

https://dspace.org/

Tomatoes, land, and hearsay: property and history in Asante in the time of structural adjustment

Berry, S

1997-05-19
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8425

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED SOCIAL RESEARCH

SEMINAR PAPER
TO BE PRESENTED IN THE RICHARD WARD BUILDING
SEVENTH FLOOR, SEMINAR ROOM 7003
AT 4PM ON THE **19 MAY1997**.

TITLE: Tomatoes, land, and hearsay: property and history in Asante in the time of structural adjustment.

BY: **S. BERRY**

NO: 420

Tomatoes, land and hearsay:
property and history in Asante in the time of structural adjustment

Sara Berry

As debate over African economic problems and prospects has shifted from concern with the continent's "agricultural crisis" in the 1980s, to a focus on environmental degradation and sustainable development in the 1990s, the policy wheel has come full circle. In the 1980s, a number of donor agencies and governments argued in the 1980s that African economies' rising foreign debts and chronic budgetary deficits were fuelled in large part by stagnating or declining levels of agricultural production, brought on by African governments' poor choice of policies and excessive intervention in domestic markets and production.[1] To reduce their debts and regenerate agricultural production for domestic markets and for export, African governments were advised to adopt structural adjustment packages designed to reduce or eliminate controls on prices, trade and output, cut government spending, and transfer assets and productive activities from the public to the private sector.[2] By the end of the decade, as many economies began to show signs of agricultural recovery (arguably due as much to better weather and long-term urban growth as to policy-induced shifts in relative prices)[3] and greater macroeconomic stability in the short-term, policymakers' attention shifted to the question of how to promote sustained and equitable economic growth in the long run.[4] Focussing particularly on the problem of environmental degradation, some analysts have begun to call for increased regulation of Africans' economic activities, from hunting, herding, and farming, to commercial logging, mining and manufacturing. One recent study, sponsored by the World Bank, proposes "an action plan" of incentive schemes to "create demand" for smaller families and improved agricultural technology--backed up by controls to "eliminat[e] open-access land tenure conditions" and induce "policy-created artificial scarcity of farmland..." Others have advocated fences, armed guards and/or closely monitored "buffer zones" to prevent exploitation of protected areas and species.[5] Having argued in the 1980s for getting the state out of many areas of economic activity in Africa, donor agencies now apparently want to bring it back in.

Calls for renewed intervention raise questions about state capacity, and link the issue of sustainable development to another set of policy debates--namely those concerning prospects for democracy in Africa. Reporting on Africa's economic situation in the mid-1990s, the World Bank took hopeful note of recent signs of "political liberalization"--a rather open-ended term which refers, broadly, to the reduction or relaxation of state control over political organization and debate--and the emergence of a "rich and vibrant associational life...independent of the state...."[6] The authors express cautious optimism that "the political transition which is taking place in Africa ... forms a backdrop [for economic progress], and ... may even interact significantly with the development agenda,"[7] but add that further state and institutional "capacity building" will be needed. They decline, however, to offer detailed prescriptions for institutional reform, beyond appeal for "reconciliation" between formal and informal institutions,[8] and exhorting African governments "to move farther and faster" in privatizing publicly owned assets and enterprises.[9]

While the Bank and other donors have shifted their stance more than once on what roles African states and institutions ought to play in economic development, policy debates have also been marked by underlying continuities in analytical strategies and assumptions about African *capacities* for economic and political development. Despite recent appeals for flexibility, in policies and institutional capacity,[10] much of this discussion rests on reified, a-historical approaches to thinking about African institutions and their role in economic and political transformations. After discussing some of the conceptual inflexibilities which underlie recent arguments both for and against increasing the role of states and local institutions in resource allocation and management, this essay discusses the possibility of developing a more processual approach which takes account of existing flexibility, diversity and ambiguity in African institutions, and draws on a case study of land rights and agricultural practices in a rural community in Ghana to illustrate the argument.

Re-thinking institutions

In 1983, the Ghanaian economy was in serious crisis. After more than a decade of declining exports, deteriorating infrastructure, and spiralling inflation, Ghana was poorly prepared to cope with the severe drought which affected much of West Africa in 1983-4. The crisis was further compounded when Nigeria suddenly expelled undocumented aliens from the country, forcing over a million Ghanaians, many of whom had migrated to Nigeria to escape deteriorating economic conditions at home, to return to an economy already devastated by drought and depression. Domestic food supplies fell sharply, and many imported goods virtually disappeared from markets and shops. In exchange for financial assistance, the Ghanaian government embarked on a program of economic liberalization, under the guidance of the World Bank and other donors. Price and exchange controls were eliminated or greatly reduced; government harrassment of private traders abated;[11] state marketing agencies were gradually disbanded or "downsized"; and tens of thousands of government employees were laid off.[12] In addition, some state agencies were reorganized along private lines. In the early 1990s, Cocobod, the cocoa marketing board, relinquished its official monopoly over the cocoa export trade, and began to compete directly with private firms. Credit for smallholder farmers was expanded both through the Agricultural Development Bank, and the Rural Banks--private banks organized within rural communities to mobilize savings for rural development, but supervised by the Bank of Ghana.[13] And studies were commissioned to investigate the feasibility of privatizing property rights through a formal program of land registration and titling.[14]

Aggregate economic indicators suggest that the overall performance of the Ghanaian economy improved markedly in the late 1980s and early '90s, and the country has often been cited as an example of the success of structural adjustment programs.[15] Between 1984 and 1989, foreign aid and imports doubled, bringing back a wide range of consumer goods which had all but disappeared from Ghanaian shops and markets.[16] Exports also grew significantly, but remained relatively undiversified: in 1993, cocoa, timber and gold accounted for 80% of the value of Ghana's merchandise exports.[17] Total agricultural production grew modestly at an annual rate of two percent, from 1987 to 1991. While production and trade generally increased, consumption remained heavily oriented towards imports. In the 1990s, real incomes have been steadily eroded by the falling value of the cedi, and only those at the upper levels of the income scale have enjoyed rising standards of living. For a large number of Ghanaians, including many of the nation's farmers, the gains from a decade of structural adjustment have been painfully small.

The mixed record of economic performance since the mid-1980s has been accompanied by considerable debate over its causes. In 1995, a World Bank report argued that structural adjustment policies had succeeded in stabilizing many economies in Africa, but had yet to launch them onto a path of sustained economic growth. The authors added that top-down programs of privatization mandated under structural adjustment were reinforced, in Ghana and other African countries, by spontaneous changes in local social practices and in political consciousness. In particular, they cite two kinds of evidence to support this view: (1) the "evolution" by local communities of increasingly individualized rights to land and other forms of property, under pressure from population growth and commercialization;[18] and (2) the emergence of a newly energized "civil society" whose constituent groups articulate popular demands for less government and more accountability.

The Bank's report suggests that such developments point to changes in the way power is brought to bear on resource access, resource allocation, and the distribution of wealth, which may bring greater transparency and accountability to African governance in the long run. But there is little agreement among policymakers or scholars as to why this is happening or what it implies for sustainable development and democratization. On the national level, some credit civil society with helping to bring about political as well as economic liberalization by initiating or supporting demands for privatization and the rule of law,[19] while others point to the incompleteness or outright failure of many democratic transitions as evidence that civil society has been relatively ineffectual.[20] On the local level, some maintain that spontaneous transformations in, e.g., rural property rights obviate the need for state-

mandated privatization, while others continue to advocate formal land registration and titling.[21] Disagreements over the political strength and effectiveness of "civil society" are paralleled by debates over the capacity of communities and other local institutions to manage resources under conditions of rapid economic, political and demographic change.

While observers disagree as to whether African states and local institutions are moving in the direction of democracy and sustainable development, many share a common set of assumptions about their underlying character. Postcolonial states in Africa are often described as "neopatrimonial"--a term first coined by Aristide Zolberg to help account for the swift demise of the parliamentary-style governments which took power immediately after independence. In a recent article, Bratton and van der Walle explain succinctly that in neopatrimonial regimes "the right to rule is ascribed to a person rather than an office," and officials govern through the award of personal favors rather than the rule of law.[22] Personal relationships and patronage "constitute the foundation and superstructure of political institutions...from the highest reaches of the presidential palace to the humblest village assembly"[23] and determine, to a large extent, the way African governments respond both to political opposition and to economic change. Adding that neopatrimonial rule "corresponds to the normal forms of social organization in precolonial societies,"[24] they suggest that "contemporary political changes are conditioned by mechanisms of rule embedded in the ancien regime."[25] In other words, neopatrimonialism is deeply entrenched in contemporary African politics because it is traditional.

Similar arguments inform much recent discussion of local institutions' capacities for resource management and political participation. Even optimistic assessments of the transformative potential of Africa's "rich associational life" often rest on typologies of coping strategies or institutional parameters rather than dynamic analysis of social interactions. In detailing the "anatomy" of Ghanaian politics and civil society, for example, Chazan offered vivid descriptions of the strategies with which ordinary Ghanaians struggled against economic decline in the 1970s and early 80s, but said little about how such behavioral "syndromes" give rise to social or political transformation.[26] More recently, Widner explained Ivoirian farmers' "discovery of 'politics'" during the cocoa crisis of 1987-90 in terms of the presence or absence of various structural traits in "participant" and "non-participant" villages.[27]

Chazan's and Widner's attention to the energy and resilience with which African men and women have confronted political and economic upheavals is, of course, a far cry from the sweeping dismissiveness of authors such as Cleaver and Schreiber, who recently attributed environmental degradation to the "persistence of traditional arrangements and practices," the "breakdown"of "traditional land tenure systems [and] tenure security," and the inability of African "institutions and individuals [to] adapt quickly enough in the face of very rapid population growth."[28] Yet both approaches tend to cast African communities and institutions as stable entities, whose ability (or inability) to cope with externally introduced change is rooted in time-honored habits of resource management and conflict resolution. Like prognostications of the imminent "breakdown" of "traditional institutions" unable to imagine a changing world, optimistic assessments of Africans' collective ability to manage resources or bring about progressive political change through grassroots action often project images of African societies which are not very different from the "closed, corporate, consensual communities" imagined by colonial administrators, and some of the anthropologists who worked for them.[29]

Reified, a-historical depictions of states and local institutions in Africa have been reinforced, ironically, by "new institutionalists" who disavow structuralist explanations social behavior, in favor of rational choice. By treating social processes as aggregates of individual behavior, new institutionalists often imply that groups in civil society act collectively, whether or not they are formally organized, in single-minded pursuit of shared goals. Thus, civil society's goals are sometimes inferred from its members' occupations (law, business, teaching, journalism) or institutional affiliations (churches, traders' associations, ethnic unions) rather than determined through direct empirical investigation--in a manner reminiscent of marxist concepts of classes, or class fractions, "in" and "for" themselves. Even when efforts are made to observe what elements of civil society are up to, it is often deemed sufficient to conduct opinion surveys,[30] document the ideas and activities of one or two leaders,[31] or treat institutions as sets of

rules, without problematizing the social group(s) who recognize them.[32] Similarly, those who advocate giving local communities a greater role in managing their own resources often treat "the community" as a monolithic entity, whose capacity for effective management is presumed to derive from long established rules of mutual trust and cooperation, enhanced by the low levels of transactions costs and information asymmetries said to prevail in local settings and "customary" institutions.[33] It is but a short conceptual step to the opposite conclusion--that traditional institutions are "breaking down" under the pressure of accelerated change, and must be rebuilt or coerced into altering their ways.

Such arguments are fundamentally at odds with a growing body of work by historians and anthropologists which documents the complexity and variety of historical processes in Africa, and questions the usefulness of evolutionary, as well as functionalist paradigms, for understanding them. Pointing to millenia of migration, adaptation, and cultural interaction among African peoples, as well as trade and contact between Africa and other parts of the world, many of these scholars have argued that it is more realistic to try to understand African social relationships and institutions in processual rather than in structuralist terms.[34] It is now widely recognized, for example, that the "customary" rules and practices cited in contemporary disputes over land are of relatively recent historical provenance, many of them "invented" or significantly redefined to serve the needs of colonial administrators.[35] Similarly, a growing number of scholars have questioned the paradigm which represents African societies as "responding" *en bloc* to "exogenous shocks." In Africa, as in other parts of the world, changes in climate, population density, economic conditions or patterns of conquest and domination have often led people to question established practices, experiment with new ideas, and contest or renegotiate rules and boundaries which they find inadequate or unacceptable in new circumstances. In the process, social identities and institutions have multiplied and/or been reshaped so often that they appear to take on permanent qualities of fluidity, ambiguity and creativity.[36]

Thinking about institutions as processes begins with movement and interaction. For example, one might conceptualize social institutions, such as household, family, community, etc., not as clearly bounded, consensual social entities, but rather as constellations of social interactions, in which people move, acquire and exchange ideas and resources, and negotiate or contest the terms of production, authority and obligation. People interact, within and across various social boundaries, in multiple ways and relations among them are constituted less through the uniform application of written or unwritten rules, as through multiple processes of negotiation and contest which may occur simultaneously, or in close succession, but need not be synchronized or even mutually consistent. Over the course of the twentieth century, for example, farmers in many parts of Africa sought access to the means of production through their membership in social networks, but the terms on which they did so changed in a variety of ways. Access to both land and labor was frequently mobilized through social networks but, in some areas, farmers' access to land remained more closely linked to their ties with relatives, neighbors and local authorities than did their access to labor.[37] Thus, changes in conditions of access to land and to labor followed different trajectories over time, and their impact on crop patterns, methods of cultivation, uses of agricultural income, and the distribution of assets and income varied from one locality to another, according to differences in the way land and labor were combined in processes of agricultural production, as well as variations in local market conditions, off-farm employment opportunities, and debates over authority, obligation, and the division of labor and output.

Such a approach implies that membership in social institutions creates opportunities for people to engage in negotiation and/or struggle, rather than guaranteeing outcomes (subsistence, identity, etc.) or necessarily defining stable, consistent social relationships. It might be objected that this simply re-invents an old wheel: that, for example, economists have long understood markets as arenas of exchange which occupy no fixed territorial boundaries or institutional structures, and may not even be seen by their participants as fields of shared interest. Instead, a market is constituted by multiple, simultaneous (or successive) acts of participation in a particular form of exchange, its boundaries revealed (like consumer preferences) through practice. The difference lies, I think, in the objectives of the analysis. Economic theory analyzes market performance in terms of equilibria: economists are more interested in identifying conditions under which a given set of transactions will reach equilibrium than in the processes of

negotiation, conflict, compromise, etc., through which transactions themselves are effected and their terms and conditions changed. Market theory is grounded, of course, in methodological individualism and eschews structuralist terminology, but the emphasis on equilibria gives rise nonetheless to a kind of structuralist thinking about social aggregates. Defined in purely voluntarist terms, market boundaries are (and can be) treated as conceptually unambiguous *because* they are not described. If we attempt an empirically informed description, we are forced to confront the fact that different participants (and observers) may see the market, or any other social institution, differently and that its boundaries, structure, and socio-historical significance are therefore subject to both ambiguity and debate.

What is needed, in other words, is attention to the processes of negotiation and debate through which institutions themselves are constituted and people conduct their affairs within and among them. In the following pages, I will argue not only that institutional boundaries and structures are negotiated and contested, but also that negotiations themselves are on-going processes (rather than sets of equilibrium conditions) whose significance for social relationships lies, inter alia, in the fact that they don't end. In several recent essays which re-visit the idea that wealth-in-people has long been central to processes of accumulation and socio-economic change in Africa, Guyer suggests that in many parts of Equatorial Africa, people are valued for their singularity and creativity as much as (or more than) for their (undifferentiated) labor or capacities for reproduction. Throughout the region, she argues, multiplicity and singularity have figured centrally in material life, social adaptation and modes of thought. "As Laburthe-Tolra writes: `The Beti of the past enjoyed to the highest degree a genius for multiplicity and variety. "Mekyae, mekyae": there are all sorts of lineages, all sorts of marriages, all sorts of chiefs and slaves, all sorts of rituals and dances, all sorts of hunting and trapping, of machetes or cooking spoons....'"[38] If African societies and cultures have exhibited great diversity and fluidity over time, as much recent scholarship suggests, it is appropriate to shift our analytical focus from structures to processes, from rules and outcomes to on-going negotiation and debate.

Understanding institutions in terms of processes, rather than outcomes, of debate and negotiation is, of course, closely related to the analysis of discourse which has been a central theme of post-Foucaultian debates over culture, power and history, in Africa and elsewhere. Scholars working in this paradigm have done a great deal to elucidate the workings of hegemony--the exercise of power without coercion--in particular by showing how discourse can exclude events or categories of people, acts, or ideas from discussion or even from imagination. Trouillot argued recently that, because plantation owners in Haiti and their compatriots in France believed that "enslaved Africans and their descendants could not envision freedom," *they* could not envision the possibility of a slave uprising. "The Haitian Revolution thus entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened."[39] But discursive hegemonies are rarely absolute. The kinds of debates one hears in Ghanaian courtrooms and courtyards, for example--over institutional and territorial boundaries, rights to property and relations of power--are as noteworthy for their openendedness and lack of finality as for their power to limit or conclude. To be sure, people do not participate in such debates on equal terms, nor does the fact of debate guarantee anyone access to wealth, power, or even subsistence. It does, however, affect the way people spend time, use resources, and think about their problems and possibilities.

If one thinks of institutions as flexible constellations of activities, in (and among) which people move, negotiate, and exchange things and ideas, there is no reason to assume that institutions (or their members) will act in coordinated or even consistent ways, or that moving people, resources or activities from one institutional arena to another will necessarily change the way they think, act, are used, or happen. Sudden relocations or redefinitions of institutional rules and practices may intensify debate and struggle over the boundaries between them--just as colonial or national boundaries in Africa have sometimes given rise to new kinds of cross-border economic activity, community organization and social identity.[40] Institutions do play significant roles in processes of social change, but often as objects rather than parameters of struggle and manoeuvre. To grasp their historical significance, we have to ask who is debating, crossing and/or protecting their boundaries, and how? Before we can understand whether "privatization" and "political liberalization" are likely to promote economic development, we need to ask

what those processes consist of, and what they mean, in theory and in practice, to the people who are engaged in carrying them forward.

Kumawu

In June and July, 1994, I lived in Kumawu, a rural town about 50 km northeast of Kumase, the regional capital of Asante. Kumawu is located on the edge of the ecological "transitional" zone between the forests which cover much of southern and central Asante, and the open savannahs of the Affram Plains. According to the last published Ghanaian census, its population in 1983 was 8,409. Any census count of a community like Kumawu is of course somewhat arbitrary since, at any given moment, many people who consider themselves Kumawufo... (people of Kumawu) may be farming, trading, working, visiting, worshipping or politicking in other places. Many residents of Kumawu farm, but they also engage in many other kinds of income-earning activities, depending on opportunity, skill and wherewithal. Many children attend school (there are several primary and junior secondary schools in the town, plus Tweneboa Kodia Senior Secondary School which draws students from other communities as well as from Kumawu), but the streets, compounds, and surrounding fields are never empty of children (many wearing uniforms) even during school hours.

Kumawu is relatively well served by the taxis and trotros (passenger vans) which constitute the backbone of Ghana's transportation system: a trip to Kumase takes about an hour and a quarter, and one rarely has to wait more than half an hour for a vehicle. Many people who live in Kumawu commute to Kumase on a daily basis to work and/or trade. Most Kumawufo... have many relatives who also reside in the town--and many others who live and work in the cocoa farming areas of Central and Western Ghana, the Affram Plains, Kumase, Accra, Northern Ghana, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Germany or Canada. The town's wealthiest entrepreneur has built two mansions which overlook Kumawu from the southern escarpment, but he has lived in Accra for fifty years and spends only an occasional weekend in Kumawu. The Ohemaa (Queenmother), whose judicial, ceremonial and political responsibilities in the town are considerable, commutes from Toronto to fulfill them.

Tomatoes

In Kumawu, the bush fires of 1983 destroyed not only standing forest cover, but also many cocoa farms. In the immediate aftermath of the crisis, farmers (including refugees from Nigeria and the non-agricultural sectors of Ghana's decimated economy) concentrated on growing staple foodstuffs--principally maize, cassava and cocoyam-- for home consumption and for sale, together with small amounts of vegetables to supplement their household diets.[41] As the economy recovered, farmers began to experiment with growing larger amounts of vegetables for the market. By the end of the decade, tomatoes had become Kumawu's most conspicuous commercial crop.[42]

In 1994, most tomatoes in Kumawu were grown on fields of one hectare or less, often in combination with other crops.[43] Most of the farmers whom I interviewed cultivated more than one plot of land, but few had more than one field under tomatoes at any given time. It was, however, common to plant tomatoes two or three times during the year, and a few farmers had as many as four fields under tomatoes at once. A field might be used for two or three consecutive crops of tomatoes, but would then be rotated to other crops or left fallow, and the farmer would seek another field if s/he wanted to plant tomatoes again. The principal reason for the small scale of most tomato cultivation appeared to be financial. Tomato cultivation in Kumawu is highly commercialized. Farmers reported spending anywhere from $45 to $80 or more per acre on fertilizers and pesticides for each crop of tomatoes. Most farmers employed laborers, at $1.20-$1.50 for half a day's work, for field preparation and harvesting, which included headloading crates of freshly picked tomatoes to the nearest motorable road, and many also used hired laborer to help with planting, weeding and spraying. (Some farmers also paid rent to use land for growing tomatoes--an issue discussed in the next section.)

None of the farmers I interviewed kept close track of the total amount spent on labor for a given crop. Most did, however, give a total figure of the amount "invested" in a particular field. To the extent that such figures represented amounts which farmers had either borrowed, or taken in a lump sum from savings or some other source of income, to finance the cost of producing tomatoes, they probably understated the total cost of production. Thus, reported returns of up to 100% on amounts "invested" in tomato fields were probably exaggerated. Nonetheless, it appears that, when market prices were favorable, farmers derived a profit from growing tomatoes.

No one in Kumawu was overstating his or her tomato profits in June and July of 1994. Tomato buying, like tomato growing, is privately organized: government neither controls prices nor subsidizes any of the costs of marketing. During the harvest season, buyers, most of whom are women,[44] travel daily from Kumase or Accra, in small, covered vans (panel trucks), which ply the roads around Kumawu from before dawn until 9:00 or 10:00 pm. Since tomatoes are perishable, they must be moved as quickly as possible, and buyers from Kumase make several trips to Kumawu in a day. Farmers bring their tomatoes to the nearest road, where they wait for the next buyer. Prices are negotiated on the spot: while farmers continually exchange information about local negotiations, buyers who travel to and from one or more of Ghana's large urban markets every day have better access to information about daily or even hourly changes in price, and farmers often feel themselves to be at a disadvantage in the negotiating process.

Perhaps their greatest disadvantage, however, is their own success as growers. During my stay in Kumawu, the price of tomatoes--which stood at ca $30 to $35 per box at the beginning of June, just before the harvest began--fell to $1.50 a box in early July. At that price, farmers could not earn enough to pay laborers to pick their tomatoes and carry them to the nearest road--let alone recover any of the money they'd spent on labor or chemicals earlier in the growing season--and many left their tomatoes to rot in the fields.

The collapse of farmgate prices in mid-1994 appears to have been exceptionally severe. In 1993, for example, farmers reported having made modest profits at prices of $3-$6 per box. Nonetheless, it underscores the fact that growing tomatoes is a risky business, as well as a highly commercialized one. To the extent that economic liberalization eases access to markets and attracts more buyers and sellers, it also increases people's exposure to market fluctuations. In this case, of course, the growth of small-scale cultivation of tomatoes has also intensified competition and exacerbated seasonal fluctuations in price. Under the circumstances, several farmers explained that, while they would like to expand their production of tomatoes, they could not afford to do so. Instead, they tried to cope with the risks of growing tomatoes by diversifying their crops and/or sources of income. Full time farmers invariably grew other crops, as well as tomatoes, for sale and for home consumption. Cassava, maize and cocoyam were the most popular staples, but most farmers also planted some yam, beans and other vegetables, and several women grew onions as a commercial crop. In addition, many of the people who were growing tomatoes in 1994 were not primarily engaged in farming at all. Among the tomato growers I met were traders, artisans, civil servants, itinerant preachers, and a couple of aspiring musicians. All were well aware of the vagaries of the market: they approached tomato cultivation as a kind of gamble--hoping to clear enough of a profit to make a long deferred purchase or simply supplement their meager incomes from other sources, ready to move to other ventures and/or locations if they failed.

To finance their "investment" in seed, chemicals and labor for growing tomatoes, most of the farmers I spoke with in Kumawu needed access to credit. Many of my informants said they had borrowed the money from relatives or friends. The Kumawuman Rural Bank--part of a nationwide network of community banks established under the aegis of structural adjustment, which are governed by local boards of directors and required to operate without government subsidies--makes few loans to local farmers. In the 1980s, as part of the government's program to revive exports, the Bank made loans to cocoa growers to enable them to rehabilitate or replant old or neglected farms. At that time, Ghanaian farmers still sold their cocoa through the Marketing Board, and Rural Banks counted the Board on to ensure that growers repaid their loans. When a farmer delivered cocoa to an agent of the Marketing Board, s/he was not paid

directly, but instead received a receipt which was redeemable at the local Rural Bank. If a farmer had borrowed money from the Bank, the amount of the loan could be deducted from the value of the crop, thus guranteeing repayment. However, as the managing director of the Kumawuman Rural Bank explained ruefully, "the farmers were very clever." Thus, a farmer who had borrowed money from the bank might arrange to collect his/her receipts from the Marketing Board in the name of a friend or relative; then report to the Bank that his/her crop had failed, leaving him/her unable to repay the loan.

Unable to prevent such practices, the Bank eventually stopped loaning money to cocoa growers at all. In 1994, the only loans which the Bank admitted making to farmers[45] went to civil servants (whose salaries are paid through the Bank, thus guaranteeing loan repayment) and members of a local Christian sect, led by an ex-produce buyer, who had withdrawn from the town and set up a separate village on its outskirts, where they practiced a strict communitarian life style. Known to themselves and other Kumawufo.. as the Gyedifo.. (Believers), members of this sect enjoyed a widespread reputation as successful farmers. Asked why the Bank had singled out the Gyedifo.. as worthy borrowers, the Managing Director answered simply, "because they are organized."

By 1994, then, the Kumawuman Rural Bank did not appear to be playing a significant role in making credit available for small-scale farming ventures. It had also scaled back its involvement in large-scale farming, after its primary venture of the 1980s ran into difficulties. In the original scheme, a Yugoslav firm entered into a partnership with the Ghanaian government and the Kumawu Traditional Council to grow maize on the edge of the Affram Plains, about 35 km east of Kumawu. Known locally by its acronym, KIFCOM, the scheme planned to cultivate maize on a very large scale, using advanced mechanized technology. Each of the three partners contributed key inputs. The Kumawu Traditional Council supplied the land--over 10,000 ha in a vast tranche of the Affram Plains which is claimed by the stool of Kumawu; the Yugoslav company provided technical and managerial expertise; and the government of Ghana helped to negotiate a loan from the Japanese government, through IFAD, for infrastructure and equipment.

The scheme got off to a slow start. The Yugoslav firm built a dam and feeder road, but their technical and managerial expertise proved poorly suited to local farming conditions. Reportedly, only ca 1500 of more than 10,000 ha allocated by the Traditional Council were under cultivation when the scheme went bankrupt in 1992.[46] At this point, the Yugoslavs went home, and the government decided to convert KIFCOM to a cooperative for local farmers, under the joint management of the Rural Bank and an Interim Management Committee of Kumawufo... Blocks of land were allocated to groups of farmers who agreed to work them "cooperatively," and to individuals with the means to attempt large-scale cultivation on their own. With the encouragement of the Kumawu Traditional Council, a few of its well-to-do members went through the cumbersome and expensive process of taking out formal leases on tracts of 100 ha or more, and several members of the Rural Bank's Board of Directors planted tomatoes.

The Bank, which was given responsibility for administering the Japanese loan, arranged to purchase a couple of small tractors, equipped with harrows and carts. In the spirit of cost recovery urged by proponents of structural adjustment, the Bank proposed to set up a tractor hire scheme, using the proceeds to repay the loan and add to the Bank's revenues. But the Ministry of Agriculture objected that this was inconsistent with their plan to turn KIFCOM into a cooperative farm, and proposed instead that participating farmers purchase the equipment out of the joint proceeds of their crop sales, thus phasing out the Rural Bank's role as financial intermediary. At the same time, however, the Ministry insisted that the Bank was still responsible for the Japanese loan. The Bank's directors protested that they could hardly be expected to guarantee the debts of an enterprise over which they had no control, and denied the Ministry's claim. As a precautionary measure, they impounded the tractors and farm carts and locked them up in the basement of the Bank's building in Kumawu. There matters stood in July 1994.

As these stories suggest, the course of structural adjustment has not run altogether smoothly in Kumawu. Private production of agricultural commodities for the market certainly increased between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, but efforts to reorganize rural credit supplies on commercial lines and

attract foreign investment to develop local agriculture were not very successful. For the Ministry of Agriculture, the Rural Bank's inability to provide credit to more than a handful of local farmers or to invest successfully in large-scale commercial farming called into question the competence of its directors. For the Rural Bank, farmers' ability to evade repayment vitiated their efforts to underwrite the revival of export crop production while operating on a commercial basis. Local attempts to attract foreign investment also failed, bringing the government back in. The ensuing negotiations over the division of assets and obligations between public and private institutions broke down over questions of accountability and access. The whole saga raises questions about the feasibility and indeed the meaning of privatization, to say nothing of its efficacy in promoting economic development. The questions multiply when one turns from the subject of credit to the matter of farmers' access to land.

Land

In addition to new demands for credit, the spread of tomato cultivation has given rise to new land tenure arrangements in Kumawu. About half the farmers I interviewed were growing tomatoes, as well as other crops, on "family" or inherited land for which they paid nothing. However, many had also leased plots of land for the express purpose of growing tomatoes.[47] For the most part, such leases were short-term and strictly commercial. A few farmers had arranged to lease plots for up to five years, but most were renting fields for a year or a single cropping season of three or four months. Rents were usually paid up front, in cash. The amounts were individually negotiated, and varied considerably from one farmer to another. Those I interviewed reported paying anywhere from $5 to $20 per acre for a year or less. I also talked with a few young men who said they had leased tomato fields from their relatives--typically a "grandmother" or an aunt. Interviewed separately, the older women whom they named confirmed that such transactions had taken place, but complained that "the children" had never actually paid them any money and that they (the women) felt powerless to insist. For most farmers, however, the practice of paying cash in advance to lease a tomato field was relatively unproblematic. Compared to the cost of chemicals and labor, rent accounted for a modest portion of farmers' "investments" in tomato cultivation, and most said that finding land to rent on these terms was "not difficult." More complicated questions arose, however, over who was entitled to lease out tomato fields and collect the rent.

Land in Asante is not held as "private property"--subject to rights of exclusive ownership which are vested in individual or corporate persons. Instead, most land is subject to multiple, overlapping claims by several different kinds of social agents. In general, an individual may acquire the right to use a piece of land by reaching an agreement with the "owners."[48] As we've seen, many such agreements are negotiated among members of one family. Families have established long-term rights to land in Kumawu in a variety of ways (see below), and individual members may request to be allocated one or more parcels of land by the family head (or elders), or by a parent or sibling from his/her own sub-allocation. Such transfers of land rights among relatives are described as "gifts" (not to be confused with bequests). A person who receives such a gift customarily acknowledges it with a small return gift, usually of drinks or money, known as *aseda* or "thanks." Made in the presence of witnesses, the payment of *aseda* serves to confirm the gift, and witnesses' recollections may be invoked at any time to defend the rights of the recipient against rival claims. Disputes over boundaries between family members' plots are common: they may be resolved by family elders or, failing that, by elders of the stool. In a discussion of her role in settling such disputes, the Queenmother (*ohemaa*) of Kumawu noted that intra-family boundaries are rarely marked. "If your farm lies next to a stream, good for you!" In most cases, however, individuals' claims stand or fall with the recollections, and reputations, of their witnesses. In practice, land rights are subject to intermittent or on-going negotiation, and tenure security depends more on a person's standing with his/her relatives and neighbors than on the way in which a claim was originally acquired.[49]

Many intrafamily transfers occur through inheritance. In Asante, descent is reckoned matrilineally and, historically, inheritance followed lines of descent. When a person died, members of the family met to select an heir. The heir inherited the deceased person's property which might include "family property" which the decedent had inherited during his/her lifetime, as well as self-acquired

property which s/he had not already given away. In the twentieth century, it has become common for individuals to bequeath self-acquired property by means of written wills, though such bequests may be challenged by the matrilineal family after a person dies. A common ground for such challenges is the claim that property specified in the will was not self-acquired, but already belonged to the family. If the claim can be sustained, it follows that the deceased person was not entitled to give or bequeath the property in question.[50]

An heir is not supposed to treat inherited property as his/her personal possession, but to act as a trustee, managing the property for the benefit of the family as a whole. (For this reason, the heir is chosen after a person dies, by living members of the family whose interests s/he is supposed to protect.) Of course, heirs do not always discharge their responsibilities to the satisfaction of their relatives, nor do family members necessarily agree as to which parts of a deceased person's estate were self-acquired. In 1985, the Rawlings regime enacted legislation which was designed to strengthen the inheritance rights of spouses and children vis a vis those of the matrilineal kin.[51] The law applies only to self-acquired property, however, so that matrilineal inheritance remains very common. Disputes over inheritance have been involved in a substantial proportion of land cases brought before the courts, as well as to extra-judicial arenas of arbitration, both before and after the passage of PNDC Law 111.

Families may endow individual members with rights of usufruct, but neither the individual nor his/her family owns the land outright. Except for land claimed directly by the government, ownership in Asante is vested in the stools--chiefly offices, many of which trace their origins to the period before the founding of the Asante state in 1700.[52] (This statutory principle, which was formalized during the colonial period, means that disputes over land often turn, at least in part, on competing interpretations of Asante history. I will take up this issue in the following section.) Stools' rights take precedence over family rights, although a chief who wishes to remain on the stool does not abrogate long-standing family claims lightly.[53] In principle, the stool must approve a family's allocation of use rights to non-family members, and is entitled to receive something in recognition of its allodial rights. Portions of stool land which are not claimed by a family (and/or its members) are under the direct control of the stool: the chief may allocate or lease portions to particular individuals or groups, and expects to receive tribute from anyone who derives something of value from such land. Amounts and forms of such tribute payments vary widely depending, inter alia, on the value of the resources derived or produced on the land, and the land user's relationship to the chief. Earlier in this century, the spread of cocoa as Asante's most important commercial crop led to demands for substantial amounts of tribute, and helped convert relations between chiefs and farmers who are not their subjects into those of landlord and tenant.

If land is commercially valuable, the chief will demand the going market price for allocating a parcel of land, and will expect to receive an annual payment in addition. In urban areas, formal leases for building plots specify both the duration of the lease and the annual groundrent due the stool. By law, part of the groundrent must be remitted to the government to help defray the costs of land administration. A file on each leased plot is also kept at the Lands Commission which is responsible for verifying that there are no previous claims on a newly leased plot. Since the 1970s, the government of Ghana has owned certain valuable, land-based resources--including mineral rights and any tree of a size and species to qualify as marketable timber. In short, the government plays a key role in the disposition of rights to urban and any other commercially valuable landed properties.

In recent years, formal leases have become increasingly common in rural areas, for building plots and for land designated for commercial uses, such as large-scale farming. A paramount stool, such as Kumawu, presides in turn over a hierarchy of sub-stools, some of which have rights over portions of the land belonging to the paramount stool. In such cases, the sub-stool may receive a share of the allocation fees and/or rents paid to the stool by lessees and other land users. Thus, for any given parcel of land, the list of interested parties is likely to be long--especially if the land has, or is expected to develop, commercial value--and there is ample room for debate over their respective claims. Adjudication of a land dispute can take many years, and court judgments--while theoretically protected by the legal principle of res judicata--are rarely final in practice.[54]

Hearsay

In Kumawu, stools, families, and individuals have acquired claims to land in a variety of ways. Many claims are based on past transactions, including not only formal leases and recent exchanges and gifts, but also agreements made and battles fought by sometimes distant ancestors. (In principle, any historical event which is held to have defined or influenced an individual's or family's relations to the stool may be adduced to support or question claims to portions of stool land.) With a few exceptions, my inquiries about families' histories elicited stories of ancestors who had migrated to Kumawu from other parts of Asante--in several cases, before the founding of the Asante state in 1700--and were allocated land by the Kumawuhene (or in some cases by another chief or family already settled there) for themselves, their families and followers "to eat upon."[55] Some also claimed to control hunting or fishing rights in more distant portions of Kumawu land. The exceptions were several families who had migrated to Asante from "the north"[56] during the colonial period, and one Kumawu chief, Nana Obiri Yeboah, who explained that his forebears had descended from the sky to settle at Kumawu long before the founding of the Asante state. Although he did not state explicitly that his ancestors were the first settlers at Kumawu, Nana Obiri Yeboah's narrative clearly implied that his family had not received permission to settle there from anyone else and, hence, did not need to consult anyone before allocating parts of their land. A few years before, Nana Obiri Yeboah had provided the land on which the Gyedifo.. built their settlement; in 1994, many members of that community were also leasing farm plots from him.

In the early part of the twentieth century, people who came from "the north" to settle at Kumawu obtained long-term rights of usufruct from the stool on much the same basis as Asante migrants. Referred to by other Kumawufo.. as "northerners" or "strangers", their descendants are visibly separated from the rest of the townspeople by religion and dress (most are Muslims), and live in the zongo, a distinct quarter within the town. However, when asked about their place of origin, most of the zongo residents I spoke to said that they came "from Kumawu". In part, their insistence on claiming local origin may reflect the lingering influence of an old stigma. Before the colonial era, many slaves in Asante came from the north. To be of northern origin might, therefore, mean that a person was of slave descent and, as recently as the 1920s, public mention of a person's northern origin was considered an actionable offense.[57]

Criteria for determining "foreign"origin in Asante changed, however, under the combined influence of cocoa and colonial rule. During the twentieth century it has become common, in both popular and scholarly discourse, to refer to Asante as a nation and to date its founding from Osei Tutu's war of independence against Denkyira in 1700.[58] Whether the term accurately describes Asantes' understanding of their collective identity before the mid-twentieth century is difficult to unravel from historical sources, particularly those of twentieth century provenance. What is clear from the colonial archives is that British administrators' interpretation of Asante nationhood changed during their tenure as its rulers, as they attempted to sort out competing claims to land and office. In particular, the spread of cocoa cultivation in Asante in the early twentieth century gave rise to intense struggles over the income generated by production and sale of the crop. Following the lead of their counterparts in the Colony,[59] chiefs in Asante began to demand tribute from farmers who were cultivating cocoa on their stool lands. In adjudicating the ensuing disputes, colonial commissioners also cited practice in the Colony as precedent, declaring that chiefs could collect cocoa tribute from "strangers" but not from"citizens". In keeping with their own claim to rule Asante "by right of conquest",[60] they assumed initially that Asante "citizenship" applied to all native subjects of the conquered state.[61] Asante chiefs objected vigorously, pointing out that, in the Colony, a chief was allowed to collect tribute from any farmer who was not a subject of his stool, and demanding equal treatment. Since their own authority rested heavily on incorporating Asante chiefs into the apparatus of colonial administration, the commissioners conceded the point: by 1913, Chief Commissioner Fuller had ruled that "'stranger' in this connection means anyone Ashanti or non-Ashanti, not belonging to the particular Division or Clan, on whose territory he has made himself a Plantation."[62] The definition remains in widespread use today.

Under colonial rule, then, "citizenship" in Asante came to be defined in terms of political allegiance--not to the colonial regime or its domain, the Protectorate of Asante, but to individual stools. This practice distinguished Asante from other British colonies, such as Nigeria, where Africans were identified for administrative and legal purposes by their places of origin. It helped to secure the place of Asante chiefs in colonial society, and has lent a distinctive cast to the shape of "civil society" since Ghana became independent of colonial rule. In Kumawu, the Traditional Council continues to insist on its right to collect tribute from "strangers"--an important source of tension in current struggles over rights to land in the Affram Plains.[63] To date, the Council has not claimed the right to lease land for tomato cultivation, but there is some evidence that individual chiefs may be starting to do so.[64] More generally, the shifting, sometimes contested meanings of "citizen" and "stranger" in Asante illustrate the impracticality of trying to understand contemporary property rights or state-society relations in terms of "communities" and "traditions" which have endured, unaltered, since precolonial times and only begun to "break down" in the last ten or twenty years.

I referred earlier to the fact that throughout the twentieth century, and possibly before, disputes over land in Asante have served as important sites for the (re-)production of history. Relevant historical events may be of recent or ancient provenance. In addition to narratives of conquest, migration, settlement and negotiation, many land claims are based, at least in part, on judicial precedent. During the early years of the twentieth century, colonial administrators served as judges in Asante. In 1924, Native Tribunals were established, where civil cases involving modest amounts of property were adjudicated by Asante chiefs. The commissioners' courts continued, however, to hear capital cases and civil cases involving substantial amounts of property, and they also served as courts of appeal for litigants who were dissatisfied with the rulings of the Native Tribunals. In both commissioners' and customary courts, records were kept of charges filed, judgments given, and (in increasing detail) litigants' and witnesses' testimonies. In land disputes, the courts frequently demarcated boundaries between disputants, as well as pronouncing on the validity of competing claims. As court judgments accumulated, they formed an increasingly important body of evidence in subsequent land ligitation. In 1993, I heard lawyers in the Kumase High Courts argue, without irony, that scholarly works by non-Ghanaian authors could not be considered reliable sources of evidence, while citing rulings by colonial officials as incontrovertible proof of the validity of their clients' claims.

In short, much of the evidence adduced in land disputes consists of narratives of past events. Information about geneaologies, migrations, wars, negotiations, contracts, and the results of previous adjudication is regularly presented in court, by litigants, witnesses and lawyers,as evidence to substantiate or challenge contemporary claims to land. Judges wrestle continually with problems of historical interpretation, and base their rulings on a wide range of historical sources, many of them orally transmitted. Whatever its status in written law, oral history is routinely presented in court, and carefully weighed along with documentary evidence and eye-witness accounts. The ambiguities of this practice were nicely expressed in an exchange which I observed in the High Court of Kumase in 1993. Counsel for the defense was leading in evidence a witness whose testimony turned on a narrative of events which occurred at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Attempting to discredit the testimony, counsel for the plaintiff objected that the witness's evidence was "nothing but hearsay." "Of course," the judge replied, leaning across the bench and speaking slowly for emphasis. "*All* traditional history is hearsay. But it is *permissible* hearsay." And he ordered the witness to proceed with his story.

If claims to land rest on historical knowledge, how is such knowledge produced and distributed? In Asante, negotiations or disputes over land are likely to involve many people who present different, often conflicting, versions of historical knowledge to support their claims. The production (and circulation) of knowledge in this context is competitive--but not perfectly so. Some witnesses carry more weight than others, owing to differences in social position or reputation; some give more convincing accounts. People may also influence the course of negotiations by limiting access to historical knowledge. During my stay in Kumase, a case before the High Court was stalled for weeks after the judge, seeking to clarify variations in witnesses' testimony concerning the movements of a shrine and its devotees in the early eighteenth century, subpoenaed the Asantehene (or his acccredited representative) to provide the

authoritative version in court. Each time a hearing was scheduled, a functionary from the palace appeared before the bench, offered excuses, and requested another date. As I watched the same thing happen repeatedly, my initial disappointment (at being denied the opportunity to hear what promised to be highly significant testimony) gave way to a realization that, by refusing to testify, the Asantehene was, in effect, shaping the outcome of the case. Even if the judge were finally to abandon the subpoena and issue a decision without benefit of Otumfuo's testimony, the case could later be appealed, or new charges brought, on the grounds that the court's judgment had been inadequately informed. By being withheld or kept incomplete, the power of history was enhanced.[65]

History is more than a commodity

I have referred to the production of history, in the context of claims on land and chiefly office, as imperfectly competitive, but metaphors of the market do not really do justice to the processes involved. It is true that historical knowledge is supplied in response to claimants' demands and, as we have just seen, that people sometimes hold their knowledge off the market in an effort to increase its value. But the analogy will take us only so far. For one thing, the quantity of history is not finite: past events may be re-presented and re-interpreted--orally, visually, tangibly or in writing--indefinitely. Even records which are withheld--locked up or left unspoken--continue to influence claims of property and power, as people speculate about their contents or propose alternatives.[66] This is not to deny the many ways in which the acts and perspectives of the powerless or disadvantaged may be silenced, by deliberate omission or socially constructed practice, in all forms of historical production.[67] But they are there to be rediscovered and, like all historical accounts, reinterpreted. The supply of history is unlimited: parts of it may be silenced, but it is not scarce.

According to market theory, a commodity which is not scarce has no value. But history in Asante is anything but worthless. In conversations about history, in Kumawu and elsewhere, I was struck by the fact that people often referred to family history as "our secrets." Since such a statement was likely to be followed by a detailed recital of information about the history of the speaker's family, the claim to secrecy was evidently not meant to deny me or other listeners access to the speaker's knowledge. Rather, I would argue, such assertions of secrecy served to remind the audience of power--both the speaker's power to shape the narrative, and the power of the narrative itself to shape negotiations over claims to property and influence. As a friend in Kumawu explained to me, family history is a secret "because it can affect you."[68]

The metaphor of secrecy, applied to family history, suggests a way to understand the value of history in the social economy of Asante in the twentieth century. Unlike the commodities (or "goods") of neoclassical economics, history derives its value not from scarcity but from motion. To "affect" people--to protect or enhance their claims to property, or shape their ability to influence others--history must be heard and seen. The production of history is a performative as well as an archival process: its value depends on having an audience. This helps to explain not only the rhetorical oxymoron of recitals of family history advertised as "secrets",[69] but also the High Court's receptiveness to "permissible hearsay."[70] Like the payment of *aseda* to one who bestows a gift, narrations of history create witnesses, who may in turn be called upon (or decide) to become narrators. By offering their recollections, or proposing their own interpretations, witnesses become participants in the (re-)production, as well as the preservation, of history.

The production of history in Asante is, then, a social process which invites participation and in which historical narratives tend to proliferate over time, rather than converge toward a single, dominant version. In this context, the value of history depends not on scarcity, but on the social dynamics of production. This was illustrated for me when I asked Nana Obiri Yeboah to tell me about his family history. On the appointed day, Nana assembled the elders of his stool and began by pouring libations and offering prayers to his ancestors. He then launched into a vivid and detailed account, lasting for over an

offering prayers to his ancestors. He then launched into a vivid and detailed account, lasting for over an hour, of his forebears' descent from the sky and their subsequent activities in Kumawu. At the conclusion of his narrative, the chief offered to show me the family's shrine, which marks the spot where their ancestor first set foot in Kumawu. Together with the assembled family elders and a small accumulation of onlookers, my assistant and I followed the chief to the shrine, which was located in the bush about a half mile from town. Here Nana again offered libations and prayers, courteously including a prayer for the success of my studies in Ghana and my safe return home. Our way to the shrine led past the village of the Gyedifo..., Nana's tenants, many of whom exchanged greetings with the chief as we passed, and witnessed our procession to and from a key icon of his ancestral rights in Kumawu.[71]

History in Kumawu serves not only to establish a person's claims on property and power, but also to constitute or reaffirm relationships with other people whose actions or recollections may help in the defense or exercise of such claims. The value of historical production depends, in turn, on participation. Even for those who decide to withhold historical knowledge, temporarily or indefinitely, as the Asantehene did from the High Court, the advantage of hoarding depends on the fact that people know it's happening--that the knowledge exists and may someday be reproduced. Others, like Nana Obiri Yeboah, choose to put history on display, not only relaying their knowledge to the curious foreigner, but also dramatizing the act of narration for the benefit of a wider audience (in this case, his tenants) for whom the history in question is of more than academic interest. Because they offer recurring opportunities to (re)define and (re)affirm claims on people, property and power, such performances are of as well as about the social and economic history of Asante. People do not participate in the production of history on equal terms, but they do participate--and in doing so contribute both to the proliferation of historical knowledge and to its continuing power.[72]

Their participation also runs directly counter to a central tenet of "privatization"--that the establishment of exclusive, unambiguous rights to property requires bringing an end to the proliferation of potential claims and the historical precedents on which they are based, in order to create "tenure security" and promote more productive patterns of land use. In a recent article, Thomas Bassett argued that a World Bank project to construct a map of rural landholdings in northern Cote d'Ivoire from aerial photographs (purportedly a "neutral" and "objective" exercise) actually distorted the realities of local land tenure arrangements, by freezing boundaries between plots and arbitrarily ascribing all rights over them to two people, an "owner" and a "user."[73] The result of this effort to silence the present as well as the past was to make tenure rights less secure, and to provoke conflict between those whose rights the Bank's map recognized and those whose rights it ignored. Such counterproductive interventions are encouraged by scholarship which refuses to acknowledge the processes of negotiation and contest that help to constitute African political and economic realities, and clings to the colonial administrator's conviction that ambiguity and indeterminacy are obstacles to progress.

References

Allman, Jean, 1993. The quills of the porcupine: Asante nationalism in an emergent Ghana. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Amanor, Kojo S., 1994. The new frontier. Farmers' responses to land degradation. A West African story. London: Zed.

Ambler, Charles, 1988. Kenyan communities in the age of imperialism. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Asante, S.K.B., 1975. Property law and social goals in Ghana, 1844-1966. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.

Asiwaju, A.I., ed., 1985. Partitioned Africans: ethnic relations across Africa's international boundaries, 1884-1984. London and Lagos: Hurst and University of Lagos Press.

Bassett, Thomas, 1993. "Cartography, ideology and power: the World Bank in northern Cote d'Ivoire," Passages, 5:8.

Bassett, Thomas & Donald Crummey, eds., 1993. Land in African agrarian systems. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
Bates, Robert, 1989. Beyond the miracle of the market: the political economy of agrarian development in Kenya. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Bayart, Jean-Francois, 1993. The state in Africa: the politics of the belly. London & New York: Longman. First published in 1989.
Berman, Bruce & John Lonsdale, 1992. Unhappy valley. 2 vols. Portsmouth, NH & London: Heinemann & James Currey.
Berry, Sara, 1993. No condition is permanent: the social dynamics of agrarian change in sub-Saharan Africa. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
Boone, Catherine, 1990. "The making of a rentier class: wealth, accumulation and political control in Senegal," Journal of Development Studies, 26, 3:425-49.
Bratton, Michael & Nicholas van der Walle, 1994. "Neopatrimonial regimes and political transitions in Africa," World Politics, 46, 4:453-89.
Bruce, John & Shem Migot-Adholla, eds., 1994. Searching for land tenure security in Africa. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
Callaghy, Thomas & John Ravenhill, 1993. "How hemmed in? lessons and prospects of Africa's responses to decline," in Callaghy & Ravenhill, eds. Hemmed in: responses to Africa's economic decline. New York: Columbia University Press.
Chanock, Martin, 1985. Law, custom and social order. Cambridge: Cambridge Universiton Press.
Chazan, Naomi, 1982. "The new politics of participation in tropical Africa," Comparative Politics, 14:
Chazan, Naomi & Donald Rothchild, eds., 1988. The precarious balance: state and society in Africa. Boulder, CO: Westview.
Chazan, Naomi, John Harbeson & Donald Rothchild, eds., 1994. Civil society and the state in Africa. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
Clapham, Christopher, 1985. Third world politics: an introduction. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
Clark, Gracia, ed., 1988. Traders against the state: anthropological approaches to unofficial economies. Boulder, CO: Westview.
_____, 1994. Onions are my husband: accumulation and survival by West African market women. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Cleaver, Kevin, et al., eds., 1992. Conservation of West and Central African rainforests. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
Cleaver, Kevin & Gotz Schreiber, 1994. Reversing the spiral: the population, agriculture, and environment nexus in sub-Saharan Africa. Washington, DC: World Bank.
Comaroff, John, ed., 1980. The meaning of marriage payments. London: Academic Press.
Cooper, Frederick, 1994. "Conflict and connection: rethinking African colonial history," American Historical Review, 99,5:1516-45.
Cooper, Frederick & Randall Packard, eds., forthcoming. Development and the social sciences. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
Danso, Elijah Yaw & Andrew K. Agyare, 1992. "The socio-economic perspective of the Bomfobiri Wildlife Sanctuary," Forest Resource Management Program, unpublished ms.
Edmundson, A.R., 1975. "Land ownership and acquisition in Kumasi." Kumase: Land Administration Research Centre, University of Science and Technology.
Ensminger, Jean, 1992. Making a market: the institutional transformation of an African society. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
_____, forthcoming. "Changing property rights: reconciling formal and informal rights to land in Africa," in John Nye & John Drobak, eds. Frontiers of the new institutional economics. London: Academic Press.
Fay, Michael, 1992. Ecological and conservation implications of development options for the Dzanga-Sangha special reserve and the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park, Yobe-Sangha, Central African Republic. Report to the GTZ, Mission Forestiere Allemande, Cooperation Technique Allemande.
Fortes, Meyer & E.E. Evans Pritchard, eds. 1940. African political systems. London: Oxford University Press.

Feierman, Steven, 1990. Peasant intellectuals: anthropology and history in Tanzania. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
Firmin-Sellers, Kathryn, forthcoming. The transformation of property rights in the Gold Coast: an empirical study employing rational choice theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Flynn, Donna, forhcoming. Controlled borders and contested boundaries: ideology, gender and trade along the Benin-Nigeria border. Northwestern University Ph.D.
Guyer, Jane I., 1993. "Wealth in people and self-realization in equatorial Africa," Man (N.S.), 28:243-65.
_____, 1995. "Traditions of invention in equatorial Africa," Paper commissioned by the Joint Committee on African Studies, Social Science Research Council and American Council of Learned Societies.
Guyer, Jane I. & S.M. Eno Belinga, 1995. "Wealth in people as wealth in knowledge: accumulation and composition in equatorial Africa," Journal of African History, 36:91-120.
Havers Commission, 1945. Report on expenses incurred by litigants in the courts of the Gold Coast Colony. Accra: Government Printer.
Hofmeyr, Isabel, 1993. 'We spend our years as a tale that is told': oral historical narratives in a South African chiefdom. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Hopkins, A.G., 1973. An economic history of West Africa. London: Longman.
Kanogo, Tabitha, 1987. Squatters and the roots of Mau Mau. London, Nairobi & Athens, OH: James Currey, Heinemann & Ohio University Press.
Kyerematen, Alex, 1971. Inter-state boundary litigation in Ashanti. African Social Research Documents 4. Cambridge: African Studies Centre, Cambridge University.
Loxley, John, 1991. Ghana: the long road to recovery. Ottawa: North-South Institute.
Mann, Kristin & Richard Roberts, eds., 1991. Law in colonial Africa. Portsmouth, NH & London: Heinemann & James Currey.
Martin, Mitchell, 1993. "Neither phoenix nor Icarus: negotiating structural adjustment in Kenya and Zambia," in Callaghy & Ravenhill, eds. Hemmed in: responses to Africa's economic decline. New York: Columbia University Press.
McCaskie, Thomas, 1995. State and society in pre-colonial Asante. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Mikell, Gwendolyn, 1995. "The state, the courts and 'value': caught between matrilineages in Ghana," in Jane I. Guyer, ed. Money matters: instability, values and social payments in the modern history of West African communities. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Moore, Sally Falk, 1986. Social facts and fabrications. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Moore, Henrietta & Megan Vaughan, 1994. Cutting down trees:gender, nutrition and agricultural change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Murphy, William, 1980. "Secret knowledge as property and power in Kpelle society: elders versus youth," Africa, 50, 2:193-207.
National Archives of Ghana, Accra (cited herein as NAGA).
National Archives of Ghana, Kumase (cited herein as NAGK).
New York Times, 1/18/1996. "Endangered Bushmen find hope."
Ollennu, N.A. & G.R. Woodman, eds., 1985. Ollennu's principles of customary law. 2nd edition. Birmingham: CAL Press.
Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. & C. Daryll Forde, eds., 1950. African systems of kinship and marriage. London: Oxford University Press.
Ranger, Terence, 1983. "The invention of tradition in colonial Africa," in Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, eds. The invention of tradition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Rattray, Robert S., 1969. Ashanti law and constitution. New York: Negro Universities Press. First published, 1929.
Roe, Alan & Hartmut Schneider, 1992. Adjustment and equity in Ghana. Paris: OECD.
Sandbrook, Richard, 1985. The politics of Africa's economic stagnation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Royal Anthropological Institute, Rattray Collection. Microfilm.
Sarris, Alexander & Hadi Shams, 1991. Ghana under structural adjustment. New York: New York University Press for International African Development Fund.

Snrech, Serge, 1995. Preparing for the future: a vision of West Africa in the year 2020. Summary report of the West Africa Long Term Perspective Study. Abidjan: CINERGIE.
Tonkin, Elizabeth, 1992. Narrating our pasts: the social construction of oral history. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, 1995. Silencing the past: power and the production of history. Boston: Beacon Press.
Vail, Leroy, ed., 1987. Creating tribalism in southern Africa. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
Vail, Leroy & Landeg White, 1991. Power and the praise poem: southern African voices in history. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
Wells, Michael & Katrina Brandon, 1992. People and parks: linking protected area management with local communities. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
Widner, Jennifer, 1993. "The discovery of 'politics': smallholders' reactions to the cocoa crisis of 1988-1990 in Cote d'Ivoire," in Callaghy & Ravenhill, eds. Hemmed in: responses to Africa's economic decline. New York: Columbia University Press.
World Bank, 1981. Towards sustained development in sub-Saharan Africa. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
_____, 1986. Financing adjustment with growth. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
_____, 1995. A continent in transition: sub-Saharan Africa in the mid-1990s. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

---

[1] First fully articulated in the influential "Berg Report," this argument dominated policy debates among major international donors for a decade. World Bank, 1981.
[2] Since financial assistance with budgetary and balance of payments deficits was made "conditional" on policy reforms, most African governments complied, however reluctantly.
[3] In many countries, policy reforms mandated by the World Bank and the IMF "adjusted" the rural-urban terms of trade through cuts in real urban incomes on the order of 40 or 50%. World Bank, 1986:19. In contrast, a recent review of long-term trends and prospects in 18 West and Central African countries argues that rapid urbanization provided a major stimulus to economic growth in the region after 1960. Snrech, 1995.
[4] World Bank, 1995.
[5] Cleaver and Schreiber, 1994:12 and passim. In designating protected species, conservationists sometimes classify certain categories of people (such as "Pygmies" or "Bushmen") as contributing to the "biodiversity" of an endangered ecosystem--in contrast to other categories of people (e.g., "Bantus" or "immigrants") whose habits of production and consumption are considered threats to its integrity. Fay, 1992; New York Times, 1/18/1996.
[6] Diamond, 1993, quoted in World Bank, 1995:4.
[7] Ibid:5.
[8] Ibid:63.
[9] Ibid:54.
[10] See, e.g., World Bank, 1995:63.
[11] See, e.g., Clark, ed., 1988 and Clark, 1994.
[12] By 1989, 33,000 civil servants had been laid off. Roe & Schneider, 1992:75. See also Loxley, 1991:15-19.
[13] Sarris & Sahms, 1991:128-130.
[14] Migot-Adholla, et al., 1991; Bruce & Migot-Adholla, eds., 1994.
[15] See, e.g., Roe & Schneider, 1992; Martin, 1993; Herbst, 1993; World Bank, 1994.
[16] Roe & Schneider, 1992:84ff.
[17] Ghana, 1994:86.
[18] Notably, Bruce & Migot-Adholla, eds., 1994.
[19] Chazan, Harbeson & Rothchild, eds., 1994; Callaghy & Ravenhill, 1993; Widner, ed., 1994.

[20] See, e.g., Bratton & van der Walle, 1994.
[21] Cleaver & Schreiber, 1994; Wells, et al., 1992. In some countries, the World Bank has continued to lay the groundwork for land registration, while publicly disavowing the intention of soing so. See, e.g., Bassett, 1993.
[22] Bratton & van der Walle, 1994:458. Since Zolberg's book was published in 1966, the neopatrimonialist argument has been advanced by a number of authors. Like Bratton and van der Walle, authors such as Joseph, 1987, and Young, 1988 have been primarily concerned with prospects for democratic transitions under neopatrimonial regimes. Others have focussed on the economic implications of neopatrimonialism, arguing that neopatrimonial regimes are prone to rent-seeking, and tend to block the emergence of strong, independent national bourgeoisies. Sandbrook, 1985; Boone, 1990; Callaghy & Ravenhill, 1993.
[23] Bratton and van der Walle, 1994: 458.
[24] Clapham, 1985:49, quoted in ibid:459.
[25] Bratton & van der Walle, 1994:454. The logic of their argument leads them to conclude that "only formal institutions--such as trade unions, human rights organizations, and, especially, political parties--can force recalcitrant governments into amending constitutions and calling elections," and hence that "prospects for democracy are better in transitions from settler oligarchies [where such institutions flourish] than from all variants of neopatrimonial regime." Ibid: 487, 489.
[26] Chazan, 1982. See also Chazan & Rothchild, eds., 1988.
[27] Widner, 1993: 313ff.
[28] Cleaver & Schreiber, 1994: 2,6,9,11. Rapid population growth they attribute to "traditional attitudes that favor numerous offspring" (7) combined with incentives which depress "*demand* for smaller families." (11)
[29] The quote is from Ranger, 1983: 249. While I question Ranger's conclusion that colonial rule transformed African societies into frozen embodiments of such European "inventions" of African tradition, his elucidation of their inventions was masterful and has exercised a deservedly formative influence on much subsequent historical research. Berry, 1992 and 1993:ch. 2.
[30] Widner, 1993.
[31] Bates, 1989; Firmin-Sellers, 1996.
[32] See, e.g., Ensminger, 1992.
[33] Wells, et al., 1992; Cornia, 1994; Cleaver & Schreiber, 1994; Ensminger, forthcoming.
[34] See Comaroff, ed., 1980; Moore, 1986; Vail, ed., 1987; Feierman, 1990; Cooper, 1994, among others.
[35] Ranger's (1983) seminal essay was, in some ways, anticipated by Colson, 1971. Their ideas have been developed and revised by, inter alia, Chanock, 1985; Mann & Roberts, eds., 1991; Bassett & Crummey, eds., 1993.
[36] See, for example, recent studies of African rural economics by Amanor, 1994; Berry, 1993; Feierman, 1993; Moore & Vaughan, 1994; Guyer, 1995; Guyer & Eno Belinga, 1995.
[37] Details of this argument are spelled out in Berry, 1993.
[38] Guyer, 1995:11. See also Guyer, 1993, and Guyer & Eno Belinga, 1995.
[39] Trouillot, 1995:73. Arguing in a similar vein, Cooper and Packard (forthcoming) suggest that the field of development studies has served to enable certain kinds of interdisciplinary discussion and analysis about economic change in non-western societies, which may disappear if development is discredited as a subject of scholarly analysis.
[40] See, for example, Asiwaju, ed., 1985; Flynn, forthcoming.
[41] Except where other sources are specified, all my information on Kumawu was collected during fieldwork in December 1993 and June-July 1994.
[42] Altogether I interviewed 31 farmers in Kumawu, 24 of whom were growing tomatoes at the time. About half the interviews were conducted during visits to farmers' fields. I also took part in numerous informal conversations, with farmers and other townspeople, about crops, prices and the exigencies of tomato growing. Throughout this essay, prices have been converted from figures reported to me in cedis at the rate of $1 to C1000--which was approximately the rate of exchange prevailing in mid-1994.
[43] Parts of many tomato fields were planted in other crops, though I saw little evidence that farmers were interplanting tomatoes and other crops.

[44] As Gracia Clark (1994) has shown in an excellent study of Kumase Central Market, women dominate wholesale and retail trade in foodstuffs and other agricultural produce in Asante Region.
[45] Some farmers said they had borrowed money from the Bank by putting up their houses as collateral. Representatives of the Bank denied that loans were made on that basis.
[46] Danso & Agyare, 1992.
[47] I obtained information from 28 farmers about the terms on which they had gained access to land. Quite a few were cultivating more than one field, some under more than one kind of tenure arrangement. Fifteen people reported growing crops on family land which they used free of charge; fifteen had rented one or more fields for cash; and two were sharecropping.
[48] The duration of usufruct agreements varies a great deal, depending on the needs of both tenants and "owners." In contrast to the short-term leases for tomato fields described above, building plots in urban areas are typically leased for 99 years--a practice introduced by the colonial administration around the turn of the century. In Kumase, the earliest such leases will begin to expire in a few years, raising interesting questions about the subsequent status of the properties involved. Buildings belong to the person(s) who construct or purchase them, but the land they stand on does not. Asked if property owners' claims on land wouldn't be protected by their titles to buildings, a staff member at the Land Administration Research Center (University of Science and Technology) replied "Of course, the building is yours, but what if the Asantehene says `Right: take your building and go'?"
[49] Compare Moore, 1986.
[50] In other words, once an item becomes family property, in principle it remains so in perpetuity. Ollennu & Woodman, eds., 1985: 148.
[51] PNDC Law 111, 1985. See also Mikell, 1995, for examples of debates over the interpretation of this law with respect to rural property in Sunyani.
[52] The situation is well summarized in Edmundson, 1975.
[53] This point was made to me several times, in conversations with both chiefs and ordinary citizens. See also Rattray, 1969:353.
[54] Compare Moore, 1986:304-5.
[55] Rattray, 1969: 354-5. First published in 1929, Rattray's Ashanti Law and Constitution became a reference on "customary law" for colonial officials and court judges throughout the region. Most of his information on land tenure was collected in Kumawu. Royal Anthropological Institute, Rattray Collection, MS 106, Nos. 21-22.
[56] In everyday parlance, "the north" may refer to either the northern, non-Akan regions of Ghana or the West African savannahs beyond Ghana's borders.
[57] In 1920, Kumawuhene Kweku Boaten filed a complaint against one Kweku Agyeman who, he said, had referred to him in public as "Anwani"--child of an Anwa or northerner. By suggesting that his mother was a native of Anwa, Kweku Boaten argued, Kweku Agyeman had as good as called her a slave--a "grave insult," which the Kumawuhene wanted publicly retracted. NAGK 27, Enquiry into the Kumawu Omanhene's complaint against Kweku Agyeman, 31/5/20.
[58] Allman (1993) traces the rise of "Asante nationalism" as a political movement in the twentieth century. See McCaskie, 1995:88-101 on Asante identity and citizenship in the 18th and 19th centuries.
[59] From Britain's annexation of Asante in 1896 until 1946, Asante was administered separately from the Gold Coast Colony, although both administrations answered to the same Governor in Accra. The chronic tensions between successive Governors and Chief Commissioners of Asante are discussed in a recent essay by Ivor Wilks, "On which leg was the boot?"
[60] Since Asante offered no resistance to British annexation in 1896, this claim was untenable until 1900 when, fortuitously for the Asante administration, the Queenmother of Edweso, YaaAsantewa, led an armed uprising against British rule which was defeated after several months' of siege.
[61] NAGA ADM 5/3/13, Belfield Report, 1912:14.
[62] NAGK 2743, Chief Commissioner Ashanti to Colonial Secretary, 6/10/13.
[63] According to several of my informants, the Affram Plains are slated to be a prime focus of infrastructural development in the near future. I plan to discuss the history of Kumawu's claims to land in the Affram Plains in another paper.

[64] For example, at Abotonso, an area in the hills immediately south of the town where many Kumawufo... have planted tomatoes, a large number of farmers had leased plots from one citizen of the town. However, in 1994, the recently installed Queenmother successfully "reclaimed" the land for her stool, including the right to lease out plots and collect rents from tomato growers.

[65] Such tactics are not a recent invention. In the late 1930s, soon after the "restoration" of the Asante Confederacy, the Chief Commissioner urged repeatedly but unsuccessfully that the recently reinstated Asantehene settle several unresolved land cases in Bekwai, so that the "reconstruction of this area can progress." NAGK 991, Nkwanta-Mbiem land dispute, 1935-9.

[66] People who hoard historical records may be induced to release them if alternative versions appear to be taking over the story.

[67] In addition to Trouillot, 1995, see recent contributions to African historiography, including Tonkin, 1992; Vail & White, eds., 1991; and especially Barber's masterly treatment of the social dynamics of *oriki*. Barber's primary unit of analysis is the poetic genre of *oriki*; mine is the process of making claims on property and power. Another suggestive exploration of oral histories as genres is Hofmeyr, 1993, though I find her attempt to distinguish "true" from "corrupt" historical narratives problematic.

[68] Similarly, Murphy, 1980:197-8, has argued that in limiting young people's access to secret knowledge, Kpelle elders stress its value as property and a source of power.

[69] Declarations of secrecy also serve to remind listeners that the speaker has the power to withhold the information s/he is about to impart. The subsequent recital is thus cast as a gift, which establishes a claim on the hearers' good will and implies an obligation to recriprocate: secrets revealed help to create social relationships. My understanding of this point owes much to a chance encounter in a government office in Accra where I had gone, accompanied by a chief from Kumase, in search of an early colonial map of that city. On our way into the building, the chief, who had recently obtained a favorable court judgment in a well-publicized land dispute, warned me not to reveal his identity to the functionaries inside the office, lest the notoriety of his case prejudice their willingness to supply the information we sought. When we entered the office, he asked to speak to the official in charge. When this man duly appeared, the chief launched into a cordial conversation which moved, in the space of ten minutes or so, from an anonymous inquiry to increasingly broad hints and, finally, an open declaration of the chief's identity. Our business concluded, we left the building, but returned a few minutes later to deliver a second round of thanks to everyone in the office, from the senior official to the most junior clerk. The chief had clearly made friends in a government agency which he might have occasion to revisit.

[70] The attention given in Ghanaian courts to competing, unverifiable oral accounts of events in the distant past is too marked and time consuming to be written off as ephemeral. Like absent witnesses, overcrowded dockets, archaic and/or conflicting documents, and lawyers' own busy schedules, hearsay helps to prolong litigation--especially in land and chieftaincy disputes. Lengthy disputes and the associated high cost of litigation have helped secure a place in Ghana's rentier class for members of the bar and bench. See, e.g., Kyerematen, 1971; Asante, 1975; Havers Commission, 1945.

[71] That my presence occasioned this particular production of Nana Obiri Yeboah's family history only underscores the point that such productions serve as part of an on-going process of negotiation. Nana simply took the opportunity afforded by my inquiries to reaffirm his family's claims by reproducing evidence of his family's history, in narrative and performative terms.

[72] J.-F. Bayart, 1993, also invokes the idea of participatory dynamics in his wide-ranging analysis of the mobilization and exercise of state power in Africa.

[73] Bassett, 1993:8.