In many settlements, cocoa was taken up by peasant farmers who farmed on a small scale and did not move in search of land. The migrant frontier transformed the lives of these farmers, since it resulted in the rapid alienation of land to migrants on lands adjacent to their settlements, which subsequently created land hunger for the local citizens, who could no longer expand into uncultivated land.

PHASE 3: THE DECLINING FRONTIER

By the late 1970s, all existing frontiers had been colonized within the forest zone of Ghana. The lack of new frontier districts transformed

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the nature of production. In the expansionary phase of pioneer frontier development, land was readily available and labour was scarce. Land was used to attract labour, and labour rewarded with future grants of land and plantation. As land became increasingly scarce, family members could no longer be guaranteed access to land and close kin began to compete for land. Among the matrilineal Akan, land-purchasing cocoa farmers frequently allocated cocoa farms to their sons, nephews, and wives in recognition of services rendered in creating cocoa farms. From fieldwork, which was conducted in Akyem Kotoku in the 1930s, Margaret Field records that fathers regularly provided sons, daughters and wives with farms. The heirs of the cocoa farmer were:

> usually nephews belonging to his own *abusua* [matrilineage], but he can and is expected to give cleared land to his sons, daughters and wife. Such gifts must be sealed with rum in the presence of witnesses, and then remain the property of the recipients and their successors or legatees. (Field 1948: 72)

One of Field's informants described the process through which land was allocated to wives:

> A husband may give his wife a farm for herself and then the profits are hers entirely, but when he gives her the farm she must give him rum before witnesses as a sign that the farm is now hers. Then, even if there is a divorce, the farm remains hers. But if there is no rum put on the gift the farm is the husband's to farm and it stays with him if there is a divorce. (Field 1948: 69)

In the late 1950s, Hill (1959) reports a different situation among women cocoa farmers at Asafo and Maase in Akyem Abuakwa. The interviewed women were insistent that they had made the cocoa farms in their own right and that their husbands had not given them any help in acquiring land and cocoa farms. By the 1970s, land scarcity had become more pronounced. Okali (1983) records bitter disputes between wives, children and their husband's matrikin over land. She describes how wives frequently worked on the cocoa farms of their husbands with the implicit understanding that they would be rewarded in the future with a gift of cocoa plantation. However, in many instances the matrilineal relatives of the husband took over the land when the husband died, without allocating portions to wives. This often resulted in bitter disputes. Okali (1983) records that wives would frequently make demands on husbands to grant them farms, and when this did not occur they threatened their husbands with divorce. Sons and nephews who spent considerable time establishing the plantations of their fathers and uncles experienced a similar fate. One son had managed his father's cocoa plantations, only to find himself displaced by his father's matrilineal heir. He bitterly declared: 'If you follow your father you are a fool' (Okali 1983: 107). Wary of working for their fathers – only to have the plantations seized by matrilineal kin – many sons abandoned their father's cocoa farms when they saw other relatives treated more favourably. However, the same fate also befell nephews, who worked on their uncle's plantations only to find themselves displaced from inheriting the land by junior brothers of their maternal uncle.

In this predicament, youth increasingly withdrew their labour from their family farms. They sought to gain access to land and livelihood through other circuits. However, these avenues were blocked by the existence of a large number of migrant labourers, working as annual labourers and sharecrop tenants. Threats of withdrawal of labour from the family farm ended merely in the replacement of young family members by migrant tenants and labourers. If the youth sought to gain income by working as wage labour or as sharecrop tenants, they had to compete against migrant labourers who were usually more willing to accept lower remuneration and lower standards of living. This led to increasing enmity between the local youth and migrant labour, which became manifest in the late 1960s.

The decline of the cocoa frontier in Ghana in the late 1960s was reflected in a slump within the cocoa sector and a national economic recession. In government circles and the mass media, this economic crisis was increasingly blamed on the large number of West African 'aliens' working in Ghana, many of whom had originally migrated into the cocoa sector but had since moved into petty trading. In a wave of xenophobia, an Aliens Compliance Order was enacted in 1969, which gave migrants without work permits two weeks to leave Ghana. While expulsion was largely directed at the informal sector and petty traders, it spread into the farming areas (Amanor 2005).

Adomako-Sarfoh (1974) further reports that, following the overthrow of the Busia government, there were attempts by the National Redemption Council to encourage migrant Sahelian labour back into the country. These moves were rejected by rural youth who demonstrated against the return of the migrant labourers. However, migrant labour from the Sahelian countries increasingly relocated to Côte d'Ivoire, where processes of frontier development were still in an expansionary state. Government policies in the Côte d'Ivoire encouraged Sahelian migrants to produce cocoa (Chauveau 2006), and they were provided with better opportunities to gain farmland than in Ghana. During the 1970s, Côte d'Ivoire displaced Ghana as the largest cocoa producer in the world.

In the 1970s, the Ghana cocoa industry was beset by problems of the decline of the cocoa frontier and the rehabilitation of old cocoa plantations, which required considerable labour and investment in inputs. These costs were not recouped in the price of cocoa, which reflected the cheaper costs of production in newer frontier areas (Ruf 1997), effectively marginalizing old frontiers. Migrant labour was often reluctant to work in old cocoa districts, since the remuneration for the intensity of labour compared unfavourably with new frontier areas.

The retreat of Sahelian migrant labour opened up new avenues for youth to work as farm labourers and as sharecroppers in the Ghana forest zone. Without access to migrant labour, cocoa farmers became increasingly dependent upon local youth. However, local youth refused to work as annual or sharecrop labourers. They preferred to work as casual 'by day' labour or on contract for specific work. Farmers could no longer delay paying labourers until after the harvest. During the 1970s old cocoa-producing districts suffered from shortfalls of labour for cocoa rehabilitation and increasing expense of labour in relation to the low yields achieved (Boateng 1974).

PHASE 4: AGRICULTURAL RESTRUCTURING – CRISIS AND COMMODIFICATION

By the 1970s, the pioneer phase of cocoa had exhausted itself. Cocoa farmers found it increasingly difficult to reward children and other dependants who worked for them with land or farms. Rehabilitation of old cocoa farms was arduous, expensive and a risky undertaking. The work was often painfully slow, since there was a high rate of failure in replanting. With declining returns from cocoa, many farmers were forced to release land to sharecrop tenants, since they had insufficient capital to hire labour. Many farmers chose to convert from cocoa to food crops, given the difficulties of rehabilitating old plantations.

The conversion of land from cocoa to food influenced the nature of sharecropping relations. Increasingly, sharecropping has been adapted to short-term contracts for food production in which the land is released to tenants for a short duration of between two and five years. The landlord usually gained a third or a half of the crop, depending on the demand for land and the value of the crops grown. With food crops becoming subject to sharecrop arrangements, sharecropping has become more pervasive. In many areas, youths prefer to farm on land which they negotiate with landowners on sharecrop arrangements rather than working on family plots allocated by family elders. The potential returns from sharecropping and intergenerational conflicts between youth and elders within families about rights to land and rights to labour services have influenced the allocation of land to children. In many instances, the income realized from sharecropping has become more valued than the support of children, resulting in the displacement of family farms. As the demand for sharecropping land increases, family land is increasingly released to family youth on sharecropping terms. In 1983 I overheard the following exchange between a patrilineal Krobo father (who was an absentee landowner) and one of his sons at Odometa in the vicinity of Asesewa:

> *Son*: Papa, the land you have given me to farm is useless. It is not fertile at all. It's all covered with *Jus* [*Euphorbia heterophylla*, a problem weed which is difficult to get rid of and indicates poor soil].
>
> *Father*: Yes, but you never think to send me anything better. How many years have you been farming here? And what crops have you sent to me? Don't you know that I also have to eat from the land? Because of that I have been forced to look for somebody to come and farm the land on a sharecrop contract. If you want another plot then you will have to take it on a share basis.

Son: Papa, that is not right. I am your son, so how can you give me a land on sharecrop basis?

Father: Yes and I am your father so you should have been sending me something to eat, which you never did.

Son: It's not right. If that is the case then I am leaving and going to my mother's people.

Intergenerational conflicts are frequently intertwined with generational conflicts, and competition between elders to control land, labour resources and the redistribution of wealth within the extended family. Elders attempt to control not only the access of youth to land, but also the redistribution of land and wealth from the senior generation to the younger generation. Rising commodification and social differentiation results in increasing stress and conflicts within families as family elders suffer from differing economic fortunes. The less economically successful elders frequently place more demands on their more successful fraternal kin for redistribution. The more economically successful often attempt to resist redistribution to the kin of their generation and pass on their wealth to their children. With the decline of distribution within the extended family, the less successful elders attempt to hamper the redistribution of wealth to children by asserting the primacy of generational succession over intergenerational succession – the transmission of property from senior brothers to junior brothers rather than from father or uncle to son or nephew.

The youth frequently suffer most from these conflicts between elders over control and transmission of property. When elders are able to withstand the demands of their brothers and nephews and transmit their resources to their chosen heirs, retribution can be taken on their death. In the Kwae area, in the late 1990s, instances were narrated to me of family elders who had given land to their sons for oil palm cultivation. On the death of the elder, the successors to the position of family elder (*abusuapanyin* or *abusuahene*), ordered the oil palm plantations of the sons of the deceased to be uprooted, and then distributed the land to their chosen heirs. Such reversals result in an increasing reluctance of sons to establish plantations on family land, since they are in danger of losing their investment, or become increasingly subject to the demands of their lineage (Gyasi 1994).

Within the Akyem area, wealthy farmers aspire to create plantations, which are recognized as creating an 'inheritance' (*agyapade*) that can be left for children and nephews, and which bestow upon them a sense of achievement and of honour. The value that the farmer has added in creating the plantation cannot be disputed. However, with the decline of frontier land, aspiring farmers can no longer acquire their own individual plots through forest clearance or easily purchase land on which to establish plantations. If they use family land, the extended family can claim that the individual was assisted by the resources of the lineage. Therefore, the lineage has claims on the redistribution of these resources. In this situation, the aspiring plantation farmer frequently prefers to use land outside of family land. The same difficulties that hinder the transfer of land within the family obstruct the purchase of land. Lineage members claiming an interest in the land will oppose attempts to sell land. Thus, the main outlet through which land can be gained for plantation development is sharecropping.

As a result of these tensions over claims of ownership of land and rights to sell land, many wealthy and influential farmers chose to operate outside of the circle of family land, electing to work any land they acquired on a sharecrop basis and to contract out in the same fashion any family land they inherited, or over which they gained management responsibilities. For instance, Nana Frimpong Manso, the *abusuahene* (family head) of his matrilineage in the Akyem settlement of Ntoronang in the late 1990s, controlled over 100 acres of matrilineal land with his three sisters. Yet he chose to concentrate his farming activities on a 40-acre plot at Kodobeda, which he had contracted on a sharecrop arrangement with his father's matrilineage. Because of his family relationship he had acquired the land on favourable terms, giving his father's matrilineage a third share of the harvest after ten years. He had planted cocoa and oil palms on the land. His intentions were to pass on the plantations to his sons who would 'inherit' the sharecrop arrangement. He had given out his own matrilineal land to tenants on a half-crop share (*abunu*) basis.

Fathers who are close to their children, who wish to farm with them or help establish them in farming, will frequently negotiate land for their children with their matrilineage on a sharecrop arrangement. As sharecropping becomes more prevalent and sharecropping contracts more competitive and difficult to find, many young farmers seek to gain access to sharecropping land on their father's matrilineage. Matrilineal elders are often amenable to granting sharecropping arrangements on favourable terms with the sons of their male members, since the pre-existing patrilateral relationship between them is taken to promote trust and cooperation This can also create a lasting bond between the children of males and the matrilineage (Amanor 1999). However, this occurs in a situation of increasing commodification of rights to family land.

Paradoxically, both bad and good intergenerational relations within matrilineages lead to sharecropping. This suggests that sharecropping arises as a response to underlying structural conditions within the agrarian system, resulting from tensions between capital, landed interests and labour, and redistribution of wealth within the context of the increasing commodification of agricultural production.

In the present period, different variants of these relations can be found in different areas. These differences arise from the peculiarities of contemporary agricultural development policies, which are often implemented as projects within specific localities. This leads to government and agribusiness initiatives that are confined to particular localities, and develop distinct infrastructures within confined areas.

In the Kwae area, the Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation (GOPDC) has transformed agricultural production. It was originally a World Bank and Ghana government initiative but has since been privatized. GOPDC created the infrastructure for modern hybrid oil palm production in the Kwae area, and developed agribusiness outgrower schemes in the late 1970s. It expropriated 7,000 families working on 9,000 hectares of land. This has created landlessness in the area, a high demand for land, and a wide availability of labour. Oil palm and citrus cultivation now dominate this area. Both crops are regarded as highly profitable fields for investments, but they require considerable capital. Elders seek to retain the land under their control for these sectors and lease them out to sharecroppers with capital to develop plantations. To gain access to sharecropping land, farmers have to make customary *aseda* ('thank you') payments to secure the land before the landowner and witnesses. This is the same customary convention that was used in the past to seal the transmission of land from fathers to wives and sons, which involved the presentation of drink and a sheep, and which Field (1948) refers to above as 'giving rum'. These *aseda* payments now involve a monetary payment, which has been inflated and is beyond the means of many farmers (Amanor with Diderutuah 2001). This ensures that family members applying for land have the intention to invest in high-value plantation crops rather than cultivate low-value food crops. After the plantations are established they are divided in half. One half is allocated to the landowner (who selects which half s/he prefers), and the other to the tenant, who retains use of the land until the plantation is no longer productive, which can be about 25 years for oil palm and 50 years for citrus. Through these sharecrop arrangements elders with land but insufficient capital to invest in modern seeds and in labour can gain access to highly profitable plantations.

In a study at Mamanso, about 50 per cent of plots were under sharecropping arrangements (Amanor with Diderutuah 2001). Sharecropping was common between close kin, including parents and children, and husbands and wives. In poorer families, where the new generation cannot afford to invest in plantation crops, land is being transferred out of the family to tenant farmers. These arrangements ensure that land is redistributed to the most capitalized farmers and that tenant farmers do not produce subsistence food crops. This reinforces processes of social differentiation and the emergence of a landless stratum among the youth.

In contrast, in settlements to the south of the oil palm and citrus belt, such as Apinaman and Dwinease, on the edge of the Atewa Forest Range, agriculture is now mainly based on food cropping. Cocoa in this area has declined, but it has not been replaced by alternative plantation crops. Land shortage is pronounced in this area, the consequence of the creation of a forest reserve in the 1920s, which did not leave sufficient land for subsequent generations and resulted in the marginalization of the area. With insufficient land for farming, most youths within this area have taken to small-scale gold and diamond mining and chainsaw timber production as alternative livelihoods. This results in scarcity of farm labour and high labour costs, and elders experience difficulty in getting family youth to help them on family farms. This results in intergenerational conflicts. Elders claim the youth are lazy and irresponsible and refuse to transfer land to them. There is a general despondency among youths, who feel that their parents have not provided them with a viable future. Unable to gain sufficient labour or sharecroppers, the elders attempt to sell the land to outsiders. Although, by custom, elders are not supposed to sell family land, there are caveats that enable distress sales of land, to meet funeral and medical expenses (Amanor 2001). However there is little demand at present for this land from external investors, who can gain land in more favourable locations, and few land sales have occurred. This area is situated outside the main commercial zones of agriculture, where labour can be hired more easily, and where there is readier access to agricultural services, transport and markets. Thus, the articulation of change brought about by land sales, and threats by elders to sell land is largely rhetorical, reflecting intergenerational struggles around issues of moral economy and redistribution and control of youth by elders.

CONCLUSION

The theory of the evolution of property rights assumes that increasing scarcity and value of land will result in the rise of land markets and institutions for the management of land, as the increasing value of land and the need for security in transfer of ownership offset the transaction costs. In contrast with this theory, in Ghana, land sales were more prevalent in the nineteenth century, when there were large supplies of cheap frontier land that was not utilized. Since then, two factors have resulted in declining outright sales of land.

First, the reconstruction or reinvention of customary land tenure systems under colonialism has created the notion of allodial title and vested this in paramount chiefs. This effectively embedded land sales in social relations that were essentially administrative, but legitimized politically as customary relations. In effect policy directives shaped land relations. Rights to allodial title constructed by the colonial regime as an appropriate form of communal land tenure enabled chiefs to claim monopoly rights to sell and transact land, to gain revenue from land, and to expropriate land users in the public interest, frequently with support from government.

Second, these customary claims of paramount chiefs have been contested, and subverted from below through the commodification of user rights in land through sharecropping and other types of land-leasing arrangements. Notions of individual ownership of land and rights to sell and transmit family property have also been contested within family lineages, with family elders using their powers to prevent transmission of land from one generation to the next, to the benefit of the existing elders.

With many claims on family land, and few opportunities to gain access to new uncultivated lands beyond the domain of the family, many farmers are now forced to engage in sharecropping arrangements, which are essentially the commodification of use rights on family land. The elders claim that the sharecrop arrangements contribute to the development of family land. It gives the lineage an economic interest arising from the development of the land by the tenant and its subsequent division between the developer and the lineage. Sharecrop arrangements also give tenants security of rights in their share of the plantation, which does not occur on family land. Sharecrop arrangements increasingly replace land sales and transmission of property within the family when agriculture is successful and profitable. While there is a decline in outright sales of land over time, there is an increasing commodification of user rights in land.

Sharecropping reflects negotiations and struggles between land holder, labour and capital interests in the control and redistribution of farm assets. The increasing commodification of agriculture results in a struggle between landed elders and labouring youth over rights to land and labour services, and a transformation of reciprocal obligations into transactions of land and labour, represented by the increasing prevalence of hired labour and sharecropping. However, increasingly sharecroppers are not constituted by land-hungry poor farmers, but by comparatively wealthy tenant farmers involved in agricultural accumulation, with capital to invest in hybrid seeds, labour and land. Thus, within the most capitalized smallholder sectors, such as the Kwae oil palm and citrus belt, entry into sharecropping increasingly becomes dependent upon the ability to invest in the development of modern plantations, which excludes a significant section of poor youth from acquiring not only family land but, increasingly, sharecrop land. This results in complex processes of social differentiation and expropriation of land, which are being carried out within the structures of the family and the lineage. In its most commoditized form, this excludes poorer family members from gaining access to land. While this process is shaping the emergence of new types of land markets, this can hardly be portrayed as a harmonious evolution of land markets in response to systemic features such as population growth, the demand for land or the emergence of nuclear families. Power relations and processes of social differentiation lie at the heart of these transformations, and these are disrupting family relations and notions of a moral economy.

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ABSTRACT

It is argued that land shortage and the decline of new frontier areas results in increasing conflicts over rights to land and to labour. This constrains land sales and agricultural land becomes increasingly transferred though sharecropping and the commodification of user rights in land, rather than through the evolution of clearly defined land markets. Smallholder agriculture increasingly becomes an individual undertaking, in which labour is hired, and rights to land are acquired rather than allocated within the family. Agricultural relations of production become increasingly commodified and the moral economy of the family is undermined and increasingly socially differentiated. The article traces historically the emergence of these production relations in south-east Ghana.

RÉSUMÉ

L'article soutient que le manque de terre et la raréfaction des nouvelles terres cultivables génèrent des conflits en matière de droit à la terre et de droit au travail. Cette situation restreint les ventes de terres, et le transfert de terrains agricoles se fait de plus en plus souvent par le biais du métayage et de la marchandisation des droits d'utilisation des terres, plutôt qu'à travers l'évolution de marchés fonciers clairement définis. Les petites exploitations sont de plus en plus nombreuses à prendre la forme d'entreprises individuelles qui emploient des ouvriers et acquièrent le droit à la terre (autrefois octroyé au sein de la famille). Les relations de production dans l'agriculture sont de plus en plus marchandisées et l'économie morale de la famille est fragilisée et de plus en plus marquée par une différenciation sociale. L'article retrace l'historique de l'émergence de ces relations de production dans le Sud-Est du Ghana.