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SOME CHIEFS ARE “MORE UNDER” THAN OTHERS

Kinship, ritual, and the concept of political hierarchy among the Asante

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All photographs by Timo Kallinen
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1 INTRODUCTION

Anybody who has had any dealings with Asante chiefs has probably met, or most certainly heard of, a chief who is described as the “highest”, “most important”, or “most powerful” chief in Ghana right after the king of Asante. Most likely, one is also told that this same chief used to own “all the lands” in that particular town or district, but for some reason or another he does not own them anymore. Not surprisingly, the “highest” are countless in numbers, while it is extremely difficult to meet a chief who says that he is among the “lowest”. Even a chief of a very small village will declare that among all the village headmen in the area, he is the senior. However, in most cases, these people are not just showing off to an ignorant and naive outsider. On the contrary, when asked, they are able to produce flawless evidence in support of their assertion. The problem is that there are so many, sometimes even conflicting, grounds on which one is able to build his claim for precedence. Some chief is of high rank because his ancestor conquered all the other chiefs in the area, someone because his office is the oldest, and some because his ancestors were closely related to the king, and so forth. How is one able to determine who is higher and who is lower? And how does political authority relate to these various assertions?

This is a study of how political hierarchy is constructed among the Asante. It explores the principles that legitimate chieftaincy and hierarchies among chiefly offices. Furthermore, it shows how the institution of chieftaincy is connected to certain aspects of social structure and cosmology and how it is precisely because of this connectedness that chieftaincy continues to be viable despite major changes in Asante (or Ghanaian) society. The Asante belong to a larger ethnic and language group called the Akan. The Akan people live in the coastal and forest areas of Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. The Akan language and its dialects are classified under the Tano language family, including Asante (Twi), Fante, and Akuapem, which also have their own distinctive written forms. The social and political organization of all Akan groups is more or less uniform. It is often said that the Akan political order provides a classic example of a chiefdom or segmentary state (cf., Southall 1956, 229-263). The best known of the Akan polities is the kingdom of Asante (Ashanti), which is a union of a number of autonomous chiefdoms under one king, the Asantehene. Every Asante chiefdom is a distinct territorial unit centred on the chief’s capital town or village. The chief is elected from a group of candidates eligible by right of membership in a matrilineal descent group in which the office has been
vested. He is accompanied by a queen mother and is guided by a council of divisional chiefs or elders who are the representatives of the resident matrilineages of the chiefdom. Together they form a legislative and executive body, and most importantly function as a judicial court. Each chiefdom is composed of several matrilineages that are established on the basis of common matrilineal descent from a known female ancestor. The anthropologists have usually viewed the lineage as a fundamental corporate group with important religious, political, social and economic functions. Today the Asante kingdom, with its chiefdoms and lineages, coexists with the republic of Ghana. This coexistence has sometimes proved to be problematic mainly because the Asante kingdom and the modern nation state are organized according to an entirely different logic with the result that their relationship to the Ghanaian society is also fundamentally different.

In terms of modern anthropology, the classical definition of Asante social and political structure is by Meyer Fortes. His theory on Asante as a hierarchical, centralized polity, which coexists with a segmentary lineage system, is the starting point of my study. Fortes published several articles on the Asante and his views were elaborated in his book *Kinship and Social Order* (1969a). Through a rethinking of some of his key concepts I will introduce a model of the Asante polity that gives, I think, a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between social and political structures in Asante.

### 1.1 Collecting data

My fieldwork was carried out primarily during 2000-2001. This happened to be a particularly vibrant period in the Asante political life with a new king just installed a year earlier and the presidential elections of December 2000, which resulted in the first peaceful and democratic transfer of power in the history of Ghana. My permanent residence was in Kumase, the capital of the Asante kingdom, which is a city of one million people, although the surroundings are very “village-like”, if compared to any other metropolis that I have seen. Even though the old buildings of the historical section of Kumase were destroyed during the wars against the British, the place still has a feeling that cannot be compared with any other city. The town plan, the names of the streets and quarters, tell of a long and eventful history, but most importantly, the fact that the city is still divided among the numerous
chiefs of the different afekuo, administrative and military groups, underlines the idea that it is a chiefdom first, and only after that a modern city. The inhabitants of Oseikurom, as it is often called after the first king, identify themselves passionately with their hometown. Being a Kumaseni (or a Kumasenu as the true “Kumasi boys” call themselves) means much more than being the urban opposite to the “villagers” (nkuraasefo); it connotes history and tradition and forms a major part of their “Asanteness”. This is well exemplified by the way a friend of mine described his grandmother’s house: “You see, today most of the houses are made of concrete, but ours is made of mud [i.e., clay]. There aren’t many houses like that left anymore. When people see that our house is made of mud, they understand that our family is very old. It is as old as Kumase itself”.

I lived with a shopkeeper family, whom I had known for six years before I started my research. We lived in a two-storey building, which was inhabited by several households, most of them related one way or the other to my host family. Almost half of my stay was spent “touring” outside Kumase and conducting fieldwork in other localities. As noted by many before me, the Asante are constantly on the move; they visit and are frequently visited by people from other localities (e.g., Fortes et al. 1947, 167). In fact, most of the anthropologists who have studied the Asante have also conducted their fieldwork in several localities. Hence, staying in one place would have seriously impaired my chances of getting a full picture of the social and political life of the Asante.

Kumase was not important to me only because it was the seat of the Asantehene and centre of political life. I took a special interest in the affairs of the chiefs of the so-called Adonten group. The chiefs of this group, which has a glorious but yet turbulent history, are major players in the local politics of Kumase and also in the whole of Asante. Through personal connections I was able to speak with some of the Adonten chiefs and other people involved. In addition to that, there is also rich and voluminous documentation concerning the history of the Adonten group. Adonten’s connections to other chiefs through clanship took me to different places outside Kumase as well as outside Asante. The most important of these was Nkoransa, a northern Asante chiefdom, the chief of which is traditionally considered a “brother” to the Adonten chiefs. Nkoransa also became the place where I studied the Asante traditional religion. Another place that I visited frequently was the Akan chiefdom Kwawu, a southeast neighbour of Asante. Those Kwawu chiefs who belong to the Asene matriclan are also related to the Adonten chiefs and the Nkoransahene. In Kumase I also
followed closely some the current court cases that involved the traditional rights of the chiefs.

The necessary archival material was obtained from two main sources: the Ghana National Archives, where the records of the British colonial government and the post-independence regional administration are held, and the Manhyia Record Office, in which the documents produced by the Kumase Traditional Council and Asanteman Council are deposited. The data I have used consists mostly of public enquiries held in connection with court cases, i.e., cross-examinations of chiefs by their opponents and judges. The court cases constituted a valuable source for my study because in them the chiefs themselves explicitly debate the key principles that define hierarchies. The holdings of the archives cover a rather wide time span, 1906-1980, but my data is mostly from 1925-1950. It seems that during that time, the latter part of the colonial period, which was also characterized by the indirect rule, the cases were many and the administrators had a particularly keen interest in them. In addition to this, some of my informants were kind enough to give me access to their private papers. Some additional archival material was also collected from the Public Record Office in Britain.

1.2 Outline of the problem

In order to find out how it was materially possible for a kingdom, such as the pre-colonial Asante, to emerge in the middle of a thick tropical forest, the archaeologists Peter and Ama Shinnie set up excavation sites in localities that had a central role in the oral traditions concerning the dawn of the kingdom. One of these sites was the village of Anyinam, a good 30 kilometres south of Kumase, which is famous as the birthplace of the first Asantehene Osei Tutu. Because of this history the village chief has been granted some special privileges by the king. Namely, he has the right “of continuing to wear his sandals when greeting the Asantehene; he also does not remove the cloth from his shoulder as custom requires from others and is entitled to shake the Asantehene’s hand” (Shinnie & Shinnie 1995, 15). Normally, a village chief does not have the right to shake hands with the Asantehene; the king is greeted by bowing from a distance. Moreover, no chief, not even the great paramount chiefs, has the right of greeting the king with both sandals on and his left shoulder covered. So, in this very specific
sense, the chief of this tiny village is the most senior chief in the whole kingdom.

This case epitomizes practically all the important questions that re-occur throughout this study. First of all, it shows how high rank or seniority can be argued on various grounds. In fact, it would simply be impossible to try to list all the possible arguments. Hence, I will concentrate on the most important ones, which are relevant within the framework of kinship and ritual relations. These matters are discussed mostly in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Second, it shows how origins and histories are crucial for asserting superiority. Thus, different representations of the past, genealogies and historical narratives, are instrumental for my study. My intention is not to portray the hierarchy of chiefs at any certain point of time – past or present. Instead, I study the basic principles that create and maintain hierarchies through time. Hence, the examples I give cover a temporal span from the genesis of the polity to the present day. Some things described here belong to the past, but many are still very valid. The principles themselves are historical and, of course, subject to change and circumstance. Chapter 5 focuses on the ways in which the hierarchies are based on the ideas of the past and also how this enables the processes of change.

Third, the example of Anyinam also raises the question whether this prerogative of the village chief is only “symbolic” or “ceremonial”, having to do merely with etiquette and dress code, or does it entail any political power or authority? How do hierarchical relations of this kind relate to the formal political structure of the Asante state? To understand the relationship between the social and political orders, it has to be established how power and authority are constructed. Where does the king’s power and authority to allocate rights come from? What are the principles for distributing authority to other chiefs and the people? Chapters 7 and 8 address these questions.

Fourth, the Anyinam case shows that the traditional ideas about superiority and seniority among the chiefs are not forgotten although there are people who claim that chieftaincy is a thing of the past. On the contrary, these ideas remain topical in modern Ghana. In Chapter 9 I discuss the position of the institution of chieftaincy in Asante (and Ghana) today and how it has endured the challenges of colonial and post-colonial times.

I begin the study by discussing the Asante kinship and marriage systems in Chapter 2, and particularly how the ideas of hierarchy and political relations relate to them. This discussion is linked to Fortes’ view on
the Asante political system as a system of descent groups, which is re-examined in Chapter 3.
Meyer Fortes' interest in the Asante was lifelong and versatile. Although in
the anthropological community he is probably best known for his two
monographs on the Tallensi of northern Ghana, his other major research site
was in the south, among the Asante. He partly drew his inspiration from the
legendary government anthropologist R. S. Rattray, but, as he put it himself,
“the Ashanti themselves were the principal magnet”. Fortes collected the
bulk of his field data during 1945-1946 in a research project called the
Ashanti Social Survey. The survey was branded as “an experiment in social
research” because it was an interdisciplinary project, which combined
reports from three fields of study. It was a joint effort by an anthropologist
(Fortes himself), a geographer, and an economist, and its aim was to give “a
broad, general picture of the social and political structure of the Ashanti to-
day”. The survey was facilitated by the Gold Coast Government and
Colonial Research Council (among others) and it was thought to address
questions like “progress”, “development”, and “welfare” in the colony
(Fortes et al. 1947). However, in spite of the practical orientations of his
first study, Fortes’ subsequent published works on the Asante were mostly,
if not solely, concerned with anthropological theory. Even now, two decades
after his death in 1983, Fortes’ impact on Asante studies remains strong.
Not only does his work constitute an important point of reference, as well as
reassessment (e.g., Clark 1994), but also the huge body of data he and his
many assistants collected in the 1940’s has served as material for
subsequent studies up to the present time (e.g., McCaskie 2000).

Despite his vast knowledge of, and deep affection for, the Asante
people, Fortes’ scholarly curiosity was not directed at individual people. As
T. C. McCaskie (ibid., 22) has noted, Fortes was in agreement with his
mentor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1968, 192), who maintained that an
anthropologist should be interested in “the actual relations of Tom, Dick and
Harry” only so far as they illustrate a general description. What is really
needed “for scientific purposes is an account of the form of the structure”
(ibid.). For those purposes Fortes found his data on the Asante to be most
appropriate. In his essay *Time and Social Structure* (1970 [1949], 1-32)
Fortes took the Asante household as an example of how structures could not
be understood unless it is realized that the principles of social organization
that bring structures into being operate through a period of time and in
changing circumstances. These considerations later formed the basis for the
model of the developmental cycle of the domestic group (Goody 1971). But
most importantly, in Fortes’ writings of the 1950’s and 1960’s the Asante came to exemplify how a complex, but yet unmistakable, differentiation between two kinds of normative orders could prevail in society.

2.1 Structural domains

The distinction between private and public domains, internal and external spheres, has a long history in Western social thought, dating back to the political philosophy of the ancient Greeks. This dichotomy apparently made its way into modern anthropology through the writings of the social theorists of the Victorian era (Rosaldo 1980, 401-409). The idea of two structural domains “as an aid to systematisation” or “a heuristic framework” had its most explicit elaboration in the works of Fortes, notably in Kinship and Social Order, where he distinguished the familial, or domestic, domain from the politico-jural domain. In that book his treatment of the Asante social system provided the most important “paradigmatic ethnographical specimen” in support of his theory of “how kinship and polity are interconnected in tribal society” (Fortes 1969a, 219).

Fortes (1969a, 95-96) begins his definition of domain with the notion of person as a composition of various statuses. In a social situation or relationship a person puts one or more of them into use, while the rest remain inactive but still available in a new or changing situation. Each of the statuses deployed is connected to certain norms and behavioural patterns, which ultimately give a social situation its unified structure. Hence any social relationship or activity consists of “persons-in-relationship acting in customary ways, exercising rights and privileges and discharging obligations or responsibilities in conformity with norms and values that allow them to accomplish culturally legitimate aims and ends in the service of their individual needs and propensities” (ibid., 96). Fortes concludes that all “social events, occasions and institutions” can be seen as nexuses of status elements, which are not only associated with normative behaviour, but have also “a characteristic socio-spatial substratum” of their own, such as a working place, home, village, and so forth. These “social nexus formations” can be systematically categorized as follows:

I suggest that the social and cultural elements and processes that make up a given social system fall into determinate sectors of organization. Each such sector – which I call a domain – comprises a
range of social relations, customs, norms, statuses, and other analytically discriminable elements linked up in nexuses and unified by the stamp of distinctive functional features that are common to all. It is, to make a crude comparison, as if everything in one domain were blue, in another red, and so on. The domain of law in our society embraces judges and courts, police, prisons and lawyers, the statute book and case law, marriage lines, death certificates, voting rights, and a hundred and one more offices and practices. Heterogeneous as these items seem to be, they are all intrinsically bound up with one another and have a common, though very abstract, functional significance, centered on the authority of the state. We have no difficulty in distinguishing the domain of the law from that of the family, which is mirrored in our vocabulary of kinship and family (ibid., 97-98).

In essence, the domains are several; one can discriminate between legal, religious, economic, political, and so on. Fortes was convinced that societies could be typed according to the number and character of domains incorporated in their social structure, although he does not pursue this matter at length. However, he makes a basic distinction between “complex societies”, where a high level of specialization of roles and statuses prevail, and thus a greater variety of domains can be found, and “simple, or primitive societies”, where the domains remain relatively undifferentiated (ibid., 99). More importantly, some domains of the social structure are considered common to all human societies, and that is where the dichotomy between familial and politico-jural is brought forward:

As I see it, human social organization everywhere emerges as some kind of balance, stable or not, between the political order – Aristotle’s polis – and the familial or domestic order – the oikos – a balance between polity and kinship… [P]olity identifies the domain of legitimate authority and of the associated constraining powers that emanate from the total society in which individuals have citizenship. It works through institutions, offices and arrangements – or their equivalents – that are backed by and enforce rules and norms of a legal or, as I prefer to say, jural kind, in compliance with which there is an element of contract. At the opposite pole of social structure, as I see it, is the domain of the family as a domestic association which is the agency that fulfils the productive (i.e. providing food and
shelter) and reproductive (both physical and social replacement) requirements that are indispensable for society to exist or even persist at all. In this domain conduct is regulated primarily by moral not jural norms and value, so that mutual trust and amity are the prescribed values (Fortes 1978, 14-15).

The two domains are ultimately separated by the sets of “normative premises” governing each domain. The politico-jural domain is regulated by jural norms backed by public sanctions, even to the extent of the use of physical force, while the familial domain is controlled by moral norms, which have their basis in amity among close kin (see Fortes 1969a, 250-251).

According to Fortes, every society from the smallest hunter-gatherer groups to large-scale industrial states has its political and familial spheres, but what differentiates them is how and by what means they are connected to each other. To summarize, everywhere and always there are political things and familial things, but in simple societies, those without administrative organization, kinship plays a significant part in the political structure, whereas in complex societies “family and kinship relations have little or no politico-jural validity in the extra familial social structure” (ibid., 79). Thus, when studying “tribal societies” it would be important to “explore the structural interconnections” between kinship and polity (Fortes 1972, 283). When Fortes (1969a, 251) talks about kinship operating in two separate domains he does not suggest that there are two kinds of people, political people and familial people; on the contrary, he clearly states that “there is no entity as a kinship person who is not also invested with politico-jural, economic, ritual, etc. identity and responsibility”. But what he does suggest is an elementary division made between two kinds of kinship relations: bilateral relations (filial, sibling, and affinal relations), which belong to the familial domain, and are thus politically irrelevant, and descent relations, which belong to the politico-jural. Or, as Harold Scheffler (1970, 1464) calls them, an ego-oriented kinship system, which consists of “a field of social relations ascribed between individuals on the basis of the simple parento-filial relations”, and an ancestor-oriented descent system, which consists of “a field of intra- and inter-group relations, defined in terms of common descent”. This division of kinship relations into two basic categories served as an important theoretical starting point for *African Political Systems* when the editors created their typology of political systems:
We must here distinguish between the set of relationships linking the individual to other persons and to particular social units through the transient bilateral family, which we shall call the kinship system, and the segmentary system of permanent, unilateral descent groups, which we call the lineage system. Only the latter establishes corporate units with political functions. In both groups of societies [i.e., states and stateless societies] kinship and domestic ties have an important role in the lives of individuals, but their relation to political system is of secondary order (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1969, 6).

The ensuing critique has touched on a number of aspects of this distinction. The universality and variability as well as the historical specificity and cultural relativity of the two domains were discussed especially by the feminist writers of the 1970’s (Comaroff 1987, 54-57). As John Comaroff has pointed out, this criticism was partly enforced by the fact that Fortes himself had difficulties in deciding how the domains should actually be treated (ibid., 57-58). On the one hand, he renders that “kinship and polity can be analytically and empirically distinguished even where the two orders seem to be fused together in a single kinship polity” (Fortes 1978, 15). But on the other, he seems to deny it by stating that “this is a methodological and analytical distinction”, and thus the “actualities of kinship relations and kinship behaviour are compounded of elements derived from both domains and deployed in words and acts, beliefs and practices, objects and appurtenances that pertain to both of these and to other domains of social life as well” (Fortes 1969a, 251).

2.2 Political blood and familial spirit

Fortes quite clearly saw that his theoretical notion of a social person being basically a combination of two kinds of statuses was matched by the indigenous Asante notions of human essence. Namely, the conception that a person is made of blood, mogya, which is inherited matrilineally, and spirit, nt r , which is transmitted patrilineally, seemed to constitute an ideological basis for the separation of two complementary social fields. The former determines a person’s political and legal rights in the community, whereas the latter provide him/her with a “cluster of moral and contingent rights”.
Without both, i.e., acknowledged maternity and paternity, a person is not seen to be complete (Fortes 1963, 59-60). In addition to these two, a person also has a “soul”, kra, which affects his/her destiny (nkrabea) in life, and a “spiritual backing,” sunsum, which can be “tall” or “short”, i.e., more or less potent, depending on the experience and knowledge of the person in question. However, kra and sunsum are not acquired through filiation, but from supernatural sources, and they do not endow a person with any kind of social status.¹

Matrilineal descent confers membership in a local matrilineal descent group, abusua, members of which trace descent to a common ancestress. It also is based on the notion of shared blood, which can be transmitted by women only. This perception is exemplified by a well-known proverb that runs: abusua baako, mogya baako, “one lineage, one blood”.² The lineages belong to exogamous matriclans, also called abusua or abusua k se, “big lineage”.³ The clans are not localized units and they include member lineages throughout all Akan chiefdoms. All persons belonging to the same clan, irrespective of their place of residence, are considered to be related by blood, or more specifically, to be descendants of a common ancestress (Fortes 1969a, 158-162).⁴ The matrilineage has a male head (abusua panin) who is assisted by a female head (obaa panin). He exercises authority over the internal matters of the lineage, but in that capacity he is largely dependent on the support of the elders of the lineage. These matters are mostly what Fortes called domestic, such as marriage, divorce, property relations, etc. (ibid., 163-165). The lineage also forms a link to higher

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¹ Similarities and linkages between the constitutive elements make this quadripartition problematic and hence it should not be considered a definitive model of the Akan conception of personhood. Both Fortes (1969a, 198-199) and Rattray (1959, 153-155) as well as many contemporary writers (e.g., Gyekye 1987, 85-102) have pondered on this matter.

² The strength of this notion is well exemplified by one of Gracia Clark’s (1994, 98) informants, who maintained that abandoning the lineage would mean that “I would have to open my wrists and drain out all my blood first”.

³ The number and names of Akan matriclans vary in different accounts (see Wilks 1993, 80). The contemporary Asante usually mention the following eight: Oyoko, Bretuo, Asene, Aduana, Ekuona, Asona, Agona, and Asakyiri.

⁴ There is no constituted national hierarchy of matriclans. Their relationship should rather be seen as complementary in terms of their mythical contributions to society and the offices vested in their lineages. For instance, the ancestors of the Asakyiri clan are considered to be the first people who built houses, while the ancestors of the Aduana clan were the first ones to put out fires. Similarly, although the fact that the office of the Asantehene is vested in a certain lineage of the Oyoko clan is a source of pride for every Oyoko person and lineage in the country, there are important and powerful offices vested in other clans as well, whose members are equally proud of them. Accordingly, many people, at least of the older generations, know which stools are vested in the lineages of their clans and take interest in their affairs.
political authorities since the decisive criterion for citizenship in a chieftdom is “membership, by right of birth, of one’s mother’s matrilineal lineage” (ibid., 145-146) and “all transactions of a political or juridical nature” are conducted through the lineage heads (ibid., 163). Politically the most important corporate possession of the lineage is the stool, the office, vested in it (ibid., 165). The corporate character of the Asante matrilineage will be discussed extensively later; at this point it is sufficient to say that Fortes (ibid., 183) considered it to be the primary segment of the Asante political structure.

Rights to offices, land, and property are transmitted through the line of matrilineal descent. According to Fortes it is a “fixed principle of Ashanti social structure” that at death every person must have an heir and successor. What is actually inherited is a jural status, which is “anchored in a person, labelled by kinship terms, and represented in material possessions which can be passed on” (ibid., 173). This idea is more or less identical to the notion of positional succession. Men are in most cases succeeded by their nephews and brothers, and women by their daughters and sisters. The basic unit of inheritance is the minimal lineage (yafunu koro), which Fortes also called the “nuclear and paradigmatic descent unit” within the larger maximal lineage. The household (afie, sing. fie) is usually built around a minimal lineage (ibid., 169-175). In terms of the relations between close matrilineal kin, Fortes had his focus on mother-child, sibling, and uncle-nephew relations. His description emphasized the warmth and intimacy of the first two and the formality and strained nature of the last (Fortes 1962, 263-264, 270-276). The relationships within the lineage are regulated “by law and sanctioned by the deified jural authority projected in ancestor worship” (Fortes 1963, 60).

Patrifiliation, in contrast, confers membership in a nt r division, which does not constitute a corporate group like the matrilineage, but rather a ritual category, members of which share a specific weekday for rituals.

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5 The stool (akonnua, pl. nkonnua) is the material symbol of every office. Thus offices are usually referred to by using the term “stool”.

6 This parallel with the Central African materials, such as Audrey Richards’ (e.g. 1962) work on the Bemba of Zambia, was recognized by Fortes (1969a, 173) himself. Elsewhere Fortes (1975) discusses both kinship statuses and offices as instances of “corporation sole” as defined by H. S. Maine (1861). However, Marilyn Strathern (1985, 199) has pointed out that the notion of kinship roles as “miniature offices” bestowed with rights and obligations regarding people and property is characteristic of West African (and presumably Central African) societies. Hence status devolution, or what she calls a holder/heir model, is not necessarily a good analytical metaphor for discussing kinship in other societies.
connected to nt r, certain avoidances and names, and a formal salutation.7 There are nine divisions and they are divided further into several subdivisions (McCaskie 1995a, 170-173). In terms of shared bodily substances, nt r is considered to be transmitted by semen in sexual intercourse, and also by saliva, which is put into an infant’s mouth by his/her father or paternal grandfather in a name-giving ceremony. Whether the nt r divisions are (or were) exogamous has been matter of dispute: Fortes claims that the boundaries of the category of unmarrigeable patrilateral relatives are defined by demonstrable genealogical connections and not by shared nt r as such, whereas Rattray (1955, 45) states the opposite. The fact that the beliefs and practices associated with nt r were already dying out in Fortes’ time has made it difficult to study it (Fortes 1962, 265). Nowadays, most people do not know to which nt r division they belong and some are not even familiar with the concept. However, the nt r affiliation remains an important matter for the chiefs and royals who continue to perform the rituals connected to nt r.

According to Fortes, patrifiliation does not guarantee politico-jural rights like membership in a lineage does.8 It rather forms a basis for a personally meaningful and rewarding relationship (Fortes 1963, 66-67). Ideally, children, and sons in particular, should live and spend as much time as possible with their fathers, who are responsible for their “moral training” during their formative years. After this they may join their own lineage kin. Fortes emphasized the father’s lack of legal authority, although he has the right to instruct and discipline his children. He concluded that the tie between the father and his children is primarily an affectionate one, regulated by personal conscience. The father is able to express moral goodness by making material gifts to his children even though there are no binding obligations to do so, and conversely, his children support their father in his old age although it is not explicitly their duty (Fortes 1962, 268-269). Instead of jural norms, patrilateral relationships are “regulated by inter-personal moral bonds and sanctioned by beliefs about the mystical components of personality” (Fortes 1963, 60).

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7 According to McCaskie (1995a, 170), the most important nt r rituals are the “blessing of the mouth” with water and the “washing”, i.e., purification, of one’s kra. Some nt r rituals were recorded by Rattray (1955, 50-54).

8 However, patrifiliation can form a basis for “quasi-citizenship” in one’s father’s chiefdom. This is done by voluntarily accepting certain political obligations, e.g., payment of levies imposed by the chief. Nonetheless, a “quasi-citizen” is not eligible to inherit offices or property of his/her father’s lineage nor can he/she transmit his/her status to his/her offspring (Fortes 1959a, 208).
Superficially, the criteria that define relationships between individuals within the descent group as hierarchical or equal are clear-cut. Seniority of generation, age, rank or office command respect. Conversely, equivalence in the same categories permits familiarity (Fortes 1969a, 192). However, it does not follow that by applying these criteria one would be able to grade all the members of a given descent group in any definite way. For instance, it is not at all rare that a woman has a junior brother who is younger in age than her eldest son. So, in terms of generational seniority, the one having a junior status of a nephew is actually older than the one with the senior status of an uncle. In these cases the young uncle is often quick to point out that “I’m actually X’s uncle”, while the elder nephew, of course, acknowledges the existing relationship, but is still likely to add that “it is not so important in our case, because I’m older than Y”. These same ideas about seniority apply also to other relatives outside one’s own lineage and the same kinds of contradictions occur. In terms of patrikin, one frequently runs into a classificatory father (FB) who is younger than his classificatory son (BS) and they both respond with the same kind of unease if their formal relationship is brought up. However, when it comes to everyday life, the two might have grown up together and hence they tend to treat each other as siblings. A man in his late twenties described to me his relationship with his father’s brother, roughly the same age, by saying that “even though he is not my brother, we are very close. Sometimes I even begin to think that he is closer to me than Z [speaker’s brother next after him in age]”. However, respect is not merely a question of status, and this did not go unnoticed by Fortes (ibid., 192), who recognized that authority and influence also command respect. But it has to be understood that they too can contradict or be contradicted by the status of the person in question. For example, the lastborn of a set of siblings, who has earned a fortune as a migrant worker, a *burger*, might become virtually treated as the head of the sibling group, a

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*According to Fortes (1969a, 192-193) the Asante terminological system “follows the usual Crow-type rules of classificatory generalization”. I think it has to be added that the Asante system does not have the same terminological disregard for the generational differences in ego’s father’s matrilineage as it is usually the case in a “textbook” Crow system. Nonetheless, as Harry Basehart (1962, 293) very fittingly points out, there is an extensive set of alternative terms, which “introduces varied possibilities in the concrete application of terms by a given ego, possibly in accordance with shifts in the social situation”.

*Burger* [b ɡ ] is a very widely used Ghanaian slang word meaning a person who has travelled overseas. Its etymology supposedly goes back to the 1960’s and 1970’s when many Ghanaians migrated to Germany, especially to Hamburg and its environs. Consequently, all emigrants regardless of their destination are called *burgers*, short for Hamburger. In Ghanaian folk imagery a *burger* is often seen as a frivolous spender who
position normally held by the firstborn, but that does not, strictly speaking, change his place in the line of succession. Or an uncle who has squandered his fortune on alcohol, extramarital affairs, or unwise business deals is treated with the formal respect due to his status by his adult nephews, but in practice his opinion or advice, which in normal circumstances would be crucial, do not count. Although the basic principles that define hierarchy and equality are the same within both lineage kin and patrikin, their social significance differs. In Fortes’ terms, they are operative in different domains. Broadly speaking, seniority in terms of generation and/or age can be decisive when offices and property are inherited within the matrilineage, whereas within the patrikin its importance is limited to giving and receiving formal respect in social intercourse.

As Fortes’ critics have pointed out, his analytical approach resulted in a two-dimensional view of Asante kinship, namely in a tendency to define all bilateral relations necessarily, and completely, familial and descent relations above all political. Thus entire categories of social relationships, and not their elements or aspects, are assigned to one or the other structural domain (Yanagisako 1987, 113). For instance, the following quote seems to suggest that a man’s relationship to his own children is exclusively familial and to his sister’s children primarily political:

An Ashanti father’s model field of kinship relations has two parts. On the one side is his wife and children, on the other a sister and her children, the two being residentially separated. In relation to his children he conducts himself solely in accordance with norms of the familial domain. These entitle him, for example, to chastise his children if they misbehave. In relation to his sister’s children his behaviour is ruled more strictly by reference to the politico-jural domain, the source of his lawful rights and duties towards them. This corresponds to a field of social relations that extends beyond the domestic field – it includes his lineage, the village political authorities, and the chiefdom of which he is a citizen (Fortes 1969a, 98).

Consequently, Fortes saw that this duality was also responsible for “the chief problem of kinship relations” among the Asante, which was the adjustment of “moral claims and bonds arising out of marriage and

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has adopted the Western life style. His counterpart, a local guy, is poor and ignorant of the ways of the world. Ulf Hannerz (1992, 228-229) reports similar ideas in Nigeria.
fatherhood to those imposed by matrilineal kinship” (1962, 283). Hence although a person’s social relationships are neatly classified under two “sections”, it also follows that a person’s social life is characterized by the diverse obligations coming from these “sections”. Fortes’ own favourite example was a man’s controversial double status as an uncle and a father, which meant that he had to care for both his sister’s and his own children so that neither of them would be neglected or favoured. He had to be both a law-abiding uncle and a morally good father. In practice, living up to this ideal proved troublesome. Hence, the duality of relations implied both complementarity and conflict.

2.3 Marriages of men, women, and offices

2.3.1 Marriage as a process

The critics of *Kinship and the Social Order* were puzzled by its rather casual dismissal of so-called alliance theory (e.g., Kuper 1972, 290). However, Fortes himself had made it clear earlier that in creating and consolidating inter-group relations marriages are of secondary importance. He maintained that a social structure based on an association of exogamous corporate unilineal descent groups cannot hold together in a stable political system unless there is some sort of overruling centralized government or it “is knit together in the field of dyadic social relations by a web of kinship ties that counterbalance the centrifugal tendencies of the descent groups”. The principal social mechanism producing these ties is complementary filiation and not marriage (Fortes 1959, 209). To put it in a simpler way, it is the birth of children to parents from different groups and not the exchange of women between groups that brings the groups together. Although Fortes, of course, understood that without mating there cannot be filiation and succession of generations, he still insisted that kinship creates an “involuntary, perpetual, and inescapable bond of complete mutuality” based ultimately on prescriptive altruism, whereas marriages and affinal relations in general are characterized by “norms and institutions of contract, of obligatory exchange, of credit and debt, of sexual love, of nominally voluntary choice and terminability, by the spouses or those who have jural control over them” (Fortes 1972, 293). In short, kinship transcends the realm of free choice of human beings and is thus axiomatic, while marriages
are merely agreements made (and unmade) by people and thus “artificial”, as Fortes once put it (ibid.).

One can also see an interesting parallel between Fortes’ lack of interest in marriage alliances and the way he perceived the Asante marriage as “a bundle of separable rights and bonds rather than as a unitary all-or-none tie” (Fortes 1962, 280). It is my understanding also that, among the Asante, to be married legitimately does not depend so much on any legal rules about marriage, but rather on the man’s capacity and compliance to carry out the duties of a husband and father and the woman’s to perform those of a wife and mother. Any customary or civil formalities are seen as secondary.11 Similarly, in her study of Kumase market women Clark (1994, 344) noted that her informants saw marriage as a process rather than as an event or a state of being. The appearance of regular allowances from the side of the man and preparation of daily meals by the woman “marked the beginning of marriage as a socially recognized pairing” and their ending marked the termination of that relationship (ibid.). Hence common-law marriages, mpena aware (lit. lovers’ marriage), are ordinary among the Asante and they are not considered to bring any social stigma upon the people involved (cf. Fortes 1963, 59).12

According to Fortes the decisive formality that establishes a legal marriage (aware) is the giving of tiri nsa (lit. head drink), which consists of liquor and/or a sum of money. It is handed over by the head of the husband’s lineage to the head of the bride’s lineage, after which it is distributed between the bride’s father and members of both lineages witnessing the transaction. The husband may also personally distribute some customary gifts to the bride, her parents, uncle, lineage elder, and sometimes to certain deities and charms. The payment of tiri nsa guarantees the husband exclusive sexual rights over his wife, legal paternity of the children born in that marriage, and rights to essential domestic and economic services. Conversely, the man is obliged to provide his wife and their

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11 This is not to say that the rules are unimportant. In certain situations, for instance, when claiming compensatory damages for adultery, the jural context of the relationship becomes crucial (e.g., Rattray 1929, 24). Judging adultery cases was one of the main responsibilities of chiefs during the pre-colonial and colonial periods (e.g., Vellenga 1983). Although, by Ghanaian national law, the jurisdiction of chiefs in these matters has been restricted nowadays, they still have a role in arbitrating adultery cases in accordance with “native customary law”.

12 However, prolonged and casual courtship might lead to speculations on the “real” status of the union by outsiders and also by the two parties involved. A friend of mine told me that he had visited an acquaintance in a house, which was not his permanent home. In the house he met a woman, who was preparing a meal for them, and the man introduced her as his wife. When the woman heard this, she responded angrily: “Since when have I been your wife?”
children food and clothing (and also housing in case of patrilocal or neolocal marriages). He has to take care of her in case of illness, be able to satisfy her sexually, and take responsibility for her debts. Constant failure to fulfil the marital duties on the part of either husband or wife gives ground for divorce, which both parties are entitled to demand. In case of divorce, tiri nsa is returned to the husband’s lineage, but other customary gifts presented by the husband are not returnable (Fortes 1962, 280-281).

Fortes (1970, 7-8) concluded that in the case of the Asante “the usual ethnographic method of describing domestic organization is not applicable” and thus “such ‘blanket’ terms as patrilocal and matrilocal are quite useless”. Nevertheless, some “blanket terms” have been applied by others. Rattray (1929, 22) spoke of patrilocal marriage, but elsewhere he described some practices that he considered survivals of matrilocal marriage (Rattray 1955, 229). Clark (1994, 104) claims that “the classic Asante marriage” is duolocal, but in practical terms “women can legitimately live with a wide range of kin, including mothers, fathers, uncles, brothers, sisters, aunts, and children, as well as with husbands”. My own observations confirm Fortes’ conclusion. Although I did not conduct a household survey or anything like that, it became very evident during my fieldwork that real life residential patterns are extremely diverse and complex and reducing them to a single rule of post-marital residence would not be justifiable even as a sweeping generalization.13 This same observation could be made both in urban and rural settings. Hence, instead of concentrating very closely on the residence rules, the anthropologists (especially Fortes) have stressed the fact that marriage does not at any rate undermine a woman’s (or her children’s) politico-jural status, which is tied to her lineage and chiefdom. This is the case even in patrilocal marriages, where the wife moves to her husband’s place of residence, but does not lose her membership in her natal lineage or, in case of inter-chiefdom marriage, her “citizenship”. For example, Rattray (1929, 22) wrote that the wife’s “position (apart from the contract which she has entered) appears to be one of almost complete isolation and independence, among strangers, for the very children she may bear will not belong to her new lord [i.e., husband]”.

13 Some of the existing forms are quite hard to fit into any of the basic rules identified by anthropologists. For example, as Katherine Abu (1983, 160) has also noticed, one of the most desirable arrangements among the contemporary Asante is when a husband sets up a new place for his wife (and their children), but he himself goes to live in another place of his own choice. This is certainly something other than duolocality or neolocality as they are commonly understood.
Asante marriage is constrained by the concept of incest (*mogyade* and *atwebenefie*). Those unmarried men and women who are forbidden as sexual partners are also prohibited as spouses. Most importantly, this relates to members of the same matrilineage. Strictly speaking, the prohibition extends to the matriclean throughout Asante and all the other Akan peoples sharing the same clan system. On the paternal side marriage is prohibited with any “patrilineal descendant” of one’s great grandfather (Fortes 1962, 278-279). Polygyny is admitted, and customarily it is an obligation for chiefs and traditional priests. In the case of ordinary men, the husband needs his wife’s (or wives’) approval before taking a new wife. As for affinal relatives, one’s wife’s real and classificatory sisters in the same lineage are prohibited as new wives (Fortes 1963, 63). Nowadays, male attitudes towards polygyny are becoming increasingly unenthusiastic. The young men I talked to said that they would never enter a polygynous marriage because “it’s too expensive”, but added that in principle “a man should have the right to marry as many women as he wants to, if he can afford to take care of them”. Those women interviewed by Clark (1994, 342) in the 1980’s saw polygyny as “a serious threat to their economic and personal interests” and considered co-wives always as competitors and not as helpers or confidants. However, many people I know who have grown up in polygynous households have close relationships to all of their father’s wives and deny that the relations between the co-wives were ever particularly strained.

In spatial terms, the ideal match is a man or a woman from the same locality. According to Fortes’ field survey in 1945, more than 75% of married persons had their spouses from the same or adjacent village (1962, 279). One can see two main reasons for such a loose kind of village endogamy. First, by marrying within a close distance women avoid separation from their matrilineal relatives, and men will be able to stay close to their children, even if they have moved to live with their uncles after the formative years. Second, as Fortes put it, “the character and family background are known” by both parties involved and consequently they are likely to be saved any unpleasant surprises in the future (ibid.). Nowadays, this spatial preference is compromised, but not replaced, by the growing

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14 The term *mogyade* refers simply to sexual intercourse with a “blood relative”, i.e., those of the same *abusua*. The term *atwebenefie* is more problematic since it entails sexual relations with patrilateral relatives but also with the spouses of certain persons with whom one has close social relationships (including both relatives and non-relatives), and hence, as Rattray (1929, 304-306) noted, in many cases it has more to do with adultery than incest. More recently, this distinction has been discussed by Françoise Héretier (1999, 160-170).
desire, especially among young people in urban areas, to live and work abroad. Therefore, I am told, the **burgers** are the hottest items in the contemporary marriage market.\(^{15}\) For most of the male emigrants that I spoke with the “perfect wife” came roughly from the same locality where they had grown up (or otherwise considered home) and had a recognized, acceptable family background. So, in all, one could say that the endogamous aspect has these days more to do with social and cultural familiarity than physical distance.

In genealogical terms, the most desirable spouse has customarily been a real or classificatory cross-cousin from either side. This is not the preference of the couple but of the senior men, mother’s brothers and fathers, who traditionally have the final say in these contracts, although it has to be kept in mind that “all parental kin have rights and interests in the married partners, and therefore have a voice in the match” (Fortes 1969a, 213). The members of the parental generation defend these unions on various grounds, but very often the reasons have to do with expediency in distributing and transmitting property and wealth (Fortes 1962, 281-282). Similarly, Fortes’ own view on the two forms of cross-cousin marriage was very pragmatic. He concluded that whichever of these two forms “proves most convenient or feasible in a given case, it is initiated by parents and uncles and permits them to fulfil a major paternal duty without doing violence to avuncular obligations” (Fortes 1969a, 214). So, even though there are marked differences between the two forms of marriage, they still have basically the same function of reconciling the conflicting claims arising from the two fields of kinship. For instance, in the case of a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, an uncle is able to make sure that his daughter has a decent husband in his nephew, and since he is also his possible successor the inheritance left behind will indirectly benefit his daughter as well. Similarly, a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage gives a father an assurance that his son has a good wife in his niece and that when he gives material gifts to his son he is not neglecting his sister’s children because the gifts will be at least partly shared by his niece, now also a daughter-in-law. However, already in Fortes’ time many young people saw this form of marriage as unattractive because they felt that cross-cousins are

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\(^{15}\) Many young men who wanted to migrate told me that one of the main objectives, alongside with getting rich, was the attainment of “**burger status**”, which would eventually help them in the marriage market. When they returned home, they could “choose anyone at all”. However, those who really had travelled and returned home often complained that finding “a nice girl to marry” had actually become more difficult because, according to them, there are so many women “who just want to use you in order to get a visa or residential permit and then leave you”. 

more like full siblings than prospective spouses. In Fortes’ survey only 8 % of all married women were or had once been married to a cross-cousin and consequently he saw this as an indication that young people were becoming more able to choose their spouses independently (Fortes 1962, 282). The impression that I got is that the young people of the urban areas are likely to marry later in life and they are also less dependent on (but certainly not indifferent to!) the wishes of their parents and uncles, whereas in the villages the marriages tend to follow the traditional pattern more closely.16

2.3.2 Keeping the great names

In addition to these practicalities brought up by Fortes, there is one aspect of the cross-cousin marriages that has fascinated many anthropologists. This debate was launched by Rattray who had tried to explain “cross-cousin marriage and its particular relationship to the social organization of the Ashanti, by metaphysical beliefs” (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 111).17 Rattray’s proposal was based on the observation that people are thought to be able to reincarnate through a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Quite simply, when a man’s son (sharing his nt r) marries his niece (sharing his mogya or abusua through his sister), their children will bear exactly the same inherited components of blood and spirit as the paternal grandfather. In these instances the grandson is considered as a possible reincarnation (kra pa, “good soul”) of the grandfather (see Figure 1). After his death the grandfather becomes an ancestor and he is believed to be able to born again in his descendants who combine both matrilineal and patrilineal elements of his person.18 Exactly how, when, and how many times the actual

16 As for cross-cousin marriages, it is difficult to say anything certain about their popularity nowadays. All I can say is that the structural problems that the cross-cousin marriages are supposed to address are still there, although not in such a critical form as in Fortes’ days. Similarly, I imagine that in small villages with effective endogamous tendencies cross-cousins would be highly valued as marriage partners. However, this is merely my own guesswork and more extensive research would be needed in order to give a more accurate picture.
17 The other major anthropological debate is whether the Asante have a double descent system. It has been reviewed by others (e.g., Goody 1969, 106-111) and I do not see any reason to take it up here.
18 I cannot see any reason why these same principles should not apply to women as well, and hence in Figure 1 granddaughter Aa could be a reincarnation of her maternal grandmother Aa. But since senior men contracted the cross-cousin marriages and they were seen predominantly as the business of male officeholders, I am referring here to men only. Nevertheless, I disagree with Luc de Heusch (1981, 69-70) who suggests that nt r constitutes a case of “the regime of masculine sex affiliation” and thus does not concern women. Although nt r is transmitted only by men, it is not transmitted only to men.
reincarnation is thought to occur is a complicated question and different interpretations are based on a variety of ideas concerning the qualities and interrelationship of mogya, nt r, kra, and sunsum (e.g., Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 172). Nevertheless, my own understanding is that the possibility of rebirth is not restricted to the paternal grandfather and grandson relationship and it may take place in later generations as well, provided that there is a conformity of mogya and nt r between the person and the ancestor who he personifies.19 It is only that this particular form of marriage creates offspring in the grandchildren’s generation who are ideal for reincarnation.

However, Rattray argued that the same idea of reincarnation was also behind the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage even though contemporary evidence did not support this claim. The whole argument was based on his hypothesis that a dual organization had previously existed in Asante. He referred to certain oral traditions claiming that all communities had started as pairs of men and women, who lived in isolation and hence did not marry from any other group or place. In the long run these groups kept on growing until there were “a great many people who belonged to one or other of the two clans, and one or other of the two ntoro” (Rattray 1959, 328).20 Accordingly, as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969, 107) puts it, a double dichotomy of the social group was established. In such a case, if similar rules of exogamy prevailed,21 there would not be any difference concerning the “direction” of marriages; both patrilateral and matrilateral cross-cousin marriages would produce male and female “duplicates” of (some of) the grandparents.22 Finally, the groups started to expand and found other groups

Women inherit it from their fathers just as the men do and they also need it in order to exist as “whole persons”.

19 For instance, the present Asantehene Osei Tutu II is often said to be the reincarnation of the first Asantehene Osei Tutu. I have heard a number of stories that testify of the change in kingly persona. In these stories people who knew the king “as a young man” are surprised to meet him “as a completely different kind of man” after he has been installed to the office. In this case, there are ten generations between the ancestor and his reincarnation, and hence the status as a reincarnation of the first king is not seen to result directly from any single marriage, but rather from a new relationship to the ancestor established in the installation rituals.

20 According to Rattray (1929, 66-67), the Asante matriclans were formerly divided into two intermarrying moieties that had been afterwards merged into each other, and the name of one or the other moiety had come to represent the clan as a whole. Thus, for instance, the Bretuo clan was originally “a twin clan”, supposedly named Bretuo ne Tena, “Bretuo and Tena”, signifying its dual character. The relatedness between the Bretuo and Tena is still acknowledged, e.g., the Okwawuhene, a non-Asante paramount chief from the Tena clan, is considered to be a brother to the Mamponhene, who is Bretuo.

21 It has to be kept in mind that Rattray considered the nt r divisions to be exogamous and that same view was adopted by his critics also.

22 In Figure 1 a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage between son Ab and daughter Ca would not create a possible reincarnation of anyone in the previous generation. However, in a dual
to marry. This led to the disintegration of the dual organization and the locally bound isolated intermarrying descent groups were incorporated into a single exogamous group, members of which started to marry from new, previously unknown groups (Rattray 1959, 328). Ever since, Rattray (ibid., 330-331) insisted, there has been no “true dual organization”, and that has resulted in a “curious anomaly”, where the abusua and nt r “can come back independently of any special combination”, except when a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage is arranged by two parties. Rattray’s critics, namely Brenda Seligman (1925) and later Lévi-Strauss (1969 [1949]), did not pay much attention to his evolutionary hypothesis, and concluded that “the dialectic of the ntoro and of the abusua would entail the marriage of bilateral cross-cousins only if each category comprised two and only two exogamous groups”, but this was not the case among the contemporary Asante, who had “an indefinite number of clans and ntoro”. Hence, “the metaphysical necessity of reincarnation through alternate generations” could only be met by the patrilateral type (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 111-112). So, for Rattray the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage remained some sort of a survival from times immemorial, whereas for the rest it constituted a dilemma, which had to be solved by using other approaches (Heusch 1981, 68-70). Whether such dual organization described by Rattray really existed in pre-historic Asante is not important here. What concerns me are the ways in which these two forms of marriages allocate so-called great names, which connect individuals and descent groups to noble ancestry both matrilineally and patrilineally.

The Asante themselves express the significance of the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage with names. A child is named by a man who belongs to the same nt r division. Usually that person is his/her father or grandfather. In the case of a boy, he might be named after his father, father’s brother, grandfather, etc. In general, it can be said that the names used are those of his patrilineal ancestors and are thus considered to belong to the nt r division (or sub-division) in question.23 Some of the names that are

23 This applies to the so-called ancestral names. It has to be kept in mind that the Asante name their children after many other things too and therefore a person usually has several names. A person uses one of his/her names in everyday social intercourse, while the others are kept “in the box” (adaka mu) and brought up in some special occasions. Although the contemporary Asante, for the most part, are not familiar with the beliefs and practices of organization, this would happen. If granduncle Aa would have married his brother-in-law Bb’s sister, his nephew Ab’s matrilateral cross-cousin marriage with his daughter (in that case Ba) would produce “duplicates” of grandfather Bb and his sister (Aa’s wife). Hence, the difference between patrilateral and matrilateral marriages would merely depend on one’s point of view.
used are known as great names (aboadenfo, sing. aboadeni). They have belonged to chiefs, war heroes, great accumulators of wealth, and other prominent persons in the past. Naming children after them is not merely a way of commemorating their great deeds, but also the “admirable characteristics displayed by such persons were understood as accreted properties of the nt r” and they might be reincarnated in their patrilineal descendants (McCaskie 1995a, 172).

When Rattray (1959, 324) enquired about the justification for patrilateral marriage from his informants he was told that “[i]f my niece does not marry my son, but marries a man not of my ntou (ntoro), then I cannot call any of her children after myself or my ancestors”. To put it in another way, if a

FIGURE 1. Inheritance of abusua and nt r in a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage.
Legend:
A, B, and C signify membership in an exogamous matrilineal descent group (abusua).
a, b, and c signify membership in a patrilineal ritual division (nt r).
Grandfather Aa and his reincarnation, grandson Aa, are marked with dotted line.
man wishes to name his successor, i.e., his male matrilineal descendant, after himself or his patrilineal ancestors, it requires that they both share the same *nt r*, which is possible only between a grandfather and grandson produced by a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Through such a marriage the predecessor may pass on, along with his status, office, and property, also his name, the admirable qualities of his *nt r*, and furthermore, be secure that he himself may reincarnate in his successor. Hence, it follows that the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage is the primary technique by which patrilineally inherited great names can be given to matrilineal descendants and thus kept in the matrilineages. To put it more figuratively, it is a way of directing flows of matrilineal and patrilineal nobility along the same channel.

The reason given for making cross-cousin marriages may now be analysed in detail. The majority give as the reason for these marriages the desire ‘to bring back certain names’. When the family group was centre of the social world, the uncle, who was its head, wanted his name to be perpetuated; later the uncle became the chief, and still later the king, and names came more than ever to mean a link with the aristocracy. A clan [i.e., matrilineage] is therefore not anxious to lose any names, and (...) family arrangements are necessary to ensure that no loss takes place (Rattray 1959, 323).

Therefore, it is not only that the great names of a particular *nt r* division make the division itself noble, but also (some of) these names become associated with lineages since famous lineage ancestors once carried them and were able to pass them on to their matrilineal descendants. In terms of succession to an office, a candidate’s name and his *nt r* affiliation differentiate him from the rest of the candidates, who might be equally eligible in terms of matriliney. So, in this sense the names are things, which should be kept away from the sphere of exchange, because they affirm the differences of identity between groups and individual within groups. At the same time the names connect them to their origins (Godelier 1999, 200). For example, in case of the office of the *Asantehene*, a candidate has to be a member of a particular lineage of the Oyoko clan, preferably carrying the

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24 There is no constituted hierarchy of the *nt r* divisions, but precedence is claimed by referring to the great names of the past officeholders who have belonged to the same division (McCaskie 1995a, 170-172).
name of one of the former rulers, and thus belonging to the same nt r division.\textsuperscript{25}

Nonetheless, it has to be emphasized that the name itself or membership in a “famous” nt r division does not guarantee a candidate anything in the way that full membership in the matrilineage guarantees candidacy. Other candidates with “modest” names might have other virtues valued more by the electors (McCaskie 1995a, 172-173). Similarly, the great names are not considered great merely because they are associated with great ancestry. Every man has the potential to make his own name great. In fact, as a very prominent officeholder once put it, a “man was born to make name” and it was a huge misfortune if a man came to realize that “after his death his name might go into oblivion” (cited in Wilks 1975, 462).

A pertinent historical example is Asantehene Kwaku Dua Panin, who was installed in 1834, and who was considered to have a “commoner’s name” and accordingly not fit for a king, but his supporters argued that he had a great name “in his own right”, notably because of his bravery in the battle of Katamanso against the British in 1826 (McCaskie 1995a, 189). After making his name and nt r great this way Kwaku Dua made every effort to pass both his name and the office of the Asantehene to one of his grandchildren by arranging marriages between his favourite sons and eligible royal women (ibid., 198). Kwaku Dua had hundreds of children, and only the selected few were to marry royal women, but eventually two of his grandsons were installed as kings, namely Kwaku Dua Kuma and Kwaku Dua III, who later became better known as Akwasi Agyeman Prempe (McCaskie 1980, 199-200).

On the whole, it appears that among the royals patrilateral cross-cousin marriages were practised indifferently and they were not perpetuated one generation after another according to any strict rules about the sons of chiefs (or kings) marrying royal women. In his study of the marriages of the Asante queen mothers Rattray constantly ran into “incorrect marriages” or “mésalliances” that introduced new nt r elements and ancestral names to the royal lineage. In actual fact, he discovered that only three out of the nine queen mothers whose conjugal relations he had studied had entered a “correct marriage” (Rattray 1959, 321-325). This “spoiling” of nt r, as

\textsuperscript{25} For instance, the late Asantehene Opoku Ware II, who passed away in 1999, belonged to the Asafode subdivision of Bosommu\textsuperscript{r} nt r and the “greatest name” mentioned in his case is the second Asantehene Opoku Ware, to whom he is patrilineally connected through Akyempemhene Adusei Kwa, Dwansahene Opoku Tano, Gyakyehene Kwadwo Adusei, Bepoahene Amankwa Boko, Kwame Adusei of Gyakye, and Gyakye Abontemdomhene Kwadwo Adusei (Wilks 1995, 4).
Rattray called it, did not result from failed marriage plans or anything like that, but merely from the fact that royal women were not obliged to marry their matrilateral cross-cousins and so produce reincarnations of past kings as perfect rulers-to-be. Hence, the chiefly lineages never really had any “caste-like aspect”, as Edmund Leach (1968, 25) erroneously assumed. For instance, T. E. Bowdich, an officer of the British African Company, who led an expedition to Asante in 1817, wrote that

[t]he sisters of the King may marry or intrigue with whom they please, provided he be an eminently strong or personable man; that the heirs of the stool may be, at least, personably superior to the generality of their countrymen (Bowdich 1966, 254).

Instead of following prescriptive marriage rules, the unions of royal women often served political ends so that they were meant to confirm alliances between polities (Wilks 1975, 327-344). For example, after the first Asantehene Osei Tutu had incorporated the chiefdom of Amakom to the capital Kumase and killed Amakomhene Akosa Yiadom, the successor of the latter married Osei Tutu’s niece Asantehemaa Nyako Kusi Amoa and was thus able to establish an important affinal (and later patrilateral) link to his new overlord’s lineage (see Figure 10). In this case the husband and wife were certainly not cross-cousins and, what is more important, this arrangement was unique. When I discussed it with the present Amakomhene he made it very clear that such marriage has not become customary and, correspondingly, he did not remember that anyone of the Amakom royals would have married from there ever since. However, the second Asantehene Opoku Ware was a product of this marriage and it was through this single transaction that the names of the Asafode subdivision of Bosommuru nt r were introduced to the ruling lineage of Kumase, kept there ever since, and considered to be among the noblest names in Asante.

As is evident in the above, patrilateral cross-cousin marriages were particularly important to the kings and chiefs. Through such unions they were able to perpetuate their reign beyond their own demise, and respectively, “office holders, and the Asantehene above all, were looked to atavistically in relation to their” great names (McCaskie 1995a, 172). The patrilateral marriage as a chiefly marriage served also as a starting point for Heusch’s explanation for the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. He claimed that the two types of marriages “stem from two different ideologies and can certainly not be put on the same footing”. According to him they are
practiced on different “social levels”. The patrilateral type was practiced by “princely families”, whereas the matrilateral by “ordinary folk” (Heusch 1981, 69). The former revolves around reincarnation, while the concept of nt r is “quite alien” to the latter. Instead, the latter type is associated with residence rules, or in the Asante case, with the variety of such rules. By referring to Lévi-Strauss’ (1969, 441) notion of disharmonic and harmonic regimes, Heusch (1981, 70) deduces that Asante as a matrilineal society has a “fluctuating residential regime that hesitates between virilocality and uxorilocality”. Similarly, due to uncertainty of the residence rules the system “oscillates between the disjunction of husband and wife and that of the siblings” (ibid., 69). Heusch suggests that through a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage the Asante are able to stabilize their residential system, because in such cases post-marital residence becomes as fixed as possible (ibid., 69-70); the nephew lives with his uncle (and now father-in-law) and siblings, as he is expected, and the daughter is not likely to live elsewhere since two important men, her husband and father, live in the same place. In the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage this type of preservation of the conjugal cell is not probable, since the husband would have to leave his own lineage kin and move to his wife’s and father’s house, which is not very likely (cf. Fortes 1970, 19). Or, conversely, the wife would have to leave her uncle with the much-valued paternal grandchildren. This view is also confirmed by the fact that the standard answer provided by Rattray’s (1959, 322) informants, when he asked the advantages of one’s nephew marrying one’s daughter, was “because it will keep my daughters in my house”. To my mind, this explanation adds relatively little to that already given by Fortes, according to which cross-cousin marriages are practised in order to balance the pressures arising from different fields of kinship. I do not see anything incorrect in Fortes’ or Heusch’s views on the functions of the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, but I think their explanations as a whole remain half-finished. A fuller picture starts to emerge when the attention is turned to the actual matrilateral marriages of the chiefs. Contrary to Heusch’s theory, there is evidence suggesting that matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is very important for chiefs and nt r has everything to do with it.

2.3.3 Distributing the great names

In his critique of Rodney Needham’s (1969) distinction between prescriptive and preferential marriage systems, David Schneider (1969, 34)
asserted that in the writings of alliance theorists it is difficult to distinguish between marriages as expressions of alliance and marriages creating alliances. Generally, it is understood that Lévi-Strauss followed Marcel Mauss in proposing that exchange between groups is “the basic mode of integration”. However, when Mauss spoke of total services he not only meant that exchanges took place between groups and not individuals, but also that the series of exchanges and the things exchanged in them all formed a total system of exchanges. For this reason there cannot be any single marriage, gift, or other mode of exchange that is more crucial or decisive than any other (ibid.). So, in order to paraphrase Mauss (1990, 5), the exchange of women is “only one feature of a much more general and enduring contract”. In such instances marital exchange between a wife-giving and wife-taking group should be seen only as one expression of the structural principle of alliance. But according to Schneider, all marriages cannot be treated that way. In an opposite situation, if a husband represents one group and a wife another group, “and these two units are not already in a set or formal relationship to each other, then that particular marriage may create a bond and reiterate it in another way by the offspring of that union” (Schneider 1969, 57). In this case, one may speak of a marriage creating an alliance. I find this distinction very useful for analysing the different kinds of marriages of the Asante chiefs.

Maybe because of Fortes’ rejection of marital exchange as an integrative social mechanism no one has really discussed the political significance of marriage alliances in Asante. Even one of Fortes’ staunchest critics, Leach (1968, 24-25), claimed that among the Asante marriage alliances do not serve political ends and, moreover, “there are no ‘relations of perpetual affinity’ which can serve to express enduring political relations of superordination and subordination”. However, he was wide of the mark and led to this conclusion by a rather selective reading of Rattray. On the contrary, marriage alliances do serve political ends in Asante, and moreover, one can make a relatively clear distinction between those marriages that create alliances and those that express them.

In the above, I referred to the marriage between the chief of Amakom and the niece of Asantehene Osei Tutu as a tie that cemented the incorporation of the chiefdom of Amakom to Kumase. Most often, when the Asante discuss such marriages, it is the Asantehene who marries a woman from an allied or subordinate group. Accordingly, the successive Asantehene have married from the member chieftdoms of the Asante kingdom and other Akan and non-Akan tributaries in order to strengthen
and/or sanctify the alliance between the polities, and in some cases it is said that the chief or the whole polity in question is a wife to the Asantehene. Usually, it is only the affinal link once established that is preserved and commemorated in oral traditions, ritual, speech, and such things, but the alliance itself is not perpetuated by similar marriages in the succeeding generations. Such a marriage is known as adehye aware, a union between two persons of freeborn descent, and Rattray (1929, 24) described it as “the highest or most desirable form of marriage”. It is exactly marriages of this type that create alliances between groups. One could now argue that even in this case the marriage is only an expression of the political alliance between the two chiefdoms, especially since it is said to strengthen or sanctify it. However, a political alliance is based on oaths exchanged by the rulers who represent their polities, whereas the marital exchange takes place between two kin groups (to which the rulers belong). Although the latter tie symbolizes the former, it does not mean that they belong to the same total system of exchanges. Hence, the two exchanges, although in conformity with each other, involve different sets of groups. The term adehye aware is not restricted to marriages between chiefdoms, or to chiefs as such, and normally it refers to a conventional marriage between two freeborn persons. It is only that for chiefs it serves political ends. Marshall Sahlins (1985, 48) calls such chiefly ties “founding marriages”, which are characteristic of the system of positional succession. The statuses of husband and wife are inherited by the successors of the two officeholders that originally contracted the marriage that formed the alliance between the ruling groups. In these cases a single aristocratic marriage outweighs the multitude of commoner marriages, which are not considered significant in forming political alliances. As Sahlins points out, structures of this kind are not statistical; they are not expressions of “the empirical frequencies of interactions” (ibid.). This distinction is significant in the Asante case.

The second form of marriage practised by the chiefs should be seen as an expression of alliance. In order to understand it fully, it is important to first take a brief look at the political structure of what Fortes calls a chiefdom (man, pl. aman). By this he refers to the towns and villages, which are made up of mutually independent matrilineages of diverse clan origin. One of the component lineages is a ruling lineage, or royal lineage, of the chiefdom, whose position is based on the ancestral occupation of the

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26 This is in opposition to persons who descend from slaves.
27 Rattray (1929, 22-32) lists six different forms of marriage among the Asante. The two forms that I discuss in this passage I consider to be the politically significant ones.
The offices of the chief (hene, pl. ahene) and the queen mother (hemaa, pl. ahemaa) are vested in that lineage. The other component lineages are comprised of the descendants of those groups and individuals who have arrived later to the locality and who have been given permission to settle there by the ruling lineage. They are represented by divisional chiefs or the lineage heads (impanyinfo, sing. panin) who have sworn an oath of allegiance (soaye) to the chief. Together they form a council of elders. The chiefly stool owns the soil (asase), whereas the members of the so-called commoner lineages have the right to “eat on the soil” (didi asase so), meaning that they can have their homes and farms on the land, and also hunt, fish, and make use of any collectable products of the forest. In return the chief is entitled to a part of the crop during the annual harvest festival and to a fixed share of the catch of the hunters and fishermen as well as other products of the forest. Customarily, he has the right to levy a wide range of taxes and mobilize his subjects for war or communal tasks (e.g., Fortes 1969a, 139-150).

The structural relationship between the ruling lineage and the other member lineages of the chiefdom, as described by Fortes, is presented in a generalized form in Jack Goody’s typology of dynastic structures. In this royal descent group structure “the dynasty is but one of a number of similar groups” (Goody 1979, 46; see Figure 2). This implies that if for one reason or another the descent group holding the chiefly office is not able to function as a ruling lineage, any other lineage is structurally capable of taking its place.

FIGURE 2. Royal descent group structure according to Goody (1979, 27).
Legend:
UDG: unilineal descent group.

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28 According to A. Y. Y. Kyerematen (1971, 17-19) in Asante traditional accounts the ancestral occupation is established through discovery, gift, purchase, or military conquest.
The second form of marriage is known as *ayete aware*. The most important thing that separates *ayete* marriage from *adehye* marriage is that in the latter case the tie is seen to exist between the man and the wife and their respective lineages, but in the former only between the chiefly office and a wife-giving commoner lineage. To put it simply, the women in the *ayete* marriages, the “stool wives” as they are called, are not married to the chief but to his office, which, of course, is vested in the ruling lineage. Accordingly, when the chief dies his successor will inherit the “stool wives”. Or, when a chief is deposed, he will only stay married to his “personal” wives, whereas the “stool wives” stay married to the office. But most importantly, when a “stool wife” dies, or the chief divorces her, her lineage has to replace her with a new woman. This possibility of sororate is, in addition to marrying twin girls (Fortes 1962, 279), a form of marriage that is considered incestuous for ordinary men but not for the chiefs (Rattray 1929, 27). In 1946, when the Ashanti Confederacy Council was reviewing the legislation concerning “stool wives”, the relationship was defined as follows:

The bond is between the Stool and the House; for example the original aseda [i.e., bride wealth] sealing the marriage need not be repeated; the new wife is merely continuing an existing marriage, not making a new one. (...) The obligation of the House is to see that the Stool has, as wife, a woman of the House. If the individual wife of the moment for any reason vacates her place, the House must, on demand, put another individual in that place (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/5a).

Basically, the *ayete* marriage starts as a conventional marriage, but it is perpetuated after the death of either of the parties involved. In a way, since the exchange of bride wealth does not reoccur, it is seen as a single marriage and not a series of successive marriages. However, not all chiefly marriages have resulted in this arrangement. As for the question how and when an *ayete* relationship is actually constituted, the Confederacy Council did not have a definite answer. The memorandum states that

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29 The word *ayete* comes from *yere*, a wife + *te*, to patch, fill a gap, replace (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/5a).

30 The use of the term “House” is slightly confusing here, particularly since it is later in the document defined as family “in the local sense” (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/5a). As noted above, marriages are contracts between matrilineages and not households. Most probably the authors refer to the “clan house”, the headquarters of a locally anchored lineage.
[t]he mere fact that a Chief has married one woman from a House does not entitle him to a replacement on her death; but if he makes the request, and it is complied with, and if this happens several times over the years; it becomes recognised that ‘there is ayete in that House’. The bond apparently arises in this way, and not by one definite agreement or transaction; but there seems to be no uncertainty in a given case as to whether there is ayete in the House or not (ibid.).

Hence one could say that the adehye marriages may create alliances between the ruling lineage and other component lineages of the chiefdom in the first instance, whereas ayete marriages come to express those alliances between lineages.

In the ayete relationship the chiefly lineage is turned into a wife-taking group and the commoner lineages into wife-giving groups and this is exactly where it becomes visible how the ayete marriage relates to matrilateral cross-cousin marriage and nt r. First of all, as Figure 3 clearly shows, when the initial marriage between the chief and a woman from a commoner lineage is perpetuated by the succeeding generations the spouses are bound to be cross-cousins (real or classificatory). Hence when the adehye marriage is turned into ayete marriage it also becomes a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Of course, in reality the unions do not always take place tidily between first cousins as in Figure 3, nor do the nephews automatically follow their uncles to the throne, but the basic principle of positional succession employed here is always the same. In the Asante terminological system a male ego may call all his collateral female relatives from his mother’s brother’s daughter’s lineage by the same term and they are all marriageable. Obviously, it has to be taken into account that the old “stool wives” inherited from the previous ruler might belong to ascending generations and not considered cross-cousins as such. However, nowadays, when chiefly marriages are becoming increasingly monogamous, the ayete relationships have undergone certain adjustments, but they are, nonetheless, still upheld. After the death of a former “stool wife”, the lineage in question will choose a woman from its ranks who will continue as “the chief’s wife”. However, these “stool wives” do not perform marital duties in the same way as in an ordinary marriage, but they still have some specific obligations, for instance, they represent their lineages in ceremonial occasions with the “real” wife of the chief. They are not allowed to take a “real” husband without the permission of the chief. If such permission is granted and the woman gets married to another man, the lineage still has to fill the vacancy with one of its unmarried female members. Even quite recently, chiefs have been known to use their prerogative to ban their “stool wives” from entering a conventional marriage.
according to the Confederacy Council’s view, there are ways of dealing with this problem.

The [age] gap usually occurs through death; but if the Stool becomes vacant there may be great disparity between the old wife and the new chief. Either party may not wish her to continue as a Stool wife, in which case she may be divorced in the ordinary way, and a new wife put in her place (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/5a).

Nevertheless, the cross-cousin status and the age difference are of secondary importance, when one merely considers the “stool wives” as representatives of their own lineages upholding the tie between the chiefly office and the subordinate group. However, the age of the wives is important regarding the children that these marriages should produce in abundance. This has to do with the idea that the stool has to have as many sons (*ahenemma*, sing. *heneba*) and grandsons (*ahenenana*, sing. *henenana*) as possible.

They [the Asante] say that sons are the support of their fathers. Chiefs, in particular, stress this. The more sons and sons’ sons a chief has, the more secure does he feel. As their social standing depends on him and as they have no rights to his office, they will support him in all circumstances. They are the most trusted followers, and important chiefs appoint their own and their brothers’ sons and sons’ sons (...) as titled councillors to attend closely on them (Fortes 1962, 269).

The offices of such “titled councillors” are known as *mmamma dwa*, sons’ and grandsons’ stools, which are not vested in matrilineages, but are filled “by appointment or at least confirmation” by the superior officeholder who (or whose ancestor) had created the office in question (Fortes 1969a, 202). Sometimes these offices are reserved specifically for the chief’s own immediate offspring, but sometimes they are awarded to non-relatives and passed on in a pseudo-patrilineal line to brothers, sons, and grandsons of the first occupant.32 However, because of the matrilateral marriages the patrilineal line of officeholders may be in conformity with matrilineal succession. The office of the *Akomforehene* of Kumase is a good example of

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32 Occasionally, these offices have also been called *nt r* stools (e.g., PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/3a), which implies that the patrilineal dimension is not merely based on matters of practicality, such as getting uncompromised support and loyalty, but that it also has some spiritual significance.
that.\textsuperscript{33} The first Akomforehene Boakye Atonsa was a son of Asantehene Kwaku Dua Panin and his wife called Nana Adwoa Adowaa who belonged to a certain lineage of the Asona clan. Originating from this union an ayete relationship was established between the Asantehene’s office and Adowaa’s lineage and the office of the Akomforehene was created for their son. Up till now, five kings (and some royals of the Asantehene’s lineage) have married from the Akomforehene’s lineage and had several children. As a result of this, as the present Akomforehene Boakye Atonsa II puts it, “almost all the royals of the Akomfore stool are [real or classificatory] great, great grandchildren of the past Otumfuo”.\textsuperscript{34} When I asked about the succession to the Akomfore stool, the answer was that it is matrilineal, but “the children of the Golden Stool” are in a favoured position in comparison to the other royals. Hence, the matrilateral “stool marriage” ensures that the ruler may appoint his own patrilineal offspring as his councillors without compromising the principles of matrilineal descent. The male children from “stool marriages” are thus eligible both matrilineally and patrilineally.\textsuperscript{35} In addition to offices, it was also customary for the Asantehene to allocate land in Kumase for his favourite wives and their matrilineages. They were not only allowed to settle there, but the lands became corporate property of the wives’ lineages and sometimes attached to the offices created for the sons (e.g., Berry 2001, 89, 126-127).

As noted above, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage does not produce possible reincarnations of the grandparental generation and hence, superficially, it might look like outright “spoiling” of nt r. However, it has to be understood that the objective of the “stool marriage” is not the keeping of great names as in the patrilateral type but their distribution. In fact, the handing over of names was one of the reasons why the commoner lineages were eager to give wives to the chiefs. This becomes unmistakably clear from a letter to the Ashanti Confederacy Council written by a chief, Atipinhene Boakye Dankwa,\textsuperscript{36} who complained that the ayete system was becoming too much of an economic burden for the chiefs. In 1946, when the letter was written, the Atipinhene claimed that the cost of living had reached such a point that the chiefs were unable to maintain their many wives and

\textsuperscript{33} The Akomforehene belongs to the Manwere group in Kumase (see Figure 8).
\textsuperscript{34} Otumfuo or Otumfo, “the powerful one”, is the most commonly used appellation of the Asantehene.
\textsuperscript{35} This is a point that should be taken into account when reading the works of the historians, who have often treated “bureaucratic” or “patrimonial”, (pseudo-) patrilineal succession as antithetical to “aristocratic”, matrilineal succession (e.g., Wilks 1966).
\textsuperscript{36} The Atipinhene belongs to the Ankobea group (see Figure 8).
children and thus some of the latter were in danger of becoming “ruffians and jail-birds”. However, in the past such problems had not existed.

But let us remember that in those past days, a Chief did not equally clothe and maintain all his wives. Their maintenance lay on the bare shoulders of their own relatives… Moreover, in the past, Chiefs’ sons were not trained in any work. When they married, their wives were mostly fed by their own relatives, because *they were contented with the high names which were given to their children* (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/5b; italics added).

Not only were the chiefs exempted from bride wealth in the case of successive “stool wives”, but they and their sons were also exempted from those economic responsibilities that are usually considered an essential part of the foundation of the whole institution of marriage. These responsibilities were seen to have been covered by the chiefly names passed on to the children, who belonged to the wife-giving lineage. By distributing them to the commoner lineages it became possible for the chiefs to maintain a large number of wives. Thus through marriage the chiefs are able to share their “greatness” in the form of names and receive in return extensive rights to women. It is important also to notice how this relates to the totality of exchanges between the ruling lineage and the commoner lineages. Tribute, services, and rights to women move up to the chief, while rights to land, offices, and names move down to the commoners.

From this it follows that the great names were also valuable things that could be exchanged and this observation opens up a totally new avenue for the comparison of patrilateral and matrilateral cross-cousin marriages. As there is no “true dual organization” in Asante and people are free to marry from a number of lineages belonging to different clans and also from a variety of *nt r* divisions, it is impossible to keep the great names exclusively in a single matrilineal descent group. As Rattray (1959, 330) noted, “[a] man may therefore to-day be compelled to bear a name which previously was possessed by a man of some clan [i.e., matrilineage] quite different from his own”. However, as it became apparent above, the names are important for the identity of the groups and their members, and through the idea of reincarnation they quite literally connect them to another time of origins, when the ancestors had made their names great through their great deeds. So, they cannot be given away entirely; they have to be kept to some extent. Here one runs into something that resembles the seemingly
paradoxical idea of “keeping-while-giving” developed by Annette Weiner (1992). The two forms of ideal marriage are responses to this paradox. Hence, in case of chiefs, who are the ones having the great names, the two forms stand in a peculiar relation of both complementarity and sequence. The matrilateral cross-cousin marriages, which distribute the great names, are practised by chiefs themselves, whereas the patrilateral cross-cousin marriages, which keep the great names in the lineages, are practised by the sons of chiefs. The first ones give them away, but the second ones “get them back”, as the Asante themselves have put it (Rattray 1959, 321-322).

FIGURE 3. The “stool marriage” as a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage.
Legend:
C1, C2, and, C3 are successive chiefs.
W1, W2, and W3 are their respective wives who are also their MBDs.
S1, S2, and S3 are sons and grandsons of chiefs.
The dotted line separates the ruling lineage from the wife-giving lineage.

This chapter about the politics of kinship and marriage among the Asante has touched on two of the most influential models in kinship studies of the
twentieth century, namely descent and alliance theories. Accordingly, there has been much talk of groups, divisions, and categories. Despite the marked differences of these perspectives they both have concentrated on a certain type of society, which has its basis in Émile Durkheim’s (1984, 127-131) idea of segmentary society. The two schools of thought disagree on the fundamental nature of the segments, whether they are physically there or whether they are to be described through concepts and ideas. Similarly, there is no consensus on the rules about how the segments are formed, whether they have more to do with corporate character or marriage rules and exogamy. And finally, there is disagreement on how the segments are related to each other, whether they are primarily related through complementary filiation or marriage alliances. However, they both share the idea that if the segments are to be discrete there can be no overlapping membership. People are either in or out of the segment; there cannot be a simultaneous membership in two or more segments of the same order (Schneider 1969, 43-50). This does not mean, as Fortes (1969a, 287) emphasized, that all members of the society are sorted into unattached groups, “like apples in a stack of boxes”. Certainly, people belong to all sorts of groups and have all sorts of relationships, and hence they are in no way “prisoners” of their segments. In a lineage-polity, like that of the Asante, lineage membership forms “the indispensable foundation for a person’s social existence; but there are components of personhood and areas of social action that are independent of lineage regulation” (ibid., 288). However, in terms of the politico-jural domain, the lineage is seen as the only relevant group. So, when Fortes says that the Asante polity is a “lineage-polity”, he suggests that abusua, the matrilineal descent group, is the primary political group, a number of which comprise a chiefdom. This, of course, corresponds to Goody’s structural model presented above. A person gets his/her politico-jural status through a membership in a lineage, recruitment to which takes place through matrilineal kinship. Thus kinship forms a bridge between the familial and politico-jural domains (Fortes 1972, 287-288). Or more specifically, “the pivot of the whole system is the status of citizenship, which originates for each freeborn individual by matrification and is established by the recognition of his descent as the credential for lineage membership” (ibid). In the following chapter I will re-examine Fortes’ model of Asante polity by studying the principles according to which a person’s politico-jural status, his/her citizenship in a chiefdom and eligibility to hold an office, are designated. To be more precise, I will investigate whether such a status is derived directly from
membership in a separate and exclusive political group and whether group membership is determined solely according to rules of kinship and descent.
3 IS THE STATE A GROUP OF GROUPS?

Early anthropologists searched for common concepts that could be used in describing both Western and tribal societies. As a result, Roy Wagner (1974, 97) insists that social anthropology became “the science of descent groups” when the anthropologists turned kinship “into jurisprudence and corporate economics”. Since the tribesmen did not carry passports and did not have permanent addresses, their politico-jural rights and obligations had to be defined according other principles. Most often these were seen to be derived from a membership in a social group, e.g., kin groups, age sets, or residential groups, which had clearly defined criteria for membership. In this defining, the anthropologists assumed that tribal societies have a similar “constitutional charter” as Western nation states (ibid., 103). Ghana, as a nation state, presents itself as a group of groups. The republic of Ghana consists of ten administrative regions, which are all divided into numerous districts and so forth.1 These forms were, of course, preceded by comparable divisions made by the British colonial administration. All of these divisions have fixed boundaries defined in state laws and a citizen of Ghana is a resident of only one region and district, where he/she exercises his/her citizenship rights. In Fortes’ writings the structure of Asante state was seen in many ways analogous to a modern state. It too was a group of groups.

The subtitle of Fortes’ 1969 volume was The Legacy of Lewis Henry Morgan, which referred to the second key theme in the book. In addition to its contribution to kinship theory, the book was also concerned with disciplinary history: it explained how a certain intellectual legacy had been handed down to Fortes and his contemporaries (most importantly E. E. Evans-Pritchard) from Morgan through W. H. R. Rivers and Radcliffe-Brown (Fortes 1972, 285-286). In terms of the study of political organization, Fortes claimed that Morgan had already understood that the “gens”, i.e., a unilineal descent group, belonged to the “realm of government and of political institutions” and therefore it had to be kept separate from the “kindred”, which belonged to the domestic sphere. Accordingly, Morgan had realized that in simple societies it was the “gens” and never the family that was the basic unit of political organization. All this, of course, corresponded to Fortes’ distinction between bilateral kinship

1 The regions are Greater Accra, Central, Western, Eastern, Volta, Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Northern, Upper West, and Upper East. The chieftdoms of the Asante kingdom are located in Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo Regions, but there are also Asante “islands” in the Eastern and Volta Regions.
and descent (Fortes 1969a, 36-38). Furthermore, Morgan (1985, 61-66) had spoken of *societas* (or “gentile” society), in which the government was founded on “gentes, phratries and tribes”, and *civitas* (or political society or state) where the political organization rested on territory and property. An evolutionary sequence was postulated between the two societal forms; the former belonged to “ancient society” and the latter to “modern society”. Fortes (1972, 285) commended Morgan for his “thoroughly modern technique of synchronic analysis” and how his views on kinship and polity had been ahead of their time, but then again wanted to strip Morgan’s findings of “their pseudo-historical clothing”. He suggested that the evolutionary stages should be thought of as “representative types of political systems” (Fortes 1969a, 37). Thus Morgan’s “gentile” and political societies had been reintroduced in a synchronic form in *African Political Systems*, where the editors maintained that in state societies “the political unit is essentially a territorial grouping”, for example, a ward or district, whereas in segmentary lineage systems it is a corporate descent group (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1987, 6).2 As significant as the distinction itself is the feature that the two types of society are claimed to have in common: namely the fact that the political systems of both states and stateless societies are approached as systems of groups. Morgan (1985, 66) defined the “gens” as the primary political group among the Iroquois: several “gentes” comprised a phratry, a number of phratries a tribe, and finally several tribes constituted a confederacy. Similarly, Fortes (1969a, 138-153) saw an Asante chiefdom as a cluster of matrilineages, and a number of chiefdoms formed a confederacy. Thus tribal polities were seen as a hierarchical series of groups, where the higher structural levels encompassed those of the lower.3

In this chapter I will first look at Fortes’ model of a closed descent group as a primary segment in the political system of the Asante and then show why my data on offices vested in descent groups is difficult to accommodate into this model.

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2 The idea of states growing out of stateless societies is not completely absent in the writings of the structural-functionalists (see Evans-Pritchard 1969, 189).
3 This point is discussed in greater detail in the Tallensi ethnography (e.g., Fortes 1969b, 50, 206, 232).
3.1 Do rules make the group?

Morgan (1985, 67-68) used the term descent to refer to a classificatory principle that was used as a criterion of group membership. To him a “gens” was “a body of consanguinei descended from the same common ancestor” (ibid., 63). What held the body together was “the bond of kin” (ibid., 69). However, as an organized group the “gens”, or in his particular case the Iroquois matrilineage, derived its “vitality and individuality” from the “rights, privileges, and obligations conferred and imposed upon its members” (ibid., 70-71). A very similar division was made by Rivers (1926, 86-88), who applied the term descent only to the membership in a unilineal group and kept it firmly separate from the processes of transmitting rank, property, and office. The members of the descent group, which Rivers called a clan or a “sib”, were kept together by relations of “sibship”, a common totem, and habitation of shared territory (ibid., 19-22). Nonetheless, group membership involved “certain duties and privileges in relation to the other members of the group” (ibid., 9). What separated Radcliffe-Brown from Morgan and Rivers for the most part was that, instead of treating descent merely as a subdivision of a kinship system, he sought to approach it from the point of view of its “social purposes”, or “the reality of kinship relations as a part of a social structure”, as he once put it (Radcliffe-Brown 1950, 10). He saw groups as corporations that owned an “estate”, which was “a collection of rights (whether over persons or things) with the implied duties”. The most important of these rights were the ones over a group’s territory and members. The continuity of the group was seen to be directly dependent on the continuity of its estate (Radcliffe-Brown 1968, 34-35). Two kinds of normative necessities followed from this. First, in order to maintain the continuity and unity of the group no person outside the group could be allowed to share its estate. Thus group membership should be restricted only to persons who fulfil certain criteria (ibid., 37). Second, the estate of the group had to be shared among its members in such a way that conflicts would not arise or, at least, not remain unresolved. This meant that there had to be norms, which systematically defined and allocated rights and duties among the group members and made their intergenerational transmission possible (ibid., 43-44). Both of these necessities were considered to be met if a corporation adopted “a system of unilinear reckoning of succession”. For that reason Radcliffe-Brown concluded that the main social purpose of descent is the precise definition of rights (ibid., 46). Consequently, an individual acquired those elements of
his/her own status, i.e., the totality of his/her rights and obligations, that were drawn from the corporate group he/she belonged to, through unilineal descent (ibid., 37-39).

Fortes (1969a, 74-75) criticized Radcliffe-Brown for understanding descent primarily as a jural concept and therefore ignoring “the external status of such [corporate descent] groups within the overall politico-jural structure”. In other words, what Radcliffe-Brown had not really grasped were the political relations between corporate groups which were also regulated through descent. However, as for the question of descent and status, Fortes was more in agreement with his predecessor. He saw descent as a source of “title to membership or to specific jural status, with all that this means in rights over and toward persons and property” also forming “the basis of the social relations among the persons who are identified with one another in the corporate group” (Fortes 1953, 30). For example, in an Asante lineage certain norms and behaviour patterns were an inseparable part of membership in a descent group:

An Ashanti once admitted to his matrilineage exercises the capacities of citizenship and personhood ordered to the lineage system *qua* member of his lineage and through its organization. In marriage, for instance, he must obey the law of lineage exogamy and receive sanction from his lineage elders; in fulfilling his political duties to the chiefdom and exercising the corresponding rights, he must act through his lineage. Precise ritual obligations are likewise identified with his lineage membership, and there is a clear-cut dichotomy between these capacities and responsibilities, on the one side, and their complementary counterparts, ordered to his patrilinial connections, on the other (Fortes 1969a, 274).

As Michel Verdon (1983, 6) has pointed out, Fortes and his predecessors shared a Hobbesian assumption that “interpersonal behaviour must be regulated for individuals to associate and form groups (i.e., to form an ordered society)”. Groups simply could not exist without definite rights and obligations and their systematic assignment, or otherwise, anarchy would prevail. A person had to have a status, or position, in the group, which was defined according to certain normative criteria. In non-Western societies it was kinship, or more specifically descent, that served as an “instrument for assignment of rights and status or for establishing interpersonal and intergroup connections” (Fortes 1969a, 281). Hence groups were not seen so
much as a number of individuals brought together by some common interest or activity, but as systems of statuses. Briefly put, Fortes saw the political system of a given society as a system of groups. A person acquired his/her politico-jural status, i.e. a compilation of rights and duties, by becoming a member of one of the constituent groups. In some societies these groups are corporate unilineal descent groups and member status is assigned according to principles based on descent.

Two major lines of criticism arose from this view of the inseparability of descent and status: the so-called New Guinea models mainly re-examined the ways in which descent had been seen as a strict criteria for group recruitment (e.g., Strathern 1973), while the so-called transactional models questioned the ways in which descent had been considered to regulate interpersonal behaviour in segmentary lineage systems (e.g., Holy 1979). In both cases the critics had their focus on the relationship between the “descent dogmas” and actual social behaviour. These studies concentrated on “classical” segmentary lineage systems, such as the Tallensi and Nuer, but also societies that were characterized as “fluid”, “small-scale”, or “loosely structured”, like those of the New Guinea Highlands. Rarely, if ever, was critical attention given to descent systems in state societies. There are at least two reasons for this. On the one hand, it was widely accepted that in centralized states descent groups and the principles that regulate them are subject to state intervention and therefore they do not have the same “political relevance” as descent groups have in the segmentary lineage systems. A person’s political status is seen to become more and more dependent on his/her allegiance to the state and less on descent (e.g., Middleton & Tait 1967, 4-5). Or, on the other hand, in some cases the state incorporates the descent groups into its own administrative structure and enforces the rules governing the groups. Thus descent groups have plenty of “political relevance”, but they are boxed within a hierarchy of power categories of a different order, for example, ranked offices, and hence their structural autonomy is compromised by external factors (e.g., Lloyd 1969, 99-106). All in, descent in states was not considered an “autonomous social force” as it was in stateless societies. The neglect of state societies in the study of descent systems is a major shortcoming on the part of the critics of classical descent theory. For instance, it has been claimed that in order to construct his model of Tallensi social structure and ascertain patrilineal descent as an overriding principle in it, Fortes had to make some sweeping generalizations concerning indigenous Tallensi notions of kinship and ignore some local variations of
structure (Anglin 1979). If this is so, it puts the validity of the segmentary lineage structure as a specific type of political system into question, since the Tallensi ethnography supplied an essential part of the empirical data on which the typology was built. Is it not equally important to re-examine the “Ashanti model”, since it provided the necessary material for formulating “the concept of the corporate descent group as an ideally perpetual juristic person” (Fortes 1978, 12)?

3.2 Descent and territory

In *Kinship and the Social Order* Fortes (1969a, 128-138) begins his study of the Asante state and citizenship by contrasting the Asante lineage with the Lozi village, i.e., a descent group compared to a territorial group. The Lozi of Zambia live in relatively small village communities, which are interlinked by ties of cognatic kinship. Citizenship in the Barotse state, in which the Lozi are the dominant group, is based on personal allegiance to the king (through his dignitaries), and not on membership in a kin or territorial group. However, this allegiance forms only one part of person’s “full civic status”. Although in principle all the land and its resources are vested in the kingship, a person’s rights to obtain and cultivate land as well as exploit other natural recourses are based on recognized residency in a mound village, which is considered a person’s “true home”, even though during the rainy season the floods compel people to live elsewhere. Residential status is conferred by the village headman, and any cognatic link (but not affinal) to him entitles a person to apply for residential rights in his village. Most often a Lozi child is brought up in the village of his/her parents, but later in life the “indefinitely spreading web of cognatic kinship ties” enables him/her to choose from a great variety of villages and he/she is always free to move. Thus the field of kinship relations of a Lozi is constructed of “atoms of interindividual relationships”, which he/she can make use of “in any combination that serves a particular purpose” (ibid., 131). Nonetheless, it is the residency, not the kinship status as such, that is the key to land rights, and if a person decides to move to another mound village he/she will lose all his/her rights and properties in the former place of residence. When a new village headman is elected, the sons of the previous headman are preferred, but in the absence of a suitable son, all cognatic male relatives of the same or younger generation can be considered. His election is ritually confirmed by the king and his dignitaries,
who have also the right to discharge him. In addition to his role as a
distributor of land, the headman also administers the internal affairs of the
village and to the outside world he represents the whole village as its leader.
Hence, and Fortes cites Max Gluckman, the village is “the basic unit, below
state, of political structure as it exists territorially” and a corporate group
with its identity focused on its headman. Among the Lozi cognatic kinship
transmits rights to land and office, but otherwise the political significance of
kinship is fundamentally different than what it is among the Asante. This is
so because the Lozi village is a corporation only externally; its structure is
not in conformity with the kinship ties of its members, which extend far
outside the territorial group. So, among the Lozi the boundaries of the
corporate unit are a result of the “politico-jural status accorded to it in the
overall political system”, namely residential rights and the common
allegiance to the headman (ibid., 132).

In the Asante case, Fortes argued, one finds “discrete and exclusive
corporate groups”, which are not demarcated by such extraneous regulations
as among the Lozi, but “strictly by rules of kinship and descent” (ibid., 138).
Although Asante was a state society, he (ibid., 139) asserted that the rule of
matrilineal descent was “operative throughout the social structure, in all
domains” and identified the lineage as the “indivisible segment of the
political structure” (ibid., 183). Politically, the most important part of the
“estate” the matrilineage has is its right to office. The office is “the keystone
of the lineage’s continuity”, both on the plane of “religious ideology”,
meaning the relations between the living and the ancestors, and on that of
politico-jural relations (ibid., 189).

An individual attains his/her politico-jural status, or citizenship as
Fortes usually called it, in the chiefdom only as a member of a matrilineage,
and thus “the ideology of matrilineal descent embodied in the lineage
system is the medium for the articulation of the familial domain with the
politico-jural domain” (1972, 287). For example, as a member of one of the
component lineages a person acquires eligibility to occupy the office(s)
vested in his/her lineage and usufructuary rights to farmland. There is no
such thing as personal allegiance among the Asante; a person is connected
to his/her chief through his/her lineage head who has sworn an oath to the
chief. Full membership status in a lineage is acquired through matrilineal
descent alone. Migrant populations who had been incorporated into a local
“host lineage” of the same clan or descendants of foreign slaves who had
been adopted as “quasi-members” were treated as true members of the
lineage “for most social purposes”, but they were not eligible to occupy
offices (Fortes 1962, 255). In terms of group membership and politico-jural status, Fortes concluded that what the village represents in the Lozi polity, the matrilineage does in Asante, or more generally “what the substratum of locality represents among the Lozi, the kinship substratum [...] does for Ashanti” (Fortes 1969a, 155). The fundamental difference between the two was that the lineage boundaries were determined internally, namely through descent, whereas the village boundaries hinged on external factors.

In Fortes’ model the Asante lineage approximated the ideal type of corporate unilineal descent group (ibid., 304), but there were some problematic issues as well. Although he generally considered local ties to be secondary to lineage ties, he realized that in order to function as a corporate group, it was necessary for the lineage members to assemble for the conduct of their affairs (Fortes 1953, 36). He often spoke of the lineage as a local (or localized) group, but he used the word only in its casual meaning (e.g., Fortes 1962, 259). Elsewhere he made it clear that the lineage is not a locally bounded but a locally anchored association (Fortes 1969a, 183). This means that a lineage has its “ancestral home” in the village or town, where it has the seat of its office and its headquarters (abussua fie), where the ancestral stools,4 the paraphernalia of the office, and sometimes the shrines of the deities attached to the office are permanently kept. The lineage burial ground is in the same locality (ibid., 166). Customarily, every Asante village or town is also divided into wards (abrono, sing. bronro), where the members of a single lineage are supposed to live in several households (Fortes 1962, 254-255, 262). However, the people comprising the lineage may be, and very often are, widely dispersed. Sometimes, group dispersals have resulted directly from political imperatives, such as wars, stool disputes, etc. (Fortes 1970, 9). Some built-in structural inclinations of matrilineages are also a factor. Namely, the men of matrilineages want to retain control over their sisters and sister’s children, and thus the sisters are not likely to move away from their home villages. But when marriages outside the boundaries of one’s own community do occur, wives move to their husbands’ locality where they will establish new branches of their natal lineages. Also during the pre-colonial period the practise of pawning (awowasi) dependent kinsmen as collateral for debts was a factor in scattering lineage members (Fortes 1969a, 146). Finally, although the Asante have always been known as “inveterate travellers”, the increasing

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4 After an officeholder’s death his stool is “blackened”, i.e., consecrated, and deposited in a stool house (nkonnua fie) or stool room (nkonnua dan) with the stools of his predecessors, where they serve as ancestral shrines.
occupational and social differentiation brought by the colonial era created “the so-called drift to the towns” (Fortes et al. 1947, 167), and it is safe to say that this drift is nowadays only getting stronger. Today, this takes place on a global scale, since more and more Asante migrate out of the country, particularly to the metropolitan centres of Europe and North America. Nevertheless, migration itself does not change the primary allegiance of the migrants to their ancestral home and its chiefly authority. They and their descendants are never deprived of their membership status in their natal lineage no matter where they choose to live (Fortes 1969a, 147). Hence there is no strong imperative towards territorial and demographic consolidation of the lineage or the polity.

However, in many cases the migrants have established themselves in a different locality, and have lived there long enough so that they are considered to have become amalgamated to another lineage of the same clan in their new locality. Or perhaps an office has been created for them, and hence they are considered a lineage of their own. What happens to their political status in their ancestral home in such cases? This is the point where Fortes got confused. On the one hand, he stressed that lineages are “demarcated from one another by unequivocal structural boundaries” and a person can belong to “one and only one lineage”, but on the other hand, he insisted that a branch which is attached to a new lineage of the same clan never loses its membership in its natal lineage. To support this, he presents instances where people “fulfil citizen obligations” in two separate chiefdoms (ibid., 147, 184). Can a single group act as a constituent of two different groups at a higher structural level? Can a person have two (or more) political statuses in different communities? If so, are Asante lineages then overlapping rather than discrete groups? By focusing on rights to the office of the chief I will explore the ways in which a person’s political status is dependent on his/her membership in a particular descent group.

### 3.3 Descent and chieftaincy

E. E. Kurankyi-Taylor (1951, 18) calls the Asante lineage a perpetual corporation meaning that it is understood to be comprised not only of its living members but also of the dead and unborn. In this scheme of things the office of the chief holds a nodal position, since it stands between the living who are considered the guardians of “the fortunes and affairs of the whole body corporate” (ibid., 172) and the ancestors (asamanfo) who have
absolute power over the former. Generally, the ancestors are considered to use their powers to help the living in their worldly undertakings, but the bad deeds of the living also bring shame on the ancestors, who do not hesitate to punish them (ibid., 191-192). Thus the prosperity and welfare of the living is believed to depend directly on good relations with the ancestors (ibid., 39). Because of the delicateness of this connection it is vital that the office vested in the lineage is occupied by a person who is a matrilineal descendant of the apical ancestor of the lineage and thus close enough to the ancestors for communicating with them. This communicating takes place through sacrifice. As Fortes (1963, 59) has put it, the Asante matrilineages are committed to being “of pure freeborn descent” because “their entire social existence hinges on their prerogatives of hereditary office and rank; and these would be jeopardized if the established laws of kinship, descent, inheritance and succession were set aside in the slightest particular”. In other words, the necessity of keeping the lineage, from which the chiefs are elected, a closed descent group ultimately arises from the relationship between the living and the ancestors, which has its nexus in the office and its occupant.

The methods of electing a new chief vary in detail from one chiefdom to another (see Rattray 1929), but some general characteristics are shared by most. The so-called kingmakers who are the principal officeholders of the chiefdom make the final decision in the matter. Basically, they are the same persons who form the council of divisional chiefs or elders and who are also able to depose a chief. In the election process some members appear to be more important than others, so that their concurrence is necessary to hold a valid election. When the paramount office in the chiefdom has fallen vacant, it is the duty of the kingmakers to first approach the queen mother and ask her “to nominate one of the members of the Royal family whom she discretionally considers suitable for installation” (PRAAD ARG 6/2/28a). The queen mother herself is elected and installed by the chief and his elders, and she hails from the same matrilineage as the chief but need not to be in any exact relationship to him (such as mother or sister). At this point, any man who is able to make a reasonable claim for the office can offer himself as a candidate by presenting himself to the queen mother through an appropriate dignitary. After weighing the available candidates and nominating one of them, the queen mother and the elders of the ruling lineage “will then inform them [the kingmakers] through the linguists of her nomination and address them of his conduct and capability” (ibid.). The kingmakers consider the nominee
brought forward by the queen mother and either accept or reject him. In the former case he is introduced to the public and his training may begin. In the latter case the queen mother is asked to appoint another candidate. A number of candidates can be introduced and rejected before “everyone says he is good”, Obiaa se ye. Only after the chief-elect has been ritually installed, the blackened ancestral stools and other paraphernalia of the office, which connect him to his ancestors, are presented to him. During the transitional period they have been in the custody of caretakers (wirempefo), who are not eligible for the succession (Fortes 1967, 17-18).

The transfer of power among the Akan combines both prescriptive and elective elements. On the one hand, there is a group of people known as the royals who are all, given the certain restrictions of sex and age, genealogically qualified to occupy the office(s) vested in the ruling lineage. On the other hand, a candidate put forward by the ruling group has to be suitable, not only in terms of genealogy, but in other respects as well. According to K. A. Busia (1968, 9) the qualities required from a candidate are “intelligence (adwempa), humility (ahobr -ase), generosity (ne yam ye), manliness (aboorduru), and physical fitness (d m biara nni ne ho)”. As discussed above, whether a candidate is considered to possess these qualities depends partly on his name or his membership in one of the nt r divisions. In terms of realpolitik, the candidate has to already have support among the kingmakers and in order to secure that he has to have access to economic resources, since the use of money in “lobbying” has been and still remains a central feature of the election process (Wilks 1993, 136-139). Despite the complexity of demands made on a candidate it is safe to say that an accepted genealogical relation to the past ruler, or more precisely to the royal ancestors, is the primary charter for the chiefly office; without it the other qualities would not be taken into consideration. But even in terms of common descent there are differences in eligibility, and this brings me to the question of elimination: who are included and who are excluded from the group of eligibles?

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5 Among the Akan there are no strict rules of primogeniture: “[b]rother may succeed brother; nephew, uncle; grandson grandfather; and the younger may be chosen before the elder” (Rattray 1929, 85).
Some segments of the ruling lineage, in certain cases all but one, are non-eligible, because they are considered “latecomers”, i.e., groups of people absorbed into the original lineage after the foundation of the office (Fortes 1969a, 146-147). In some chieftdoms the office rotates among the eligible segments of the lineage, sometimes referred to as “branches” or “gates”, whereas in others all eligible segments can contest for it. As a result of these practices, the candidate elected can be quite distantly related to the ex-ruler, both in terms of collateral kin as well as ascending and succeeding generations. If a suitable candidate cannot be found, the search has to be extended to the group of “non-eligibles” of the same lineage or even to the collateral lineages of the same clan. Thus, theoretically speaking, all clan members are potential officeholders. Interestingly enough, the Twi word “dehye” can mean both a “royal” and “freeborn person”, a lineage or clan member of full standing. On a more practical level, the Asante themselves make a very clear distinction between “true royals” whom the actual incumbency of office concerns, and “commoners” who are not directly involved. “There is a stool in the family of every Akan [person], but it is only the royals that can have it”, as one of my informants confirmed. Similarly, Fortes (1969a, 162) pointed out that “[t]he notion that every true member of a clan is eligible to succeed to any of the offices vested in its branches is understood to be a fiction”, but he too realized that there are certain situations where the rules of succession have to be altered.
There are well-authenticated cases in most chiefdoms of lineages becoming extinct or being disfranchised for treason, and offices held by them being awarded by the chief to a member of a collateral lineage or even to a son of the last holder and thus to a different lineage. The principle [of matrilineal succession within the lineage] is not thereby invalidated. It rests on the postulate (...) that lineage vested office is tied to the sanctioned ancestral stools and that a person who is not eligible by demonstrable descent to offer sacrifice and libation to them in his own right cannot have ancestral sanction for occupying the office bequeathed by them (ibid.).

Fortes’ view on demonstrable matrilineal descent as a primary charter for office among the Asante is not questioned here. What is re-examined here is the exclusiveness and locatedness of the descent group. In fact, there are persons outside what is perceived as “the localized lineage”, even outside the boundaries of the chiefdom, who are considered (or consider themselves) eligible to perform sacrifices for the ancestors and thus occupy offices in their own right. Whether these claims for eligibility are generally acknowledged or rejected has to do with things other than an instantly recognizable status as a group member. A short study of dynastic affairs in the chiefdom of Amakom demonstrates that the lineage boundaries are highly elusive and negotiable, and that the “groupness” actually emerges through political competition.

3.4 Two passages in the dynastic history of Amakom

The chiefdom of Amakom is among the five original settlements in the vicinity of present day Kumase. Even today, one is able to find it from any map, located very close to the business centre of the city. Although initially an independent chiefdom, it was annexed to the capital in the wars that preceded the foundation of the Asante kingdom. It belongs to the Adonten group (Adonten fekuo) in the administrative and military hierarchy of Kumase (see Figure 8). In addition to Amakom itself there are four other chiefdoms in the group whose ruling lineages belong to the Asene matriclan and the chiefs consider themselves brothers (nuanom, sing. nua). In Asante oral traditions the cradle of the Asene clan is usually located in the area called Adanse, where the great ancestress of the Asene people, called
Krokotoi or Amena Gyata, emerged from a rock or a bead. Her descendants dispersed throughout the Akan country founding new settlements, some of which later became known as autonomous chiefdoms (Rattray 1929, 271). However, some Asene chiefs do not confirm these myths and claim independent origins (see Busia 1968, 3-4). In the two passages below I will focus on the Amakom ruling lineage’s relations to other Asene lineages in terms of sharing rights for office. My first example is the ruling lineage of Nkoransa, which is a direct offshoot of the Amakom ruling lineage. The second one is a group of migrants claiming membership in an Asene lineage in Adanse and thus claiming to be related to the Amakom people as descendants of a common ancestress.

3.4.1 Brothers afar

The chiefdom Nkoransa lies on the northern fringe of the forest belt, a good 100 kilometres from Kumase and Amakom. The genealogical link between the two chiefdoms is relatively unambiguous (Figure 4). Traditions concerning the creation of the Nkoransa chiefdom are widely known and there are several published accounts as well (e.g., Meyerowitz 1952, 36-44). They differ in detail, but the basic outline seems to be the same in all. The first chief and founder of Nkoransa was a young Amakom royal called Bafo Pim. His maternal uncle, Adu Donyina, had laid an unsuccessful claim to the Amakom stool and was compelled to leave his ancestral home. “In the olden days things were different from what they are now. If you contested for a stool and lost, you had to go away, for sometime at least”, as the present Amakomhene explained to me. So, Adu Donyina, his sister Afua Sapon, and her son Bafo Pim left Amakom and proceeded north. When they arrived to the whereabouts of present day Nkoransa, Adu Donyina fought and subdued the indigenous populations of the area and did not stop until he got to the site where the capital of the chiefdom is currently located. There he met three old men, Asene Diamin, Akwasi Ampofo, Akwasi Dase, and their sister Duoduwaam Amane, who also belonged to the Asene clan.6 They told Adu that they were hunters of the chief of Takyiman, to whom the lands

6 The name Nkoransa is said to be derived from nkokora mme nsa, lit. “three old men”. Traditions collected by C. Y. Boateng suggest that the three old men had also migrated from Amakom during some earlier period (Goody & Boateng 1965, 175). I have also heard some people in Nkoransa refer to them as the “three wise men”, which gives a certain “biblical flavour” to these accounts!
belonged. After getting permission from the Takyimanhene Adu decided to settle there with his clansmen. Soon after that a war broke out between the Takyimanhene Ameyaw Kwaakye and Asantehene Opoku Ware, in which Nkoransa was the major ally of the Asantehene. Consequently, Ameyaw was defeated and Nkoransa was awarded vast areas of land that had been deserted by the Takyiman people who sought refuge elsewhere. Many of the oral traditions depict the war as a result of Bafo Pim’s intrigue against the Takyimanhene. Some sources indicate that Adu Donyina had already died during the journey from Amakom to Nkoransa, and Bafo Pim had replaced him as the leader of the migrant group (e.g., PRAAD ARG 1/6/5/1/41a), but most seem to agree that it was Adu who led his people to their present day abode and that he also died there (e.g., PRAAD ARG 1/2/12/2).

Nonetheless, all accounts confirm that Bafo Pim fought against Takyiman and was subsequently installed as the first Nkoransahene. Historians, relying on Muslim chronicles, date the Asante conquest of Takyiman to 1722-1723 (Wilks 1975, 245). Some local traditions also imply that the migrants were still in Amakom after the Denkyira war of 1701 (PPKT a). In light of this information, one can estimate that the Nkoransa branch seceded from the Amakom ruling lineage roughly 300 years ago.

Despite the long separation Nkoransa and Amakom have maintained very close relations. The Amakomhene is an uncle (w fa, pl. w fanom) of the Nkoransahene, even though in casual conversations they tend to refer to each other as brothers (see Figure 4). Much the same can be said of Nkoransahene’s relationship to other Asene chiefs of Kumase. As one of the members of the Adonten group described the situation, “Though Omanhin of Nkoranza left Coomassie and went to Nkoranza, our relationship remained the same” (PRAAD ARG 1/6/5/1/41a). However, there is something that makes Nkoransa’s relationship to Amakom particularly strong. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Amakomhene Akosa Yiadom II:

TK: I have been told that the Amakom royals can claim for the Nkoransa stool when it becomes vacant, and that the Nkoransa royals can make a similar claim for the Amakom stool. Has anybody from Nkoransa ever inherited the Amakom stool?

7 Usually manhene (pl. amanhene), a ruler of an man, most often translated as “paramount chief”.
FIGURE 4. Reconstruction of the relationship between the ruling lineages of Amakom and Nkoransa.

Legend:

NOTE: Some traditions suggest that Adu Donyina (B2) was a son of Afua Sapon (B1) (IAS/AS 77), whereas others claim him to have been a full brother to Akosa Yiadom (A1) (Myerowitz 1952, 37). Similarly, Bafo Pim (C3) is sometimes referred to as Adu Donyina's brother (PRAAD ARG 1/6/5/1/41a).
However, the name Adu suggests that he would be a brother of B1, B4, B5, and B6 thus belonging to the Asofodee subdivision of Bosomtwe nt3, where male children were traditionally named Adu and Opoku in alternate generations (see Wilks 1975, 330). That would, of course, require that Amoanima Panin (A3) married only once. None of these speculations question the relationship between the two chiefdoms.
AY II: It is true that we can inherit them and they can inherit us. In fact, when the Nkoransa stool fell vacant the last time, I was invited there to see the proceedings.

No one from Nkoransa has ever come to inherit the Amakom dynasty. It was only once that they had a lot of candidates for the Nkoransa stool and the elders there were having difficulties making up their minds. One solution they thought about was to ask for somebody from Amakom to occupy the stool. However, in the end they thought: “Why go so far to look for a chief?”, and decided to choose one of their own candidates.

So, in actual fact, no one from Amakom has ever inherited the Nkoransa stool, even though it was close once.

What is remarkable here is that rights for office are reciprocal. Not only are the members of the derivative segment, which now could be said to constitute an autonomous lineage, still eligible for the office of their natal lineage, but also the members of the natal lineage have become eligible for the office vested in the migrant segment. In my experience, instances of this type of open sharing of royal status between two related groups are not very common, but claims from “outside” based on common ancestry have occurred and do occur constantly. Hence the boundaries of the group are recurrently contested and re-negotiated. The events below give a

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8 For example, during the 1950’s more than a half of the cases brought before divisional councils concerned rank and status depending on membership in a particular lineage (Fortes 1969a, 168).

9 For example, in the case of the office of the Asantehene vested in the Oyoko K k abusua of the Oyoko matriclan, one could say that historically the rights for office have become more and more restricted. The descendant of Dako Panin and Dako Kuma, grandsons of Obiri Yeboa, who was the uncle and predecessor of the first Asantehene Osei Tutu, have been eliminated from the line of succession (McCaskie 1995a, 175-77), and several claims made by the ruling Oyoko lineage of the chiefdom of Kokofu up till the end of the pre-colonial period have been effectively rejected (Wilks 1975, 578). However, this has not put a stop to claims from the “outside”. In fact, during the spring of 1999, when a successor for the late Asantehene Opoku Ware II was elected, the “Asaman Kani family” of Ekuona matriclan laid an unsuccessful claim to the Golden Stool by declaring that Obiri Yeboa was not a real uncle to Osei Tutu and that he had actually belonged to the Ekuona clan. Owing to the lack of male heirs an Oyoko, Osei Tutu, had been appointed as a caretaker for the stool, which was to be returned to the Ekuona lineage in due course. The
demonstration of how such claims have arisen and how they have been dealt with in Amakom.

3.4.2 Resident aliens

Sometime in the 1940’s a group of people, about sixty in number, came to settle in Amakom. They came from the kingdom of Akyem Abuakwa, more accurately, from a town called Asamankese, a little less than 200 kilometres southeast of Kumase. The newcomers belonged to the Asene clan and claimed to be maternal relatives of a woman called Akua Kwabena, alias Elizabeth Benson, a self-styled grandniece to the two successive Amakomhene, Anin Badwa and Kwaku Atta. They were introduced as relatives to the Asantehene, the Asantehemaa, and the “brother-chiefs” of the Adonten group, to whom they also paid the necessary aseda, “thank you money”(MAG 21/12/2/95a). Consequently, in order to restore “the homogeneity of Amakom Royal Family”, the migrants were adopted to the ruling lineage of Amakom. After the death of Amakomhene Kwaku Atta in 1949 a candidate from the migrant group was put forward by two Amakom elders. This claim was firmly resisted by representatives of the five subordinate stools of Amakom, who insisted that the adopted members formed only a non-eligible branch of the ruling lineage. None of them could be installed as a chief because:

(i) They had never before attended Amakom royal funerals;
(ii) They had never before contributed to the payment of Amakom royal funeral expenses;
(iii) They had never before paid Amakom debts;
(iv) They had never before paid (...) for the upkeep and progress of Ashanti Nation of which Amakom forms an integral part;
(v) They had never paid or contributed to Adonten Division Levy within the framework of Kumasi Division of which Amakom forms an integral part…
(vi) They had never before rendered any of the following menial services for the maintenance and prestige [of] the Amakom Stool to which they now claim to succeed, viz:-

(a) They never attend State Durbars with Amakomhene;

matter was taken to the Chieftaincy Tribunal of the National House of Chiefs, but eventually the case was dropped by the plaintiffs.
(b) They had never before carried the Amakomhene’s Stool;
(c) They had never served as Nhinkwa [servants] during Akwasidae and Awukude ceremonies 10 to acquaint themselves of the ceremonials peculiar to the Stool, as contradistinguished from the custom at Akim [Akyem Abuakwa] (...) [I]n short they are total strangers (MAG 21/12/2/95b).

Apparently, the Amakom elders did not reject the migrant group because they were not eligible by descent to offer sacrifice and libation to the ancestral stools but because of their lack of ritual knowledge. Also, they had not yet shared the debts, taxes, and other economic burdens as true lineage members should do. Nor had they claimed their membership in the ruling group by assuming obligations outside the lineage, namely towards the state, the “Ashanti Nation”, and the clansmen, the “Adonten Division”. In addition to the list above, the newcomers were thought to be ignorant of “the various landmarks and boundaries of the extensive Amakom Stool lands” and they did not “know the peculiar idiosyncrasies of the Amakom people” (ibid.). Consequently, the candidacy was nullified, and the disagreement between the two factions was arbitrated by the Kwamohene from the Adonten group. The migrants and their supporters rendered an apology to the newly elected Amakomhene, Mensa Yiadom, and provided a sheep to be slaughtered in order to appease the ancestral spirits (MAG 21/12/2/95a).

Ms. Benson, the hostess of the migrant group, was not satisfied with the status granted to her relatives and brought the matter to the Asantehene’s court in 1952. In the trial she claimed that her maternal granduncle, Amakomhene Anin Badwa, had originally been a resident of Dompoase, a town in the Adanse area (ibid.). In Dompoase there are two major Asene lineages: the office of the chief, the Dompoasehene, is vested in one, and a subordinate office of the Krontihene, “the field commander”, in the other. The members of the two lineages are descendants from a set of female twins, Atta Kuma and Atta Panin, whose mother was Nyaako Sika, the granddaughter of Krokotoi, the great ancestress of the whole Asene clan. In addition to the twins, Nyaako Sika had two other daughters, Nyankomago and Tawia. The offspring of Nyankomago moved to a place called Wassanu, while Tawia’s descendants were the ones who migrated northwards and founded Amakom (IAS/AS 77; Figure 5). Thus all Asene people,

10 Festival days during which offerings to the ancestral spirits and deities are made.
including those settled in Amakom, are originally from Dompoase, as one of Ms. Benson’s witnesses stated. For that reason, centuries later, when Amakomhene Anin Agyei had been captured by the British in the war of 1900-1901, and the Amakom stool became vacant, the queen mother of Amakom, with some of the chiefs from the Adonten group, had sent a delegation to Dompoase in order to find a suitable candidate to fill the office. It was Ms. Benson’s granduncle, Anin Badwa, who had been chosen and later installed. After his death in 1913, his full brother Kwaku Atta had succeeded him. Ms. Benson alleged that Amakomhene Kwaku Atta had buried her son in the burial ground reserved for the royals. Similarly, she argued that “[i]f ever any of female my relatives [sic] should be married, it used to be my Nana Kwaku Atta that took the head rum [i.e., the bride wealth]”. If someone died in Adanse, Kwaku Atta sent a delegation to the funeral, and correspondingly, if a relative died in Amakom, a delegation from Adanse attended the funeral. The same had been done regarding Asamankese. She also insisted that her relatives had taken part in paying the debts of the Amakom stool (MAG 21/12/2/95a).

She concluded that the members of her granduncle’s lineage in Dompoase, called Bosompem Ketekye lineage, are eligible for the Amakom stool (and also for the paramount and Kronti stools of Dompoase). What is more, she avowed that the predecessors of her adversary, Amakomhene Mensa Yiadom, had migrated from the chiefdom of Nsuta and were actually more recent arrivals in Amakom than the Dompoase people. She also managed to bring in several witnesses who corroborated her version of the history of the Amakom stool and testified that the relatives from both Asamankese and Dompoase had been sharing the court expenses of the Amakom stool. Mensa Yiadom, for his part, tried to prove that Anin Badwa hailed from Amakom and never lived in Dompoase. In the end, the court, which constituted of a panel of four chiefs and one linguist, ruled the case in the favour of the plaintiff stating that, “Elizabeth Benson is a royal and eligible to Amakom stool”. Since the migrants from Asamankese were expressly “collateral relatives” of her granduncles, the two past rulers of Amakom, they too had to be considered royals (ibid.).
Several years later, an administrative intervention allowed the new royals to capitalize on their status. As an active member of an opposition party called NLM (National Liberation Movement), *Amakomhene* Mensa Yiadom found himself at odds with CPP (Convention People’s Party), the ruling party of independent Ghana. His name was connected to an illegal railway strike, he was arrested, and his personal property was seized (PRAAD ARG 2/2/117a). A protégé of Ms. Benson was put on the stool. However, the reign of the new chief, Anin Badwa II, did not last very long. After the overthrow of Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah in the military coup of 1966, the Amakom stool was returned to Mensa Yiadom, who remained on it till his death in 1980 (Berry 2001, 72). His nephew, the present *Amakomhene* Akosa Yiadom II, shares his predecessor’s view of the past; the history about *Amakomhene* Anin Badwa coming from Dompoase as well as the
whole genealogy (Figure 5) connecting Amakom and Dompoase are “all lies”. Furthermore, he rejects all histories about the Amakom people migrating from Adanse as products of someone’s vivid imagination: “We didn’t come from anywhere! We have always been here. How can you be Adonten Piesie [i.e., the “firstborn” of the Adonten group], if you came from somewhere?” According to him, membership in the same matriclan does not entitle anybody to an office vested in a specific matrilineage. In order to support his point, he used an example from the chieftdom of his nephew: “Look at Nkoransa. Most of the stools there are Asene stools, but it doesn’t mean that they can inherit the paramount stool. If you are not a royal of the stool, you can’t contest. If I knew that I wasn’t a royal, I would never contest”. Similarly, when I talked with some of the Asene people from Dompoase who belonged to the ruling lineage, I was told very plainly that “the Dompoase line is a different line”. At the moment, some of the remaining original members and descendants of the migrant group still live in Amakom, although in some sort of “semi-ostracized” state, but one can be sure that if and when the Amakom stool becomes vacant again their claims will certainly resurface in one way or another.

In light of the recent history of Kumase, it is not at all surprising that dynastic conflicts occurred in Amakom during the 1950’s and early 1960’s, and that the newly established post-colonial state took such a keen interest in them. That was precisely the era when Amakom and its environs changed “from village to urban neighbourhood” (Berry 2001, 70-73). The territory of Amakom is relatively small, especially in comparison with the nephew, Nkoransa, which is one of the biggest traditional areas in Ghana, comprising more than 100 towns and villages. Amakom, on the other hand, has gone through some major changes. It is now one of the central districts in a city of one million people. A university, a polytechnic, a secondary school, and a sports stadium have been built on Amakom lands. A beer brewery, a Coca-Cola bottling plant, and a great variety of smaller industries are located within Amakom boundaries, not to mention office buildings and modern residential areas. Needless to say, the land prices have skyrocketed during the past 50 years or so (ibid.). The current situation in Amakom is radically different from that of Nkoransa, where the natural resources remain largely unexploited and the majority of the population is still engaged in farming and trading as they were in the pre-colonial period.
3.5 Knots and boxes

The two examples of dynastic relations of the Amakom ruling lineage to other Asene lineages show perfectly how corporate group character emerges in the context of segmentary relations. Basically there is a more or less open-ended category of clansmen, which breaks into groups in competition for office(s). Obviously, these divisions do not follow strictly from genealogical facts. In the first example, there were two groups that trace descent from a common ancestor and are thus in agreement that the members of both groups have royal status for each other’s offices. So, in this case, if a corporate group is to be defined from the point of view of its rights, it would be more appropriate to speak of one group (instead of two), which holds rights for two offices. In the second example, common descent was considered an inadequate source for status. The critical emphasis was put on both secret and practical knowledge as well as participation in collective action. However, what both cases taken together clearly demonstrate is that combining and dividing people into different groups cannot not be derived from a distinct set of rules as Fortes suggested. Although both cases admittedly show that the Asante themselves view matrilineal descent as the most important principle in their political organization, it is equally clear that the “descent principle” and “group principle” are not congruent. Even though group solidarity is conceptualized in descent terms, in practise it is easy to see that there are descent ties of greater and lesser political significance. Hence one has to distinguish Fortes’ analytical model, first, from the Asante actors’ mental representations of their own political relations and, second, from what the Asante actually do.

When taking into consideration the interconnectedness through the clan system, it is now possible to see how two, or even more, abusua in different chiefdoms become overlapping. They are all able to provide their members with the status needed to fill an office in a political group other than what would in Fortes’ model be perceived as their own. If one wishes to remain faithful to Goody’s diagrammatic representation, one should then show the dynastic group’s connections to other descent groups that trace descent from the same founding ancestor, as is done in Figure 6.
FIGURE 6. Alleged dynastic relations between the chiefdoms of Amakom, Nkoransa, and Dompoase.

But how advantageous is it really to represent the lineages as discrete rectangulars or boxes? In his treatment of the Asante lineage Fortes had juxtaposed it with the Lozi village, thus explaining how the former is a corporation both internally and externally and the latter only externally. Certainly, there are marked differences between unilineal descent and cognatic kinship, but the idea that one or the other has some intrinsic “group forming qualities” seems rather questionable in light of the material at hand. Fortes (1969a, 132-133) argued that the Lozi village system does not set down “absolute structural boundaries” and hence the villages should be thought of as “fixed mooring points in the ever-changing flow of cognatic relationships”. Or, and he uses Gluckman’s phrase, they could be seen as “knots” that shape the network of kinship ties. But could it not be equally said of the Asante that there is a flow of clan relations in time and space, which have their intersections around offices? Hence offices are the “knots” that give form to the web of clan relations. They seem to be an important reason why certain descent lines are emphasized while others are overlooked. This is so because in a state like Asante, which is fundamentally a constellation of offices, it is the connection to office that makes a descent group of any range or depth a constituent unit of the administrative structure.

Among the Lozi, people have kinship, affinal, and friendship relations in other villages all over the country. Within that framework people assist each other in economic ventures, support one another in cases of sickness, and so forth (ibid., 132). However, the politically important relationships, those that entitle a person to farmland and village headmanship, are in the confines of the village. In some stateless societies
with cognatic kinship, like the Iban of Borneo, there are no such boundaries and a person’s kindred is defined simply in terms of accessibility:

Kin and non-kin do not, in cognatic systems of this type, constitute defined “groups”, but rather an ad hoc structural polarization of allegiances to the actor. In systems of this type, kinship establishes for the actor an internal field of moral relations that are also politico-jural relations, as against the outside world at large, on the principle of amity within and enmity without; and there are no rules or criteria by reference to which an outside observer can determine unequivocally where the boundaries of the field lie (ibid., 232; italics added).

At first sight, this would seem to be the antithesis of the Asante system, where people are supposedly distributed to their own “compartments” within and from which they manage their affairs. But does it need to be so? In the case of the territorially dispersed matriclans, one can say that ultimately the boundaries of the group are set by genealogical or quasi-genealogical criteria. But within that huge category of people, things get much more complicated: some clansmen are so close that succession rights can be shared with them, whereas some are so distant that they are not considered much more than strangers. Hence, determining which descent relations produce “politic-jural relations” is by no means an easy task. As my data shows, an outside observer, no matter how familiar with the rules of matrilineal descent among the Asante, cannot conclude who is eligible for a particular office. The only way of finding that out is to study it empirically, by examining what the actors involved are actually doing. Sometimes it has to do with genealogical distance, sometimes with principles other than descent.

3.6 Groups on the ground, groups in the mind

Fortes’ view of Asante lineages as closed groups seems even more peculiar when one considers his work on the Tallensi. As Charles Piot (1999, 133) has observed, Fortes “is completely at a loss to decide where one Tallensi community stops and another begins – spatially, linguistically, or politically”. Fortes says the same about their descent groups: they too are “‘overlapping’, ‘intermeshing’, ‘merging’ and ‘blending’ into one another”
My conclusion is that the same applies to political groups in Asante; there are no associations with fixed boundaries defined in terms of descent and locality. It is rather that the idea of closed group satisfies an analytical need to see that there is a system with definite parts, in this case lineages, which comprise aggregates of a higher order. This idea of “pyramidal segmentation”, which has its classical statement in the works of Fortes (cf., Southall 1956, 249-250), is ultimately based on mathematical concepts of hierarchy. In the so-called Eulerian model, hierarchical relation is understood as one between larger and smaller, or more correctly, between the one that encompasses and the one that is encompassed (Leach 1971, 234). In the case of Asante political groups, the conditions for establishing such a hierarchy are not complied with: the lineages do not encompass their members, and the chiefdoms do not encompass their lineages. So, the Asante state is not a hierarchical series of groups, a group of groups, if groups are to be seen as empirical facts, as actual masses of people “who can be seen and counted and plotted in space and time”, as Evans-Pritchard (1969, 266) once put it. In this sense, the Asante kingdom and the nation state that surrounds it are incomparable as political groups.

However, this does not rule out the fact that the Asante themselves think and talk about their political relations by referring to exclusive groups and principles of matrilineal descent regulating group recruitment and relations, although what they actually do might not be in congruence with these notions. Posing questions, giving testimonies, making arguments, and passing judgements in courts would not be possible without these shared notions about the “enduring form of their society” (Holy 1979, 13), even if there is no direct relationship between the lineage structure (as perceived by the actors) and the observed social processes. As Greg Urban (1996, 135-146) points out, the descent theorists’ “obsession” about groups is understandable in the sense that there was a very strong “circulating discourse” of descent rules and groups in the societies that they studied. However, it is another thing to assume the social group and its representation to be identical. Ladislav Holy, following Peter Caws (1974), makes a distinction between actor’s representational models, which correspond to the way the actor thinks and/or says things are, and operational models, which correspond to the way he/she practically responds or acts (Holy 1979, 12). The difference between the two models derives from their differing degrees of generality and their “differing roles in legitimising and interpreting the ongoing social transactions” (ibid.). Operational models consists of norms that are situation specific and from
the point of view of the representational model they may be seen as “contingencies”, whereas representational models are ideologies, which “transcend specific interactional situations and have an existence beyond and above them” (ibid., 13). So, in real life interactions the ideas about the enduring form of the society provide merely one factor to be considered, in addition to which the actors have “a number of other notions about their political relations and processes, which equally form part of their conceptual universe” (ibid., 11). For example, in the court case regarding the royal status of the immigrant group, the central part of the arguments of both parties was about demonstrable matrilineal descent as the most important criterion for group membership, but in a certain situation secret and practical knowledge suddenly took the place of shared ancestry as the decisive factor.

Holy’s views are similar to those that Verdon (1980) has called ideological or political definitions of descent. What these analytical definitions have in common is that they do not consider descent as a principle of group recruitment, but see it as an ideology, which serves to pattern political relations. For instance, Sahlins (1965, 104-106) has argued that a “descent doctrine does not express group compositions but imposes itself upon the composition” and therefore it is “in the first place a political design, exercising arbitrary constraints on the supposition of ancestry”. What is the strength of that sort of ideology? Why are actors constantly referring to it, even though it cannot directly explain action? According to M. G. Smith (1956, 65-66), the ideology of descent “assumes invariance and uniformity in the constitution and relations of the differentiated units, while permitting their internal differentiation, cohesion, or development according to circumstance, and rationalizing these departures as consistent [with it]”. This flexibility or arbitrariness is clearly visible in the above statements made by the Asante themselves. For instance, by referring to descent principles it is possible to exclude some people from the group by saying that they are not royals just because they are related and include other people in the group by maintaining that they are royals because they are related. To put it simply, descent as a representational model is particularly unconstrained. However, it has to be understood that the ideological discourse is not irrelevant to the political action. It is not that the Asante do whatever they choose in every situation and then just explain it away by reference to the “descent dogma”. The descent ideology is not merely an “a posteriori justification of conduct” (Karp & Maynard 1983, 483-484). On the contrary, as Ivan Karp and Kent Maynard have pointed out, “the
genealogical process of classification does not merely legitimize political action; it helps to formulate it” (ibid., 484). Thus when it is thought or uttered that “those are the Asene people of Asamankese, those are the Asene people of Dompoase, but we are the Asene people of Amakom”, it is not done only to justify political action. Such a thought or utterance also provides “an index of actors’ hopes, aspirations, and strategies in their political relationships” (ibid.). It tells about the way the actor thinks things should be.

As a final point, it can be said that the Asante ideas about their political relations are based on groups, such as the *abusua*, matrilineages, and the *aman*, chiefdoms, and membership and citizenship in them. However, an outside observer is mistaken if he/she takes it as an accurate description of ongoing social processes and builds his/her analytical model of the Asante political structure on it. Consequently, determining a person’s politico-jural status directly from the tenets of this ideology is not possible.

As an ideology or cultural logic, the segmentary lineage system is also extended to offices. Thus offices are classified according to the clan identity of the lineage in which they are vested; for instance, it is said that “the Amakom stool is an Asene stool”. Furthermore, the stool gives clan identity to the whole polity. One can thus say, for example, that “Nkoransa belongs to Asene” or “Nkoransa is Asene”. Through this extension, the offices, the chiefs occupying them, and their polities become related to each other. Therefore it is possible to say that “the Amakomhene is an uncle to the Nkoransahene” or “Amakom and Nkoransa are brothers”. In the following chapter I will show how the segmentary lineage system, in fact, forms a basis for a hierarchy of offices, which exists in conjunction with a different kind of hierarchy; namely that of the Asante state, based on oaths of allegiance.
During the very early days of my fieldwork I visited a friend of mine in a town on the shoreline of Lake Volta, outside Asante territory. There I met a man who introduced himself as a full brother to the head of one of the north-eastern Asante chiefdoms close to the savannah belt. I told him about my research and he seemed to be interested in what exactly I wanted to study. After hearing me out he said: “If you want to study the Asante chieftaincy, the first thing you have to do is to find out to which clans the different stools belong”. At the time, I must admit, I did not fully understand the full significance of this advice. Familiar with the works of the anthropologists and historians, I thought that the central issue in chieftaincy is the authority relations founded on the oath of allegiance. To put it in simple terms, I thought I should find out who is under whom, and not who is related to whom. However, during the ensuing months of fieldwork it became painstakingly clear to me that the so-called chain of command was complemented by, and indeed many times compromised by, a huge network of relations based on clanship, kinship, and friendship. When I returned to the lakeside afterwards and met my royal friend again, I found myself in the middle of a “chieftaincy-quiz”. Over a bottle of beer, he gave me the name of an office and I had to tell him to which clan it belonged, or conversely, he would mention a clan and then I should list as many offices that I could that belonged to that particular clan. At the end of the “quiz” I was congratulated in a very hospitable Ghanaian manner: “Oh, you have done well. Now you know something about Asante chieftaincy”.

In African Political Systems states and stateless societies were treated as markedly different kind of structures. Perhaps most importantly, the role of kinship in their political organization was understood to be dissimilar. In small-scale stateless societies political structure and kinship organization were “completely fused” and in those of larger scale, like the Tallensi and Nuer, the lineage structure was “the framework of the political system” (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1969, 6-7). State societies, on the other hand, were organized “on totally different principles”; they had an administrative organization, which in many cases resembled “the pattern with which we are familiar in the modern nation-state” (ibid., 6). To my mind, Fortes’ work on the Asante was a major departure from this point of view. In Kinship and Social Order his aim was to investigate “the relationship of kinship system to polity in tribal society – more precisely, to explore the structural interconnections between certain specific
mechanisms, processes, and norms of kinship and descent systems on the one hand and the political and jural framework within which they operate” (1972, 283). The “Ashanti model” then showed how “the ideology of matrilineal descent embodied in the lineage system is the medium for the articulation of the familial domain with the politico-jural domain” (ibid., 287). As noted above, this meant in practise that citizenship and royal status are allocated according to principles of kinship and descent. Thus, even in a state society like Asante, kinship is not left out of politics, to the level of domestic and interpersonal ties. Simply put, kinship ties together the political institutions and the social structure. And this, I think, was also Fortes’ suggestion for solution of “the ostensible paradox of a centralized Asante state existing in tandem with a segmentary lineage system” (McCaskie 1995a, 77), which has perplexed other anthropologists as well (e.g., Basehart 1962, 281). However, as the field anecdote above proposes, there is another way of looking at it. Namely, when the ideology of segmentary lineage system is extended to the chiefly offices, their relations can also be patterned according to principles of descent. Hence, the notion of kinship also orders the relations between political institutions and not only relations between people and institutions. These relations may also take a hierarchical form. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the principles that define such hierarchies and, finally, discuss what is their relationship to the hierarchy of ranked offices defined and sanctioned by the state.

4.1 Hierarchy as a chain of command

The relationships between the offices within a chiefdom were and still are expressed in a military idiom. According to Fortes (1969a, 150) the army of a chiefdom was made up of “lineage contingents grouped in companies, each under a captain who, in peace time, served as a councillor”. Military service was expressly a lineage obligation. All able-bodied men of a lineage formed a single fighting unit, which was led by their lineage head. Every unit was given an area of operations, for instance, members of a particular lineage formed the main body, Adonten, of the field army, and accordingly the head of the lineage was titled Adontenhene, the commander of the main body.¹ All units were subordinate to the paramount chief, and he was the

¹ In addition to the military title, a lineage head or a divisional chief might be called after the original name of the group that he represents, which can be derived from its clan identity or place of residence or origin (see Dunn & Robertson 1973, 23-24, 180-184). For
supreme commander of the whole army. The war organization of different Akan chiefdoms varied in some details, but they were all modelled according to a standard type (see Rattray 1929). So, it follows that the lineage heads are also military commanders (\textit{asafohinfo}, sing. \textit{asafohene}), and at least in principle, kinsmen fought side by side under the command of the head of their own \textit{abusua}. Fortes (1969a, 160-161) argued that the military organization, which formed the basis of the titled offices, required “seven – and only seven – primary positions of command apart from the chief’s” and this number would then correlate with the number of matriclans. Thus in the chiefdom there would be an office to facilitate people from every clan. Another important aspect was their structural autonomy: “authority and responsibility were so distributed among them that each had a function independent of those of the others and all were necessary for the defence and the normal government of the chiefdom” (ibid., 161). The major implication from this is that all the offices in the chief’s council are equal in rank, the chief’s office being \textit{primus inter pares}. And since office gives a descent group its political status, then all the descent groups of same structural level are of equal rank. There is no hierarchy between the offices forming the chief’s council because their “only bond with one another on the political level was their common allegiance to the chiefly stool” (ibid.). So, the only tie that creates hierarchies between offices is the one created by the oath of allegiance.

The oath of allegiance is reciprocal: the elders swear it collectively to the chief and receive it from him collectively. For example, in Nkoransa the elders take the following oath to the \textit{Nkoransahene}:

\begin{quote}
How my ancestors served yours likewise will I serve you; If I do not help you in any way I violate Boakye, Kwasiada and Yawda (PRAAD ARG 1/2/12/10).\footnote{Boakye, Kwasiada, and Yawda are “names of oaths”, which refer to some known disasters that have fallen on the Nkoransa stool. In an oath a person conditions the welfare and stability of the community on his/her/others’ actions by making a reference to some specific misfortune of the past. The oath is sanctioned by the chief to whose stool the oath in question belongs (see RAI MS 106: 18: 2150 for the origin and meaning of the Nkoransa oaths).}
\end{quote}

The chief, in his turn, answers:

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
\item instance, the \textit{Nifahene} of Nkoransa, “the commander of the right wing”, and his people occupy a place called Seseman and hence he is most often called the \textit{Sesemanhene}.
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}
I swear Kwasiada, Yawda, and Boakye that I will follow the example of my ancestors and obey what my elders will tell me (ibid.).

The verbal content of oaths differs from one chiefdom to another. In a number of oaths some specific responsibilities are mentioned, for example, the chief swears not to wage war against his sub-chiefs, not to seduce the wives of his subjects, or not to run away in battle (Rattray 1929, 165-166). Sometimes the content can be rather abstract, for instance, an elder might pledge that he will respond to his chief’s call whether he is called at day or night (ibid., 86-87). Generally speaking, the oath does not enumerate the rights and obligations of the parties concerned, it rather re-confirms the tie or union formed by the ancestors. However, this seeming abstractness does not mean that the people involved do not take the oaths very concretely. As one of my informants affirmed: “If you have sworn that you will respond to his [chief’s] call, you have to do so. It is not a matter to be taken lightly! I think it’s only in case of sickness that you don’t have to respond. Otherwise there is no excuse”. A violation of oath is considered both “a politico-jural delict and act of sacrilege”, which falls under the jurisdiction of the chief or the king (Fortes 1969a, 153-155).

However, although the relationship is dyadic, it forms a link in a chain of similar relationships. As the elders pledge allegiance to their chief, similarly the chief does to his overlord. At the top end of the chain is the king, the Asantehene, and at the low end the chiefs of the most inferior rank, like the village headmen (adekurofo, sing. odekuro) and their elders. What in Fortes’ parlance is called man, a chiefdom, is an analytical construct. In reality the chiefdoms, which are nowadays often called “paramountcies”, consist of several layers of offices, each layer tied together by common allegiance to a particular overlord. Hence one could say that the chiefdom is made of several miniature chiefdoms organized according to the same model: the paramount chief’s elders have their own councils of elders, who in turn might have their councils, and so forth. Commands of the chief to his subjects have to be “transmitted through the appropriate hierarchy of chiefs, councillors, headmen, and lineage elders in proper sequence”, and conversely, “a citizen’s relations to his politico-jural superiors were mediated through the same series of steps” (ibid., 145). Thus, according to Fortes, the hierarchy of offices could be represented as “a series of concentric circles of authority and privilege”, as Rattray had done (ibid.; see Figure 7).
Despite the outward complexity of Figure 7, its main proposition is fairly simple. Rattray (1929, 403-405) created this model primarily for showing how “decentralization” was the fundamental principle of the “Ashanti Constitution”. For instance, if the paramount chief of A wishes to give an order to his subject residing in village A5, he must always do it through A2, or more precisely, the chief of subdivision A2 will convey the message to the village head of A5, who will forward it to a lineage elder, who will give it to the subject in question. Furthermore, there are no collateral “lines of communication” between the constituent parts of the chiefdom. For example, villages B1 and A5 are connected to each other only through their common allegiance to the paramount chief. To put it more figuratively, the circles never touch each other; they are connected only through the centre of the greater circle.

So, basically, Fortes and Rattray both saw the hierarchy of offices among the Asante as a chain of command. This more or less corresponds to what is understood by hierarchy in “modern common sense”. Whether it is called a “power hierarchy” or “military hierarchy”, it is ultimately a system of graduated authority (see Dumont 1980, 65). However, it has to be added that although the political authority seems to stem from the king or the paramount chief and radiate downwards to the sub-chiefs of different orders, there is still a certain degree of autonomous political power on all levels of segmentation. So, there is no ultimate monopoly to political authority at the top, which would then be merely delegated further to the lower levels. That is the reason why political anthropologists have often called Asante a segmentary state in order to distinguish it from a so-called unified state (see Southall 1956). But what if, for example, one is told that in Figure 7 the chief of A3 is senior to the chief of A4, although they are on the same ladder in the power hierarchy? Or, alternatively, one is told that the chiefs of D, A1, D2, F2, and A7 all belong to the same matriclan and the chief D2 is their head. They are on different ladders, but the one claiming headship is not the one on the highest ladder? Obviously, these are all hierarchical relations, but they cannot be explained by reference to the chain of command. Yet these kinds of relationships do exist and are constantly discussed by the Asante themselves. In such instances the chiefs in question are usually connected through clanship, kinship, or friendship, or they may be considered neighbours in a particular area. In order to explain how such relationships are constituted, I will first have to discuss briefly the concept of clan.
FIGURE 7. An Asante chiefdom and its component parts described in a diagrammatical form by Rattray (1929, 97).

Legend:
The outer circle A represents a chiefdom under a paramount chief, who is represented by the centre of the circle. Inside circle A there is a smaller circle B with points 1, 2, 3, and 4 marked on its boundary line. They stand for the elders, through whom the villages represented by circles D, E, F, and G swear allegiance to the paramount chief. Circle C contains all of them thus representing the capital of the chiefdom. Outside C there are slightly smaller circles A1, A2, A3, and A4, which stand for the four subdivisions within the chiefdom owing allegiance directly to the paramount chief. Within the subdivisions there exists an organization exactly similar, although in a smaller scale, to that which is included in the greater circle A. Each subdivision has its chief's capital (C1, C2), the villages within the capital (B1, B2, D2, E2, F2, and G2), and outlying villages under subordinate chiefs (A5, A6, A7, and A8). The lines leading from the centres signify the lines of communication between chiefs (Rattray 1929 96-98).

4.2 What is a clan?

Fortes established that *abusua* is equated with brotherhood and thus it implies amity. As a lineage *abusua* is “descent translated into specific jural,
political, and ritual rights and duties, commitments and privileges”, whereas as a clan its meaning is much more vague. According to Fortes, the Asante themselves see it as “amity innate in the ties of siblingship extended to the farthest limits of putative co-descent” (Fortes 1969a, 161-162). Hence clanship too connotes brotherhood, but on a more generalized level, which is exemplified, among other things, by hospitality provided to a clansman visiting from another locality. Here one easily gets the impression that the nuclear family (mother-child and sibling bonds), the lineage, and the clan together comprise a single field of amity, in which harmony and goodwill are strongest at the core and weakest at the margins. However, Fortes refuted such notions, for instance, Bronislaw Malinowski’s views on “extensions” of intrafamilial kinship relations underlying classificatory kinship terminology (ibid., 67-68). Thus to speak of a single field of amity would be a misinterpretation, because although all three relationships mentioned are conceptualised in descent terms, Fortes saw them as based on entirely different principles and therefore incommensurate. On the one hand, relations within the nuclear family are based on moral imperatives that ultimately go back to biological and psychological facts that define human existence. An Asante mother does not love her children because it is her obligation to do so according to her lineage status; she does so because she is human and thus predetermined to put first the well-being of her offspring. These relationships have nothing to do with descent as such: a father’s love for his children is as unconditioned and “natural” as the mother’s even though in a system of matrilineal descent he is not recognized as a predecessor of his children (ibid., 191-192). On the other hand, the solidarity within the descent group, namely the lineage, was based on jural imperatives. The norms that regulate the relations within the lineage could not be directly derived from the same moral elements that are constitutive of filial relations. Thus descent relations should not be seen as “extended” parental or sibling relations. On the contrary, the two types of relations could be seen in an opposed relationship: the moral imperatives and emotions that indissolubly and universally belong to parenthood put limits to the external authority of the lineage or the state in respect to the reproductive nucleus.3

3 Sylvia Yanagisako (1987, 114-115) has stressed this idea of opposition in her reading of Fortes. Her observation points to an interesting contradiction in Fortes’ thought. On the one hand, he says that filial relations connect groups to each other, but on the other, he seems to think it possible that the reproductive nucleus is antithetical to groups.
The third type, clanship, seems difficult to fit into these normative categories. The Akan clan consists of “politically discrete regional sections”, these being the localized lineages, and clansmen from different polities were not connected by jural ties as lineage members were, even though, genealogically speaking, both relationships are founded on shared matrilineal descent. Instead of clearly defined jural principles, the ties of clanship were upheld by “the belief in the immortality and sempiternity of the clan system” (Fortes 1969a, 161-162). Thus Fortes saw that clanship was not political kinship in the way that lineage kinship was. In terms of the structural domains, clanship in a centralized political system proved difficult to accommodate; it seemed to have more in common with cognatic systems than segmentary lineage systems. For instance, among the Tallensi solidarity within both the lineage and the clan was governed by same set of principles, so that the latter could be seen as an extension of the former (Fortes 1969b, 244-250). Accordingly, the maximal lineages were the smallest and the clans the largest “corporate units that emerge in political action” (ibid., 103). The Akan clan, in contrast, had “corporate characteristics”, but it never emerged as a unit of political action and thus could not be considered a corporation like a lineage could (Fortes 1969a, 161-162). In both societies, Tallensi and Asante, lineage and clan relations are distinguished from other kinship relations because they are defined according to the principles of unilineal descent, but the ways in which these relations are regulated differ significantly. Among the Tallensi lineage and clan solidarity, embodied in rights and duties, has its foundation in the “moral premises” of the society, more precisely, in “the axiom that kinship is binding in its own right” (Fortes 1969b, 249). Ultimately, the social order is seen to be sanctioned by the ancestors (ibid., 144). Among the Asante the internal and external relations of the lineage are “subject to the jural regulation of the state”, which rested in the state’s command of organised force (Fortes 1969a, 158-159). An important and direct implication from this is that clanship, and consequently the whole concept of descent, has a different meaning in stateless societies than it has in state societies. Thus employing parallel terminology tends to create confusion.4

However, Fortes did not consider clan ties to be completely insignificant in the Asante political organization. For him the Asante state was “a union of political communities bound to one another by chains of

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4 On a more general level, the early critics of the structural-functionalist school had pointed out that the terms lineage and clan had been applied to various societies without sufficient reference to the differences in their overall structure (Fried 1957, 6-7).
interlocked allegiances to the eminent office within a framework of law and of fiscal, religious, and military organization, reinforced by a network of clanship, dynastic kinship, and marriage ties” (ibid., 154). Hence in this scheme of things the clan system is an important “unifying force” (Fortes 1962, 260):

Chiefs who belong to the same clan call one another ‘brother’ and this is not a mere title of courtesy. Often this connexion has the support of a tradition that the founders of the chiefships were the sons of one mother. Chiefs thus fraternally related often consult together over urgent public issues irrespective of their immediate allegiances. When one of them is installed, his brother chiefs send him obligatory gifts and he, in turn, sends gifts to thank them. They may have special ceremonial duties at his installation; and again, when a chief dies his brother chiefs must attend the funeral with special gifts and may have ceremonial duties in connexion with it. These ties are thought of as holding between chiefdoms – the stools – not as being personal, and they often in the past formed the basis of concerted political action (ibid.).

What is remarkable here is the precedence of political allegiance and a jural framework over association based on common descent (or other institutions). “The network of clanship” is a subservient system to the system of allegiances, and thus it simply has secondary, consolidating functions. It could not be regarded as an equivalent, alternative system of association: the territorially scattered lineages were politically discrete, and hence kin groups of larger scale, the matriclans, lacked political unity. This view has had a major impact on the ways in which the relations between offices within the chiefdom and the state have been seen.

4.3 Seniority

A good analytical tool for discussing the hierarchical relations between chiefs of the same clan is the concept of the order of precedence used by James Fox (1994). Much like Louis Dumont’s (1980) concept of hierarchy it is based on the idea of oppositions. Certain opposite categories are ordered asymmetrically in such a way that one member of the opposition is greater than the other. For example, in case of the Asante, it can be said that
older is considered superior to younger or indigenous is superior to migrant. Hence, as Fox (1994, 98) puts it, the “categorical asymmetry is effected by imposition of value”. To create precedence, the categories used must be both asymmetric and complementary, and used recursively. Thus a simple line of precedence follows this kind of pattern:

\[
a > \frac{b}{a} > \frac{b}{a} > b
\]

Older $>$ younger/older $>$ younger/older $>$ younger
Indigenous $>$ migrant/indigenous $>$ migrant/indigenous $>$ migrant

Unlike Dumont’s idea of hierarchy, there is no single dominant opposition that constitutes a hierarchy. The hierarchies emerge from the interaction of valued oppositions. According to Fox, “both the priorities given to different oppositions by different groups within the same society and the various valencies of these oppositions give rise to social hierarchy”. Since precedence is always a matter of social contention, it also becomes subject to complicated processes of reordering (ibid.). So, both the importance of a specific category for precedence and the value imposed to it can be questioned by the other members of the society. One set of categories may be used to dispute another in order to argue a case of precedence. A very simplistic, but yet pertinent, example of such situation could be the challenge between the younger uncle and older nephew mentioned in the first chapter. There the genealogical category of older $>$ younger (i.e., uncle $>$ nephew) is contested by the temporal category of older $>$ younger.

Among the Asante, hierarchies between chiefs who are connected through the segmentary lineage system, bilateral kinship, friendship or spatial cohabitation are based on the idea of seniority. Sometimes seniority has to do with a favourer position granted by a common overlord, such as the Asantehene. However, very often seniority is legitimated by reference to categories of valued oppositions. For instance, a chief may claim that he is the senior because he is the oldest (in terms of the genealogical or temporal age of his office) of the chiefs who belong to a certain group or category. Or he may say that he is the senior because he is the descendant of the indigenous inhabitants of an area occupied by a group of chiefs. Very often, but not nearly always, seniority and authority coincide. For example, as mentioned earlier, the position of the ruling lineage of a chiefdom is

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5 Seniority here refers to precedence, not temporal or genealogical age. Both can be used to legitimate precedence. The Twi term *panin* can be understood either as precedence or older age, depending on the context.
legitimated by the ancestral occupation of land, which many times refers to the idea that the lineage ancestors first discovered and populated the area, which later became to constitute the territory of the polity. However, in contrast to the chain of command, seniority is very debatable and it is frequently contested on differing grounds.

To illustrate the idea of seniority I will present two ethnographic examples. The first case, already familiar, concerns seniority in the Adonten group of Kumase. The second discusses the headship of chiefs belonging to the Asene matriclan in the chiefdom of Kwawu. In both cases the chiefs in question belong to the same clan and polity. Although the two cases are similar in many respects, they exemplify two different kinds of relations between the chain of command and seniority. In the Adonten case, the chiefs swear allegiance to the same overlord and their relations are confined within an “administrative category”, but in the Kwawu case all of the chiefs have different overlords and hence their relationships cross-cut the chain of allegiance.

4.3.1 The brothers

Fox emphasizes that an important feature of any line of precedence is that it has “an initial term or inception point”. Therefore the order of precedence is always concerned with origins or sources (ibid., 98). In the Asante case both relations, those of seniority and authority, have their legitimation in the past, in history and myth. I have explained how the chiefly offices are related through the segmentary lineage system, or more specifically, on the grounds that their founding ancestors were thought to have been matrilineally related. Similarly, one’s place in the military organization is also explained by reference to the foundation of the polity. So, in order to understand the relationships between chiefs, one has to know when, how, and why the chiefs are considered to have become connected in the first place. Hence, the origins of the polities, localities, and clans are of decisive importance. In case of the Adonten group, everything goes back to the time when Kumase was established as the capital of the Asante kingdom.

Usually, Akwamu, a chiefdom southeast from Asante, is credited for having introduced this new “politico-military form of government”. The

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6 It is important to note that the military idiom itself entails the idea of subordination, or rather the chain of command. For example, when a chief is called a Nifahene, it implies at the same time that he is a Nifahene to someone; he commands someone’s right wing.
historians maintain that the Asante adopted the Akwamu military pattern towards the end of the seventeenth century, and furthermore, in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century refined it by adding new elements (e.g., Kea 1971, 207-211). The emergence of the military organization is described in the Asante traditional accounts about Asantehene Osei Tutu’s development from an irresponsible and dangerous youth to a grown man and a chief. The outline of the tradition can be given as follows. The chiefdom of Kwaman (later renamed Kumase) was held as a tributary state by the kingdom of Denkyira, a southern neighbour of Asante. A young Kwaman royal, Osei Tutu, had been sent as a hostage to the court of Denkyira. While in Denkyira, Osei Tutu stole gold and other valuables belonging to the court and also attempted to kill the Denkyirahene through magic. Osei Tutu managed to escape back to Kwaman with chasers on his heels. His uncle, Obiri Yeboa, who was the chief of Kwaman at the time, was shocked by his unruly behaviour and sent him to Takyiman to look for shelter from the revenge of the Denkyirahene. In Takyiman Osei Tutu took the queen mother as his lover and while sleeping together killed her, beheaded her, stole her gold, and ran away back home. Enraged, Obiri Yeboa warned Osei Tutu not to disappoint him for a third time, and the wayward nephew was sent for the last time to seek refuge in Akwamu. While Osei Tutu was in Akwamu, Obiri Yeboa decided to wage war on the neighbouring people of Domaa. This particular conflict, known as the first Domaa war, was the last one fought without firearms, and moreover, the Kwaman army attacked the enemy in one group without covering their sides or their back. Consequently, the Kwaman were defeated and Obiri Yeboa was captured and killed.7 In the meantime, Osei Tutu had stayed in Akwamu and made a close study of their military organization. When the news of his uncle’s death reached Akwamu, Osei Tutu decided to rush back to Kwaman and accept the office of his late uncle that had been offered to him. Komfo Anokye, a traditional priest, to whom he had been introduced in Akwamu, accompanied him. On his way he performed several feats of valour. In Kwaman he vowed revenge on Domaahene Domaa Kusi, the killer of his uncle. He started preparing for war by arranging the army into different groups, each having a separate function, and training the soldiers to

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7 I was told by Domaahene Agyeaman Badu II in 2001 that the skull of Obiri Yeboa is still kept in the main palace at Domaa. During their annual yam festival the Domaahene places his foot on the skull, thus commemorating the historical victory and chiefly power over external enemies. Likewise, the skull of Domaahene Domaa Kusi, the slayer of Obiri Yeboa, was (and most probably still is) deposited in Kumase, and used in a similar manner during the Odwira festival (McCaskie 1995a, 214).
use guns. Finally, he led his army to the battlefield, drove away the Domaa from their lands, and killed Domaa Kusi (IAS/AS 39; McCaskie 1992, 238-241; Otamakuro Adubofuor 2000, 3-4; Wilks 1993, 103-106).

The story tells of a transformation on three separate levels: personality, technology, and organization. First of all, when exiled to Akwamu Osei Tutu puts aside his past life as a killer and thief and gets reformed. He acknowledges his own membership in the abusua and the state, i.e., he sees himself for the first time as the successor of his uncle and a chief in the making. As McCaskie (1992, 238) has put it, Osei Tutu internalizes “the behavioural norms deemed mandatory to human status (and appropriate to his privileged rank)”. Consequently, he assumes the responsibility of avenging the death of his uncle. The maturation process has put an end to homelessness, solitary existence, and negligence of duties and agreements. The two other transformations that followed were the external outcome of the first one, as well as elements of the maturation process as a whole: through the renewal of warfare, Osei Tutu’s kingship becomes fully developed. By defeating the Domaa in battle, Osei Tutu is able to add something (e.g., land, captives, heroic deeds) to the kingship. A new technology is introduced; obsolete weapons are replaced by firearms. The third, and in terms of this study the most important, level of transformation is organizational: the component offices of the chiefdom are reassigned to new military functions and they are renamed with new military titles. This is generally considered to be the origin of the distinct military units (often referred to as “divisions”, “wings”, or “clans”) in Kumase and subsequently in other Asante chiefdoms.

The administrative structure and military organization of Kumase in the “post-Osei Tutu era” is somewhat different from “the common Akan type”. The Kumase army has also been divided into task-oriented fighting units, and military service is, in principle, a lineage obligation. The basic difference is that in Kumase each unit is composed of several offices (and their subjects) of diverse lineage and clan origins. In fact, such a unit is a group of chiefdoms, each of which was organized internally according to the traditional model. Accordingly, a member of a group is theoretically capable of waging war either as a component of his own group (and the Kumase army) or separately as an independent chiefdom. Such an aggregate is called fekuo (pl. afekuo) meaning “a group of persons sharing something in common” (McCaskie 1980, 190). The afekuo were created by successive Asantehene, and ties of friendship and/or kinship hold them together. The birth of the most ancient afekuo dates back to the times of Osei Tutu and
Komfo Anokye. The most recent addition to the number of afekuo took place in 1995, when Asantehene Opoku Ware II created the Nkosuo fekuo.

The origin and development of the fekuo institution is well exemplified by the Adonten fekuo of Kumase (see Figure 8). The original number and names of offices that formed the Adonten group is vague, since some of the original members have been elevated to paramountcy and are not considered as subdivisions of the Kumase chiefdom anymore. These include Nkoransa, Agona, and Asaman. However, their ties to the group remain strong and, in one way or another, they are still considered as members. According to Amakomhene Akosa Yiadom II, the present members of the Adonten group are the chiefdoms of Eduabin, Amakom, Antoa, Akyawkrom, and Kwamo, which all belong to the Asene clan, and Asanso, Abenkyim, Aboaso, and Ayiaase, which belong to the Ekuona clan. ⁸ Because of its antiquity Amakom is called Adonten Piesie, “the firstborn of the Adonten group”. Although senior in age, Amakom is not the most senior administratively: the leader of the group, the Adontenhene, is the chief of Eduabin, and he commands his junior brothers in war where the Adonten group constitutes the main body of the field army. In Eduabin traditions the group was brought together for the first time by Eduabinhene Aduonin Pim when the Asante chiefs were asked to fight a supernatural enemy:

…Okomfo Anokye threw a searching question to the would-be Ashanti nation, “Who will be able to fight with the fairies or ghosts?” Adontin Pim (…) responded to this request of Okomfo Anokye. He said he would fight with the fairies or ghosts with alacrity (…) The Ghost’s War, it is said, was caused by the Juabenhene and the Adontenhene of Kumasi, then known as Aduabinhene who negotiated with his brothers known as “Aseniefo” for this war. The Aseniefo or Asenie group which he consulted about the war were as follows:-

Amakomhene – Akosa Yiadom
Akyawkramhene – Tutu Anpim

³ Sometimes Otikrom is also mentioned as a member of the Adonten group. The ruling lineage of Otikrom belongs to the Aduana clan and is a cadet line of the ruling lineage of the chiefdom of Assumegya. Otikrom had joined the Adonten group temporarily during the rebellion of 1900-1901 against the British (Tordoff 1965, 230). Traditionally, Otikrom belongs to the Benkum fekuo (i.e., the left wing). See also Lewin (1978, 227) for some additional members in the late nineteenth century.
Antohene – Sakodie Date

He further negotiated with five Ekuona Chiefs, namely Asamanghene, Asansohene, Abenkyimhene, Aboasohene and Ayaasehene (...) The war with fairies it is said was one of a marvellous event because nothing was seen at the spot in question by the Adontenhene and his colleagues only gun shots and noise were heard. So after considerable fighting, the Adontenhene and colleagues having bravely fought these fairies, took to their heels (...) So the Adontenhene Aduonin Pim and his brothers defeated the fairies and captured them (IAS/AS 95).

Due to this initial success the same composition was used when Osei Tutu fought the Domaa, after which the chief of Eduabin was permanently appointed as the Adontenhene (ibid.). However, traditional accounts from other chiefdoms do not mention “The Ghost’s War”, and Amakom traditions even testify that the Adontenhene is merely a caretaker of the title. The present Amakomhene states that “as Adoten Piesie, Amakom used to be the leader of the Adonten group”, but due to certain circumstances they had lost that status. One of his predecessors, Amakomhene Kwaku Atta, described to the colonial administrators how the first chief of Amakom, Akosa Yiadom, lost the title to the chief of Eduabin who had held a junior position prior to that. Hence in a government enquiry it was established that

…[I]t was in prospect of the 3rd. DOMENA war (when the enemy were routed and their King slain) that the army was organized and his [Kwaku Atta’s] predecessor AKUSA YADOM appointed Head of the ADONTEN Division. In this war BUAKYI DANQUAH the Head of the EDUABIN family took part under AKUSA YADOM. In the 1st DENKYIRA war (when their King NTIM JAKARI was slain) AKUSA YADOM continued ADONTENHENE. BUAKYI DANQUAH was then dead. In the 2nd. DENKYIRA war AKUSA YADOM was too old to fight and he appointed the EDUABINHENE EDUANIM PIM, who succeeded BUAKYI DANQUAH, to lead the ADONTEN in his stead. During this war AKUSA YADOM died and his successor EDUPENIN was a child.
FIGURE 8. Administrative structure of Kumase showing the position and composition of the Adonten group (Adonten fekuo).
Legend:
The seat of the office is in brackets below the name of the group.
So when EDUANIM PIM returned victorious from the war he refused to restore to AMAKOM the symbols of his leadership – the horn and state umbrella. The King acquiesced in this usurpation and EDUANIM PIM continued to lead the ADONTENS in subsequent wars, and his successors have been regarded ever since as ADONTENHENE (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/128a).

The two traditions claim different principles as constitutive to the hierarchy between offices: according to Eduabin traditions the senior position was originally a reward from the overlord for confronting a supernatural enemy, while the Amakom traditions assert that initially the oldest should be the most senior. To put in another way, the Amakom traditions rely on precedence based on the category of older > younger, while Eduabin traditions claim that seniority has absolutely nothing to do with such a category. The disagreements concerning the origins of the group and its headship do not change the notion that “all the chiefs of the Adonten group always move together”. The fekuo is seen as a group of offices eternally tied by clanship, and disputes between individual officeholders, which arise almost constantly, do not compromise that unity. As the etymology of the term fekuo suggests, the relationship between its members is fraternal. The head of the group (fekutire) is only senior, not superior, to other officeholders within the fekuo, and he is able to give orders to his brothers and friends in war only. Thus the other chiefs respect (bu) the Adontenhene as the senior brother, but do not serve (som) him as they serve their overlord, the Asantehene, to whom they have sworn an oath of allegiance. In terms of allegiance, all of the five chiefs stand in a similar relationship to the Asantehene. They swear their oaths of allegiance directly to him, and more importantly, the same ceremonial sword (nsuafena), the Mponponsuo sword, is used in the ritual. They all have been granted the status of a “big man” (bir mp n, pl. abir mp n) and hence are entitled to carry the elephant tail (mena or mmra), the insignia of the abir mp n. All five of

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9 According to a third version, in a manuscript prepared by Asantehene Akwasi Agyeman Prempe during his captivity, Akosa Yiadom had originally purchased the title of Adontenhene from Osei Tutu (HAKWCI, 105-106).

10 *Af*, a peer, a contemporary, a comrade + *(e)kuw*, a group, a collectivity (McCaskie 1995a, 281).

11 Certain swords are considered to have specific spiritual significance (McLeod 1981, 9). “Oath swords” of lesser rank are Ahwe hwe baa, Akrafona, and Gyapatia (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/2/12a).
them occupy their own ancestral lands and command the allegiance of their own sub-chiefs and subjects.

However, the hierarchical dimension is not restricted to the relationship between the group’s leader and the rest of its members. First of all, those five chiefs who belong to the Asene clan are considered senior to those four from the Ekuona clan. Secondly, an order of precedence exists among the Asene chiefs. According to Amakom traditions it is based on the age of the offices, even though the dates of the foundation of the offices and the genealogical links between the ruling Asene lineages of the five chiefdoms are rather obscure, in most cases putative instead of demonstrated. According to the present Amakomhene the Adonten chiefs are ranked in the following way:

We are not equal (…) Nowadays, I am the second in command. In the absence of the Adontenehene I take his place. Antoa is after me, then Akyawkrom, and lastly Kwamo.

Furthermore, the chiefs distinguish themselves by using different appellations. In the same way that the Amakomhene refers to himself as the “firstborn”, the Adontenhene calls himself Adonten Onini, “the superior” of the Adonten group (IAS/AS 95), while the Antoahene speaks of himself as Adonten Akoten, “the general” of the Adonten group (IAS/AS 34). Both Adonten and Antoa are also said to be among the four Poduo stools of Kumase, which are considered to have “supernatural significance” (IAS/AS 95).

Very much like Fortes and Rattray, the colonial administrators took the oath of allegiance as the only significant political relationship between chiefs and, moreover, they saw it distinctly as a relation of subordination between the giver and receiver of the oath, the subject and his/her overlord. However, in their capacity as the supreme judges and lawgivers of the land, the British frequently ran into cases where claims for superiority were made on bases other than direct allegiance. By far the most important and best known of such cases was between Adontenhene Kwame Frimpon

12 I do not know exactly what is meant by Poduo stools. It is sometimes said that these stools were created by Komfo Anokye.

13 Apart from the chain of command the colonial administrators and the Ashanti Confederacy Council had a system of “grading” chiefs for different purposes, e.g., payment of adultery fees and slaughtering of sheep as compensation. It is my understanding that the grades were originally based on the size of the “allegiancy fees” paid by the chiefs at their installation (PRAAD ARG 2/2/120).
and Amakomhene Kwaku Atta, which took place during the 1920’s.\(^{14}\) Throughout the first two decades of colonial rule the Adontenhene, or “Chief Frempon” as the British knew him, had gained influence in the political circles of the capital and subsequently managed to get the upper hand over his junior brothers. His prestige was mainly due to his “forceful personality and a marked aptitude for business affairs”, as one administrator described him. However, this favoured position was not enough; he made great efforts to change his status into authority. Accordingly, he made certain “claims to subserviency” concerning the other chiefs of the Adonten group, which included, among other things, a share of tribute received by the Adonten chiefs on alienating their lands. The other chiefs, with the Amakomhene as their spokesman naturally refused his demands. Initially, in 1920, the Amakomhene lost such a case against the Adontenhene, but when he had appealed, a separate enquiry on “The Tribal Organisation” of the Adonten group was held in Kumase in 1924-1925 (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/128a).

The administrators had some clue of what to expect. A very similar court case had taken place a little earlier between the chiefs of Bantama and Nkawie Kuma, who belong to the Kronti fekuo of Kumase (see Figure 8).\(^{15}\) Originally, Nkawie Kuma had been attached to Kumase as a wife or a brother-in-law of the Asantehene and later “given” to the Bantamahene as a friend (adamfo, pl. mmadamfo), whom he should “look after”. The question under scrutiny was whether the Bantamahene, as a head of the fekuo, was also superior to the chief of Nkawie Kuma and thus whether the friendship between the two also implied subordination of the junior to the senior. A great number of witnesses called by both parties were heard. The spirit of the case was crystallized in a statement given by a linguist of the Bantama stool: “There are different relationship between chief [sic]. Some chiefs are ‘more under’ than others” (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/130a). Accordingly, the court concluded that the chief of Nkawie Kuma is under the chief of Bantama, but “in a more limited sense that is usually attached to the term

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\(^{14}\) See Berry (2001, 20-26) for the personal motives and relationship between Kwame Frimpon and Kwaku Atta.

\(^{15}\) These enquiries form a very useful piece of “colonial ethnography” (Pels & Salemink 1994). Of course, the administrative interests of the colonial government restricted the scope of the enquiries and certain ethnocentric views were strongly enforced. But as judges the colonial administrators were forced to deal with questions that have been largely ignored by the subsequent academic research. Rattray wrote a two-page memorandum about the Adonten case, but never brought forward “its main finding”, which I think he never fully grasped, in his published works (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/128b).
‘UNDER’”.16 In practical terms this meant, among other things, that the Bantamahene is not entitled to any profits gained from the Nkawie Kuma lands nor has he any right to claim contributions from Nkawie Kuma for the debts or other expenses of his office. However, because of being “under” the Bantamahene, although in an “exceptional” sense, the chief of Nkawie Kuma had to show certain signs of respect, for example, when coming to Kumase or leaving there he was obliged to “pay his respects to Bantamahene in person or by deputy” (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/130b).

This new notion of “underness” provided an important precedent for the Adonten enquiry. The colonial administrators concluded that “practically every point there [in the previous inquiry] decided is reflected in the relationship between the ADONTENHENE and the other ABREMPON [i.e., “big men”] in the Division”(PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/128a). Hence, after a thorough investigation, it was decided that the Adontenhene had no “executive or administrative authority” over the other chiefs of the Adonten group (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/128b), but nevertheless, he received some recognition, which was “prescribed by custom governing the observance of the forms of respect and courtesy between the junior members of the family and their senior” (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/128a; italics added). These forms were:

1. When public debts are imposed or profits gained by the whole fekuo, they are distributed by dividing the sums to two. The Adontenhene takes one half and the other half is shared equally between the rest of the chiefs. The “lion’s share” is due to the Adontenhene as the elder brother.
2. When in Kumase the other chiefs of the fekuo must come to greet the Adontenhene each morning.
3. In the battlefield and on ceremonial occasions they must walk in front of him.
4. They must assist him in court.
5. They must assist him in warfare (ibid.).

The first three obligations on the list are done “out of respect” (obu nti) to a senior brother. They are precisely the ones in which the idea of seniority is

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16 The Asante themselves express the idea of one chief being under another by using the verb hy ase, which means “to wear”. Hence, for instance, it is said that Dendwahene hy Nkoransahene ase, the Dendwahene “wears” (is encompassed by, is under, etc.) the Nkoransahene.
manifest. However, the two obligations mentioned last are reciprocal; in them the “social identification and solidarity”, which Fortes (1962, 274) thought to be characteristic of Asante sibling relations, are clearly explicit. Thus, the same ideals of mutual sharing and co-operation, which hold together the lineage kin, are also prevalent in the relations between chiefs who belong to the same matriclan, even though in an entirely different context. For instance, in my own field interviews I was told without exception that any chief can ask for, and is entitled to get, help in warfare and litigation from another chief from the same clan. The justification for this was that it is considered proper conduct towards a relative. As one chief put it, “it does not look good if your brother is in trouble and you are not doing anything to help”. However, rights and obligations of this kind were and are not regulated by legal sanctions.

In order to distinguish superiority, or “overlordship”, from seniority it was made clear that there are certain chiefly prerogatives, which the Adontenhene does not have regarding the other officeholders of the fekuo.

1. They do not swear allegiance to the Adontenhene.
2. Their jurisdiction is equal to his. Appeals from their courts go straight to the Asantehene and not to the Adontenhene.
3. The Adontenhene is not entitled to any share of the court fees received by the other chiefs.
4. The member chiefs do not contribute to Adontenhene’s debts. They do not share the costs of the building projects of the Adonten stool.
5. The Adontenhene is not entitled to any share of the captives taken in war by the other chiefs.
6. He is not entitled to any share of treasure-trove found on the lands of the other Adonten chiefs.
7. The Adonten chiefs do not owe him any share of the tributes received from alienating land.

17 On the subject of warfare the Adontenhene told the District Commissioner the following:

Chief FREMPON. When any of my junior brothers went to war I had to give him assistance, for it is not good for a big brother to see a younger brother beaten.

D.C. It was entirely a matter of what was due from relationship [sic]?

Ch.F. Yes. As I said before, if some stranger gives offence to one of us he gives it to all (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/128a).
8. The Adontenhene is not entitled to exact any “death duties” (awunnyade and/or ayibuade) on the death of the other chiefs or their subjects.\(^{18}\) (One of the main witnesses in the case placed decisive importance to this point, since “it shows the power which the overlord has over the subordinate”) (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/128a).

The Adonten case clearly establishes that there are “collateral lines of communication” between offices. The Adonten chiefs stand in relationship to each other, and these relationships are not dependent on their common allegiance to the Asantehene. The “brotherhood” between the chiefs is founded on common descent, namely membership in the Asene matriclan. Claims for seniority are instituted by reference to the valued opposition between older and younger, or on promotion by external authority. The hierarchy of the Adonten group is boxed within a hierarchy of power categories of a different order. In other words, the seniority of the Adontenhene is encompassed by the superiority of the Asantehene.

4.3.2 The uncle and his nephews

My second example is also from the Asene clan, but from a different Akan group than the Asante. In the chiefdom of Kwawu, a southeast neighbour of Asante, there are six chiefly offices vested in lineages of the Asene clan. However, these offices do not constitute a similar unit in the administrative structure of the chiefdom like the Adonten group does in Kumase. On the contrary, all six are separated: they serve six different overlords, who are the divisional chiefs of the Okwawuhene, the paramount chief of Kwawu, who belongs to the Tena matriclan (see Figure 9).

According to Nana Kwabena Tia II, the Asenehene of Kwawu, the first Asene people migrated to Kwawu from a town called Krokosi. They settled in the area of present day town of Abetifi, and named it Krokosiwaa (lit. “little Krokosi”). After having established themselves there they heard that there was a war going on in a nearby area and thought it safer to move eastwards across the Afram River and stay there for the duration of the

\(^{18}\) There seems to be some confusion concerning the two Twi terms. According to McCaskie (1995a, 316-317) awunnyade involved the self-acquired movable property of an individual, whereas ayibuade involved the immovable property. However, Kwame Arhin (1995, 137-138) maintains that the difference is that in the case of the former a chief took part of a deceased subject’s property, but in the latter case a chief took a part of his subordinate chief’s property.
hostilities. After the war the Asene people returned to Krokosiwaa only to see that a new group of people had arrived there. The leader of the newcomers, who was an ancestor of the present chief of Abetifi, recognized the Asene people as the original inhabitants and asked for the Asenehene’s permission to settle on his lands. The Asenehene gave them land, but also said that he cannot be their chief because as an Asenehene he can only be the chief of people who belong to the Asene clan. It was then agreed that the leader of the newcomers can become the chief of the whole settlement, but when he is in the part of town that belongs to the Asenehene he is regarded as junior to him. Later this community that combined the two groups came to be the town of Abetifi, which constitutes the Adonten division in the chiefdom of Kwawu (see Figure 9). But still, even nowadays, when the chief of Abetifi, or the Kwawu Adontenhene, comes to the Asene ward:

1. He is not allowed to bring his state umbrella.
2. He is not allowed to wear any headdress.
3. When entering the Asenehene’s palace, he must uncover his shoulders and tie his cloth around his chest.

To sum it up, he has to behave like a subordinate officeholder to the Asenehene, even though outside this particular space he is the overlord of the latter. This relationship is legitimated by reference to the relationship between the indigenous and the migrant, which is often seen as the ideological basis of the relationship between the chiefly lineage and other lineages resident in a chiefdom. However, as described above, in actuality the reverse has taken place: the Asenehene pledges allegiance to the Kwawu Adontenhene, and through the migrant chief, he is connected to a hierarchy of larger scale. This hierarchical ambiguity is not endured; it is rather done away with by separating the political space into two, within and without the clan, where the positions of both chiefs can be constituted by reference to their autochthony. Hence temporal continuity is established by dividing the space and the category of indigenous > migrant remains uncontested.

As for the other Asene lineages in Kwawu, four of them, namely those of Adumoa, Pepease, Bepon, and Nkwatia, are direct offshoots of the Asene people of Krokosiwaa (or Abetifi). The dispersal has taken place mainly as a result of marriages. Asene women have moved to the localities of their husbands and consequently set up new branches of their natal lineage, which by gaining rights to offices have become constituted as autonomous groups. The Asenehene described this process to me in a rather
wistful tone: “All Asene people should live together in the same place, but because of marriages, we are now in different places”. The fifth Asene lineage, established in Obo, is originally from Amakom, which they were forced to leave behind due to a war. They formed one half of a larger Asene group, which migrated southwards from Kumase and while some decided to join their clansmen in Kwawu others continued further south to a place called Akyim Ati.

The relationship of the five junior Asene chiefs to the Asenehene resembles that between the chiefs of the Adonten group and the Kumase Adontenhene in many ways, although the hierarchy is constituted by reference to the genealogical category of older > younger, and not the temporal age of the office or a senior position awarded by a common overlord. The five chiefs address the Asenehene as their uncle and he refers to them as his nephews (as is also the case between Amakom and Nkoransa). They do not swear an oath of allegiance to the Asenehene; they swear it to their respective overlords, but after that they are formally introduced to the Asenehene. Customarily, they do not owe any tribute to the Asenehene, but as one of the Asenehene’s linguists put it, “if he [an Asene chief] has something he wants to give, he will give”. They hold their own positions in the military formations of their own divisions, but they are also obligated to assist the Asenehene in warfare. As elders of the divisional chiefs they are members of the judicial courts of the latter, but they are also obligated to support the Asenehene in litigation. As their uncle the Asenehene sees it, it is his obligation to support them militarily, legally, or in any possible way, “when they consult him in times of difficulties”. However, what is very different from the Adonten case is that the hierarchy of offices within the clan is not boxed within a larger hierarchy: there is no administrative group that constitutes a whole, which can then be divided into uneven parts. On the contrary, the allegiance to the divisional chiefs and the nephew relation to the Asenehene, which both have similar political implications, directly contradict each other. Figure 9 illustrates how the ties of clanship cleave the neat pyramidal structure of the chiefdom. Although the contradiction is more strikingly visible here, it is not completely absent from the Adonten group either. The paramount chiefs of Nkoransa, Agona, and Asaman, who do not belong to the Kumase chiefdom anymore, but are considered to have their own paramountcies, are still considered members of the Adonten group in many respects.19

19 For instance, see Tordoff (1965, 376) for the Agonahene’s statement that “although I am an Omanhene yet I regard the Adontenhene as my senior”.
4.4 Status, power, and authority

It is now clear that when chiefs talk about each other as relatives, it is not an idiom in which administrative relations are talked about as kinship relations (although the former may coincide with latter). There is a distinctive set of relationships between chiefs, which are patterned according to the principles of descent and kinship. The hierarchical aspect of the relationships is defined through the concept of seniority. The question is now why did Fortes exclude them from the “Ashanti model”, even though he clearly was aware of their existence?

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1969, 5) established that states are societies in which, among other things, cleavages of privilege and status correspond to the distribution of power and authority. They argued that the “king and his delegates and advisers use organised force with the consent of their subjects to keep going a political system which the latter take for granted as the foundation of their social order” (ibid., 14). It is then implied that rank or status without any “power and authority” should be considered politically insignificant. Susan McKinnon (2001, 67) has pointed out, when discussing Evans-Pritchard’s Nuer ethnographies, that Evans-Pritchard recognized the superior position of so-called dominant (or aristocratic) lineages, but did not explain where this status was derived from. The Nuer aristocrats are said to have “prestige rather than rank and influence rather than power” (Evans-Pritchard 1969, 215). Therefore the hierarchical order of the society is not considered to have any political consequences. Evans-Pritchard acknowledged that status and power do not necessarily coincide, but in such cases the status is structurally insignificant.20

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20 As Jukka Siikala (personal communication) has pointed out, elsewhere, in his work on the divine kingship among the Shilluk of Sudan, Evans-Pritchard (1962, 66-86) does exactly the opposite: he discusses the status of a sacerdotal king, a king who “does not govern”, as the pivot of the Shilluk political structure.
FIGURE 9. Kwawu administrative structure showing the position of the Asenehene as the head of all sub-divisional chiefs from the Asene matriclan.

Legend:
The seat of the office is in brackets below the name of the group. Arrows signify the uncle-nephew relationships.
Hence in the case of Kwawu *Asenehene* and *Adontenhene*, the fact that the indigenous *Asenehene* is senior to the migrant *Adontenhene* should be considered structurally insignificant, and the fact that former swears allegiance to the latter significant. The put it bluntly, the *Asenehene*’s seniority is “symbolic”, whereas the *Adontenhene*’s superiority is “political”. This does not make sense because, as was shown above, the *Asenehene*’s seniority has a lot of political implication, although they are not based on formal authority or power to coerce.

Dumont (1980, 66) defines hierarchy as “the principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole”. He adds that “the view of the whole” is provided by cultural values; in his case religion gave the Indian caste system its unity. Within the whole, ranking is based on oppositions between religious purity and impurity. This view differs from that of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, not only because power and authority are not fundamental to the hierarchy, but also because they are seen as subordinate to the constitutive value. Since purity and thus higher status are not based on power, it follows that the “purest” Brahman priests, who have no secular power, are considered superior to the kings, who are the holders of secular power, although, as Dumont points out, “in fact priesthood submits to power” (ibid., 71-72).

But the Asante chiefs are not like the Brahman priests. They do have powers. It is rather that the power of seniority is very different from the power of an overlord. It is mostly power of persuasion (cf. Clastres 1998, 29-30), which emerges through the concept of respect. As a senior, in normal conditions, a chief has no authority, in a politico-jural sense, over his juniors. For instance, the *Adontenhene* does not command the obedience or force of the Adonten chiefs, but he has their respect, through which he is able to influence them. As signs of respect he receives homage, gifts, and assistance from his junior chiefs. And these are relations that the laws of the kingdom do not back up. Thus, Fortes obviously did not consider these as politico-jural statuses and did not pay attention to them in his account of the Asante political structure. However, if one studies the rights and obligations entailed in these statuses, one can hardly say that they are merely symbolic or ceremonial. Certainly, things like mutual assistance in warfare and litigation are something very political, even in (or precisely in) the conventional sense of the word. What is problematic about these statuses is their segmentary and moral nature, which makes them difficult to accommodate in a structure that is built on the presumption of dichotomies like the familial and politico-jural domain and state and stateless societies.
This theoretical incompatibility does not, of course, make them structurally insignificant, and as has been shown, seniority definitely has political consequences.

Once again, one is able to see the influence of Western notions of politics behind the anthropological definitions of the political. Namely, if the African kingdoms are thought to resemble “the pattern with which we are familiar in the modern nation state” (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1969, 6), then such statuses as uncle and nephew do not seem to fit. For instance, if one were told that the minister of the interior is considered an uncle to the minister of defence and because of that the latter has to assist the former when dealing with the minister of foreign affairs, one would instantly reject such a notion as a joke. But for the Akan chiefs these notions are very important and, indeed, very political, and in this sense the chiefs are nothing like ministers.
5 FORGIVEN AND UNFORGIVEN SINS: NEGOTIATING SENIORITY

When I talked about seniority with the Asante chiefs, I was very often told about how the order of precedence “used to be” and how so-and-so is “really” senior or junior to so-and-so. In these conversations, changes in relations of seniority were usually attributed to some specific historical instances. Such instances are still frequently brought up in court cases between chiefs as important precedents. In order to fully understand how seniority is constructed and contested one has to take into consideration the historical circumstances where these processes take place. Namely, one’s ability to argue for seniority is influenced by the existing relations of authority and power. There are moments when one is more likely to become recognized as the senior. As an example of this I use a judicial process concerning the violation of a taboo, which on the surface involves only the Adontenhene and the Asantehene, the violator and violated, but which has an effect on the hierarchy of the offices of the whole Adonten group. First, in this process certain statuses, which ordinarily are not considered constitutive to the order of precedence among the Adonten chiefs, become important and allow one of the members of the group to assume temporary headship. Second, the violation, or inability to live up to the values of senior status, reconnects the present time to the founding past through genealogies and historical narratives and allows a reconsideration of the principles that constitute the hierarchy. The concept of taboo in the jural framework is the beginning point for understanding this process.

5.1. Taboo and collective responsibility

Fortes’ definition of jural rested largely on that of David Tait (1961, 62), who emphasized the point that jural acts have “the moral backing of the society”. Thus Fortes (1969a, 88-89) argued that jural rights and duties “derive their sanction from the political framework of the society”. In segmentary lineage systems jural responsibilities are fixed on specific individuals (e.g., elders) and groups, but the total framework of lineage and clan relations is presupposed in them (Fortes 1969b, 230). For example, feuding, ostracism, and other such acts of retribution by an offended party are accepted by other members of the society because it is deemed that the offending party has violated norms that involve the society as whole. In
state societies the sanctions are for the most part mediated by specialized legal institutions, but ultimately they too “embody a jural consensus of a society” (Fortes 1969a, 90). Therefore jural norms are said to have public legitimacy in contrast with the private legitimacy of moral norms. Instead of external sanctions, the norms of the latter kind are enforced with “practices of morality or of religion or of etiquette” (ibid., 89). As for the consequences of non-compliance, Fortes saw that a “breach of jural norms disrupts a person’s relationship to society”, whereas an infringement of moral norms has a similar effect on a person’s relationship to individuals (ibid.). In terms of law, or jural custom, this distinction was recognized, for example, by making a division between civil and criminal offences. In the Asante context, Fortes (following Rattray) established that there are two kinds of offences, namely the “household cases” and the “tribal sins”. The former related to rules governing persons and property, and which are preferably arbitrated by the lineage elders, whereas the latter necessarily fell under the jurisdiction of chiefs’ courts (ibid., 155-157).

The “tribal sins”, which I will call taboos (akyiwade, lit. “a thing one turns his/her back to”), are things which are considered to be forbidden by the ancestors and/or the deities of the community and ultimately sanctioned by them. Every community has its own taboos, and it is the responsibility of the ruler to enforce them. Some taboos, for instance clan exogamy, involve the whole kingdom. The most dreadful ones are the “violations of the sanctity of the Golden Stool and offences against the majesty of the king” (ibid., 156). However, it is important to understand that akyiwade does not correspond to the western notion of crime, since taboo encompasses all kinds of normative categories. On the whole, taboos strike “at the very roots of the whole social system”, and thus they are considered offences from “the angle of moral values, sacrilegious in religious terms and lése majesté in the political sphere” (ibid.). If such offences were to be left unpunished by the authorities, the supernatural consequences would not only fall on the offender him/herself but also on the community taken together. Such consequences are believed to be disastrous. As Kurankyi-Taylor (1951, 39-40) has put it, “the land would cease to bear fruit, the animals in the bush would sicken and die, the tribe would decrease in numbers and in power and it would be overwhelmed by its enemies”.

A key to understanding the nature of the sanctions, both jural and supernatural, is the notion of disgrace (aniwu). When a person commits an offence he/she not only brings disgrace upon himself but also upon his/her
community. In this context community can be understood in various ways, for example, as the matrilineal descent group, the polity, or in some cases even the patrilineal nt r ritual division (ibid., 158, 197). As noted before, human communities are seen to exist on three different levels, those occupied by the dead, the living, and the unborn respectively, and the disgrace caused by the living members is seen to extend to all of these levels. Since disgrace is shared by all, it is also in everyone’s interest to do everything possible to avoid it. So, whatever discontents or frictions there might be inside the community, it is crucial not to let them turn into public matters thus making the whole community exposed to the ridicule and judgement of others. As Kurankyi-Taylor noted, “[i]t was considered a disgrace if a grouping or community was unable to settle disputes among its members without the intervention of any outsiders” (ibid., 66). Recognition of this “collectivist feeling” is an important part of a child growing up into a good person (onipa pa). So, ultimately, the whole community (of whatever type or size) is responsible for the upbringing and good behaviour of its members (ibid., 152, 181). However, this is not purely a matter of collective conscience; the traditional courts also enforce the principle of collective responsibility. Throughout Asante history instances are known where the subordinates, friends, relatives, and even superiors of the offender have been held accountable for his/her offence (e.g. McCaskie 1984, 172-173). During the pre-colonial period, in the most severe cases the existence and self-reproducing powers of the entire community were at stake. For example, Rattray (1959, 87) described the punishment for adultery with a wife of the Asantehene as follows, “Not only (it is alleged) were the woman and her paramour killed (…), but the mother, father, and maternal uncle of both parties also suffered death, while all the remaining families of both had to undergo the ceremony known as ‘drinking the gods’, and to swear that they had not connived at the offence”.

This idea is expressed in a number of proverbs, for example, onipa b ne te manmu a ne nkoa ne onipa nyinaa, “one evil doer in the community makes slaves of us all” (Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 158).

This is true even today. For instance, quite recently, a dispute over some missing stool regalia occurred between the Tredehene, who belongs to the Kronti fekuo of Kumase, and his elders. The case was not correctly reported to the Asantehene in the Kumasi Traditional Council and as a result all chiefs of the Kronti fekuo, including their head, the Bantamahene, were ordered to slaughter a sheep each (Asante Tribune Sept. 12 – Sept. 18, 2000).

In “drinking the gods” or “drinking fetish” (nom bosom) a person guarantees his/her promise by drinking water in which some “shrine objects” have been soaked, thus making
Furthermore, in addition to those supernatural agencies that have decreed the taboos and sanction them, the offender is also at risk of receiving punishment from his/her own ancestors who he/she has disgraced. It is believed that some violations are so disgraceful that the ancestors would rather exterminate the community through supernatural sanctions, which are considered to manifest themselves as the “evil fortune” (mmusuo) of the living, than live with the disgrace (Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 192). The extinction of the living members of the community is seen as the end of the community on all three levels since the living members cannot give birth to “unborn” children in whom the ancestral spirits could reincarnate. Those unable to reincarnate are “forever compelled to live in the Asaman forest in the cold dark shadows”, while those ancestors able to reincarnate live in happiness and prosperity. In conclusion, it can be said that the community, whatever is meant by it in each case, is subject to punishment for the offence of its members, whether from supernatural or human agency (ibid., 181-182).

Although a violation of taboo affects all of the violators’ collective affiliations, it is safe to say that the most important are those concerning lineage and clan. In normative terms this means that clansmen are obliged to assist each other in disputes and all forms of jural activities. This responsibility concerns chiefs and elders in particular, because they possess the high status needed in the mediation of jural cases. Thus an officeholder has to be always ready to speak on behalf of his clansman regardless of his/her political allegiance or place of residence. The present Nkoransahene, Nana Agyeman Kudom IV, explained this to me in a following way:

TK: If I am an Asene man living in some other locality than Nkoransa and I have a dispute with the local paramount chief, can I come to you for help?

him/herself vulnerable to a particular deity, which is then able to punish him/her if the promise is not kept (Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 188).

4 Asaman or Asamandow is the “land of the ghosts” or “spirit world” occupied by the ancestors. The ideas concerning its location and nature vary greatly (e.g., McCaskie 1995a, 306-307).

5 Disputes (mansosem) are kept separate from violations of taboos and they are preferably arbitrated by a third party. However, when disputes are brought to chiefs’ courts the process involves swearing an ancestral oath, which makes it a “taboo matter” (e.g., Fortes 1969a, 157-158).
AK IV: Yes, you can. You can come to me or the Amakomhene, or the Akyawkromhene or Kwamohene, or any of the chiefs of the Asene clan.

TK: And you would feel obliged to help me?

AK IV: Yes, I would help you.

TK: What kind of help would that be?

AK IV: Well, first I would try to find out what the misunderstanding is all about and then I would act as a mediator between two parties.

It is also considered a right of the litigator to call a dignitary from the same clan to follow the proceedings of the court, thus making sure that his clansman is getting a fair trial. One chief expressed this idea by saying that “there is always somebody standing behind the court”. Similarly, after an unfavourable verdict, the guilty party can ask a chief or an elder from his/her own abusua to “beg” (sre) for him, so that the judge will be lenient with the odwanefo, “the runaway” (Kuranky-Taylor 1951, 134). A person, regardless of his/her status, who refuses to assist his/her clansman is seen to have behaved disgracefully, and, conversely, a litigator who does not accept the help and advice of his/her clansmen has made him/herself a “worthless person” (onipa hun) and has disgraced those who have offered their help (ibid., 79, 81).

This is the cultural and normative logic behind the principle of collective responsibility among the Asante, which relies on the concept of disgrace and both human and supernatural sanctions. It is obvious that a breach of jural norms has an effect on a person’s status in his/her community. For instance, those royals, who have been found guilty of akyiwade practically become ineligible for the office(s) of the community because they have tried to “bring disaster” on their community (ibid., 181-182). Since taboos cover all normative categories of the society, the penalties for the violators cover them as well. Firstly, the violator will be punished for his/her transgressions against the polity, or the “jural consensus of the society”, by the legal institutions, but, secondly, through his/her transgression he/she has also made the members of his/her community liable and, consequently, he/she will receive a moral punishment from them. As the following example will show, a violation of taboo and its castigatory
consequences entails a renegotiation of statuses, which goes beyond demotions or promotions by an external authority.

5.2 “Act of treason”

Suing the Asantehene is possible only outside the traditional courts. Customarily, there is no way of taking legal action against the Asantehene: one can merely “beg” the Asantehene to reconsider his decisions or actions through an intermediary, who is usually a high-ranking officeholder. Nowadays, Asante chiefs are expected to submit their disputes to arbitration in the Asanteman Council, presided over by the Asantehene; they are not expected to take them to the Regional House of Chiefs or Ghanaian courts, which do not recognize the Asantehene as the supreme arbiter. However, some chiefs have openly defied this expectation. Principal among them has been the present Adontenhene, Nana Agyeman Nkwantabisa III, who has brought two lawsuits against the Asantehene in the Kumasi High Court. The matters at stake in the actual court cases have been discussed extensively elsewhere (see Berry 2001, 87-92), so there is no need to go into detail here. Basically, it has been a dispute over two tracts of land in the environs of Kumase: in Baaman, which is located close to the Accra road, and in Aputuogya on the road to Lake Bosomtwe. In both cases the Adontenhene

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6 At the present time in Kumase there are two separate councils: the Kumasi Traditional Council, which consists of the divisional chiefs of the capital and deals with the internal affairs of Kumase, and the Asanteman Council, which consists of the paramount chiefs of the kingdom and decides on matters of larger national interest. Both councils are presided over by the Asantehene. The Traditional Council is a “statutory body” recognized by the Ghana government, whereas the Asanteman Council is a “traditional body”, which only has arbitrary rights. The latter is the successor of the Asantemanhyiamu of the pre-colonial period, which was “restored” by the British as the Ashanti Confederacy Council in 1935. In terms of the national law of Ghana, no one can be forced to defend his/her case in the Asanteman Council. However, since litigation in the Asanteman Council is voluntary, its decisions are not appealable, unless there is evidence of foul play.

7 After the independence of Ghana, Regional Houses of Chiefs were set up for solving disputes over offices and land. They are comprised of the paramount chiefs of the administrative regions and they handle appeals from the Traditional Councils of the paramountcies. In the Chieftaincy Act 370 of 1971 the National House of Chiefs was created in order to take appeals from the regional level and also to keep a national register of chiefs. Appeals from the National House of Chiefs go to the Supreme Court of Ghana.

8 Newspaper articles about the cases (e.g., Asante Tribune Oct. 3 – Oct. 9, 2000) refer to a land case in Amaape instead of Baaman. Sara Berry (2001, 101-102), who has studied the High Court records and discussed the cases with the Adontenhene, does not mention
maintained that his ancestors had controlled the lands in question even before the time of Osei Tutu and the foundation of the Asante kingdom, and thus the Golden Stool has no legitimate right over them. The quarrelling had been going on, at least in the latter case, ever since the mid-1970’s, but the Adontenhene took the matter to the High Court only in 1996 (ibid.). This was considered akyiwade, a sacrilege and a revolt against the Golden Stool, and therefore the late Asantehene, Opoku Ware II, banished the Adontenhene from the palace, and the Amakomhene took his place as the head of the Adonten fekuo. However, after the death of Opoku Ware in 1999, his successor Asantehene Osei Tutu II appealed to the Asante people and told them to withdraw all stool and land disputes from the courts and bring them to him, as he would find a way of “solving them amicably”. His call was heard and a great number of cases were pulled out from the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs as well as the Ghanaian courts and taken to the Asanteman Council. The Adontenhene’s case was also taken under re-examination and after one year or so the Adontenhene was re-instated and the dispute concerning the land was to be resolved on a later date by the Asantehene. It was said that the breach between the Adontenhene and the Asantehene had taken 23 years, and the Adontenhene “was therefore ordered to slaughter 23 sheep to purify the Golden Stool” (Kumasi Mail Aug. 29 – Sept. 4, 2000). The Adontenhene humbly obeyed the order and afterwards praised the Asantehene for having “the wisdom of King Solomon” (ibid.).

However, before a full settlement was reached some of the members of the Asanteman Council had to be convinced to accept the purification offered by the Adontenhene. Many of them considered his lawsuit against the Golden Stool to have been “the biggest taboo in the Asante history” and “an act of treason”, and hence the Adontenhene should have been banished permanently. The biggest obstacle had been the opinion of the Adonten group. A couple of months before the Asantehene’s decision some of his linguists had asked them to express their views on the matter. A local newspaper reported that

[T]he Adonten group was not prepared to work with the Adontenhene because he, Adontenhene, did not seek their advice before suing the Golden Stool and the late Asantehene. They said that the crime the Adontenhene has committed was unprecedented in

Amaape. In the Adonten enquiry “Aputuagya”, “Amapem”, and “Barman” are listed among the Adontenhene’s villages (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/128a).
Asante history and for that matter the Adonten group of which Nkoranzahene is the most important figure must be pacified before the case was entertained (ibid.).

A new attempt to persuade the Adonten fekuo to follow its leader was made some weeks later, but the answer was that “they were not prepared to budge an inch” (ibid.). In response, the Asantehene accused some of his chiefs of inconsistency in handling the case. Why had they backed up his decision of re-examining the Adontenhene’s case in the first place, if they were not ready to live with the decision?

He told the chiefs: that in the Asante custom when one is asked to slaughter a sheep it presupposes that whatever sin he had committed would be for given [sic].

“How then do you ask the Adontenhene to slaughter 23 sheep and come out to state that his sins cannot be forgiven. This is unheard of. If you really know that the crime the Adontenhene had committed was so grievous that he could not be forgiven why did you not tell him right in the face that his sins could not be forgiven.” (Ibid.; italics in the original).

In spite of the opposition of some of his chiefs the Asantehene had passed his judgment and informed the Council that “whatever sins the Adontenhene has committed have been forgiven” (ibid.). Roughly a month later, in a meeting the former outcast was taken back to the ranks of the Kumasi Traditional Council as he himself “accompanied by family members and friends clad in white presented a sheep and drinks to the Asantehene in appreciation of Otumfuo’s benevolence” (Asante Tribune Oct. 3 – Oct. 9, 2000). The Adontenhene had now taken back his place as one of Asantehene’s councillors and the relations between the two litigants could be patched up, but the brothers of the Adonten group were still waiting for more to come. To them the Adontenhene’s “sins” against the Golden Stool might have been absolved, but those against his clansmen remained to be expiated. When I left Ghana in April 2001, things were still in a deadlock and there was no indication of any quick settlement.
5.3 Embarrassments and punishments

Some aspects of the case at hand have a long history involving matters that are exceedingly complex. It is not possible to know every single nuance of the case. But two features of the case illustrate efficiently how the hierarchy within the group is renegotiated. First, there is the position of Nkoransa in the court case as a son of the Asantehene, and second, there are the ways in which the position of Adonten as the head of the group is being questioned by Amakom and other members of the group. Although I discuss these aspects separately, they have a lot in common. In both cases the reassessment of one’s status takes place in a specific relation or situation. Moreover, the reassessment is supported by arguments in which the present relationships are considered to stand for relationships in the past.

5.3.1 Father and son

When I took up the Adontenhene’s court case in a discussion with the Amakomhene, he complained about how “this present Adontenhene has caused a lot of embarrassment to all of us”. According to him the Adonten group had done all that it could in order to protect the Adontenhene from banishment:

When he decided to take the case against Otumfuo to the High Court, we all advised him, as he is our senior brother, not to do it, but he would not listen. We even asked the Nkoransahene to go and beg his father [the Asantehene] on behalf of the Adontenhene, but he embarrassed us all by saying that he has not asked anybody to beg for him.

What is striking here is the position of the Nkoransahene. In the newspaper article cited above he is described as “the most important figure” in the Adonten group and the Amakomhene explains how he was elected as the spokesman for the whole group. This can be explained by the patrilateral link between the ruling Asene lineage of Nkoransa and the ruling Oyoko lineage of Kumase. The traditions of Nkoransa have it that the first Nkoransahene was the first son of the first wife of Osei Tutu (see Figure 10). My informants in Kumase see him as the son of the second Asantehene, Opoku Ware, but the father-son relationship itself is acknowledged by
everyone. Hence the Nkoransahene addresses the Asantehene as his father (agya, pl. agyanom) and the queen mother, the Nkoransahemaa, addresses him as her husband (kunu, pl. akununom). Correspondingly, the Nkoransahene is considered a son (ba barima, pl. mma mmarima) to the Asantehene and the queen mother is considered to be his wife (yere, pl. ayerenom). As a result, the relations between the paramount offices of Nkoransa and Kumase and their respective occupants are considered particularly close and intimate, analogous to those within the immediate family of a single person. When Fortes (1962, 268) described the relationship between a father and his children among the Asante he emphasized the father’s lack of legal authority. Affection, unreservedness, and lack of formal rules also characterize the relationship between the Nkoransahene and the Asantehene. The following is an excerpt from an interview with the Nkoransahene:

TK: You are a member of the Asanteman Council and thus swear an oath of allegiance to Otumfuo. This oath brings certain responsibilities. Are there some other responsibilities or rights that follow from the fact that you are also father and son?

AK IV: Yes. I have some customary privileges that the other paramount chiefs do not have.

TK: Can you give me an example?

AK IV: It is difficult to pinpoint anything, but in the Asantehene’s court the Nkoransahene is treated differently, with more respect.

I can ask anything from Otumfuo. For example, the last time I went to him, (...) I asked for his ntahera horns⁹ to follow me where I was going, and I got them. Others cannot do that. I cannot be denied anything that I ask from him and I can go to him anytime at all.

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⁹ Ntahera is a horn made out of elephant’s tusk. The horn blowers form a part of an officeholder’s retinue and they play a horn call specific to their chief (see Rattray 1929).
I am also a son to Dwaben. I can go to the Dwabenhenene in the same way.\textsuperscript{10}

This clearly has an effect on his status. In terms of the court case at hand, the matrilineal juniority of Nkoransa, as a younger branch of Amakom, is superseded by the closer patrilateral relationship to the Asantehene, and thus in this situation he is seen as the head of the group. The category of uncle > nephew is considered less important in defining seniority in these circumstances. Matrilineally, as a brother of the Adontenhene, the Nkoransahene shares the collective responsibility for the violation of the former, but patrilaterally, as a son of the Asantehene, he is considered the most likely to receive absolution. So, in terms of the Adonten group’s relationship to the superior office, the Nkoransahene is able to claim precedence by referring to his patrilateral status as a son to the Asantehene. In a very interesting way his (junior) position in one relation of precedence has an effect on his position in another.

What has to be pointed out is that the ways in which these kin relations are established and reinforced have their own distinctive logic. “Fatherhood”, “husbandhood”, or anything else like that does not follow directly from genealogical rules. The nature of the relationship does not depend on any real or classificatory kin relation between the persons in the present. On the contrary, the relationships are grounded on the idea that the present relationship stands for an “original” one, which once existed between their great predecessors. To paraphrase Sahlins, one could call them founding relationships. Certainly, the notion of kinship between offices and their occupants is partly based on what is perceived as “real” mothering, fathering, and marriages in the past, performed by their ancestors, and hence these ties are considered eternal and unbreakable. In the past, there have been disagreements between the two offices, but, as the Nkoransahene puts it, “what never changes is the fact that we are father and son”. The relationship is reproduced by reference to a chain of events: the relationship between the Nkoransahene and the Asantehene is such because Osei Tutu married Afua Sapon who gave birth to Bafo Pim, whose sisters gave birth to so-and-so, and so forth. To employ Valerio Valeri’s (1990, 157) terminology, the present relation stands for the past relation metonymically, because they both belong to the same syntagmatic chain.

\textsuperscript{10} An Asante chieftdom located roughly 30 kilometres northwest from Kumase. Dwaben is ruled by an Oyoko lineage and it is considered to be a member of the original group of chiefdoms that founded the Asante kingdom (e.g. Rattray 1929, 169-197).
Agyeman Kudom IV can stand for Bafo Pim and Osei Tutu II can stand for Osei Tutu because of the system of positional succession. Hence one can say that in the legitimate construction of the relationship the accepted genealogies of ruling lineages of both Nkoransa and Kumase, as representations of the historical past, give to it its syntagmatic component. A great variety of such cases of genealogical connections between the ruling lineages of Amakom and Kumase can be traced (see Figure 10), but still they have not come to constitute political relationships that are considered similar as that between Nkoransa and Kumase. Why is this so? The syntagmatic component alone is not enough for the construction of such relationships.

As mentioned earlier, those chiefs, from whose lineages the successive Asantehene have married, are considered wives to the Asantehene. On ceremonial occasions these chiefs may present “wifely” gifts to the Asantehene, for instance, foodstuffs or a grinding stone that denotes “fealty and subordination, in the way of the wife to the husband” (McCaskie 1995a, 146). Correspondingly, the Asantehene gives “chop money” (akwanhoma) to the chiefs in a similar manner as a husband is expected to give to a wife as her daily allowance. In contrast, chiefs have married from the Asantehene’s matrilineage, but the Asantehene calls none of them as his husband. Furthermore, it is totally unthinkable that the Asantehene would bring grinding stones to these chiefs and would collect “chop money” from them. Some of these chiefs have, of course, been fathers to the Asantehene. For instance, Asantehene Opoku Ware was a product of a leviratic marriage between Nyako Kusi Amoa, the first queen mother of Asante, and Amakomhene Adu Panin and his two younger brothers Adu Manu and Adu Mensa (see Figure 10). Hence it is often said that Opoku Ware had “three fathers”. This genealogical relation is widely known and it is also commemorated by the notion that the Asantehene has “three great oaths” (ntam k s mme nsa). But still, the Amakomhene does not usually refer to the Asantehene as his son. Neither does he think that he has liberties in his relationship to the Asantehene in a same way as the Nkoransahene does.

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11 “Chopping” means eating in Ghanaian English. See Clark (1994, 344-348) for the meaning of “chop money” in marriage and opposite sex relations in general.

12 McCaskie (1995a, 313) has discussed the origin and meaning of the Asantehene’s oaths.
As was seen in the relationship between the present Asantehene and the Nkoransahene it clearly exemplifies some rules or norms about father-child relations: their unreserved but yet hierarchical relationship is analogous to that which is thought to have existed between Osei Tutu and Bafo Pim in the past. Thus the relation to the past is paradigmatic – it instantiates a rule or principle (Valeri 1990, 157-161). The present relation stands for the past one metaphorically: it shows the analogy between two relationships, which are not only temporally, but also qualitatively, distinct, namely that of father and son and that of overlord and subordinate. Since among the Asante “wifehood” and “sonhood” connote faithfulness and subordination, it is more difficult to metaphorically link a past wife or son to a superior
officeholder of the present time even though the syntagmatic component allows that. As the Asantehene is the overlord of the Amakomhene, the metaphor of the former as a wife or son does not illuminate any rule or principle through analogy and hence such notion lacks political meaning. In other words, any such relationship is more difficult to construct and maintain since it lacks a paradigmatic component. And this, I argue, is the key for understanding why, from the array of kin relations represented in Figure 10, some are brought up and maintained as politically meaningful and some are considered more as instances of marrying or fathering.

The Asante chiefs themselves undoubtedly understand the relativity of the kinship terminology used in the political context and its connectedness to the contemporary power relations with all situational features. For example, regarding the hierarchical aspect of the matrilineal kinship relation between Nkoransa and Amakom the present Nkoransahene told me the following:

TK: Is the Amakomhene your brother or your uncle?

AK IV: This is a matter of dispute, because he can be both. In fact, there are some people here, who would even say that I am the uncle and he is the nephew. But, personally, I think that he is my uncle.

However, this sort of speculation could not take place, if both chiefs did not belong to the same clan and would not (claim to) know the genealogical links between their lineages. The notion that they are of “one blood” or “from the same mother” is considered unquestionable: that is the core principle that unites them (with others) into one whole, which can be divided into different parts. So, even though the genealogies are full of relationships, which can be brought up in order to legitimate seniority, juniority, or equality, they also set the limits for one’s claims. Although the relatedness itself can also be denied and contested, it is still more a matter of fixed and indisputable status, whereas seniority, the hierarchical aspect of the kinship relation, is clearly more flexible and open to renegotiation. To put it in simple terms, a person has to be a relative first before he/she can be considered a senior relative.
5.3.2 The junior looking after the senior

Another very important aspect of the court case is the Amakomhene’s historical seniority and contemporary juniority to the Adontenhene. The Amakomhene was originally made the Adontenhene explicitly because he was the “firstborn”. Therefore the principle or rule that the present relations within the Adonten group “should” instantiate is that the older is the senior. But, as mentioned above, the Amakom traditions hold that the chief of Amakom later lost the title of Adontenhene to the chief of Eduabin due to old age and/or ill health. So, the rule was changed, and thus the syntagmatic chain between the relationships of the past and present is not merely constructed of events in which the same principle is repeated. However, in general terms, the rule itself is not invalidated, since Amakom is still senior to the rest because it is older than the rest. Hence Amakom is junior to Adonten according to a rule that is different from the rule that makes Antoa, Akyawkrom, and Kwamo junior to Amakom. This causes a contradiction between Amakom’s historical status as the “firstborn” and its administrative status as the “second in command” even though both statuses have their legitimation in the past. To put it in theoretical terms, the paradigmatic components of different relationships within the same group seem to contradict each other. Here the inconsistency is not reconciled by a division of space like in the case of the Kwawu chiefs. Attempts to resolve this contradiction are made by narrative references to past events, which are seen to legitimate change instead of continuity.

When I discussed the recent dispute between the Adontenhene and the Asantehene with the present Amakomhene, he compared it with a case that had taken place around 1765. Back then Adontenhene Amankwaa Osei had been charged of engaging in a liaison with and impregnating a widow of the late Asantehene Kusi Obodom.13 However, instead of facing his prosecutors, and most probably a prolonged and painful death,14 Amankwaa

13 Customarily, the heir of the deceased person inherits his widow(s) (kunafo, pl. akunafo) unless the marriage is ritually called off (Rattray 1959, 173-174). The decisions made in this situation depend largely on the supposed will of the deceased who has now become an ancestor. An heir who rejects his predecessor’s widow or a widow who remarries against the supposed will of the deceased is seen to put him/herself at risk of getting punished by the deceased’s ancestral spirit (Rattray 1929, 28-29).

14 Those who were found guilty of adultery with the wives of the Asantehene were killed in so-called at per ritual (usually translated as “the dance of death”), which involved a slowly progressing dismemberment of the offender’s body (Rattray 1959, 87-89). McCaskie (1995a, 254-255) has analysed the “performative structuration” of at per.
Osei decided to take his own life (see McCaskie 1995a, 243). The Amakomhene described to me how his predecessor had tried to save the life of his senior brother in a similar manner as he himself had tried to help the present Adontenhene. According to his recollection:

The Amakomhene went to him [the Adontenhene] and told him that they would have to go and plead the Asantehene. When the time came to go to Otumfuo, the Amakomhene went there only to find out that the Adontenhene had committed suicide. So, afterwards, instead of restoring the Amakomhene to his old position as the leader of the Adonten group, Otumfuo punished us too and took away two of my villages. You see, Otumfuo can do anything he wants to you. He has taken away so many of my villages and given them to his wives.

Here the Amakomhene comes to the possibility of using a historical precedent to legitimate change. Although the hierarchy is reproduced – Adonten, nonetheless, remains senior to Amakom – the idea of change is present. As Valeri (1990, 190) has pointed out, even in those cases where a historical narrative constitutes a precedent for already established practices, it still “implies a choice between alternatives”. In this case the other alternative would have had a precedent of its own: Amakomhene Akosa Yiadom could not lead his brothers and follow his overlord to war and therefore the chief of Eduabin took his place, proved his abilities, and was thus allowed to continue as the leader of the Adonten group. Consequently, the change of rules is justified by failure of the senior chief to live up to his senior status. Apparently, the juniors perceive the failures of seniors (in front of superiors) as charters for possible legitimate change, which may take place during a period of liminal existence between the breakdown and reconstitution of the hierarchy. In the Amakomhene’s case the conflict between two incompatible statuses, as the older but junior, (re)surfaces in a situation, where the Adontenhene, as the younger but senior, fails and becomes a burden to the junior. The hierarchy becomes renegotiable in situations where the analogy between two relationships, namely elder and younger brother and group leader and his deputy, becomes void.

However, in Osei Amankwaa’s case the junior is forced to share the collective punishment and the disgrace caused by the violation of taboo without a reward, which another precedent would have legitimated. The analogy between Osei Amankwaa and the present Adontenhene suggests
that now would be a moment when the contradiction of statuses in the group could be resolved. So, it seems that the dilemma of Amakom in its historical relationship to Eduabin (or Adonten) is that history does not repeat itself in a desired way: the omissions of the successive Adontenhene do not result in a similar outcome as had initially been the case with the Amakomhene. For Adonten there is no dilemma, since according to their traditions their seniority is justified by their heroic deeds in “The Ghost’s War” and not in Akosa Yiadom’s frailty.

An important ramification of the Amankwaa Osei’s case is that it has enabled the members of the Adonten group to question the Adontenhene as the rightful successor of the first ruler, Aduonin Pim. Namely, after the death of Amankwaa Osei the Adonten stool itself was confiscated by Asantehene Osei Kwadwo. He also cancelled (pa din) the succession rights of the Asene abusua of Agyeiwaa Badu in Eduabin, in which the office was originally vested, and gave them to another lineage of the Asene clan in the village of Baaman (McCaskie 1995a, 243-244). For the other members of the Adonten group this has meant that the relationship between the Adontenhene’s office and its incumbent had to be re-evaluated. The Nkoransahene described how he saw what had happened in the aftermath of the whole episode:

He [Amankwaa Osei] killed himself before he could stand trial. But all of us were called and we all had to go there [Kumase]. Otumfuo took the Adonten stool away from the family and gave it to somebody else who was not even a royal. So, strictly speaking, the Adontenhene is not our cousin anymore.

Adonten traditions do not mention Amankwaa Osei’s transgression or suicide and also do not acknowledge any change in the line of succession. It is merely stated that “Nana Amankwah Osei was succeeded on the stool by his nephew Nana Kwarteng Pete in the reign of Asantehene Osei Kwame” (IAS/AS 95). However, the historical narratives of the Amakomhene and the Nkoransahene about Osei Amankwaa contest the accuracy of the Adonten

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15 A comparable instance took place about 1785, when Amankwaa Osei’s successor, Kwaaten Pete, was unable to account for a sum of gold dust (sika futuro) missing from the state assets during his stewardship of the “great chest” (adaka kese). In addition to the compensations paid by the Adontenhene himself, the Amakomhene, Kwamohene, and the Adausenahene (who is the Nifahene of the Antoahene) were held collectively responsible and had to give up some of their lands and subjects in order to come up with their debts to the Asantehene (McCaskie 1984, 173).
genealogy and ultimately the relatedness between the Adontenhene and others. The relatedness between the offices is not denied, but the relationship between the “illegitimate occupants” of the Adonten stool and the “legitimate occupants” of the other stools is contested. This implies that the disgraceful behaviour of those Adontenhene, who have occupied the stool during the post-Osei Amankwaa period, has does not actually concern the other chiefs of the group. Since the present Adontenhene is not “really” a relative, then also the disgrace and collective responsibility should not “really” fall upon the other Adonten chiefs.

The principles that constitute the order of precedence are multiple. In case of the father-son relationship between the Nkoransahene and the Asantehene affecting the uncle-nephew relationship between the Amakomhene and the Nkoransahene, this change could be called situational. In relations to the Asantehene the status as his son enables the Nkoransahene to take precedence over other Adonten chiefs. In the relationship between Amakom and Adonten, there is a strive for permanent change, which actualizes in circumstances, where hierarchal order is temporarily dissolved as result of a breach of jural norms. Kinship relations between chiefly offices are based partly on genealogical notions of “real” kinship, and they are given political meaning when a “kinship relation” is able to stand metaphorically for a “political relation”. Thus, one is able to see how seniority is not defined merely through a conceptual interplay of different asymmetrical categories, but it is also influenced by relations of authority and power. To put it bluntly, the powerful ones tend to be uncles and fathers more often nephews and sons. However, as is evident in the above, these relations are not established arbitrarily. One cannot claim seniority without reference to a recognized genealogical relation and/or a historical precedent. And because of this, the past continues in the circulating discourse of the present.
6 THE REBELLIOUS SON AND THE LEOPARD: THE POLITICAL SYMBOLISM OF KINSHIP

As mentioned earlier, those who have subscribed to the ideological or political definitions of descent have pointed out that the power of the “descent dogma” lies in its flexibility – it seems to give room for all sorts of political manoeuvrings. In this chapter I discuss further how and why the ideology of kinship and descent is used as a justification for conduct. In the example given below a breach of allegiance is explained in terms of kinship, and these explanations are used to legitimate warfare by referring to the right order of things in society and nature. Furthermore, associating seemingly unconnected events with war also increases the potential to create new analogies, which describe the enemy as especially “deviant” or “disturbing” and thus confirm certain political actions. These associations are formed through inter-linkages between different symbolic systems. My example is the war between the Kumase based central authority and the chiefdom of Nkoransa in 1892-1893. It has an important place in the political history of Asante because it was the last rebellion in pre-colonial Asante that was suppressed by force of arms. But more importantly, the Asante themselves remember it as a war between kinsmen. It is still talked about as a disagreement between a rebellious son and his firm father, in which uncles and brothers were caught in between.

6.1 From obedient son to rebellious son

As noted above, the first Nkoransahene Bafo Pim had been the main supporter of Asantehene Opoku Ware in his campaign against the chiefdom of Takyiman. Traditions from both Nkoransa and Takyiman have it that the war was a direct consequence of a ruthless plot by Bafo Pim, who was seeking to remove the rich and powerful Takyimanhene, Ameyaw Kwaakye. To the Takyiman people these events meant the fall of their ancient Bono kingdom, which was considered to be the main contender for Asante might at the time, whereas for the Nkoransa people it was the foundation of their own chiefdom and establishment as the major Asante security post in the north. There are several published accounts of the Asante conquest of Takyiman (e.g., Meyerowitz 1952, 36-44), but below I give a shorter version of the tradition that I collected from Nkoransa.
The Takyiman royals used to be very rich. In fact, at that time, they were the richest in the whole country. They are not that rich anymore, but still, even nowadays, they have a lot of gold. I know all this because my mother has visited them and seen some of the gold with her own eyes and she told me about it. When Bafo Pim visited Otumfoo in Kumase, he used to pass through Takyiman. So, one time, he went to greet the Takyimanhene and told him: “I am going to Kumase to see my father. Is there any message that you would like me to give him?” The Takyimanhene gave him some gold to be given to Otumfoo. Bafo Pim thanked him and continued his journey to Kumase. In Kumase when he met Otumfoo, he did not give him the gold. He kept it for himself. Instead, he told Otumfoo that the Takyimanhene has sent an important message for him. When Otumfoo asked what the message was, Bafo Pim gave him a flint stone, a handkerchief, and some gunpowder and said that these are from the Takyimanhene. When you give someone a flint stone, a handkerchief, and gunpowder you are sending a message. It means: Prepare for war! So, when Otumfoo received these items, he thought: “Oh! Is the Takyimanhene going to fight me?” That is when he decided to attack first and he conquered them and took their gold.

Most of the Takyiman people fled to the north-western chiefdoms of Sampa and Gyaman, while their chief was captured, taken to Kumase and later executed. Their territory was redistributed so that the Nkoransahene was given most of it, while certain Kumase officeholders were given some parts to look after (hwe so) for the Asantehene. The land on which the chiefdom of Takyiman is currently located was given to them later, when the people returned from the refuge and “begged” land from the Asantehene. The old site of the capital of Takyiman is now on Nkoransa lands. About the motives concerning the redistribution of Takyiman lands the present Nkoransahene said the following:

TK: Did Otumfoo give the conquered lands to Bafo Pim because he was his son?

AK IV: The lands were given to Bafo Pim because he was a son to the Asantehene and because the Asantehene knew that he could trust him.
Nkoransa has been a buffer zone between Asante and the north. Over here we could stop any possible intrusion from the north, and this place also served as a platform for launching attacks to the north.

Afterwards Bafo waged wars against his northern neighbours and further expanded the territory of Nkoransa. Since then, the local traditions portray the Nkoransa chiefs as staunch allies of Kumase, who took part in the ensuing wars of expansion (e.g., Goody & Boateng 1965, 176-178). Kumase-Nkoransa relations are said to have been particularly warm during the reign of Asantehene Kofi Kakari (1867-1873), who awarded the Nkoransahene with some pieces of regalia made out of gold, which allegedly were “beyond the rank of the King of Nkoranza, and which he was not privileged to use” (PRO CO 879/39a). Kofi Kakari was deposed after the unsuccessful coastal campaign of 1873-1874, which led to the destruction of Kumase by the British troops, but he was able to make a bid for the Golden Stool once again after his successor, Asantehene Mensa Bonsu, had been deposed in 1883. However, he lost the contest to Kwaku Dua Kuma who was installed as Asantehene in 1884, but whose reign lasted for only 44 days, after which he died of smallpox, although there are allegations that Kofi Kakari had poisoned him. Just two weeks after that Kofi Kakari himself died. The official cause of death was dysentery, but it soon became publicly known that he had been put to death as punishment for killing his opponent (Wilks 1975, 560). The kingdom was now plunged into a murderous civil conflict between the supporters of two rival candidates for kingship, namely Agyeman Prempe and Yaw Twereboanna. Nkoransa remained neutral (PRO CO 879/39a).

Agyeman Prempe came out victorious and in 1888 he called Nkoransahene Kwasi Poku to come to Kumase to “drink fetish” with him. Apparently, his loyalty to Kumase had been doubted since some of Prempe’s adversaries who were on the run had found their way to Nkoransa. Poku replied that there was no need to question his allegiance and to convince Prempe he promised to recover all of those areas in the north that

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1 Takyiman traditions claim that a Nkoransahene called Wiafe revolted against Asantehene Osei Bonsu about 1810-1811. The Asantehene suppressed the revolt and he was assisted by Takyiman forces who also captured the Nkoransahene. Afterwards, the Asantehene demanded that the prisoner should be given over to him, but the “Techimanhene however, being wistful of avenging the betrayal of his ancestors and their Bono kingdom by the ancestor of Nkoranzahene, refused the demand of Asantehene and himself executed Nkoranzahene” (PRO CO 96 8/3/12). Nkoransa traditions do not mention this.
had seceded from Asante after 1874. Prempe was satisfied and “presented Opoku with a gold sword and other decorations” (ibid.). Furthermore, Poku waged war against one of Prempe’s major enemies, namely the rebellious Mamponhene Owusu Sekyere II, who was defeated, and “part of the trophies captured by the Nkoranzas were on their way to Kumase” (ibid.). It is also said that earlier the Mamponhene had requested assistance against Prempe, but the Nkoransahene refused him expressly because he could not fight against his father (Goody & Boateng 1965, 169). After the death of Kwasi Poku,² Kofi Fa was put on the Nkoransa stool and when asked to come to Kumase to take an oath of allegiance to the Asantehene he refused and stated that “they should be better friends apart”. In Kumase this was interpreted as an open rebellion “and so Prempe determined to reduce the independence of Nkoransa by force of arms and declared war against that country about the middle 1892” (PRO CO 879/39a).³

6.2 Living without father

Modern historiography, relying mainly on external sources, traces the cause of the war to differing commercial interests of the core (Kumase) and periphery (Nkoransa). Already before the reign of Kwasi Poku the level of tribute collected from the market at Kintampo by the Asantehene had been a cause of worry to the Nkoransahene who controlled the town.⁴ More recently, the main concern of Kofi Fa and his supporters was the Kumase administration’s decision to favour the growth of Wankyi market at the

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² What actually happened to Kwasi Poku seems to be a matter of dispute. G. E. Ferguson stated that he died of sickness and/or old age (PRO CO 879/39a). Tradition collected by Boateng asserts that he committed suicide along with some other Nkoransa royals because he was about to get deposed (Goody & Boateng 1965, 179) Rattray’s informants claimed that he was deposed after he had had his Gyaasehene, Adontenhene, and the queen mother’s husband killed (RAI MS 107: 9). Similarly, his reign has been dated variably. Ferguson claims that he was already on the stool during the title race between Kwaku Dua Kuma and Kofi Kakari (PRO CO 879/39a), whereas Ivor Wilks (1975, 296) says that he was installed sometime between 1885 and 1888.

³ The authoritative account of the war is a memorandum prepared by G. E. Ferguson (PRO CO 879/39a), who was the principal organizer of British reconnaissance operations in northern Asante at the time. See Arhin (1970) for the published, but abbreviated, version of the memorandum. There is also other useful correspondence by both Europeans and Africans who visited Nkoransa and its environs during the hostilities.

⁴ According to data gathered by Rattray, Nkoransa paid one third of the tolls collected from Kintampo market to the Asantehene. The tolls were paid in cowries (RAI MS 107: 9).
expense of Kintampo, which posed a major threat to the economy of Nkoransa (e.g., Lewin 1978, 107-108; 169-170). Also the intensification of German and French commercial interests in the area was a major concern for the British, who sought to strengthen their ties with Nkoransa (PRO CO 879/39b), which understandably must have alarmed the Kumase administration.

The chiefs and people whom I talked to were not so much concerned with the historical details. There prevailed a consensus on how Nkoransa had instigated the war and was brought back in line by the Asantehene. This applied to Nkoransa itself also. During my fieldwork Nkoransa was a member state of the Asanteman and on excellent terms with Kumase. The people that I spoke with, with a few exceptions, did not share the anti-Asante sentiment common in some of the neighbouring chiefdoms. Most importantly, from the point of view of my informants, the war had been essentially a break between kinsmen. A son had been disrespectful to his father. “The son got too proud, he thought he could live without his father”, was a very typical assessment of the cause of the war, although most people could not really explain how this pride manifested itself in practical terms. In 1922 Kwasi Apea Nuama, the Akyeamehene of Kumase, described the events preceding the war:

When Mensa Bonsu, King of Ashanti, was destooled, Prempeh sent a linguist by name of Kweku Coomassie to call the Omanhene of Nkoranza. The Omanhene sent a messenger to tell Prempeh what ornaments he was bringing to Coomassie. This was because on one occasion he came to Coomassie with a state umbrella and the Omanhin of Manpon [sic] seeing this, destroyed it. The reason being that he, Mampon, was head nifahene, and that he had not got such a good umbrella as Nkoranza had. The Ornaments were Gold Sandals, Gold Umbrella, Tiger skins to cover his drums, Gold Hat and certain villages [?]. Prempeh would not allow him to have the gold hat and Nkoranza did not agree and refused to come. He defied

5 Mamponhene is the Nifahene, commander of the right wing, in the Asante army. Although Nkoransa belongs to the Adonten, the main body, on public occasions, like durbars, the Adonten chiefs sit with Nifa chiefs. When entering the meetings of the Asanteman Council, the Nifa chiefs are led by the Mamponhene and followed by Edwesohene, Agonahene, and Nkoransahene in this order. As the Nkoransahene himself put it: “Militarily I belong to Adonten, administratively I belong to Nifa”. So, in this sense Mamponhene can claim seniority to Nkoransahene, and thus a junior chief bringing excessive regalia to a public gathering can be said to have behaved disrespectfully.
Prempeh and said he would not serve him anymore, and he killed some of his subjects, who were trading in Kintampo. Prempeh called his Elders and said that he would fight against Nkoranza (PRAAD ARG 1/6/5/1/41a).

Throughout the whole conflict Kofi Fa sought protection from the Gold Coast government and military assistance from the other northern chiefdoms. Early on, he had “invested in the castle” (koto aban mu) by sending some ivory and gold dust to the governor and expected this to guarantee Nkoransa’s safety (PRO CO 879/39a). A more important source of support was a union between “the fetish priest of Kraki and the confederate Kings”. It was a coalition formed under the spiritual leadership of a deity called Dente, who had its main shrine in Kete Krakye (or Krakyekrom), a town on the eastern shore of the Volta River. Dente had been known as a powerful god throughout the area for sometime, for instance, Ferguson noted that requests were “made to it from Ashanti and surrounding countries in matters relating to fetish and religion, to divination and charms, teleology, as well as in health, wealth, and disease” (ibid.). Its reputation as a war god was even more enhanced, when it became known publicly that Dente’s priest (bosomfo) had prophesised the downfall Kumase in 1874. Subsequent to the war Krakye had allied with those Asante chiefdoms that sought to secede from the Asanteman. Principal among them were Dwaben and Nsuta, both recognized to have been among the founders of the kingdom, but which Kumase also managed to put down. Later on, after the civil war and Prempe’s installation many of the refugee chiefs and their supporters found a safe haven in Krakye or in Atebubu, which was the major Akan chiefdom in the coalition. Krakye people

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6 The actual shrine was located in a cave above the river, from which Dente was heard to speak. In late 1894 its priest Kwasi Gyantrubi was executed and the shrine was destroyed by the Germans (Maier 1981, 230), but apparently it was re-established rather quickly since Rattray (1916, 52-53) visited it sometime after Togoland had been conquered from the Germans in World War I. Also when a large part of Middle Volta Basin was changed into a reservoir in the mid-1960’s Kete Krakye was left under water, and the shrine was moved from its original place. I am told that the shrine is still active and its priest celebrates an annual festival.

7 Right after the war the priest of Dente explained that Queen Victoria of England had made a secret treaty with Dente and hence the successful British campaign against the Asante had been a result of Dente’s influence over the queen. He added that “the Grandfather [Dente] is so closely bound with the Queen of England that a division of the persons is impossible, and only they themselves can say whether the Queen is the Grandfather or Grandfather the Queen” (cited in Wilks 1975, 281).
themselves had also been under Asante before 1874. They were a non-Akan group like many of their neighbours and supporters, for example, Yegi and Pran (Maier 1981). In essence, the member chiefdoms comprised a multiethnic coalition, which was united by a common oath to the god Dente and their resentment towards Asante rule. Right in the beginning of the war, Kofi Fa approached the coalition by sending “12 slaves and gold to the fetish priest of Kraki, who in response sent charms and medicated gunpowder to Kofi Fa” (PRO CO 879/39a).

The Asantehene launched the first attack on Nkoransa in the middle of 1892. During the first year of the war there were two or three (the number varies in different sources) major encounters between the Kumase and Nkoransa forces. Kofi Fa reported to the Governor of the Gold Coast that the first engagement had taken place in August, and “(2000) two thousands of my women and their babies were caught away, and (200) two hundred men also were caught and killed on the spot” (PRO CO 879/39c). Prempe’s army had been victorious, and Nkoransa town was ransacked, pillaged, and burned, while the chief and his people fled to the nearby town of Komfa, roughly 40 kilometres east of Nkoransa (ibid.). The second (or third?) battle was fought close to Komfa, where “the Kumasis suffered severely from the fire of the Nkoranzas in the swamp and marshes in the neighbourhood” (PRO CO 879/39a). The Kumase army was defeated and they retreated back to Asante territory, where they blamed smallpox and leopard attacks for their poor success. It was reported that “the Ashantis have lost several Chiefs” (PRO CO 879/39d) and later many of the Nkoransa people who were taken prisoners by the Kumase troops had been “sacrificed during the ‘custom’ for those chiefs who fell in the war with Nkoranza” (PRO CO 879/39e). Elsewhere it is said that the Kumase army lost 300 men captured and killed (PRAAD ARG 1/2/12/2a). In the meantime Kofi Fa attacked the northern Banda who had supported Kumase. Gifts were sent to Krakye “to thank the god Dente, as the success in both these wars [against Kumase and Banda] was ascribed by the Nkoranzas to the powers of fetish Dente” (PRO CO 879/39a).

After an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate peace through the Krakye priest, Prempe started to prepare for a new campaign in June 1893. Although the past years had been marked by instability and unrest in Asante, Prempe was able to mobilize an expedition of considerable size. The army was led by Bantamahene Amankwatia IV, who left Kumase with a promise to bring “the king of Nkoranza” back with him. According to Ferguson, Kumase, Mampon, Nsuta, Abesim, Offinso, Kumawu, Edweso,
Agogo, Kwaman, Asokore, and Konongo supplied troops for the campaign (ibid). At least Agona, a brother, and Amakom, an uncle, to Nkoransa did not take part; other chiefs from the Asene clan might have done the same.\(^8\)

The following is an excerpt from a conversation with the present Amakomhene:

TK: More than a hundred years ago the Asante went to war against Nkoransa. What was the position of Amakom at that time? How did you feel about it?

AY II: Of course we felt very bad! But what could we do? Except to remain neutral…and try to solve the dispute amicably.

TK: So, the Amakomhene worked as a middleman?

AY II: Yes. This whole thing got started when the son, who had received all these lands from his father, started feeling too big.

The situation of the uncle is described by referring to the tensions between kinship and allegiance. Amakomhene should fulfil his co-operative obligation to defend his nephew, but then again, he has to protect his own interests by remaining, at least formally, loyal to his overlord.\(^9\) And more importantly, he has to try to deal with the disgrace caused by the rebellious nephew and a possible future collective punishment from the part of the overlord, but also try to act as mediator in order to save his clansmen. This pressure conflict was also noticed on the other side of the battle lines. Nana Agyeman Kudom IV described the uneasy situation of his uncle:

Of course it was painful for father and son to fight against each other, but also our brothers in Amakom suffered. They [the Kumase administration] were putting the pressure on them, asking “Why does your brother cause all this trouble?” So, they too had to try hard in order to end the war.

\(^8\) However, Adonten traditions have it that Adontenhene Gyamfi “went to the Nkoranza war which was fought in the first part of the reign of King Prempeh I” (IAS/AS 95).

\(^9\) The idea that matrilineal relatives should not fight against each other is embodied in proverbs like \(\text{sa wo ko no wo nko agya mma}, \) “when one goes to war, it is against one’s father’s children” (i.e. brothers by one father but by different mothers) (Rattray 1916, 98).
Nevertheless, despite the war party sent after him, the Nkoransahene was not about to give up. He moved his main camp to the market town of Kintampo, a little less than 50 kilometres northwest from the chiefdom’s capital, where he was joined by a few reinforcements from other northern dissidents, who had been instructed to support Kofi Fa’s cause by the Krakye priest (PRO CO 879/39a). The capital of the chiefdom could not serve as headquarters anymore. Ferguson’s scouts, who had arrived at Nkoransa, reported the following:

All the shade trees burnt, oil palms cut down and made into latrines. All houses in town burnt. We fired four rounds each, ten of us, to invite any enemy in the town. We stayed from early morning till late in the evening, saw no Ashantis and returned to Buabinmai [a village roughly 20 kilometres north from Nkoransa] (PRO CO 879/39f).

Two engagements took place in the surroundings of Kintampo, after which the Nkoransahene was forced to retreat to Abease, where a decisive battle was to be fought. The Nkoransa troops suffered a defeat and lost “five men killed, and 2,000 to 3,000 women and children were taken captives to Kumasi, the Nkoranza Stool and State umbrellas became trophies of the conquerors” (PRO CO 879/39a). Around the middle of August 1893 Kofi Fa and his subjects fled to Atebubu. Close to the end of 1893 the Nkoransahene, accompanied by the Atebubuhene and the refugee Mamponhene, received messengers from Kumase, who announced that the

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10 The cutting of trees by the conqueror has several meanings. In a typical Akan town the main streets (abonten) are lined by “shade trees” (gyannua). The trees are there to provide dwo, “coolness”, which is seen as the opposite of ahoohru, “hotness”, of the bush. Both in a physical and metaphysical sense “coolness” is associated with home or dwelling, whereas “hotness” belongs to the realm of the “bush” (McCaskie 1992, 227). Thus by cutting down the “shade trees”, the enemy is not only making it physically more uncomfortable to live in the town, he is also transforming human dwellings into “bush”. Secondly, the “big tree” (dupon) is also an epithet used for a chief. Similarly, as the “shade tree” protects the townspeople from the “hotness” of the bush, the chief protects the community from their external enemies (McCaskie 1995b, 422-425). Hence the cutting of a “shade tree” also symbolizes the collapse of chiefly authority. Moreover, in the town of Nkoransa there are several trees that are considered to be inhabited by deities. In fear of possible supernatural punishments these trees might have been saved. There exists a considerable body of traditions about the “evil fortune” of those people who have violated the sanctity of the trees. However, the temporal range of these traditions does not extend to the time of the Kumase war.
“Nkoranza King is one with Ashanti King by relation, and if the former wishes to come and serve him then there will be peace” (PRO CO 879/39a). This is also how the present Nkoransahene related it:

Those were terrible times for us. We had to flee to Atebubu. But it was right after the new Asantehene had been enstooled, that we made peace. It was he who invited us to come back home. He said that we are father and son, and so we should not fight like this.

Now the Nkoransa people were able to return to their ancestral lands and this is usually considered to have been the end of hostilities. However, as late as spring 1894, when Basel missionary E. Perregaux visited Nkoransa, he was told that the local traders had not been able to travel to the coast through the Asante territory and had to use an alternative route through Atebubu, which took them from five to six days longer. Therefore they said that they had not had salt to put in their food for four years. Those people he talked to in Sekyedumase, an Asante town south of Nkoransa, told him that they were preparing a new attack on Nkoransa in order to “drive them away from their country” (PRO CO 879/39g). They also added that “the country did not belong to the Koranzas, but to Kumasi, and that the Koranzas were only slaves of Kumasi, and had no right to build their houses there again without permission from Kumasi” (PRO CO 879/39h). However, Perregaux predicted that Prempe would not launch a new attack before his final installation ceremonies:

As the Kumase King is just making a custom for his predecessors, I do not think they will go just now, but they will soon after prepare for it, if they are not checked before by the government. I met many people on my way who were kept prisoners and destined to be brought to Kumase for the custom. No doubt they will be killed as so many Nkoranza women, who have been taken prisoners and were kept for this purpose (PRO CO 879/39g).12

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11 What the Nkoransahene meant by the “new Asantehene” remains unclear to me. I suspect he referred to the final installation rites of Prempe I that could not be performed until 1894 because of the civil unrest (Wilks 1975, 587).

12 Here Perregaux most likely refers to the “funeral custom” (ayiz) of Prempe’s predecessor Asantehene Kwaku Dua Kuma, which took place in early May. Prempe’s installation was scheduled roughly a month later (Wilks 1975, 578). It was reported that during the installation ceremonies there were “over 100 headless bodies lying in the streets; these (…) were chiefly Koranzas” (PRO CO 879/39h).
On the 25th of January 1894 Nkoransa signed a “Treaty of Friendship and Freedom of Trade” with Great Britain (PRO CO 879/39i). In April of that same year, Kofi Fa wrote to Accra and informed the colonial government that the “King of Kumase will soon send his messengers to me to drink water as an oath” (PRO CO 879/39j), and he was told not to “drink fetish” or give any other promises without consulting the government first (PRO CO 879/39k). However, during the following year, the British plans for the invasion of Asante territory were well under way, and Nkoransa had become the least of its problems.

6.3 Father who can punish

Ideally, the relationship between father and son is characterised by affection. The father is considered to have a soft spot for his son, so that the son cannot be denied anything he asks for. However, in return, the father can expect obedience and impeccable behaviour from his son at all times, and he also has the right to discipline him. An important difference between the father-son and uncle-nephew relationships is that “a father can punish or, if the offence is grave, even curse an incorrigibly contumacious son”, but an uncle “can only censure an offending nephew or, in a grave case, submit his grievance to the arbitration of the lineage elders” (Fortes 1969a, 203). However, a son is as capable of disgracing his father as a nephew is his uncle, and the disgrace caused by the son extends to the patrilineal ancestry. “A man was often referred to as ‘the son or grandson of such-and-such a man’, and if this reference was an uncomplimentary one, the nsamanfo [i.e. the ancestors] were grieved, and they showed their resentment in the manner of all nsamanfo – by causing misfortune to befall the luckless offender” (Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 197). In the war of 1892-1893 there was a son (Nkoransa) who “had received all these lands from his father”, but afterwards started “feeling too big”, thinking that “he could live without his father”. The father (Kumase) tolerated the whims of his son for some time, but eventually he was left with no other option than to punish him. Soon, after the son had suffered the punishment due to him, the father relented and asked his son to return back home.

In the narratives concerning the Nkoransa war one is able to see how the right order of things in society becomes a proposal for administrative relations. Reduction to a simple set of hierarchical relations takes place
because their usefulness in the process of legitimation: relations father/son 
and adult/child are used to confirm the relationship Asantehene 
(Kumase)/Nkoransahene (Nkoransa). Or more generally, hierarchies of the 
state are legitimated by drawing analogies to hierarchies of society. 
However, analogies of this type cannot be merely reduced to metaphorical 
variances of a one-sided relationship between the superior and subordinate. 
If I would have conducted my fieldwork somewhere else or if I had talked 
to different people, those who opposed to Nkoransa’s membership in 
Asanteman, I would most probably have collected traditions in which “the 
strong and clever minded son” tried to escape from his “cruel and unjust 
father”. Hence the same relationship having the same components can be 
made to instantiate different principles in different situations. It is true that 
sons should obey their fathers, but it is equally true that if the father neglects 
his son, he will leave the father and move to live with his abusua, and there 
is nothing the father can do to stop him (Rattray 1929, 10). But taken either 
way, the analogy seeks to liberate the actors “to the realm that transcends 
contingency” (McCaskie 1995a, 262-263), meaning that the actions taken 
taken were not incidental, the actors had no other alternative that could have made 
sense. And this, I think, is exactly what is meant by the flexibility of the 
ideology of kinship and descent. On the one hand, it assumes invariance and 
uniformity, but on the other, permits departure and conflict. In oral tradition, 
the contingent actions, their motives and progression, are legitimated by 
making analogies to rules, which are considered unambiguous and 
invariable. Thus a war can be reduced to an instance of kinship relation, 
which is regulated according to multiple, but nonetheless, constituted rules. 

However, there is another way of looking at it. According to Robert 
Netting (1974, 160), who has studied warfare among the Kofyar of Northern 
Nigeria, talking about warfare in kinship terms is a way of reducing “the 
impossible complexities of group conflict to a simple determinate set of 
oppositions”:

Kinship categories are not an accidental or illogical framework for 
thinking about social conflict. For the Kofyar, the idiom of kinship 
serves as a means of organizing information about warfare. It 
communicates in terms of a structure whose ties and cleavages are 
presumably familiar to all the society’s adult members. Moreover, 
since relations are involved (in kinship among persons/ in warfare 
among village groups), the idiom functions as a calculus in terms of 
which relations at one level can be dealt with by an analogy with
relations at another. The basis of the analogy may be hidden or disguised and is thus metaphorical. The Kofyar seem to be saying that kinship causes warfare, whereas in fact kinship shares certain formal features with warfare and their similarity suggests an approach to understanding the relatively opaque and perplexing nature of conflict (Ibid., 161).

Since the logic or philosophy of kinship is shared by all the actors and it has such a central position in their lives, it is easy to apply in other situations, which are not distinctively “kinship situations”. And so, as Robert McKinley (2001) has put it, kinship provides people with “practical theory” according to which relations on both levels, domestic and political, can be treated. However, to my mind, this nature of kinship has other consequences as well.

6.4 Identifying the leopard

Eyewitness accounts tell of rather strange events in the centre of Kumase that occurred during the critical moments of the war in 1893. In this case the Asante interpreted a perfectly innocent, accidental episode according to their own cultural conceptions and interests and associated it with war. As already mentioned, during the early stages of the war, the Kumase troops had blamed leopard attacks for their defeat. Similarly, during the latter part of the war, a rubber trader called George Apea reported that a “continual stream of Ashanti women and slaves bring food to the army at Kontampo, but the Kumasis have suffered severely from sickness, famine, and from the ravages of a leopard or leopards” (CO PRO 879/39l). This must have been partly expected since a significant part of the fighting took place in dense forests (ibid.), but what must have been quite unpredictable occurred when a leopard entered Kumase and killed two people and injured five before it was finally captured. It was a relatively insignificant occurrence in an otherwise turbulent era in the history of the kingdom, but it is remembered by many even today mainly because Prempe’s successor Asantehene Osei Agyeman Prempe II was born on that very same day and thus he was nicknamed Kyeretwie, “the leopard catcher” (McCaskie 1992, 228).13 One of the

13 One of the most prestigious secondary schools in Kumase is Osei Kyeretwie Secondary School, popularly known as OKESS. Hence, in an indirect way, the school is a monument dedicated to these events.
surviving accounts is particularly interesting. Thomas Lewin (1978, 264) collected it in 1970 from an elderly Asante, who had spent his youth as a servant in the Asantehene’s palace.

In the course of this war, the Nkoransahene changed himself into a leopard. It was juju. The leopard visited the house of Nana Prempe’s wives called Hiaa. News was brought to Prempe that a leopard was with his wives. Prempe instructed his asoamfo, or carriers, to kill the leopard. The asoamfo made torches from the dried palm leaves. They went up and down with torches. The leopard backed away from the torches and attempted to jump on one soamfoni [sing. of asoamfo]. The rest of the asoamfo caught the leopard in the air and cut off his head. They brought the head and placed it at the junction of Hiaa and Boagyawe wards in Kumase. They informed Prempe that the leopard had been killed. Prempe asked the young nhenkwaan, or servants, in the palace to follow him to the scene. I was one of the servants. Prempe put one foot on the leopard and sprinkled white clay on the leopard three times. Prempe then said, “if the leopard had brought bad luck to the Asantes, it must be cursed.” But, “if otherwise it would be good luck for the Asante warriors fighting in Nkoransa.” (…) If the asoamfo had not succeeded in killing the leopard, the Asantes felt that the Nkoransahene would have defeated them for the second time (ibid., 172-173).

Why did (some of) the people of Kumase think that the leopard was the Nkoransahene? According to Lewin, the “popular Asante belief regarding the relationship between Nkoransahene Kofi Fa and the Kumase leopard” could be partly explained by the fact that the people of Kumase had been suffering from famine and diseases at the time, and thus the spiritual powers of the enemy could be held accountable for all of their misfortunes as a whole (ibid., 264).

However, there is more to it than that. First, supernatural means were always employed in warfare, and Nkoransa was and is widely known as the home of some of the most powerful deities, a number of them renown as “war gods”. Earlier in the narrative Lewin’s (1978, 172) informant states that deities named “Susa Ntoa and Kukuma Ntoa” (i.e., Seseman Ntoa and Kokuma Ntoa) had been helping the Nkoransahene in the war. Also because Kofi Fa’s great predecessor, the first Nkoransahene Bafo Pim, had been the son of Osei Tutu, he had been introduced to Komfo Anokye in his
childhood and had become a close friend of his. That is how he had learned
the art of magic, for which he also became famous. So, in this context it is
quite safe to assume that people expected a significant part of the warfare to
be carried out by magical means.

PHOTOGRAPH 3. The priest of Seseman Ntoa on a palanquin. The famous “war god”
is celebrated annually in Nkoransa.

Secondly, the perception of the enemy as a human who had condescended to
the level of an animal was part of the ideology of warfare. The ordered
behaviour of human beings (nnipa, sing. onipa) is kept categorically distinct
from that of animals (mmoa, sing. amoa), which connotes “disorder, licence,
excess, indulgence, and sensuality” (McCaskie 1992, 222). Hence to speak
of any person as an animal is considered offensive, and an expression aboa
onipa, the “animal man” carries “suggestions of boorish crudeness, of
uncivilised status, and of an absolute ignorance of behavioural norms and
properties” (ibid.). In the execution of a captured enemy chief, he was
ritually dehumanised, transformed into an animal. The logic resulting in the
transformation is evident in a recitation used in pronouncing the death
sentence:

‘Since you (had a quarrel with some one and) did not allow us to
take good ears to hear the case, it is as if you had taken a stick and
beat the Okyeame [chief’s linguist] with it to kill him; thus have you
dealt with him as if he were a beast.’ (Rattray 1929, 125).

14 In some formulaic ritual recitations used in the chiefly installation ceremonies the elders
tell the chief specifically not to “call us beasts”. Conversely, it is regarded as highly
improper to give human names to dogs, cats, or other animals that would in some respects
fit the Western category of pets.
After the beheading, the dead body of the chief was cut into pieces in a similar manner as an animal killed by hunters. This type of trial and execution was arranged even for the dead body of the enemy chief slain in the battlefield (McCaskie 1995a, 82-83). The body parts were distributed among different chiefs, so that the paramount took the head, commander of the right wing took the right leg, and so forth. Sometimes the flesh was consumed (Bowdich 1966, 300-301).

15 This resembles the way in which certain parts of the animal carcass are divided between the chiefs controlling the land, where the animal was shot (PRAAD ARG 1/6/5/1/41a). By resorting to war instead of bringing his grievances to court, the enemy chief is seen to have deliberately chosen to treat his adversaries as if they were animals, and in return he himself is treated as an animal.

Of all possible animals, the leopard (zsebz) is unambiguously a wild animal, or “bush animal”. 16 Even though it resides and preys in nature, it sometimes attacks human beings and makes intrusions to human habitations, like in the case at hand. This haphazard “shuttling” between nature and culture makes it particularly unpredictable and feared. A common understanding among the Asante hunters is that leopards are “left-handed”, they stalk and attack their victims always from the left (Rattray 1916, 62). This is highly illustrative in terms of the superior “right” (nifu) and inferior “left” (benkum). Accordingly, catching a leopard alive, imprisoning it, and possibly even taming it, would be the highest possible expression of human mastery over the “bush”. 17 Such incidents are commemorated, for example, in a textile design called Kyeretwie, which refers to Asantehene Kwaku Dua Panin’s order to catch a leopard alive (Rattray 1959, 245-246). Using leopard skins as part of regalia or clothing also has the same connotations. In the quotation above about the excessive regalia of the Nkoransahene, the “Tiger skins” that covered his drums, were specifically leopard skins.

15 I have heard eyewitness accounts of similar practices in the civil war of Sierra Leone during 1991-2001.

16 The Akan have two basic categories for animals: fiemmoa, “house animals”, and wurammoa, “bush animals”. The categorisation of a particular animal species depends on how its appearance, habits, and territory relate to human culture. These categories are not entirely comparable to the Western categories of domesticated animals and wild animals. For example, a vulture (pete) is considered a “house animal” (McCaskie 1992, 228).

17 Rattray’s (1929, 264) photograph of Nsutaheyene Kwame Gyima holding a leopard cub is very expressive in this sense.
However, the human-animal relationship has its reverse side as well. Although humans are considered superior to animals, the latter are still considered “phenomenologically living entities like people” (McCaskie 1992, 221). Furthermore, animals are thought to have something that might be called “traits of character” that are shared with humans. In the case of a leopard, the Akan clearly see something “chieflily” in it. One of the many words meaning a leopard, *kurotwiamansa* (also *etwie* and *okyem*), is also a title bestowed on chiefs. This can be explained by its alleged “guardian instincts”. Despite its hostility towards human culture the leopard is considered “a good parent ever-ready to protect its offspring so well that any attempt to steal the cub invites its wrath” (Ayim 2000, 14). When its fierceness and insidiousness are employed in the defence of its own, a leopard can also be seen as an admirable creature, resembling the chief who was expected to fight to his death when defending his subjects.

Finally, the narrative refers indirectly to the relationship between father and son when describing how the leopard visits, not attacks, the wives of the *Asantehene*. Prempe is informed that “the leopard is with his wives”, not clawing his wives, for example. I interpret this as a reference to the formal kin relation between the *Nkoransahene* and the royal wives of Kumase, which was established historically through the marriage between Osei Tutu and his first wife Afua Sapon, which, as noted before, produced *Nkoransahene* Bafo Pim. According to Akan kinship terminology, a child can refer to all his/her father’s wives with the same term “mother” (*ena, maame*), which he/she uses to call his/her biological mother. Since the *Asantehene* is a father to the *Nkoransahene*, it follows that his wives are all classificatory mothers to his son. What is intended in the narrative by this odd visit is up to one’s own guesswork. Is the son begging his mothers to speak in favour of him to his father? Or is the son trying to convince his mothers to leave his father? Nevertheless, the relationship between mother and child is seen to be the most unselfish and morally binding of all kinship ties. It is precisely the mother who “importunes her husband” to make sure that he fulfils his responsibilities to their children (Fortes 1962, 263).

The Kumase leopard, both as a beast and leopard, is a forceful symbol for the enemy chief, and when taking into consideration the

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18 The Akan kingdom of Akryem Abuakwa is also called *Okyeman*, “the leopard state”, and its ruler *Okyenhene*, “the leopard king”. This allegedly refers to the career of the first king Apeanin Kwaframoa or Atta Apeanin as “courageous, shrewd and unconquerable” warrior who attracted the attention of “other clans who felt cheated or threatened and looked up to him for succour and protection” (Ayim 2000,12-14).
leopard’s interaction with the *Asantehene’s* wives in the narrative, it becomes identifiable as the *Nkoransahene*, the son. However, the old servant’s narrative is a description of real life events; it is not a metaphor for the Nkoransa war as such. And I suppose mostly leopards are just leopards and not chiefs who have undergone magical metamorphosis. The question here is how a “happening” is made into an “event” through cultural interpretation (Sahlins 1985, 153-154). Above I have discussed the symbolic system that gives the frame for the interpretation, but what is more important here is that interpretations vary also according to interests. Naturally, the confused and starved animal could not have had any political intentions when creating havoc in the capital, but in the narrative it is made into a thinking subject, a rebellious chief and an estranged son, by the narrator who shared the interests of those in power.19

The power of the symbolism in the narrative is in the way it opens a whole new field of reference, piling up a number of new sets of hierarchical cultural categories: human > animal, village (city) > bush, cool > hot, order > disorder, which are used in justifying the violent repression of Nkoransa’s attempts to secede from the confederacy led by the *Asantehene*. The important thing to note here are the linkages made between hierarchical categories of different symbolic systems. Since the *Asantehene* is the father and thus superior to the son, the *Nkoransahene*, it follows that in all other imaginable analogies he is made to take the place of the superior, while the *Nkoransahene* is made to take that of the inferior. The *Asantehene* is the human, cool, and orderly one, who will preside over the animalistic, hot, and disorderly one. Through these associations the process of legitimation not only entails the right order of things in society but also nature. Of course, I am not suggesting that the Asante always and necessarily associate the kinship status of a son with animals. Usually they do not. What I am suggesting is that there is a cultural logic that makes such associations possible in certain situations. Since kinship logic has such a central place in peoples’ lives and it is shared by the whole society, it also means that people apply it in various and very different situations. Hence, the father-son relationship, which on the surface seems irrelevant, can be used as one implicit component of the argumentation used in the narrative about the *Nkoransahene* changing himself into a leopard. Thus, in addition to its

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19 The political stance of the narrator, Adu Gyamera, cannot be directly read from my quotation. However, elsewhere in Lewin’s (1978) book it becomes clear. For instance, he is characterised as a “nationalist” from Atwema (ibid., 233), people of which “took particular pride in their long association with the civil arm of the bureaucratic apparatus” (ibid., 29).
flexibility, I think the power of the ideology of kinship and descent is in its connectedness to other symbolic systems.

Although major historic changes have taken place between the time of the Nkoransa war and the present, the cultural logic that allows people to talk about the conflict as strife between kinsmen has not disappeared. The profit distribution of markets, the maintenance of trade routes, the presence of rival colonial powers, and other causes for war mentioned by modern historians might not be so familiar to the ordinary present-day Asante. However, what they do know is that the Asantehene is a father of the Nkoransahene and they once waged war against each other. They know that sons are sometimes disobedient and fathers have to tolerate their whims, but eventually they will be brought back in line. Hence they are able to think and talk about events that took place more than one hundred years ago as if it had happened to them.
7 SACRIFICE AND HIERARCHY: DEFINING AUTHORITY THROUGH RITUAL EXCHANGE

In the introduction to *African Political Systems* Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1969, 23) argue that what gives “political structure” its dominance over “social structure” is its “attachment to mystical symbols”.

An administrative organization backed up by coercive sanctions, clanship, lineage and age-set ties, the fine-spun web of kinship – all these unite people who have different or even opposed sectional and private interest (...) Always there are common ritual values, the ideological superstructure of political organization.

Members of an African society feel their unity and perceive their common interests in symbols, and it is their attachment to these symbols which more than anything else gives their society cohesion and persistence. In the form of myths, fictions, dogmas, ritual, sacred places and persons, these symbols represent the unity and exclusiveness of the groups which respect them (...)

Furthermore, these sacred symbols, which reflect the social system, endow it with mystical values which evoke acceptance of the social order that goes far beyond the obedience exacted by the secular sanction of force. The social system is, as it were, removed to a mystical plane, where it figures a system of sacred values beyond criticism or revision (ibid., 17-18).

Those who have later commented on Fortes’ and Evans-Pritchard’s views on religion and politics have not been in agreement on the fundamental importance of their contribution. On the one hand, there are those who claim that for the descent theorists political power was, by definition, power to coerce. Moral or affective norms that lacked coercive backup belonged to the domestic sphere. In a similar manner, religion and ritual were separated from the political sphere and seen as a part of cultural superstructure, which only reflects the more fundamental social order (McKinnon 2000, 41-42).

On the other hand, there are those who consider Fortes and Evans-Pritchard to have been among the first to understand the cultural significance of chiefly offices and their incumbents as “symbolic mediators” between opposed spheres of the indigenous cosmology. Thus, an alternative definition of power was implicit in their writings (Arens & Karp 1989, xvii). However, what is clear to all is that Western notions of power and political
relationships tend to be secularly based, and religion is often seen only seen as an aspect of politics. Thus they fail to explain how religion and ritual are used in directing actions, defining goals, and constituting relationships. Although power probably always involves the exercise of one person’s or group’s will over another’s, the underlying principles of domination, consent, submission, and resistance vary considerable from one culture to another. These are matters that the established political theory rarely takes into account (ibid., xiii-xv).

The more conventional notions of religion and state in Asante and the Asantehene as a divine king focus on the ways in which secular hierarchies are ritualized. However, my own understanding is that among the Asante the chiefly hierarchies are in one important sense ritually produced when power is obtained by engaging in exchange with the supernatural. Hence, an opposite approach becomes much more appealing. How are ritual hierarchies secularized?

### 7.1 Making the divine state

Fortes (1969a, 142) – like many before and after him – attributed the superiority of the Asantehene’s office to its “aura of mystical preeminence”, which is derived from its connection to the Golden Stool (*Sika Dwa Kofi*, lit. “Friday’s Golden Stool”). The tradition concerning the emergence of the stool is widely known and it can be summarized as follows.¹ After Osei Tutu had returned from exile and the neighbouring Domaa had been defeated, it was time to direct attention to Denkyira, which still held Kwaman and other chiefdoms of the region under its sway. During the reign of Denkyirahene Ntim Gyakari the level of tribute became intolerable, and the chiefdoms serving Denkyira decided to rise to arms with Osei Tutu as their leader. This coalition has often been called Asante Aman Nnum, “the five Asante states”, although there is no general agreement on the exact number or names of the original member states.² Consequently, Denkyira was defeated after a decisive victory in the battle of Feyiase around 1701, and the military alliance was transformed into a political union called Asanteman, the Asante state. Osei Tutu, the head of the coalition, became

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¹ The classical account is by Rattray (1955, 288-290), who has also recorded a second, somewhat different version (Rattray 1929, 276-277).
² Rattray has compiled at least five different lists (see RAI MS 107: 1: 1679; Rattray 1929, 73, 99, 132, 235).
the Asantehene, the king of Asante. Right before the decisive battle Komfo Anokye informed the Asante chiefs that “he had a special mission from Onyame, the God of the Sky” (Rattray 1955, 288-289). A big meeting was held in Kumase, where Anokye “brought down from the sky, in a black cloud, and amid rumbles, and in air thick with white dust, a wooden stool with three supports and partly covered with gold” (ibid., 290). Anokye told the chiefs that the stool contained the sunsum, the “spiritual backing”, of the Asante nation, and Osei Tutu was to become its first custodian and thus the chosen head of the newly formed state. At the same time Anokye also decreed the taboos of the stool and stated that if they were violated Asanteman would “sicken and lose its vitality and power” (ibid., 290). Hence by guarding the Golden Stool the Asantehene also protects the “character” or “health” of the state. Regular sacrifices are made to it in order to preserve and enhance its spiritual powers (e.g., Akyeampong & Obeng 1995, 495-496).

These events were paired with the destruction of old stools. The stool history of Hia has it that:

In order to eradicate off the existence of the memory of all the irregularities, the defeats and discomfits that the other enemy nations had previously inflicted upon Ashanti, especially, in the war that took place between the Ashanti and Dormas (...), fought in Ashanti during the reign of the Asantehene Nana Obiri Yeboa Manwu, Komfo Anokye, with the consent of the Asantehene Nana Osei Tutu and the Asanteman, buried all the then existing black Stools being then occupied by all Native Rulers in Ashanti in a deep trench-hole dug in the ground at a place near the present Kumasi Central Hospital upon which, Komfoo Anokye placed and planted an Ashanti State Sword which is still there to this day.4

In substitution for the said buried Stools, Komfu Anokye caused new Black Stools to be made for all chiefs in Ashanti at that time, and on every one of the Stools, he nailed “Dadikro” (i.e.

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3 See Kurankyi-Taylor (1951, 44) for the list of taboos “surrounding and protecting the Golden Stool”.
4 The tradition has it that if the sword is removed it will mean “the collapse of the Asante Empire”. There are several recent stories about failed attempts remove it. It is said that during the 1950’s, when the hospital was built, a building contractor tried to remove it with bulldozers and other such machinery. Also in 1964, when the world heavyweight boxing champion Mohammed Ali allegedly visited Kumase, he gave it a try, but in vain (see Kwame Ofori n.d., 7).
Ashanti native made) nails, signifying that, those were the very first and original Stools in Ashanti solely being occupied by chiefs whose official appellations should thenceforth be known as “ABREMPON” [i.e., big men] (IAS/AS 154).

The combination of these two events can be read as a realization of (some formulations of) the idea of divine kingship, where the problem of segmentary or particularistic interests is overcome by elevating leadership to “a mystical plane” (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1962, 66-86). The segmentary interests, materialized in the form of the blackened ancestral stools of the chiefly lineages, are buried under ground and their “tomb” is sealed with a state sword, removal of which is decreed by a taboo. A superior, golden stool is received from the Sky God, and it is said to contain the spiritual core of the emergent polity. Similarly, new, “first” stools are made for the lineages, which commemorate a new beginning under the Golden Stool. A leader of a temporary alliance is made into a hereditary king by appointing him as custodian of the stool. One could also argue that a diarchic structure was established, where the historyless, sacred, absolute, but passive aspects of power are embodied in the Golden Stool and the historical, secular, relative, but active aspects of power are embodied in its occupant, the Asantehene (cf., Valeri 1990, 46-47).

The most important ritual occasion, when the Golden Stool was celebrated, together with a magical charm called Apafram, was Odwira, a harvest festival originally dedicated to the ritual consumption of new-season yams. Thus the general timing of the festival followed the agricultural cycle marking the closure and beginning of a “year” (afe). During Odwira all of the paramount chiefs travelled to the state capital and renewed their oaths of allegiance to the Asantehene. Meetings of the assembly of chiefs (Asantemanhyiamu) usually also coincided with Odwira (McCaskie 1995a, 144-146). The ritual highlight of the festival took place on “Apafram Sunday”, when the Asantehene made sacrifices to the Apafram charm in front of the skulls of the dead enemy chiefs, and made a plea to it that if there is “[a]ny king who does not like to serve me, let me get the chance of killing him and put his head into you” (Wilks 1993, 116). On the following day the chiefs “returned each to their own country, there to continue and complete” the Odwira by ritually “purifying” their own ancestral stools, shrines of the local deities, and the regalia of their offices (Rattray 1959, 137). In 1933 one paramount chief described the origins and later developments of Odwira in a following manner:
Before all the chiefs who took part in this campaign [against Denkyira] could scatter to their several seats [they] were told by Komfu-Anokyi that the skull of Ntim Jakari would be kept at Kumasi to be worshiped yearly. This was the beginning of the “Odwira” custom or “Apafram” at Kumasi at which all members of the Confederacy were present…

This occasional meeting at Kumasi for the observance of the “Odwira” custom was the beginning of what was later to be subordinated to the Kumasi Stool, and since that time Kumasi had ever continued to be the central meeting place of the Ashanti Chiefs. From the foregoing it would be seen that the meeting at Kumasi was decreed by Komfo Anokyi after the fall of Denkyira (PRRAC, Appendix 50).

Hence the unity of the new state had its ritual expression in Odwira, where its core symbols were venerated and which superseded those rituals associated with the ancestral spirits and/or local deities of the component chiefdoms. This, of course, is closely related to more general processes when religion becomes divided into public, “state religion”, and private, “family religion”. For instance, Michael Jackson (1977, 133-134) has suggested that when political groups are not coextensive with the pattern of descent grouping, there also occurs a shift in the ritual orientation. Ancestor cults, which are thus considered “segmentary”, will be significant only at the level of domestic organization, whereas group rituals of larger scale become centered on “desocialised categories”, such as high-gods. Jackson claims that in states like Asante “ancestor cults were ritual foci for kinship groups but pantheons of gods and nature divinities dominated the religious system at the higher levels of community organisation” (ibid.,135).

There is a substantial body of literature, both anthropological and historical, on the history and meaning of both the Golden Stool and Odwira (e.g. McCaskie 1995a, 144-242). Despite the obvious merits of some of these studies, by concentrating on them alone, one is at risk of getting a very simplified picture of religion and polity in Asante. Namely, the discussions seem to revolve around the centralization of government, reduced to state/society or kingship/chiefship dichotomies, and how its hierarchical structure is “sacralized”, enforced, and reproduced in ritual. Asante ideas

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5 Studies of how the Golden Stool has been understood as a historical artefact, which meanings were subject to change, have been particularly interesting (e.g., McCaskie 1986).
about the relationship between political hierarchy and the supernatural are, however, far more complicated than that.

7.2 “Emergence through gift”

The hierarchy of the fekuo heads of Kumase (see Figure 8) has been the subject of constant dispute (e.g., Rattray 1959, 86-87, 90-92). What seems to be approved by most is that the office of Krontihene is the senior among them, and in the absence of the Asantehene he presides over the administration of the capital. Thus the Asantehene often refers to him by terms like “my right hand man” or “my second in command”. The seat of the Krontihene is located at the village of Bantama, now one of the central districts of Kumase, and hence its holder is in most cases called the Bantamahene. Despite its high status, the Bantama stool is not an ancestral stool, it is mmamma dwa, an office that is not filled according to matrilineal succession. The first occupant of the office, a man called Amankwatia was of slave origin and therefore he was not eligible for any hereditary office (Wilks 1993, 244). As recalled by Bantamahene Kwame Kyem in 1924, Amankwatia worked as a servant and a stool carrier for Osei Tutu when he was appointed as the Krontihene of Kwaman/Kumase forces in the war against Domaa:

[W]ar followed and Amankwatia who had had Osei-Tutu’s favour to be created as his principal stool carrier was asked to go and fight King Domina Kusi [Domaahene Domaa Kusi] as a result of an injunction from Komfo Anokye. Komfo Anokye as a prophet asked King Osei-Tutu to give him with 7 men who would be created Asafohene; these 7 men were supplied as follows:- Osafo, Ofram, Akyerapong Kwasi, Gyedu, Brofo Apau, Amponsa-Akusaa, Twafopbaah. These are the 7 Kurontie [Kronti] Asafohene whom Komfo Anokye made for Amankwatia to fight against Domina Kusi. (...) King Osei-Tutu as a token of remembrance and of good service presented to Amankwatia all the lands stretching from Bantama to

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6 Nowadays, in the Kumasi Traditional Council the order of precedence is the following: Kronti, Akwamu, Nifa, Adonten, Benkum, Oyoko, Kyidom, Gyaase, Ankbea, Manwere, Nkosuo (Asante Tribune Aug. 22 – Aug. 28, 2000).

7 These are the names of the chiefs, also known as “the seven gunners” (atuonson), who originally constituted the Kronti fekuo of Kumase. See Wilks (1993, 245-246) for an alternative composition.
Komon [?]. All the lands stretching from Bantama to Komonano are for Bantamahene. King Osei-Tutu dashed [i.e., gave] all these lands to Amankwatia (...) and created him (...) as his Colonel… (PRAAD ARG 3/2/38a).

After helping Osei Tutu in the Domaa war, Amankwatia was awarded with a chiefly title and land. In addition to this, he was “given” seven chiefs, who fought alongside him as “friends”. Thereafter they formed an administrative and military group, in which the Bantamahene holds the position of the senior. This tradition about Amankwatia exemplifies what Kyerematen (1971, 17) has called an emergence of a new chiefdom “through gift”. According to his research, based on traditional accounts about the origins of different Asante chiefdoms, it was a practice for the Asantehene to award offices and land to persons “who had distinguished themselves in battle or had rendered some significant political service” (ibid., 18). Hence it is understood by him that hierarchy is established by political means.

However, other traditions reveal something very interesting about the nature of Amankwatia’s services to his overlord. Namely, it is said that Amankwatia accompanied Osei Tutu to exile in Akwamu. When Osei Tutu heard the news of his uncle’s death, he decided to return home, succeed his uncle and revenge his death. But before he could be installed as a chief and could attack the Domaa, his first duty was to celebrate the funeral of his late uncle. It was precisely that duty which almost proved fatal to his trusted friend Amankwatia:

According to the custom those days, Nana Osei Tutu was to present a person with dignity to accompany his uncle to the land of the dead, but since he had been away from home for years, he knew no such person than his friend Amankwaatia. Therefore on his arrival he smeared red clay for the offer, but the Asafohene sent one of his servants to be smeared with red clay instead of Amankwaatia (…) When Nana Osei Tutu was enstooled as Kumasehene he decided to create a stool for his friend Amankwaatia who had helped him so much in life and had even given himself for the sacrifice (Kwadwo 2000, 32).

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8 Red clay is a sign of mourning. Victims prepared for human sacrifice were daubed with red clay (Rattray 1959, 214).
9 The Akwamuhene and the head of Akwamu fekuo of Kumase.
In Asante thought the spirit world is seen as an extension of the lived world, and the hierarchies that prevail among the living are also considered to prevail among the ancestors. Hence a dead chief was still a chief: “he occupied the same status and role, and had the same needs and requirements – wives, servants, cloths, gold, food – as he had had in his biological existence” (McCaskie 1989, 428). In order to provide for some of these needs human sacrifices had to be performed, and in the past they formed a significant part of the chiefly funerals. It was explicitly the duty of the dead chief’s successor to see to it, that the sacrifices were carried out properly, and thus the departed spirit of the deceased was able to continue his life in the spirit world. Otherwise, the ancestor(s) would have been disgraced and they would withdraw their spiritual support, and the crucial connection between the living and the dead mediated by the chief would be at risk of collapsing.

Consequently, in the tradition at hand, Osei Tutu has to establish a relationship with his ancestors through sacrifice so that he can fully function as a chief. A human sacrifice is needed to do that, and Amankwatia offers himself. So, the service that Amankwatia provides is not “political”, but rather “ritual”. Accidentally, Amankwatia is saved, but he is still given an award for his readiness, and he himself becomes a chief. Clearly, this is not merely a system of services and awards. It is rather a network of exchanges that connects the ancestral spirits, the chief, and his subject. There is also a similar network between the gods, the Asantehene, and his chiefs.

7.3 Chiefly sacrifice

Perhaps the most famous ethnographic example of divine kingship is that of the Shilluk of Sudan described by Evans-Pritchard (1962, 66-86). There the king is a symbol of national unity and forms a link between the secular and supernatural, since the ancient founder of the Shilluk polity is immanent in every king. However, the Shilluk king does not have organized force at his disposal to enforce his authority. His reign is dependent on the approval of the constituent political segments. The Asantehene, on the other hand, as well as other Akan paramounts, was, and to some extent still is, a ruler with considerable secular powers, but one of his main responsibilities was, and is, to communicate with the supernatural. As one of my priestly informants so aptly put it, “a chief without gods is no different from an ordinary man”, and in that respect he is not that different from the divine kings whose roles
are mainly sacerdotal. The ritual duties of Akan chiefs can be classified in a similar manner as Michael Young (1966, 146) has done in the case of the Jukun kingship in Northern Nigeria, which in other respects resembles more the “Shilluk-type” than the Akan. The Asantehene performs those rituals for which he is exclusively qualified by his office (e.g., veneration of the Golden Stool). He also provides for other rituals (e.g., by sending objects to be sacrificed elsewhere in Asante) and maintains his own spiritual potency (e.g., by observing the taboos of his office, descent group, and ntso division). Nevertheless, his role is essentially different from the liminal existence of a priest (akomfo, pl. akomfo). Unlike the priests who get possessed by the deities, and thus render their bodies as “vehicles” for the supernatural, the chiefs mainly perform sacrifices and therefore stand firmly on the side of human culture. Clearly for the Akan divinity is transcendent; it is not immanent in the human ruler himself. Ideally, the chief and priests co-operate in providing well-being and success for the people. The relationship between the two was once defined by a council of village elders in the following way:

[I]n accordance with the Ashanti Customary Law and Assigns, the Chief of a town is the Custodian of any FETISH within his town, and that, any Fetish Priest of a town, prays for the prosperity and good health of the Chief and People of the town. The said Fetish Priest never takes any grudge of any person within the town (PRAAD ARG 2/2/119a).

In the affairs of state chiefs make sacrifices to three categories of spirits: deities called abosom (sing. abosom), sometimes characterized as tutelary spirits or “fetishes”, the ancestral spirits, and magical charms (asuman, sing. suman). All of these are seen as potential sources of power.10 Here I am primarily interested in the first category. The abosom have their origins in nature, but since they have come to live with people, they are expected “to help the state” (boa zeman),11 and thus it would be highly irresponsible on

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10 However, see Gilbert (1989) for the problems involved with classifications of this type.
11 McCaskie (1995, 118) emphasizes the ambiguous nature of the abosom by stating that “[t]he expectation that they might prove cooperative and consoling when petitioned to assist in human affairs was tempered by recognition of their origin in an antagonism to culture”. Although the abosom are considered to be unpredictable and potentially dangerous, some of them are seen to have made a conscious decision to live with people and thus to become associated with a group of people. Contrary to them, there are those
the part of the chief to engage himself and his subjects in any important activities without consulting the deities. Especially for crucial matters, such as war and peace, a chief had to ask for guidance from the abosom through a priest, and as many traditions testify, the priests were “punished by death in the olden days when they told lies to the King on consultation” (IAS/AS 194).

In the Denkyira war Osei Tutu and his allies did not make an exception in this respect. In order to ensure final victory over their oppressors they turned to the priest, Komfo Anokye. According to one tradition:

Okomfo Anokye when consulted assured them that they would be victorious provided some men would give themselves up for sacrifices. Three men would be needed for sacrifice. One would be buried alive. His hands would appear at the surface of the earth and two brass pans full of war medicine mixed in water would be put in the two palms for the warriors to bath before they left for the war front. The second volunteer would be butchered to death and his flesh thrown away for vultures to take to Denkyira land. Wherever any piece of the flesh would fall the men of the place would lose their bravery and become cowards. The third volunteer should be a Paramount chief. He would be armed and he would be in front of the marching soldiers. He was not to fire a shot even if he met an enemy. He should look on for the enemy to shoot him (Kwadwo 1994, 7-8).

The three chiefs who volunteered to give their lives were Asenso Kofo, the chief of Adwumakase Kese, Edwesohene Diko Pim, and Kumawuhene Tweneboa Kodia. Variations of the same theme can be found elsewhere. A tradition from Kwaso accounts that a royal “who was a left-handed person should be sacrificed to the gods of the nation to guarantee victory in all the ensuing wars to establish the Dynasty”. In addition to this, seven chiefs from the Aduana clan, known as “the bearers of the seven Fetish Pots”, were

\[\textit{abisom}\] who have decided to stay in nature, of whose existence people do not usually know.

\[12\] The name Tweneboah Kodia is synonymous with self-sacrifice even among contemporary Asante. Recently a local newspaper published an article, where the writer urged the readers not to think of costs when the development of modern infrastructure was in question. The article was titled “The Spirit of Tweneboah Kodia must be re-incarnated” (Asante Tribune, Aug.1 – Aug. 7, 2000).
“killed to further appease the gods” (PRAAD ARG 2/2/105a). Similarly, traditions of Mampon mention that Mamponhene Boahen Anantuo took command of the Asante army in Feyiase instead of Osei Tutu himself because Komfo Anokye had prophesized that whoever led the troops to the battle would not live longer than seven days after the war. Consequently, Boahentuo was badly wounded and died three days after the guns had fell silent (Kwadwo 1994, 84). These are the most widely known stories of chiefly self-sacrifice preceding the crucial battle, but there are other similar accounts.

The most interesting point common to all traditions is the contractual nature of the proceedings. Before sacrificing his life for the sake of the others, Asenso Kofo requested that from then on no one from his town should ever be executed.13 Edwesohene Diko Pim was promised that no person of the Asona matriclan, which he belonged to, would be condemned to death. Kumawuhene Tweneboa Kodia asked the same for the citizens of his own chiefdom (Kwadwo 1994, 8).14 According to the traditions from Kwaso, the successors of the seven chiefs from Aduana matriclan became recognized as paramount chiefs, and all of their descendants were spared of executions (PRAAD ARG 2/2/105a). Mamponhene Boahen Anantuo demanded that his chiefdom should have a senior position over other chiefdoms of the same rank. Thus his successors became the custodians of the Silver Stool (Sika Dwa Pats), and in the absence of the Asantehene it is the Mamponhene who presides over the affairs of the kingdom (Kwadwo 1994, 8). To put it briefly, in the sacrifices preceding the final battle the hierarchy of chiefly offices was constituted, and certain chiefs, members of certain descent groups, and subjects of certain chiefs were given privileges.

Performing human sacrifices in order to guarantee success in warfare is nothing unheard of (e.g., Turney-High 1949, 220), and it was commonly practised among the Asante (Akyeampong & Obeng 1995, 498-501). Often the victims were “dependent humans”, i.e., prisoners, slaves, women, and

13 “Executions” usually refer to both judicial executions of criminals as well as mortuary slayings, in which the (slave) victims were expected to accompany the ancestors in the spirit world. Wilks (1993, 215-217) claims that in the nineteenth century human beings were not used as offerings to abosom anymore, but other sources state the opposite (e.g., Akyeampong & Obeng 1995, 498-501). In terms of the general situation in West Africa, Robin Law (1985) has claimed that the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1862 created a “domestic surplus” of slaves and also an increase in human sacrifices.

14 Even nowadays, some of the Kumawu people have three horizontal scars on the left corner of their mouths. I am told that this is a sign showing the executioners (abrafo) that they are protected by the ancient contract made by Tweneboa Kodia and Osei Tutu!
children (Godelier 1999, 180), but in this case those sacrificed were “humans depended on”, chiefs whose duty it was to sacrifice in order to make the state prosper. The Asante usually explain the nature of objects used as sacrifices by stating what the deity in question likes (pe) or dislikes (mpe). Accordingly, there is a group of deities known as abosom abrafoz, the “executioner-gods”, which are said to have a taste for human blood. But why should the humans sacrificed be of high rank? I can answer this only by referring to some general theories concerning sacrifice. Namely, if it is accepted that in sacrifice the victim(s) stand for the person or group making the sacrifice (Beattie 1980, 30), it is then apparent that in Osei Tutu’s sacrifice the victims substitute for the whole coalition of chiefdoms, “the nation in the making”. And if Jackson’s (1977, 129) observation that generally “as the social scale of the participant group increases, the relative value of the thing offered increases” is valid, then it is also evident that “stately” sacrifices require the most “valuable” victims. Obviously, Osei Tutu could not offer himself to be sacrificed, since he had already been chosen as the future ruler of the Asanteman by Komfo Anokye, who was the intermediary between the human realm and the supernatural. To employ the terminology introduced by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (1968, 19-49), Osei Tutu could not be the victim since he had been chosen to be the sacrificer by Komfo Anokye, the sacrificer. Nevertheless, some of his allies volunteered to sacrifice themselves if he would give them something in return, and in the absence of a better term I call that something “jural rights”. By involving himself in exchange with both gods and humans Osei Tutu was finally able to “establish his dynasty”.

7.4 Gods as exchange partners

Marcel Mauss (1990, 16-17) asserted that the first group with whom humans were to establish a reciprocal relationship were “the spirits of both dead and of the gods”, since they “are the true owners of the things and possessions of this world”. Furthermore, the gods do not merely reciprocate a gift, they “give a considerable thing in place of a small one”. Mauss called this type of exchange contract sacrifice. In his critical reading of Mauss, Maurice Godelier (1999, 186) concludes that “sacrifices to God or to the gods are not fundamentally a business deal”. If gods are really seen as “the true owners of things”, they would not be in anyway obliged to receive, let alone repay, gifts consisting of things they already own. On the contrary,
humans have received everything they have, even life itself, from gods, to whom they are thus forever indebted. Willingness to obey gods derives not only from the human desire to become favoured by the acts of gods, but also from that primordial debt, as Godelier named it. In this respect, contract sacrifices are a “correct etiquette” set by the gods themselves, and which humans necessarily have to follow in order to get heard by their spiritual superiors. According to this line of thinking, humans do not slaughter sheep for gods, so that gods would get sheep, they do it because they have been instructed by gods to slaughter sheep when communicating with them (ibid., 192-196). What can be then said about the victory insurance rites of Osei Tutu? To answer that one has to look into the Asante cosmic order and what Godelier actually says about gods.

In his study of the sacred Godelier suggests that “the sacred is a relationship that humans entertain with origins” of both themselves and everything around them, and the debt mentioned above is precisely to those powers that originated everything (ibid., 179-180). According to Godelier, the idea of contract is incompatible with this kind of relationship. On the other hand, he writes of “minor powers, forest spirits, for instance”, who “can be entrapped, made fun of, tricked, or, on the contrary, one can make friends with them, associate with them and exchange presents and gestures of affection, as between humans” (ibid., 185). One could say that for his purposes Godelier has divided supernatural beings into those who have created and those who have not.

According to the Akan belief system the universe is created by Onyame, the superior being, who has also impregnated it with his own power (tumi, “ability to change things”). Onyame has been described as typical a “withdrawn god”, who distanced himself from worldly affairs instantly after he had completed his works of creation (McCaskie 1995a, 105). So, Onyame is the source of all power, but anybody with the right knowledge about the means can obtain some of that power (Akyeampong & Obeng 1995, 483-484). Among those are the children and grandchildren of Onyame, the abosom. Together they all form “a spiritual family”, as one of my informants called it. Although the abosom are essentially mobile, capable of leaving and returning at their own will, they have their own places of origin in nature, and they can be classified accordingly:

1. Asuo (rivers). Deities that originate from water, most often rivers.

The biggest subdivision of these abosom is called Tano (or Taa),

15 See Rattray (1916, 20-21) for a tradition explaining how and why Onyame left the earth.
which refers to the Tano River in central Ghana. Many of the gods that the Asante consider “ancient” (tete) belong to this subdivision.

2. *Mframa* (winds). Deities that originate from air or the sky.

3. *Abo* (rocks, stones). Deities originating from the forest. They are considered to have a special relationship with “dwarfs” (mmoatia) and some of my informants actually equate the two.16

Their superiority to humans is based on their immortality and their extraordinary powers: they are capable of “striking you dead”, as I have often been told. They are difficult to fit into Godelier’s categories; on the one hand, they are not creator-gods responsible for originating the world, but, on the other hand, they are clearly above the everyday lives of the people. There are significant differences in their powers as well as their character. For example, some of them are known as “war gods”, and some as “witch-hunters”. Some are known as “gentlemen”, some as “rascals”. Human beings can form relationships with the *abusom*; for example, a group of people, who have settled in a place already inhabited by a god, are indebted to him/her as the original “owner” of the land, and are thus committed to obey the rules formulated by the god. Such rules become evident in the first encounter between the deity and the human community, or at the latest, when a permanent, formal tie between the two has been established.

For instance, in the village of Dendwa, located in Nkoransa, the local deity, called Asuo Akruma (also known as Kwaku Akruma or Dendwa Akruma), was living in a nearby river long before the first human settlers arrived there. At that time, I am told, monkeys instead of human beings served him. They brought him food and kept the dwelling of the deity (a cave behind a waterfall) clean. The founder and first headman of the village was a man called Adu Abo, who was originally a servant of the paramount chief of Nkoransa. One of his duties was to hunt elephants for his master, and during one of his hunting expeditions he noticed something out of the ordinary. One of the descendants of Adu Abo described the events in the following way:

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16 Descriptions given by McCaskie (1995, 108-110) and Jane Parish (2000, 489) differ from mine in some details, but the basic idea of three different natural loci is common to all.
Our ancestors were hunters. The Nkoransahene sent them here to hunt elephants. They sent their quarries to him directly. One time they stopped here to rest. Nana\textsuperscript{17} [Adu Abo] was thirsty. He told his people to go and get water for him to drink. They took a brass cup and went to the river to fetch water. But as soon as the cup touched the surface of the water, the water turned brown. They went back and reported this to Nana. He said: “Why don’t you use a calabash instead of a brass cup”. They took a calabash and went back to the river. This time nothing happened, and the water was pure and refreshing. Later some women went to the river to fetch water. Some of the women were having their menstrual periods. When they touched the water, the river stopped flowing and there was no more water coming down from the waterfall. It looked like the whole river was going to run dry. This was reported to Nana and he said: “There must be a god here”. He reported this to the Nkoransahene, who said that they should settle there and serve the god.

Later the deity possessed one of the settlers, and that person became his first priest.\textsuperscript{18} Through the priest the villagers learned the taboos of the god, which are, in addition to brass vessels and menstruation, dogs, goats, and farming on Wednesdays. Conversely, it is known that the deity likes sheep and palm wine, and hence these items are given to him in sacrifices. To this day, the taboos are carefully observed. Dogs and goats, which are characteristic to Ghanaian villages in general, are totally absent in Dendwa. On a Wednesday one is certain to meet all the villagers at their houses, because no one would even think of farming on such a “bad day” (\textit{da b}one). Even the quite considerable Christian and Muslim populations of the village, who do not usually take active part in the rituals connected to Asuo Akruma, observe the taboos strictly, because, as the traditionalists say, “they know that they are living on his land, and if they break the rules, he will punish them severely”.

However, the relationship between humans and the abosom is never one-sided. Human communities do not entertain the abosom simply out of

\textsuperscript{17} “Grandparent”, a respectful appellation used when referring to elders, officeholders, ancestors, and deities.

\textsuperscript{18} Or maybe “priestess” would be more appropriate term here, since according to Akruma’s specific instructions he should always be served by females. The term \textit{ek\textasciicircum}mfo refers to both male and female ritual specialists. This instruction does not contradict the notion of menstrual blood as one of Akruma’s taboos, since I was told that the priestesses will stop menstruating immediately after they have become in contact with the deity.
fear. This is well exemplified by a ritual recitation that was performed during the consecration of a new shrine of a deity called Taa Kwesi. It was recorded by Rattray (1955, 148-149), and I quote it at length:

When we call you upon darkness, when we call upon you in the sunlight, and say, “Do such a thing for us”, you will do so.

And the laws that we are decreeing for you, you, this god of ours, are these – if in our time, or in our children’s, and our grandchildren’s time a king should arise from somewhere, and come to us, and say he is going to war, when he tells you, and you well know that should he go to the fight he will not gain the victory, you must tell us so; and should you know that he will go and conquer, then also state that truth.

And yet again, if a man be ill in the night, or in the daytime, and we raise you aloft and place upon the head [refers to a consultation through a priest], and we inquire of you saying, “Is So-and-so about to die?”, let the cause of the misfortune which you tell him has come upon him be the real cause of the evil and not lies.

To-day, we all in this town, all our elders, and all our children, have consulted together and agreed without dissent among us, we have all united and with one accord decided to establish your shrine, you, Ta Kwesi, upon this, a sacred Friday.

We have taken a sheep, and a fowl, we have taken wine, we are about to give them to you that you may reside in this town and preserve its life. From this day, and so on to any future day, you must not fly and leave us. (...) To-day you become a god for the chief, to-day you have become a god for our spirit ancestors. Perhaps upon some to-morrow the Ashanti King may come and say, “My child So-and-so (or it may be an elder) is sick”, and ask you to go with him, or may be he will send a messenger here for you; in such a case you may go and we will not think that you are fleeing from us.

Here it is the people who are setting the rules of conduct for the god and not vice versa. Taa Kwesi is being explicitly told that he should inform the people about the outcome of any possible war and also reveal the true cause of death if somebody in the community is about to die. Even the movements of the god have been restricted with one exception: when he is summoned by a higher, but still human, authority! Nevertheless, he is asked to preserve the life of the town, but not because he had originated it (or anything else),
but because he is presumed to possess the power to do so. Similarly, the inhabitants of Dendwa expect Asuo Akruma to help the village by making “barren women to give birth” and catching thieves.


Evans-Pritchard’s (1956, 210-211) observation was that Nuer invocations to god are rather declarations than petitions; the Akan take this a step further. In the climax of the invocation that concludes a sacrifice, the Akan priest literally shouts at the god, questioning whether he/she is even able to do the things asked (cf., Rattray 1929, 122). Gods certainly are mightier than men, but it does not necessarily mean that the less powerful are indebted to the more powerful. More likely, the gods are here to establish and control a system of exchanges, where power is being distributed. As Rattray (1955, 146) once put it, they initially came to earth “in order that they might receive benefits from, and confer them upon, mankind”. To my mind, the most important thing is that after the relationship between the human community and deities is fully established, the latter become strongly associated with a specific group of people, for example, their shrines are often the corporate property of a particular lineage, or they may be attached to an office of chief or priest. Although Onyame, as the original source of all power, could be defined as belonging to an “extra-social” or “desocial” category (see Jackson 1977, 134-135), the abosom are considered by the Asante as exchange partners and thus very social, even though not exactly in the same sense as humans.
I do not know precisely which gods were meant in the traditional accounts when they refer to “gods of the nations” who demanded the sacrifices of the chiefs. The Golden Stool, containing the spiritual backing of Asanteman, is said to derive its powers from Onyame, but ultimately this statement is valid for anything-anybody powerful. Although sacrifices can be made to Onyame as well, he is excluded from the sphere of contractual sacrifice. He has no temples or priests of his own. Communication with Onyame and his powers takes place through the abosom, and from other instances we know that deities called “state gods” are specifically abosom. But still, the tumi used in executing the contracts is the same power that was used in the creation of things. The abosom seem to be able to do exchange with power, just like humans are able to exchange creations of divine powers (people, animals, food stuffs, etc.) with other humans. Similarly, human leaders transform the power obtained from the supernatural to authority and redistribute it to their followers, for example by creating subordinate political offices, as was the case with Osei Tutu granting a chiefly title to his servant Amankwatia. In exchange, the subordinates assist their superiors in dealing with the supernatural, just like Amankwatia was ready to follow Obiri Yeboa to the land of the dead, and are thus connected to the chain exchanges that cross the border between the spirit world and the living.

To fully understand the seeming contradiction between Godelier’s ideas of the sacred and contract sacrifices, one has to make a distinction between personalized power and non-personalized power. In the former case power is considered to be inseparably vested in a spiritual being of some sort, but in the latter, power is conceived as “a kind of impersonal diffused quality or force” (Beattie 1980, 38). As Marcel Griaule has observed of the Dogon of Mali, in their sacrifices, at the moment of the death of the sacrificed animal, a certain quantity of impersonal and unconscious power is believed to be released and subsequently incorporated into the people performing the sacrifices (ibid., 41-42). So, ultimately, for the Dogon sacrifice is a kind of “power management”, and in that respect they are not very different from the Akan. The inference from this is that

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19 I am told that the god Komfo Anokye served is called Boabuduro. The cult of Boabuduro is still active in Agona, Anokye’s home chiefdom, and my informants tell me that it is “the god of the Asene clan in Agona”. However, Komfo Anokye, like other priests, most probably served several deities, and Boabuduro is not mentioned by name in any of the traditions that I know about the sacrifices preceding the Denkyira war.

20 Rattray (1954, 141-144) speaks of, and has actually taken a photograph of, an alleged priest and temple of Onyame, but there is no other reference to anything similar elsewhere (cf. McCaskie 1995a, 382).
power thus obtained can be used in alternate ways, creatively or non-creatively, for good or bad. But as Hubert and Mauss (1968, 13) asserted, sacrifice involves a “moral person” and expresses the values of his/her community. This view is surely connected to Durkheim’s (1964, 43-45) separation between magic, which is practiced privately towards private ends, and religion, which is always related to a group or community. So, a contract sacrifice performed by a chief in office should be considered a religious sacrifice towards communal ends and expressing communal values. I want to stress that “the relationship humans entertain with origins” is not restricted to a single debt. Indeed humans are unable to repay “the powers and forces which made the universe”, but the way these powers are re-channelled among “lesser gods” and human rulers certainly involves the idea of contract.

Goody (1962, 389) has pointed out that sacrifices can be distinguished as those that are made regularly and those that are made only in special circumstances. The process described above clearly belongs to the second category, and it resembles in many ways the idea of reciprocity as “a starting mechanism” in forming relations of authority. The term “starting mechanism” was originally used to describe how a person achieves a position as a leader through generosity (Sahlins 1972, 204-210). In Osei Tutu’s sacrifice the victims were already hereditary chiefs, but by giving a gift to their followers they connect them to a hierarchy of greater scale. In exchange for their lives the chiefs, or rather their own and their subjects’ descendants, were given jural rights. In the case of exemption from executions, the essence of the jural rights received was that no such exchange should ever be conducted in the future. Thus the right is the negation of the sacrifice (see Figure 11). It is the uniqueness of the whole event which is important; it could not be repeated, nor was it re-enacted.

This is in contrast to reproductive sacrifice, like among the Aztecs, for

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21 One particularly interesting tradition is from Dwansa. Customarily, the Dwansahene was responsible for carrying the gunpowder of the Asantehene’s army. Before the Denkyira war Komfo Anokye prophesized that the carrier of the gunpowder would certainly become barren, but still the Dwansahene “preferred to be sterile rather than lose the dignity of the Nation”. In exchange for his sacrifice the Dwansahene was given the elephant tail (the insignia of the “big men”), a shield (a symbol of chieftaincy, much like the stool) and a “golden calabash” (IAS/AS 61). It is important to note that here the “human sacrifice” involves the unborn instead of the living. What is even more remarkable is that those sacrificed are the future patrilineal offspring of the Dwansahene (or the matrilineal descendants of his wives), but the title and regalia received are attached to his office, which is vested in his own matrilineage.
example, where divine beings were considered to have been created by sacrifice, and consequently sustained, renewed, and commemorated by sacrifice (Sahlins 1978, 47-48).

7.5 Sacrifice as struggle for power

In his study of the Shilluk kingship Evans-Pritchard treated regicide, the killing of the king who had lost his divine powers, as a structural problem. In order to question James Frazer’s theories on institutionalized ritual regicide, he claimed that among the Shilluk regicides did not really exist. It was rather a case of political assassination or armed rebellion. In an alleged regicide, the segmentary interests inherent in society have resurfaced, and the king as a person becomes once again associated with the particular segment of society he is coming from and not the divinity. During and after the violent elimination of the king, the kingship still remains divine, and a new person will be selected to fill it. So, when the king is considered to have lost his divine powers, in actuality, he has lost his overall support (Evans-Pritchard 1962, 84-85). Valeri has also discussed the political factors
connected to the human sacrifices performed by the Hawaiian kings. According to him “the king is recognized as divine by virtue of the successful performance of certain sacrificial ritual” and his ability to do that depends on certain political actions (Valeri 1985, 153). Namely, every king was considered a conquering king in the sense that he had defeated all the other contenders to the throne and was ready to defend it by force. So, the victory in a “succession war” that makes one of the contenders a “divine king” also implies the demise of others:

But these rivals were not simply killed; they are sacrificed, hence incorporated into the god, reduced to him. Moreover, they are not only enemies, but also close relatives of the victor. Hence they are his doubles. Thus, by sacrificing them the victor is indirectly incorporated into god, given a divine status. In sum, he becomes a divine king (ibid., 161).

So, the fratricidal nature of the Hawaiian kingly sacrifice is very important. By substituting himself in sacrifice with the closest possible “imitation” of himself, the king gives the best possible offering and thus becomes capable of entertaining a closer relationship with the supernatural. At the same time, on the level of realpolitik, he rids himself of challengers.

Could the sacrifice of Osei Tutu be regarded as a ritual context provided for the elimination of possible rivals and transgressors? Certainly, none of the chiefs who are mentioned in the traditions as having been sacrificed were legitimate contenders to Osei Tutu’s office. In all of the traditions that I know, only two of the sacrificed chiefs were somehow related to Osei Tutu. The first one was a “half-brother” of Osei Tutu, a chief of a town called Bonwere. In exchange, his descendants were exempted from the death penalty and also given the right to use a specific type of regalia usually reserved for Kumase royals (Rattray 1929, 277). Nonetheless, the Bonwerehene was only a “half-brother”, not a member of the same clan, and consequently not eligible for the office of the Asantehene. The second one was the junior brother of the Kuntanasehene, whose lineage was given a subordinate office in the capital in return (PRAAD ARG 3/2/64a). The ruling lineage of Kuntanase does belong to the same clan as Osei Tutu’s lineage, but to the opposite Dako moiety, and thus its members are highly unlikely to become considered eligible. However, in other instances royals are known to have been sacrificed. Missionaries who witnessed a funeral of a royal in Kumase in 1873 reported that the “King
himself killed some members of the royal house” (Ramseyer & Kühne 1875, 236-237). Unfortunately, the limited material at hand does not allow any advanced generalizations.22

If sacrifice is to be seen as an instrument of political struggle, one has to approach the question by investigating who has direct access to and control of the shrines of those deities to which sacrifices are usually made. It is already evident that in Asante thought, power transcends human agency. Although originating from the spiritual realm it is, in principle, accessible to all, but in practice access to it is restricted by limited knowledge and material means. This explains the high value given to esoteric knowledge in Asante society, namely the admiration of people who “know secrets” (nim asisem). However, this notion of general accessibility to power has represented a constant spiritual threat to the rulers. Their own powers have to be protected from witchcraft (baiy), sorcery, and other malevolent forces used by their opponents. Accordingly, chiefly councils have made decisions on which “jujus” are “harmless” and “can be allowed to remain” and which are considered dangerous and thus should be abolished (e.g., PRAAD ARG 1/30/1/18a). Similarly, rules have been formulated in order to limit the monetary value of objects used in sacrifices (e.g., PRAAD ARG 1/30/1/18b). In short, secular means have been employed in order to limit subjects’ access to spiritual power.

The other way has been to enhance one’s own spiritual potency in order to defend oneself against attacks of the same kind. Especially during the early colonial period, when mass movements for the deposition of chiefs emerged in various localities, one method used by the chiefs in fighting back was attaching new shrines to their offices (e.g., McCaskie 1981a, 139-140). For example, in 1934 the chief and elders of the chiefdom of Kumawu had acquired the shrine of a new, supposedly more powerful, bosom in order to keep their subjects in check. They were clearly satisfied with the results:

In the former days youngmen of this Division were in practice of bringing into this Division bad native medicines that got the power of compelling others to rebel against the Omanhene and their elders

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22 In the funerals of the Asantehene the haphazard killings that marked the beginning of the “primary funeral” were committed by the sons and grandsons of the Asantehene, and royals were expressly a forbidden category to them. Those persons who were sacrificed in order to send them to accompany the deceased in the spirit world were mainly royal wives and servants (McCaskie 1989, 432-443).
which sometimes resulted in destoolment and etc. but since the practise of these fetishes started nothing of these sort has occurred (PRAAD ARG 1/30/1/18c).

In Asante thought, obtaining power requires communication with the supernatural, which is usually done through sacrifice. Power connotes the ability to change things and access to its sources is regulated by secular means: not only in the sense that rulers sacrifice in order to secure the protection and prosperity of the entire society, but also in the sense that rulers seek to monopolize sacrifices, thus denying rest of the society access to higher powers. To put it bluntly, authority is used in order to get more power. And here one clearly comes to Godelier’s (1999, 194) point about how “[t]he castes and classes of antiquity could not have emerged had not these groups and these men appeared to have advanced further than other men into the space which from the outset separates man from the gods”.

But despite the objectives of self-aggrandizement, there is always a social aspect in sacrifice. Nevertheless, in sacrifice the individual acknowledges that his/her fortunes depend on powers other than his/her own, not only those of the supernatural, but also his/her allies – those who help him/her sacrifice (cf., Hubert & Mauss 1968, 102). Hence the attainment of power is seen as much a matter of exchange as it is a matter of coercion. When hierarchy is constituted in sacrifice, one is able to see both of these processes at work: the superior authority of kingship over chiefship is established through exchange between the king and the gods, but the king cannot engage in exchange without the help of his chiefs, who are compensated by jural rights, which include, among other things, limitations of the kingly authority. The status of chiefly offices, which is comprised of these jural rights, is determined in the emerging hierarchy by their participation in and contribution to the sacrifice. The kings’ and chiefs’ ability and charter to rule arises from their transactions with the supernatural, and thus the state is not elevated to a “mystical plane”, but the “mystical” alliance descends to the political plane.
8 “A PRAYER FOR PROSPERITY”: AUTHORITY OUTSIDE THE HIERARCHIES

In her study of the political systems of the region Paula Brown (1951, 261) states that in West Africa “authority is exercised by persons holding positions in kinship groups, associations, and states”. In the case of African kingdoms like Asante, she adds, authority was “a monopoly of state organization” (ibid., 276). Similarly, Fortes did not consider the hierarchies among offices of the same clan as political hierarchies, because status in them did not entail “politto-jural” authority in an accepted sense. They were not state hierarchies. Hence, they were seen to be less significant in comparison with the chain of allegiance for the political system. This view embodies the basic assumption of classical political anthropology that in state societies authority is vested in a formal structure. This, of course, is in alignment with the Western idea that in the bureaucratic machinery of a modern nation state authority is an allocated right attached to certain official positions. However, many recent studies have shown that centralized power is an illusion and “social formations are composed of competing epicentres of power whose relative strength may change over different spans of time” (Arens & Karp 1989, xxiii). This not only means political change or structural transformations in the long run, but also “moments in repetitive social processes when duly constituted authorities leave the center stage to the seemingly powerless” (ibid.). For instance, Victoria Ebin (1989) has shown in her study of the Dou secret societies of southwest Ghana how a new group of actors steps forward in a crisis situation (in her example, an increase in witchcraft), where the formal authorities, such as chiefs and diviners, are considered helpless. She claims that authority is diffused throughout the society and many of its members have “occasional” authority instead of the more permanent authority of the officeholders. In a similar way among the Asante, something as political as participation in warfare was actually sanctioned in ritual by ordinary women instead of the male officeholders, who are the established military leaders of the Asante society. This process involves the ritual movement of actors between hierarchical social and cultural categories.
8.1 Warfare and status

As Jérôme Rousseau (2001, 121) has pointed out, in a society where success in warfare provides status, the rulers are able to regulate the subjects’ ability to gain status by regulating warfare. Certainly, in pre-colonial Asante warfare was one of the major sources of status. Chiefly titles, rights to land and subjects were gained by military achievements. However, not everybody had the right to take part in warfare and seek higher status that way. The differing abilities to fight were congruent with the main cleavages in the society. Fighting separated chiefs from their subjects, free men from unfree, adult men from adolescent, and finally, men from women.

Physical violence in general was regulated by the political authorities. There was no tradition of blood feuding, and the jural custom in most cases disapproved of the idea of self-help by the offended party.¹ Quarrels between individuals belonging to different communities were, if at all possible, arbitrated by a third party (Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 53-54). Those not satisfied with arbitration brought their cases before a chief’s court (ibid., 38-39). In terms of open warfare, the lineage elders were military commanders in the army of their chiefdom, but, individually, they could not mobilize their lineages. Of course, as councillors of the chief they had great influence in the matters of war and peace, but the final decision on war was made by the chief. Hence the person who “fought” (ko) wars was the chief, and he was perceived by his subjects as the supreme warrior. His exploits in war were always considered superior to those of his sub-chiefs or subjects. These merits were commemorated in chiefly titles, horn calls, drum histories, praise poems, regalia, and such. For example, the present Nkoransahene uses the title Okatakyei, “the gallant one”, which was originally bestowed on one of his predecessors. When he is moving on ceremonial occasions, his entourage is led by men carrying blackened elephant hides (bahoma), which are the insignia of Okatakyei. The horn call of the Okatakyei is Katakye wo pe ko pa pa (Rattray 1929, 225), meaning “the gallant one loves to fight”. Individual chiefs were also known by appellations that emphasized heroic deeds in war, for instance, the first Nkoransahene, Bafo Pim, was known as Bron Kyempem Duoduakwahene, freely translated as “the conqueror of thousand Bron peoples” (Goody & Boateng 1965, 175). This refers to his victory over the Takyimanhene, who

¹ For example, one was allowed to hit a thief or an adulterer when apprehending him/her, but killing him/her would not have been any different from a murder (Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 54).
was considered to have been the most powerful chief coming from the Bono (Bron) ethnic group. In conclusion, it can be said that the ability to make decisions about war, to wage war on other people, separated the chief from his subjects. Of course, in a ladder of command the subordinate chief needed the permission of his superior before going to war, but nonetheless, he was still considered to fight on his own (e.g., RAI MS 107: 9).

For the ordinary men fighting meant a different thing. In their case it referred to the physical ability to fight, and more specifically, to the ability to own and operate a gun. The gun (*otuo*, pl. *atuo*) was, and to some extent still is, a symbol of manhood and authority. Possession and use of a gun were the mark of a free adult male. The boys learned their gun skills from their fathers during adolescence, but it was only in their late teens that they could own one. When negotiating marriages, the lineage elders had good grounds to forbid a girl to marry if they found out that the suitor did not own a gun (Arhin 1980, 26). Sometimes adolescent boys and women took part in military expeditions and performed various maintenance tasks, but the actual fighting was carried out exclusively by men. Also a slave might have carried his master’s gun to war, but he never had the right to own one. Accordingly, a slave could not join the fighting. As a symbol of authority, the gun did not have the same significance as the stool with its strong connections to the spirit world, but the inheritance of a man’s gun meant that, not only the weapon itself, but also the social and political status of the deceased had been transferred to his heir (Fortes 1969a, 149-150). This applied to chiefs and subjects alike. Even nowadays one of the highlights of a chief’s installation ceremony is when the new chief parades through a crowd showing his gun to the public. “You have handed over his gun to me” (*mode ne tuo a amame*) - a locution used in installation ceremonies - means that the person speaking is taking his predecessor’s place as a chief. Hence the gun also connected a man to his ancestors.

The relationship between men and women in Asante society could be characterized as complementary but hierarchical (cf., Piot 1999, 121). This was already noted by Fortes (1962b, 269), when he maintained that “[m]en have greater political power than women; but political status comes

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2 The term Bono refers to the Akan peoples inhabiting the areas north and northeast from Asante.

3 Guns are still important in hunting and protecting farms from pests. Gunfire is also an important part of funerals and some other ritual occasions.

4 This rule probably applied only to so-called domestic slaves, since some sources indicate that the contingents of the Asante army consisted of enslaved captives (e.g. Rattay 1929, 120-121).
from lineage affiliation which is conferred by women, and this redresses the balance”. The principle of complementarity also characterizes the relationship between the male office of chief and the female office of queen mother. For instance, a queen mother elects the candidate for the chiefly stool, and conversely, the queen mother is appointed by the chief. Similarly, a dead chief has to be buried by the queen mother and vice versa. This idea is also expressed in proverbs like *bɑa na owoo ɔhene*, “it was the woman who gave birth to a chief” (Akyeampong & Obeng 1995, 481). However, the notion that a man is a product of a woman is also constitutive for the hierarchal relation between the two categories of office. It is often said that the female stool is also the elder stool (*akonnua panin*), and hence the female ruler is perceived explicitly as a mother to the chief and not a sister regardless of their biological kin relation (Rattray 1955, 80).

How is it then established that the most important political and ritual authority is vested in the male office, which cannot, at least in principle, be occupied by a female? The first reason is the ritual inferiority of women, which is due to the polluting effect of menstruation. Women of reproductive age cannot fully perform the ritual duties of a chief because their relationship to the ancestral spirits and deities would be interrupted by their periods. However, this does not concern women past the stage of menopause, who can acquire privileges of elderly men such as the right to “cut their hair short (*dansikra*)", wear their cloths in a male fashion, drink

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5 Arhin (1983, 93) claims that the female offices complement the hierarchy of male offices. This would then suggest that, for example, the female stool of Adonten is (or is not) senior to the Amakom female stool on the same grounds as in the case of the male stools. My understanding is that female stools can hold privileges distinct from their corresponding male stools, and the whole polity is not identified with the female stool in a similar manner as in the case of the male stool. For instance, the chief of Nkoransa is a son and the queen mother a wife to the *Asantehene*, but people talk about Kumase-Nkoransa relations as father-son relations. However, due to her status as a wife the queen mother has certain ritual duties to perform when the *Asantehene* is sick (Rattray 1955, 153) and hence the female stool has a relationship to the *Asantehene* that is independent from the male stool. Thus the complementary aspect would be limited to the chain of allegiance. This is certainly a matter that requires further research.

6 There are some indications of relativity concerning the menstruation taboo. An interesting point came up in a discussion with an informant concerning the difference between left and right. To do things only with one’s left hand is considered to be an offence. Of course, in practice there are innumerable exceptions to this. When I was urging how does one really know when it is acceptable to use one’s left hand, I was given this allegory in reply: “Look, when women are menstruating we don’t allow them in the chief’s palace. But what happens, if all the men have gone to war, and there is something to be done in the palace? Then the women just have to go there!”
liquor, and pour libations” (Akyeampong & Obeng 1995, 491). They are also able to occupy male stools, although most often as regents, and carry out the required ritual duties (cf., Arhin 1983, 95). The second reason, and to my mind the most important one, is the notion that women cannot fight. This seems to go beyond any considerations of the physical strength of women (e.g., Rattray 1955, 81) and is rather a matter of strength of character. A woman is seen to be defenseless against outside threats and incapable of acting without support. Hence, she is considered to be in constant need of protection from men, most importantly from her own lineage. This reduced autonomy does not result in a lack of rights, but as McCaskie (2000, 162) has noted on women’s position in the pre-colonial era, it suggests that “individual women who tried to venture autonomy outside the perimeter of ascribed jural rights as defined by matriliny were commonly and prejudicially disadvantaged in their encounters with both the explicit facts of male political power and the implicit understandings and assumption of patriarchy”. The provision of support and protection by men is seen to be equalized by the respect and submission from the part of the women. This balance in gender relations is illustrated by several of Rattray’s (1929, 310) informants who told him that a woman should never insult a man because “a man must fight to protect a woman, and as a woman cannot fight she has therefore not any right to abuse one on whom her life and safety ultimately depended”.

That this “weakness” is ultimately seen to be spiritual and not physical is apparent in one of the traditional accounts about how Komfo Anokye helped the Asante to win the Denkyira war.

All the people now asked Komfo Anotche what they should do. He said he would help them, provided he was given one thousand of everything in the world. To this they agreed. Anotche said they must prepare for three years (...). Meanwhile Anotche went to Denkyira,

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7 Women who occupied male offices took part in fighting. The most famous example would be, of course, Edwesohemaa (and Edwesohene) Yaa Asantewaa, who led the Asante troops in 1900-1901 uprising against the British. Reportedly, she agitated some of the hesitant chiefs by telling them: “If you, the chiefs of Asante, are going to behave like cowards and not fight, you should exchange your loincloths for my undergarments”. Interestingly enough, there are traditions in Edweso, which maintain that Yaa Asantewaa was actually a man dressed as a woman (Akyeampong & Obeng 1995, 504-506).
8 As Rattray (1929, 11) observed, boys who spoke in a feminine manner were ridiculed, but girls who spoke in a masculine manner were admired and complimented by saying, “she is brave” or “she has strong eyes”.

where he turned into a red-skinned girl and sat in the market selling fish. Ntim Gyakari’s servants saw her, and reported to their master that they had seen a beautiful fair-skinned girl in the market selling fish. The fish Anotche was selling had been mixed with medicine so that the heart of anyone who ate them would become like that of a woman. Ntim Gyakari took the fish seller as his concubine, and while he was asleep Anotche took his heart and then escaped and returned to Kumasi (Rattray 1929, 276).

Here the “male heart” of the Denkyirahene is transformed into a “female heart”, and hence he becomes open to the plot of Komfo Anokye. However, this observation on the inherent “weakness” of women is not meant to be a conclusive statement on women’s position in pre-colonial Asante society. On the contrary, what I am merely pointing out is that, in terms of status derived from warfare, men stood in a privileged position.

8.2 Men and women in war

Lucy Mair (1977, 66) has divided the indigenous African states into “those in which a ‘citizen army’ was summoned from its everyday avocation when it was needed, and those in which some men at least were given special training”. The Asante fall into the former category. Although warfare might have been “the chief business” of the Asante state, as one colonial administrator once put it (PRAAD ARG 1/2/1/128a), it should not be assumed that the Asante (or any other Akan) society was somehow inherently militaristic. Even though ownership of a gun was a sign of manhood, there was no formal male initiation like among the Zulu, where a boy needed to become a warrior first in order to become a man (Mair 1977, 68). There was no distinguishable “warrior class” like in some Polynesian societies (see Goldman 1967, 380-383). A low degree of occupational differentiation prevailed in the pre-colonial era, and everybody, including the officeholders, were involved in food production in one way or another.

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9 Later, in the same tradition, the heart is put inside the Golden Stool.
10 The image of the Asante as a “warring tribe” was ideologically valuable for the colonial administration, since it partly legitimated the British presence in Asante. For example, in the 1930’s, when some of the earlier policies were critically reviewed, the necessity of conquest and occupation were not questioned because the Asante had been, after all, “a set of war-like, rather truculent natives with an overweening belief in their own powers which, of course, they had to unlearn” (PRO CO 96 715/3a).
(Arhin 1980, 28). An individual soldier went to war in order to attain wealth as much as status. A British correspondent who covered the Anglo-Asante war of 1873-1874 described the difference between the fighters on the two sides in the following way: “the Ashantees, though a brave people, are not like European soldiers; they do not love fighting for fighting’s sake. They receive no pay, and fight in hope of plunder” (cited in Wilks 1975, 682). Attitudes were not much different in the upper echelons of the society. Those among the pre-colonial power elite who advocated warfare did so usually on the grounds that the people “had multiplied and become prosperous” by fighting, and those who opposed it claimed that the same objectives could be reached by other means (ibid., 477-548). Hence warfare also had its survivalist dimension, connected to an ideology of accumulation.

As noted before, it was the responsibility of the chief, with the assistance of his councillors, to make the decision on war and peace. Before pronouncing the final judgement the ancestral spirits as well as the deities protecting the state were consulted. The men in the villages were informed of the decision by their respective lineage heads. The chief could personally lead his men to battle or he could appoint one of his sub-chiefs to take the command. On the eve of war, all commanders took an oath to their overlord, in which they promised to achieve a specific target. For example, during 1892-1893, before launching one of the two punitive expeditions against Nkoransa, Bantamahene Amankwatia IV swore to the Asantehene that:

I will proceed to Nkoranza or wherever the king of Nkoranza may be and bring him to you. I will visit Brumasi; I will take my breastplates from the kings of Prang and Yeji and Gwan. I will encamp at Atabubu where the shady trees will give shelter to my troops, and on my return I will bring Atabubu, Nkoranza and all the Brong nation with me to you as a part of your kingdom by conquest (PRO CO 879/39a).

11 Among the coastal Akans, as well as the Kwawu and Akyem, the grassroot-level mobilization was done by the Asafo which was, and still is, an organization performing communal duties such as voluntary work, fire service, sea rescue, etc. In many places it is also a political body representing the commoners as a whole, sometimes even challenging the chiefly authority (e.g., Asiamah 2000). In Asante it did not have the same importance, and what was left of it was eradicated by the chiefs in the 1930’s (Tordoff 1965, 373-374).
After the oath was sworn the troops were not allowed to sleep another night in that same locality, they had to move on to the war camp (*bosese*). When the battle started troops were “encouraged and urged” from the rear by so-called pushers (*dempiafoe*), who were usually minor officeholders belonging to the ruling lineage. The chief himself, his elders and the members of the ruling lineage were expected to fight to the bitter end. It was their responsibility to defend the sacred nucleus of the state, namely the blackened stools of the ancestors and the shrines of the gods, which had been carried to the battlefield. In the worst case, they would commit suicide by blowing themselves up along with the chiefly regalia. A chief who deserted was deposed and a subordinate chief most often executed after a trial, since he had not lived up to the oath he had sworn (Rattray 1929, 122-124). In some cases he might have been able to “buy his head” by paying a considerable fine (Arhin 1980, 25). An individual fighter was also expected to show courage in combat but not to sacrifice his life when facing certain defeat. Retreat as such was not considered dishonourable (Rattray 1929, 122-123). Nonetheless, desertion was a different thing altogether and those guilty of it did not get off without any consequences. They were captured behind the battle lines and their foreheads were cut with a specially made T-shaped blade, after which they were returned to their own villages. The scarification in their foreheads was a sign to the other villagers, signalling to them that the persons in question had been caught fleeing (cf., Kwadwo 1994, 84).

The deserter-chiefs who had managed to avoid the execution as well as the deserters from the rank and file were all humiliated publicly (ibid.). The message conveyed in these public displays seems to have been quite unambiguous.

[T]he man was dressed in woman’s waist-beads (*toma*), his hair dressed in the manner called *ariremmusem* [still common among Ghanaian women], his eyebrows were shaved off (*kwasea-nkome*), and any man was at liberty to seduce the coward’s wife without the husband being able to claim adultery damages (Rattray 1929, 126).12

12 Compensatory damages for adultery (*ayeefere sika*) can be seen as an indicator of power relations between men. The higher political status of an offended husband entitled him to a higher compensation, but inversely the bigger personal wealth of an offender-to-be enabled him to engage in liaisons with wives of high ranking officeholders without losing his life or freedom (McCaskie 1981b). To be excluded from this construction meant a total loss of manhood and status. An offended man who had been in war at the time of the offence was entitled to increased damages (PRAAD ARG 8/2/55a).
PHOTOGRAPH 5. An elderly woman on her way to a shrine. She has decorated her body with white clay as a sign of a successful ending of a ritual festival.

In order to fully understand what actually happened to those who refused to fight, the attention has to be turned to the activities of the female population during war, which involved an unreserved inversion of statuses. Unfortunately, there is not much data available on this subject, but at least in a few sources a certain ritual is mentioned. It was something that, in my opinion, has to be kept apart from so-called victory insurance rites (Turney-High 1949, 215-219), which were already performed by the chief, when consulting the ancestors and gods. The main source is the journal of the two German Basel missionaries, F. A. Ramseyer and J. Kühne, who had been
captured by the Asante troops in 1869. When they were brought to the capital of the chiefdom of Dwaben they witnessed a scene familiar to them as they travelled through the Asante heartland towards Kumase. Ramseyer described it as follows:

We had already met with some specimens of the savage female army, who in time of war dance twice a day through the towns of Ashantee, with howls and shrieks uttered for the benefit of their absent warriors. Our appearance in Dwaben was the signal for a grand flourish on their part; no sooner did we appear in sight than these white painted figures rushed forward to meet us leaping and gesticulating like maniacs, and brandishing their knives amid unearthly yells. One of them waved her sword full in the face of my wife, and then swept onward, screaming fearfully (Ramseyer & Kühne 1875, 52).

After the missionaries had been shown to the Dwabenhene, they were given accommodation in a nearby village of Abankoro, where they once again “found a troop of women who were dancing and singing wild songs, which increased in vehemence on our approach”. When the women got closer to the prisoners, they “swung their fans in our faces with the maddest gestures” (ibid., 54). Some sources, although mainly pointing to the southern Akan groups, also maintain that the women stripped themselves naked during these rituals and physically abused the prisoners of war as well as the dissidents and deserters of their own community (Jones 1993, 552-554). As the captives were settled in the village they realized that they had entered a community virtually occupied and ruled by women.

The quarters allotted to us were close by, and our opposite neighbour was an Odonko negress, distinguished like the rest of her race by several semicircular scars, reaching from the temples to the corners of the mouth.13 This woman had two children whom, to our frequent

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13 The word *dɔnkwɔ*, (pl. *nɔnkwɔodox*) means a slave of foreign origin. Sometimes it is also used as a generic term for the peoples of northern Ghana, from where many of the slaves came (McCaskie 1995a, 280). The facial scarification, commonly known as “tribal marks”, is a practice shared by many of the northern peoples (see Fortes 1969b, 16). One could draw a connection between the forced scarification of the defectors and the slave status with the facial scarification as its primary external sign. Similarly, in violent popular outbursts against chiefs the mobs have intentionally scarred the faces of their victims. This
consternation, she used to summon home with piercing shrieks from the dangerous street. In another court lived a quiet wine dealer, who was almost the only male in the place, for with the exception of a few cripples and invalids, we had met hitherto with scarcely any men. The wife of the absent chief was the principal authority, and a stout cunning little woman who turned out to be the Fetish priestess, acted as her adviser (Ramseyer & Kühne 1875, 55).

Earlier, before entering Asante proper, they had stopped in Kwawu Tafo (see Figure 9), where they were presented to “the people of influence in the town, who consisted chiefly of women, the wives of officials gone to the war, all painted white, and richly decorated with gigris and fetish charms worn for the sake of their husbands, for whom they made a daily procession through the town invoking the protection of their gods” (ibid., 35). What is significant here is that the women who are considered to be in positions of authority and influence are not the established female officeholders of the polity, such as the queen mother and the female lineage heads, but the wives of the chiefs, and at least in the case of Abankoro, a traditional priestess.14

One other description of wartime rituals of women, which most probably relies on oral traditions rather than eyewitness accounts, is from Arhin.

The main female military role, albeit played far behind the battlelines, was to engage in what was known as mmomomme twe, perform pantomime dances and sing dirges in support of the men at war. It is unclear whether the dances and songs were expected to have magico-religious effects on the enemy. But they had the practical effect of shaming potential war-dodgers known as ko saankom into joining the war. Women were also authorised to compose songs which could drive confirmed war-dodgers to suicide (Arhin 1983, 96).

also relates to the requirement that a stool holder’s physical appearance and condition should always be faultless.

14 There are sources that could be seen to indicate the opposite. For instance, Busia (1968, 20-21) writes that “the queen mother as head of the royal lineage superintended the rites and dirges of the women praying for victory and the safe return of their men (mmomomme)”. However, these sources refer merely to “prayers” to gods and not to the “mob behaviour” and use of authority.
These rituals seemingly violate a number of laws and important sociocultural norms. First of all, public nudity is totally unacceptable; it is something that can be expected only from children and mad people (*abɔdɔmfo*), who “do not know how to cover themselves”, as the expression goes. Secondly, the adornment of bodies with white clay (*hyire*) is a sign of joy and purity. *Hyire* is also a sign of a favourable verdict in a court case, a return from captivity or a dangerous journey, and a priest getting possessed by a deity. In all, it could be said that white clay is associated with a successful transition from one condition or place to another. However, during preparations for war, people were expected to wear black clothes, and if body paint was used, it had to be black as well. It was only after a victorious campaign when the troops returning home were welcomed by sprinkling white clay on them. Even nowadays, this is evident in rituals where warfare is re-enacted. So, to wear white on “a black day” is something completely improper, it denotes “an offensive level of cultural incoherence”, as McCaskie (1992, 233) has put it. Thirdly, at least in the past, women’s opportunities for self-expression in public, especially in mixed gender situations, were quite limited (Yankah 1998, 16-18). Moreover, in the case of slander, an insult on the part of a woman crossing the gender line was considered particularly grave, and a woman guilty of calling a man a fool (*gyimi*) in public could have been executed (Rattray 1929, 310). In this light, women collectively ridiculing men, all the way to the verge of suicide, was something unthinkable. Finally, a physical attack was always a serious matter, and against officeholders and their retainers it could have led to the death penalty (ibid. 310-311). Affrays between ordinary villagers were usually reconciled by their respective lineages, so that the guilty party was obligated to pay an agreed amount of conciliatory damages (*mpata*) to the victim. Domestic violence was a different thing altogether, since from the contractual standpoint of marriage the wives were the property of their husbands (McCaskie 1981, 472), and thus in many cases husbands were entitled to practice severe physical abuse, even to the extent of mutilation, in order to control their wives (Bowdich 1966, 302-303).

In addition to this, there were radical changes in the appearance and behaviour of the men who went to war. Right after the war had been

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15 Of course, this is not to say that women were doomed to silence. According to Kwesi Yankah (1998, 18) “the verbal wit of women in traditional society is largely evident in all-female forums, like courts of queen mothers, where women office holders, including *akyeame* and jury members assert their oratorical skills without inhibition”. 
declared they let their hair and beards grow scruffy, a common characteristic for mad people as well as the priests, who were known as mediators “between the space of culture and that of hostile, impinging nature” (McCaskie 1995a, 108-124). A strange atmosphere of unruly speech prevailed in the war camps. Even the most important category of verbal taboos, the oaths, which are at the centre of the Akan judicial system, seemed to have been void: “any one might then use ‘oaths’ freely and even frivolously without incurring any legal penalty whatever” (Rattray 129, 123). So, at this point, the men had left the village behind in more than one sense. The change was not only spatial; the familiar rules governing communal existence were undermined too.

To summarize, one could say that the beginning of wartime was marked by a sort of “carnival”, where women, and also men, transgressed normative behaviour. This matter becomes even more interesting when one takes into consideration the strong resemblance that these events have with calendar festivals, like the Apo festival described by Rattray (1955, 151-171), as well as rites of passage, particularly divorce rituals (Rattray 1959, 96-97). What needs to be emphasized here is that wartime is not normal time, and hence at that time men and women are not normal men and women, they become something else. To put it more explicitly, when the men went to war the women were transformed into men, and when the men returned, those among them who had not filled their obligation were transformed into women. So, in all, the ritual involved a complex inversion of statuses. Moreover, the sanctioning of military obligation was executed by women; it took place mostly in the ritual sphere and had surprisingly little to do with the politico-jural institutions of the state.

8.3 Lawless sanctions?

As mentioned earlier, Fortes claimed that in the jural custom of the Asante there are two kinds of offences, the “household cases” and the “tribal sins”. In his list of nine types of public wrongs, or “tribal sins”, he mentions “treason or cowardice in war” (Fortes 1969a, 155). His list is similar to the original prepared by Rattray (1929, 294-295). However, Rattray hesitated before adding this subject to the list and he did so only with certain conditions. He had already noted that “the punishment for cowardice in the presence of the enemy was generally death” (ibid., 126), but the basis for this was still unclear to him:
It would appear possible that both this offence [treason], and cowardice, may have been relegated to the class of capital sins because they would indirectly have involved the violation of an ‘oath’ – the former, the oath of allegiance, the latter, the oath taken by commanders before setting out on a campaign. In that case the offence would then fall into another category… (ibid., 312).

The capital crime then would not be the person’s reluctance to fight as such, but a transgression of a verbal taboo, namely the oath (*ntam*) (Rattray 1959, 205-215). Hence a deserter-chief was not executed for his negligence of a universal obligation, lack of courage, or for being unmanly or dishonourable, he was put to death because by his own actions he had invoked a disaster upon the community as a whole. Of course, according to the principle of collective responsibility, the kinsmen and the subjects of a deserter-chief could have been held liable for his deeds, but in the most well-known accounts of “court marshals” in Asante there are not any mentions of mass executions or such activities. More probably, all or some of the land and subjects of such a chief were confiscated and redistributed to those officeholders favoured by the overlord.

Conversely, there are instances where the subjects refused to follow their chiefs to the front or yielded only after persuasive measures by the state. Wilks (1975, 509) writes of enormous passive resistance in January 1874 when “it proved extremely difficult for those responsible for the mobilization to collect their fighting men” (even though they were recruited for defensive warfare). Also in 1881 the persecutory politics of *Asantehene* Mensa Bonsu stirred the “anti-conscription” sentiment among the rural population, as is evident in an observation made by a British envoy:

> Not only did they murmur against the hardness of having to fight in a cause in which they took no interest, and in the mean time, having to give up their ordinary pursuits of husbandry and trade, but they moaned that they were powerless to help themselves against the

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16 Rattray (1929, 221) refers to *Kumawuhene* Kwaatrafani, who took part in the war against Banda during the reign of *Asantehene* Osei Kwadwo, but he “was a coward (*adufo*); he ran away and the *Asante Hene* fined him £ 1,000”. Wilks (1975, 222) mentions “one senior commander” called Akuoku, who “was placed on trial for dereliction of duty, condemned to death, and executed” in the aftermath of the coastal campaign of 1863-1864.
murderous customs still retained by the King, notwithstanding his promises… (cited in Wilks 1975, 531).

Similarly, in the correspondence of the Nkoransa war there are mentions of men “rapidly deserting from the Ashanti army” (PRO CO 879/39d) and how “great dissatisfaction was expressed by the Ashanti army, that they were tired of the prolonged wars carried out by Prempeh” (PRO CO 879/39e).

In conclusion, the law enforced by the chiefly authorities did not have a lot to say about military obligation as such; the known instances are about the trials and punishments of the subordinate chiefs who had gone to war under oath. Busia (1968, 57) claimed that military obligation was “a lineage taboo”, although he never clarified this concept. In that case one would presume that non-compliance would fall into category of “household matters”, and thus it would be the responsibility of the lineage elders to control the sanctions. This was not the case either. The material currently available does not suggest that the carnival-like, public humiliations of dissidents and deserters were organized by some specific lineage or similar kind of authority.

8.4 Ritual for or against the state?

Adam Jones (1993, 558) has suggested that the status reversal and aggressive behaviour of women in war rituals did not have anything to do with mobilization as such, but rather with resisting the threatened breakdown of the society. He connects them to other rituals that are performed during certain crisis, for instance, breakouts of epidemics. In these cases the attacks and insults on men are explained by their powerlessness to prevent or stop the crisis. He makes a comparison with some rituals from other parts of Africa, also performed by women in order to avoid natural calamities, as described by Victor Turner:

[S]tructural superiors, through their dissensions over particularistic or segmental interests, have brought a disaster on the local community. It is for structural inferiors, then – (in the Zulu case, young women, who are normally under the patria potestas of fathers or manus of husbands), representing communitas, or global community transcending all internal divisions – to set things right again. They do this by symbolically usurping for a short while the
weapons, dress, accoutrements, and behavioural style of structural superiors—i.e. men (Turner 1969, 184).

However, the problem in Jones’ study is that he has compiled war rituals from various peoples, with different ecological conditions, social and political organizations, etc., who have inhabited a geographical area known as the Gold Coast at one point in time (and elsewhere in Africa). Despite some formal resemblance, it is highly unlikely that all the rituals described could have a common function and meaning.

In the particular case of the *mmomomme twe* practised by the Asante, the purpose of the ritual was not to question male or chiefly authority. The existing descriptions specifically state that the activities of women were done in support of men at war. This was achieved by weakening the enemy through magic and disgracing the dissidents and defectors. Most importantly, wars were not (usually) perceived by the Asante as a crisis that threatened the fundamentals of the society. On the contrary, warfare was seen as a major source of status and wealth. Directly the spoils of war went to men, but indirectly also to their dependants, women and children. Since fighting was exclusively a male activity, the female population, not only as dependants of their husbands, but also as “co-accumulators” who were in a disadvantaged position, took part in warfare by controlling the ritual sanctions associated with it. The women are not trying to undo what the men have done; they are rather ensuring that the men are complying with the ground norms of the society as defenders of the community but also as accumulators of wealth. Hence, through ritual, women were able to participate in warfare in its survivalist, co-operative dimension, meaning that they also took part in protecting the community and making it prosper. But, individually, none of them could rise above others as a war hero bestowed with gifts of offices, titles, land, subjects, and so forth. A linguistic detail, which supports this interpretation, is that the name *mmomomme twe* (or *mmobomme*) has been translated as “to pray for prosperity” (see Jones 1993, 551).

However, the most interesting point is that authority is “removed” from the formal office-centered structure without undermining the categorical hierarchy of the society. Women are able to exercise authority over men in military matters without questioning the notion that women are inferior to men because they cannot fight. This is enabled by ritual transformations, where women are changed to men and men who are considered as defectors or traitors are changed to women. Hence, at the
same time, everything changes even though nothing really changes. The fact that the women’s authority is “occasional” – it is not permanently tied to any kind of status – shows, once again, how the idea that some statuses are politico-jural and some are familial can be deceiving in some situations. One should not expect to find certain types of relations only in certain kinds of social spheres, or otherwise one is likely to miss those situations, where authority and power take forms, which are idiosyncratic to the non-Western societies studied.
9 CONCLUSIONS: BEYOND FAMILIAL AND POLITICAL

One of the central questions in this study has been how the Asante perceive and define power and authority. Or, what is the relationship between the political institutions and society? Generally, in anthropology there are two views on political authority that are relevant to the discussion of the Asante.

In his essay on chieftaincy among the Nambikuara Indians of Brazil, Lévi-Strauss deliberates upon why and how individuals and families are grouped together under the authority of a chief. Along with Mauss and Malinowski, he concluded that the chief-commoner relationship is based on reciprocity: the group has conceded the chief the right to certain privileges in exchange for what Lévi-Strauss called “collective security”, a chiefly guarantee against need and danger. According to him, between the chief and the group, “there is a perpetual balance of prestations, privileges, services and obligations” (Lévi-Strauss 1967, 59). This view was later repudiated by one of his students, Pierre Clastres (1998, 27-47), who argued that in such societies there existed a permanent imbalance in the exchange between the chief and the people. In fact, the chief was under an “eternal debt” to the group, which prevented him from accumulating or exercising any real political authority, and this also precluded the emergence of the state. According to Clastres, in a state things are turned upside down, and it is the people who are in an “eternal debt” to their ruler (ibid., 203-209). However, what both approaches have in common is that they understand “political authority as an internal growth, springing from the essence of human social relations and dispositions” (Sahlins 1985, 76).

Sahlins (ibid., 76-79) maintains that the indigenous schemes concerning the origins of kingship often emphasize the notion that the ruler is above and beyond society. According to “local theories of origin they are strangers, just as the draconic feats by which they come to power are foreign to the conduct of ‘real people’ or true ‘sons of the land’”. Heusch’s (1987) theory of sacred kingship in Africa shares this view. Instead of a stranger king, “[t]he acceptance of magico-religious power of a unique and transcendent being over nature, is the decisive upsetting of archaic society” (1987, 28). These “beings”, i.e., the sacred kings, and their powers are considered antithetical to the prior kinship order. In fact, the sacred kings live in “a familial counter-order that transcends, while denying, the fundamental principles of the lineage society” (ibid., 24). He concludes that “the African kings are outside culture and are directly associated with nature (or divine transcendence)” (ibid., 28; italics in the original).
The idea of two normative orders, the familial and political, was also at the centre of Fortes’ “Ashanti model”, although his standpoint differed from those of Heusch or Sahlins. He was not interested in the local theories of origins of the polity as reflected in the indigenous cosmology. However, he was concerned with investigating the structural principles that define the relationship between the two orders. He understood that even in a state society like Asante, where there are specialized political agencies with powerful sanctions at their disposal, the political institutions are not merely imposed on the society. In an interesting way this relates to Clastres’ (1998, 36-37) idea of the nature of chiefship, which is embodied in “the set of prestations and counter-prestations which maintain the balance between the social structure and the political institution”. This aspect has to be kept separate from the political practises, the activity of chiefship, as Clastres called it. In the case of the Asante, by studying the allocation of politico-jural status according to principles of matrilineal descent and patrilateral kinship, Fortes came to conclude that they form a bridge between the societal and political orders. To put it in a simpler way, he noticed how among the Asante chieftaincy is not connected to society because the chief can give orders to (some of) the members of the society and they must obey him; it is connected because the chief is related to his subjects through descent, bilateral, and affinal ties, and he acts as a mediator between his subjects and the ancestral spirits. This, I think, was the strongpoint of the “Ashanti model”. Its weakness was the rigid distinction between the two domains. Certainly, the Asante have ideas about familial and political; for instance, they speak of “household matters”, *afisem*, in contradistinction to “community matters”, *amansem*, or “chieftaincy matters”, *ahinsem*. But one cannot expect these ideas to correspond directly to analytical rules about familial and politico-jural domains. By identifying the indigenous ideas with the analytical principles Fortes could claim that the domains are facts both empirically and analytically. Similarly, he claimed that all statuses and relationships could be labelled either as familial or politico-jural. By clinging to ideas about authority as defining aspect of political relations in state societies he excluded the segmentary lineage system from his model and the whole idea of seniority as a defining principle of political hierarchy was neglected. As has been shown earlier, Asante politics cannot be understood properly without taking them into account.
9.1 Colonial and post-colonial challenges

Fortes and his contemporaries are often criticized for having had little interest in colonial structures, their looming breakdown, and later their replacement with the structures of the post-colonial nation state (e.g. Hart 1985, 247-248). This holds true for Fortes’ works on the Asante. He very rarely refers to the existence of the colonial or the post-colonial state that had been built around the kingdom he was studying.¹ However, this does not mean that Fortes was not at all interested in or did not have anything important say about the impact of modern political institutions. On the surface, it seems that Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1969, 15) agreed with the commonplace notion that chieftaincy loses its importance in African societies through the loss of independent legal authority. In state societies, the paramount ruler is prohibited, by the constraints of the colonial government, from using the organized force at his command on his own responsibility. This has everywhere resulted in diminishing his authority and generally in increasing the power and independence of his subordinates. He no longer rules in his own right, but as the agent of the colonial government. The pyramidal structure of the state is now maintained by the latter’s taking his place as the paramount. If he capitulates entirely, he may become a mere puppet of the colonial government. He loses the support of his people because the pattern of reciprocal rights and duties which bound him to them is destroyed. Alternatively, he may be able to safeguard his former status, to some extent, by openly or covertly leading the opposition which his people inevitably feel towards alien rule. Very often he is in the equivocal position of having to reconcile his contradictory roles as representative of his people against the colonial government and the latter against his people (ibid.; italics added).

They saw that the balance of forces, which underlies political systems of all kinds, is permanently altered by colonialism and hence chieftaincy is removed from its former place. However, what they apparently did not

¹ Fortes’ predecessor, Rattray, was concerned with the impacts of colonialism. However, he has been criticized for not properly recognizing the effects that colonial rule had had on chieftaincy in Asante when he was studying it (McCaskie 1983). The analysis of the Asante political system by Fortes’ Ghanaian student, Busia, was explicitly about the colonial transformation (Busia 1968).
agree with, was the idea that chieftaincy is going to be replaced by modern political institutions and gradually disappear. Although chieftaincy is seen to be more or less at the mercy of the colonial administration, it is nonetheless understood that one political institution cannot just replace another.

But the sanction of force on which a European administration depends lies outside the native political system. It is not used to maintain the values inherent in that system. In both societies of Group A and those of Group B European governments can impose their authority; in neither are they able to establish moral ties with the subject people. For, as we have seen, in the original native system force is used by a ruler with the consent of his subjects in the interest of social order.

An African ruler is not to his people merely a person who can enforce his will on them. He is the axis of their political relations, the symbol of their unity and exclusiveness, and the embodiment of their essential values. He is more than a secular ruler; in that capacity the European government can to a great extent replace him. His credentials are mystical and derived from antiquity (ibid., 16; italics in the original).

Based on the Asante material it is safe to say that Fortes and Evans-Pritchard were correct in realizing that chieftaincy in Africa was a specific type of non-western political institution and thus it could not be replaced by the colonial government. In this respect, I think, their views differed significantly from those of the “practical anthropology” propagated by Malinowski and which held a dominant position in British anthropology at the time (see Kucklick 1991). Of course, Malinowski (1968, 52) too understood that the strength of the African institutions was in their relatedness to “all aspects of culture”. According to him, “[c]hieftainship shows such a great strength and endurance because it is associated with the local religion and magical beliefs; with the tribesmen’s acceptance of customary law as the only adequate expression of right and wrong” and hence uprooting it completely would prove very difficult (ibid.). However, ultimately he believed that “[o]ne institution can be replaced by another which fulfils a similar function” (ibid.), and consequently, chieftaincy would become outmoded and eventually be replaced with modern political institutions. Views analogous to those of Malinowski have been prevalent
outside the circles of academic anthropology. Many development theorists who have subscribed to the classical modernization theory as well as to the underdevelopment and dependency theories have assumed that “the principles of ‘modern’ formalized bureaucratic office and of functional differentiation would become more important than ‘traditional’ leaders” (Harneit-Sievers 1998, 57). More indirectly, similar notions live on in the views of those political writers who speak of “failed states”, where the post-colonial administration has collapsed and the people are considered to have been left in the midst of chaos and anarchy. Such writers very often see indigenous political formations, such as clans, merely as instances of “tribalism” and equate their leaders with “warlords” (e.g. Kaplan 1994).

But most importantly, such views were cultivated by the new political elites of the post-colonial state. For example, the first head of state of the independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah (1964, 83), recognized chieftaincy as one of the “traditional forces that can impede progress”, but he, nonetheless, understood that it could not just be abolished right away, since the “place of chiefs is so interwoven with Ghanaian society that their forcible eradication would tear gaps in the social fabric which might prove as painful as the retention of the other more unadaptable traditions”. Yet he predicted a “natural attenuation of chieftaincy under the impact social progress” (ibid., 84). Consequently, there were “numerous attempts to marginalize, control, and humiliate some chiefs” (Boafo-Arthur 2003, 127). The same attitude was also adopted by the military governments of J. J. Rawlings in the 1980’s and 1990’s. The Nkrumah administration concentrated on “subjugating and suppressing the economic autonomy of the chiefs through various laws”, while the Rawlings administration barred chiefs from participating in partisan politics on both grassroots and national levels (ibid.). Not surprisingly, one chief’s comment to me about government-chiefs relations was that “all governments of Ghana, from Nkrumah to Rawlings, have tried to destroy the Asante kingdom”. Yet it has survived all these challenges and the Ghanaian constitution (CRG 270(1)) still guarantees the “institution of chieftaincy, together with its traditional councils as established in customary law and usage”. However, the Asante chiefs themselves do not justify the existence of their offices by

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2 I suppose the Asante chiefs see things differently now, since the president in office, Mr. John Kuffuor, is an Asante royal of the Apagyaa stool, which belongs to the Ankobea fekuo of Kumase (see Figure 8). The Apagyahene is considered to be a wife to the Asantehene and the stool is well known for “having a lot of gold”. During his electoral campaign in 2000 I saw Mr. Kuffuor several times taking part in public ceremonies in the Asantehene’s palace. Every time the crowd cheered him enthusiastically.
reference to the constitution, chieftaincy acts and laws, or anything like that. Their strength is still the “moral tie” to the people.

9.2 Rules of the chiefs, rules of the nation state

In his recent article about chieftaincy in contemporary Ghana, Kwame Boafo-Arthur describes the chief as “a political and social power center (if even in a circumscribed sense) in the area he rules and ipso facto a microcosm of authority who at times rivals the central government in legitimacy, recognition, and loyalty by he subjects” (ibid.). To my mind, this definition does not capture the significant differences between the two political institutions that Fortes and Evans-Pritchard recognized. First, in terms authority backed up by physical force, the chiefly power does not constitute a challenge for the post-colonial administration endorsed by such coercive institutions as the police and the military. On that level of political practise, the chiefs do not rival the government. Second, however, when it comes to the “legitimacy, recognition, and loyalty by the subjects”, it is important to understand that the sources from where the modern and traditional institutions derive their formal justification are entirely different. The link between the rulers and the ruled in the post-colonial nation-state is contractual. The politician, elected to an office, is temporarily mandated to put forward the views of those he/she represent, while those represented retain the right of recall, if they see themselves misrepresented (Spencer 1997, 12). The chief, however, represents his people in a different sense. The credentials of the chief are still to a large extent “mystical and derived from antiquity” and that is something that cannot be changed by orders and legislation supported by coercive machinery. This difference can be illustrated by a dispute between two traditional rulers, the Asantehene and the Takyimanhene, over the allegiance of certain villages. The case will show how the principles that legitimate chieftaincy are kept distinct from those that legitimate the modern government and how they are to a certain extent impenetrable to the latter. How do the principles or rules, according to which the chiefs define their relationship to the people and the land, relate to modern political institutions?

The Asantehene’s control over certain villages within the Takyiman territory has remained a flammable political question. It has led to the separation of Takyiman (among some others) from the Ashanti Confederacy in 1951 and also to open hostilities between the “pro-Asante” and “anti-
Asante” chiefs and their supporters in 1982 and 1996. I will here talk about the events that took place around February and March in 1996, when I was in Kumase myself. Any detailed account of the whole Takyiman conflict cannot be given here because it is literally hundreds of years old and also because it is nowadays connected to the larger issue of the relations between the Bono (Brong) ethnic group and the Asante (see Drah 1979). Furthermore, it is also closely associated with the post-colonial government’s decision to create a separate “Brongland” by splitting the old colonial Ashanti Region into two administrative areas, the Ashanti Region and the Brong-Ahafo Region, in 1959. This split did not have any effect on the traditional allegiances of the chiefs of the two regions, but it is still generally thought that by doing so the government sought to “break the back of what it considered as dangerous Asante nationalism” (ibid., 147). However, a short historical background of the dispute can be given as follows. The origins of the disagreement go all the way back to the Asante conquest of Takyiman in 1722-1723, which put an end to the Takyiman hegemony in the northwest and gave rise to the chiefdom of Nkoransa. As mentioned above, after the defeat of the Takyimanhene and the flight of his people, the Asantehene gave a large portion of the Takyiman lands to the Nkoransahene and trusted the rest to the hands of his ahwesofoz, the overseers or caretakers, who are subordinate officeholder assigned to supervise lands and communities geographically detached from Kumase. Those communities that swore allegiance to Kumase through these overseers are often referred to as the nine villages.3 After the British occupation of Asante that had followed the Yaa Asantewaa war in 1900-1901, the authority of the Asantehene and his overseers was nullified and the villages were returned to the Takyimanhene. However, in 1935 when the colonial government “restored” the Ashanti Confederacy Council, the villages were re-annexed to the capital and the position of certain Kumase officeholders as the overseers of the villages was recognized again. After this decision the villages remained in Kumase control, while the successive Takyimanhene pursued their claims to them in various colonial courts and lost each case. As a last effort, in 1949 and 1950, petitions were made to the King of England who also rejected them (PRO CO 96 8/3/12b).

3 The villages and their overseers (in brackets) are: Nkyiraa (Nsumankwahene), Buoyem (Asantehemaa), Offuman (Adamhene and Dadiesoabahene), Nwoase (Dadiesoabahene), Branam (Dadiesoabahene), Tano Oboase (Omantihene), Subinso (Anantahene), Tuobodom (Nsumankwahene), Tanoso (Oyoko Ahenkuahene) (PRO CO 96 8/3/12b).
Despite these setbacks the Takyiman stool has never given up its claims to these villages. Consequently, in some, if not all, of these localities there are two chiefs, one appointed by the Asantehene and one appointed by the Takyiman Traditional Council. The people of the villages are also divided into “pro-Asante” and “anti-Asante” sections. Clashes between the chiefs and their sections have occurred from time to time. In 1990 the Brong-Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs decided to establish a research committee to “investigate the reasons for the appointment of two chiefs” (Bening 1999, 169). The findings of the committee favoured the Takyiman side, but in practice the situation did not change. On the contrary, on February 1996 Asantehene Opoku Ware II announced that he had elevated four of the nine villages (Tanoso, Tano Oboase, Tuobodom, and Buoyem) to the rank of paramountcy, i.e., to the status of a constituent chiefdom of the kingdom (ibid., 168). This was interpreted by the Takyiman people as a great humiliation, since from their point of view an outsider had elevated four village-chiefs to an equal status with their overlord. This resulted in violence. Groups of men from Takyiman attacked the four elevated villages and three of the newly elevated chiefs had to seek refuge in Kumase.

…when the press arrived at Techiman for a news conference by the Omanhene and his elders in reaction to Otumfuo’s pronouncement, the whole town was charged with angry young men and women in red and black outfit chanting war songs and firing guns into the air. Vehicles loaded with armed young men were seen moving to the troubled towns while those who could not go, besieged the Omanhene’s palace to give him support (Ghanaian Newsrunner Feb. 10 – Feb. 20, 1996).

When the police and the military arrived and managed to put a stop to the fighting in the towns, the casualties of the conflict were counted to be one dead and thirty wounded (including one police officer). However, it was reported that “many more deaths could be traced to the bush where fighting went on” (ibid.). There was more to come. Some men from the “pro-Asante” section of Buoyem decided to teach “an unforgettable lesson” to some of their townsmen because they had “fled the area instead of staying behind to offer support during the unprovoked Techiman attack” (Ashanti Independent Mar. 11 – Mar. 17, 1996). Allegedly, hectares of tomato, cocoa, and food crops were destroyed in this retaliatory strike. The district
office of the National Mobilization Programme in Nkoransa received 600
refugees from Buoyem and Tuobodom (ibid.).

Meanwhile in Kumase I was surprised to hear how a lot of people
were talking about war as a future possibility. The Asantehene had given a
public announcement, according to which all the Asante in Kumase should
dress in black as a sign of preparation for war. I had earlier planned a trip to
Takyiman, which I had to cancel, because I did not want to get in the middle
of the fighting and I was also advised not to go because it was possible that I
would be targeted personally because “they will think you are a spy”. Later
I was told that the Asantehene was going to speak to his people about the
crisis in his palace at Manhyia, but also that only Asante people were
allowed to take part in that meeting. Since I was clearly very interested in
what was going on, a friend of mine suggested that he would put on his
funeral clothe and go to the meeting and afterwards tell me everything that
was said there. Unfortunately, when the day of the big meeting came, I
could not find my friend, since he was too busy earning his livelihood at the
Kumase central market. Although it would have been very thrilling to hear
the news right away, missing the meeting was not such a big loss because
the whole speech given by the Asantehene was published in the next issue of
a local newspaper called the Ashanti Independent.

In the statements given by both parties of the conflict there are
numerous references to the legislation and court rulings of both the colonial
and post-colonial eras. However, the interesting thing is that it is done
mainly negatively; the disputants explain why the laws did not concern
traditional allegiance or how they explicitly recognize the “customary
rights” of the chiefs. The matter in dispute itself was about traditional
allegiance and it could be solved by establishing what is “customary”.
Basically, the Takyimanhene, Ameyaw Takyi II, claimed that the villages
had always been a part of the chiefdom of Takyiman. For example, he
claimed that the village of Buoyem was traditionally the seat of the queen
mother of Takyiman and the Buoyemhene was his uncle and hence he could
not see any reason why his uncle should pledge allegiance to the
Asantehene. Because the villages belonged to Takyiman and Takyiman
“was not an extension of the Asante Kingdom”, the Asantehene could not
elevate them to paramountcy (Bening 1999, 169-170). The Asantehene, on
the other hand, stated that “before 1900 all the stools and people of the
present Brong-Ahafo owed allegiance to the Golden Stool”. The villages in
question had been a part of Kumase for nearly 300 years, and hence “the
Asantehene’s right to elevate them to paramountcy in accordance with
customary law, is unimpeachable” (Ashanti Independent Mar. 4 – Mar. 10, 1996).

According to Opoku Ware the whole dispute had resurrected in August 1995, when the Takyimanhene came with a delegation from the Brong-Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs to congratulate him on his 25th anniversary as the occupant of the Golden Stool. During that visit the Takyimanhene had pleaded with him to allow him to administer the nine villages. The Asantehene interpreted this plea as recognition of his overlordship. Thus Ameyaw was seen to have “expressly acknowledged the jurisdiction of the Golden Stool over the towns” (ibid.). Nevertheless, he had to be turned down because, according to the Asantehene, “granting such a request would not only have amounted to the abdication of my solemn responsibilities to my people of that area, but could also set in motion a process leading to the gradual disintegration of the entire Asante Kingdom” (ibid.). Here the Asantehene’s justification is obviously based on his status as the hereditary custodian of the Golden Stool, i.e., a divine king, and thus a symbol of the unity of the nation, who cannot let his kingdom disintegrate, since it would be against the core principles of his office. Roughly five months later, in January 1996, another delegation from the Brong-Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs, including the Takyimanhene, had paid him a visit with the intention of suggesting to the Asantehene that he would “consider certain arrangements whereby matters affecting chieftaincy in those areas may be heard by Brong-Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs”. The Takyimanhene addressed the Asantehene as his clansman, a grandfather, and begged the Asantehene that he would allow his grandson to administer the villages “for and on behalf of the Golden Stool” (ibid.). A reference was made also to patrilateral and affinal links, since the Takyimanhene’s “grandfather, Oheneba Kofi Ntisi, was the son of Asantehene Mensah Bonsu and his aunt Nana Yaa Abrafi was married to Nana Agyeman Prempeh” (Bening 1999, 174). Consequently, as Ameyaw himself put it, “a litigation over the issue in perpetuity would serve no useful purpose as that would always separate the two families within the same clan”.4

4 The actual relationship between the ruling lineages of Kumase and Takyiman is very complicated. It is often said that the Takyimanhene belongs to Ayokoo or Oyoko clan and thus to the same clan as the ruling lineage of Kumase (e.g. Arhin 1979, 50). Some sources claim that the Takyimanhene belongs to the Anana clan, which is different from the Oyoko (PRO CO 785/3a). However, there are also sources indicating that Anana is only another local name for Oyoko or a subgroup of the Oyoko (Christensen 1954, 21-25). The present Takyimanhene apparently thinks they belong to the same clan. I do not know what the view of the royals of Kumase is on this matter.
Takyimanhene’s reconciliatory gesture is based on the idea that matrilineal relatives should not fight or litigate against each other and, at the same time, he is showing respect to a senior relative and asking to be granted a privilege by him. However, this plea was once again denied on the same grounds as before. On that occasion the Asantehene also revealed his plans to elevate the four villages to paramountcy, which eventually triggered the hostilities in Brong-Ahafo (Ashanti Independent Mar. 4 – Mar. 10, 1996). The press release, which followed the unrest condemned the violence, “which had been unleashed on the peace loving people” of the nine villages, “whose only offence is that they have chosen to serve the Golden Stool as their ancestors did” and it ended in a declaration: “I must state unequivocally that what belongs to the Golden Stool will not be ceded to anybody, and that acts of wanton violence and provocation will not deflect us from our sacred rights and responsibilities” (ibid.; italics in the original).

The Brong-Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs, which had been caught in the middle of a three hundred years old dispute, took a stand, when its standing committee declared that the Asantehene “has no legal, customary, and constitutional right” to elevate the four chiefs (Ghanaian Newsrunner Feb. 21 – Mar. 5, 1996). However, it later became known that a significant part of the chiefs in the Regional House did not concur with this view (Bening 1999, 174-175). Also the government assigned its National Emergency Committee to investigate the matter and “ensure a return to a state of normalcy to enable all displaced persons to return to their homes and lead normal lives” (Ghanaian Newsrunner Feb. 21 – Mar. 5, 1996). It was, nonetheless, emphasized by the Minister of Information that “it is not the intention of government to interfere with the institution of chieftaincy” (ibid.). A reply from the four elevated chiefs also followed. They made a joint statement where they welcomed the government’s decision to investigate the case and hoped it will “settle the long standing dispute which only exists in the minds of those who want to evade history” (Bening 1999, 169). However, they added that “most of the chiefs in Brong Ahafo owe their present status to the process of elevation set in motion by the occupants of the Golden Stool” and therefore it is “preposterous for the chiefs, individually or collectively to question the constitutional, legal, moral or the customary right of the Asantehene to carry out the exercise” (Ashanti Independent Mar. 11 – Mar. 17, 1996). Although the fighting had ceased, the situation in the Takyiman area remained difficult.
By June 1996 the residents of Buoyem still faced total blockade by Techiman and socio-economic activities in the town and the surrounding communities were seriously disrupted. The four vehicles that plied between Buoyem and Techiman were burnt and all the schools in the town were closed down as the teachers had fled since the violence. By the end of September the situation in the Techiman area was still tense and the people of Buoyem found it extremely difficult to move about freely and imminent famine in the area could not be ruled out. (...) More than 2,000 people had been internally displaced, mostly from Buoyem and Tuobodom (ibid.).

According to my information, the dispute is still ongoing and no quick solution about the control of the villages can be expected. The relations between the Brong-Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs and the Asantehene have remained frosty. For instance, in 1999 when Opoku Ware II passed away, it was reported that the Brong-Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs had not received an invitation to his funeral, while all the other regional houses in Ghana had received one. However, almost all Brong-Ahafo chiefs had been “customarily notified to attend the funeral individually and were placed under various divisions in Ashanti” (Daily Graphic Apr. 29, 2000). Some refused to attend “on the account of the fact that they did not understand why they should be asked to move with some particular chiefs in Ashanti” (ibid.). The form of invitation and the “seating order” of the funeral were based on the relations of overlordship and seniority and thus they had become a very political matter.

The Takyiman case directly contradicts notions that African chiefs have to “have recourse to foreign models of the state” in order stay politically relevant (Sandbrook 1985, 49). Such notions are based on the assumption that “African peoples and leaders cannot fall back upon the legitimating force of traditional institutions, because the obvious differences in scale and organization of the modern African state, not to mention the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity of most contemporary African states are too significant to allow that” (Owusu 1989, 377). In fact it is the government, which finds itself sidelined merely as the restorer and upholder of peace. The legitimising principles brought up in the dispute have to do with ancestral obligation, clanship, patrikin, marriage, the difference between the indigenes and the conqueror, and divine kingship, which are alien concepts to the post-colonial government. The crucial relationships between the ruler and his subjects and land, on the one hand, and between
two rulers, on the other, are not defined according to laws of the post-colonial state, but according to genealogies and histories. Consequently, the hierarchical aspect, who is under whom and who is senior to whom, remains to be politically relevant.

9.3 Chieftaincy and the political imagination

Apart from the political institutions and the rules governing term, ideas related to chieftaincy have a very central role in the political imagination of the contemporary Asante (and Ghanaians). The concept of political imagination is from Jonathan Spencer (1997, 4) and it refers to the “different way in which people have identified, created or reacted to an area of life and a set of practices they themselves refer to as ‘the political’” (italics in the original). In a similar vein a Ghanaian anthropologist, Maxwell Owusu (1989, 372), has argued that any African political phenomena cannot be understood, if “the central role of traditional beliefs and practices, indigenous political ideology, attitudes and outlooks” is ignored. Hence a due account has to be given to the “total cultural setting” (ibid.). According to him, for the majority of the Ghanaians terms like “capitalism”, “socialism”, “right”, and “left”, which have originated in the industrialized West, are not a part of everyday political vocabulary. They are perceived as abstractions or inventions created by the intelligentsia that do not apply to local circumstances. They are not taken for granted as chieftaincy is (Owusu 1996, 316-317). In his own works Owusu has shown how both power seekers and power holders have “manipulated and exploited widely shared elements of the traditional political cultures (...) to provide charters for contemporary reform and even radical transformation of society” (1989, 373). For instance, the military coups that followed one another in Ghana throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s were very often legitimated by references to the relationship between chiefs and their subjects. Traditionally, in Akan culture the chief holds his office in fiduciary capacity and can be deposed at any time if he has committed a definite offence or if he has become unpopular among his subjects. This, of course, is in sharp contrast with the “modern liberal democratic practice, where bad leaders are tolerated until the next election” (ibid., 378-379). The coups, which expressly violated the latter principles, were legitimated according to the former. Ousting the president was seen to be a part of “the oldest and most treasured tradition of the people of Ghana” (ibid., 378; italics in the original). According to
Owusu (ibid., 392), “all the different types of military regimes of Ghana (…) have exploited or manipulated the symbols and values of chieftaincy, perhaps the most powerful single source of legitimation”. For instance, after the overthrow of the civilian government led by K. A. Busia by General I. K. Acheampong in 1972,

the new military rulers and chiefs and peoples in various local communities engaged in symbolic mutual exchanges and pledges of support and cooperation, amidst the ceremonial slaughtering of sheep and pouring of libation to ancestors, and taking of honorary chieftaincy titles by the rulers (ibid.).

This phenomenon is by no means limited to military rule. The civilian administration can provide numerous examples of similar ways of seeking legitimation: using ceremonial swords in presidential inaugurations, writing chiefly praise poems and drum histories about the careers of the politicians, and so on. Even the first head of state, Nkrumah (1964, 63-64), who was well known for his anti-chief stances and who saw contemporary traditional leaders merely as clients of the colonial administration supported by the system of indirect rule, relied heavily on chiefly symbolism. For instance, he adopted a chiefly appellation, Osagyefoo, “Redeemer through war”, even though he had never actually redeemed anybody through war as the chiefs and kings of pre-colonial era were considered to have done. The full title he most often used was “Prime Minister Osagyefuo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah”, which referred to his position in the government, his education, but also to his self assumed identity as a traditional leader.

What Owusu’s studies show is that the ways in which the Ghanaians perceive such things, as “presidency”, “democracy”, and “representation”, are connected in a very concrete sense to chieftaincy. If the Ghanaians think and talk about politics in general by using concepts of the traditional political system, then it is also in the interest of the politicians to refer to similar concepts and ideas. My own experiences are in conformity with

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5 The chiefly symbolism can be found in very central places. Just one look at the emblems of the two major political parties of Ghana is very revealing. The Asante based NPP (New Patriotic Party), now the ruling party, has the elephant (zono) in its emblem, which is an old Asante symbol of the wealth of the kingdom. The opposition party, NDC (National Democratic Congress), has the chief’s umbrella (akatamanso) as its symbol. It has to be remembered that in a country like Ghana, where a significant part of the population cannot read or write the official language, these symbols are far more important than the English names of the parties.
Owusu’s findings. For example, during the presidential elections I heard a lot of people talk about the presidency as a “stool”: “are we giving the stool to X?”, “should the stool be taken away from Y?”, and so on.\textsuperscript{6} Such instances illustrate how in people’s thoughts and speech the two kinds of institutions are given meanings that are not consistent with the normative bases of the institutions. To reformulate Malinowski’s (1968, 65) concepts, on the level of ideas, one can here see how “native chiefship” has a direct impact on its “Western counterpart”.

One important factor is also the persistence of the ideas about the supernatural as the source of all power and sacrifice as a means to obtain it. In his study of the effects of colonial rule on Asante chieftaincy Busia (1968, 197) discussed the ways in which “the chief’s religious position is challenged by Christianity”. He noted that even though the chief performs his ritual duties as his predecessors have done, “the libations and sacrifices he offers have lost their full significance for some of his Christian subjects, who no longer believe that the crops will fail or that misfortune will befall the tribe if the sacrifices to the ancestors are not performed” (ibid). In Busia’s time Christianity was spreading and nowadays it can be said that it is the dominant religion in Asante. Although the presence and visibility of Christianity is very strong in southern and central Ghana, its relation to the traditional belief system is not unambiguous. In modern Asante one is very likely to meet devoted Christians who, nevertheless, believe in the existence of spirits, ghosts, and witches, or regular churchgoers who also consult a “fetish priest” from time to time. In her study of the history of Christianity among the Ewe of eastern Ghana, Birgit Meyer (1999, 110) observed that in the “Ewe’s encounter with Pietist missionaries, conversion did not bring about what professional theologians and social scientists tend to expect, namely rationalization and disenchantment”. On the contrary, the traditional religion was associated with the devil and through that to the evil, problematic, and confusing things in life. Hence, the old gods did not vanish from the lives of the Christian Ewes. In a very interesting way the missionaries proved the existence of the indigenous gods by demonising

\textsuperscript{6} I once witnessed a conversation, where one party claimed that Kuffuor cannot win the presidential elections because Komfo Anokye had prophesied (or decreed) that no Asante cannot assume any office higher than the office of the Asantehene. Since Kuffuor was an Asante, he could not be elected. The objections of the other party were twofold. First, he pointed out that such military rulers as the generals A. A. Afrifa and Acheampong had actually been Asante. Second, he asked “who says that this [the president’s] stool is higher than that [the Asantehene’s] stool? After eight years the president has to step down, but Otumfuo has the Golden Stool and he can keep it as long as he lives!”
them (ibid., 110-111). This applies also in various ways to the Asante. The *abosom* and the *asamanfo* have not vanished; they are still there. It is just that nowadays more and more people will say that they are “pagan gods” or “they can do so many bad things”. They are still understood to be agents of power, although the ideas about the nature of their powers have changed. Despite the fact that the values have changed, the fundamental idea that power transcends human agency and that it can be obtained through sacrifice is still valid to the Christian Asante. I have talked to royals who are so-called born-again Christians and who therefore refuse to become chiefs. On the one hand, they consider sacrificing to the ancestors and gods a “pagan” practise, but on the other, they cannot imagine a chief who does not sacrifice. When I once asked such a person whether he would like to become a chief, if he would not have to sacrifice, the answer was:

If you are a chief, you have to sacrifice. That wouldn’t be chieftaincy anymore. That would be something new, something else. I don’t know. If such a new chieftaincy would be created, maybe I could think about it. But you have to understand that it would not be the same thing anymore.

A ruler has to be powerful in order to rule and in order to get power he has to consult the supernatural. In case of the chiefs with their blackened ancestral stools and shrines of the deities this is unquestionable. Even those who consider sacrificing repugnant understand that it is the chief’s way acquiring power and thus indispensable to him.

The interesting thing is that this idea is extended to modern rulers as well. They are also considered to have an enhanced spiritual backing. There are numerous stories about politicians obtaining “jujus” that make them bulletproof, knife-proof, immune to traffic accidents, rich, and so on. Similarly, their relationships with certain traditional priests, pastors, herbalists, and the like are a popular topic of gossip. Murders, suicides, mutilations, and other violent crimes are frequently associated with human sacrifices in the popular press and very often there is a link made to politics. Of course, one can argue that much of this is just gossip and sensationalism, and hence mostly products of human imagination, but what is important is that these stories are significant, understandable, and shareable to people who tell and re-tell them. And what give them vitality are the traditional ideas about power, leadership, and the supernatural. They are still valid to the contemporary Asante, although they have new emphasis and
connotations. Naturally, the presidents, ministers, or MPs are not divine kings, but some of the ways in which they are thought and talked about by ordinary Ghanaians have to do with the ideas about divine kingship. Therefore, although chiefs and politicians belong institutionally and normatively to entirely different categories they can both be seen on a higher, cosmological, level as people having power.

Finally, the idea of political imagination connects to the question of how do the Asante people themselves (or Ghanaians) perceive the realm of power and politics. Namely, when studying the relationship between the familial and the political spheres, one cannot merely concentrate on explicit norms about institutions and relationships. One has to also pay attention to indigenous ideas about the origins and nature of power and leadership. That is the only way of finding out how the division between the familial and political exists empirically. The system of cultural logic that fuels the political imagination of the people also gives chieftaincy its vitality and meaning. Hence, it continues to exist despite major changes in Ghanaian society. Its flexibility and adaptivity, and most importantly its rootedness in the society, have secured it, even in those times when it has been in conflict with the colonial and post-colonial states.
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a. A copy of minutes of the meeting of the Ashanti Confederacy Council held at Kumasi on January, 31, 1936
b. Acting District Commissioner, Bekwai to Chief Commissioner, 5th September 1938
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ARG 2/2/105 Creation of New States in Ashanti 1962-1965
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RAI. Royal Anthropological Institute, London, UK

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