

mother of the person who first earned or created the property; other lineage members come afterward.

There is, therefore, a kind of inheritance seniority (*mba mpanyin mu*). According to this seniority pattern (see Fig. 2), if a man, A, creates some property, the property ideally should pass to his next younger matrilineally related brother, then to the next younger, etc. In Generation -1 the eldest son of his eldest sister would come first, followed by the eldest son of his next eldest sister and so on. In Generation -2 the eldest son of the eldest daughter of A's eldest sister would come first, etc. B, C, and D inherit only after all of A's younger brothers inherit and after all the descendants of his sisters inherit. This pattern seems also to work for positions, as well.⁷

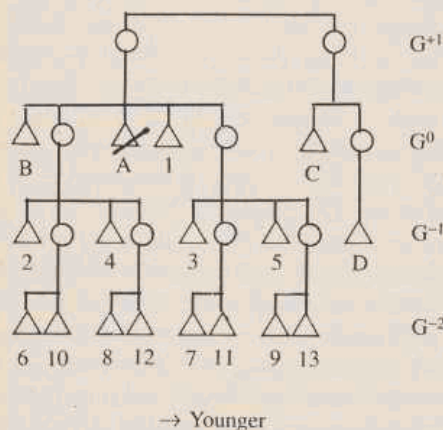


Fig. 2

A woman's property descends in the same manner, I believe, from "mother" to "daughter" by seniority.

Traditionally, there has also been some limited opportunity for father-son inheritance. A man has been able, by an oral will (or, more recently, a written one), to leave a part of the property that he has earned or created himself to his children and/or wife, subject to the agreement of his *ebusua*. Furthermore, modern Ghanaian law permits a Fanti man to leave up to a third of his acquired property to his children and up to a third to his wife. However, in spite of the potentiality, I recorded no

cases in Egyaa of sons having inherited anything from their fathers; Egyaa men give their children anything they intend for them to receive during their lifetimes, leaving their whole estate to their *ebusua* heirs. My understanding was that this is a more traditional and common way of transferring property to men's children than oral wills, though I collected no hard evidence on the question.

To summarize, the only property a man can transfer to his sons is that which he has personally acquired. His *ebusua* controls the distribution (normally within the *ebusua*) of other property which he has held. The persons in the *ebusua* who are his most likely heirs can be different for different properties since the ordering of likely heirs depends on the genealogical "age" of the property in question.⁸

Thus, the actual social effects of Fanti inheritance rules depend on the durability of property.

1) The only properties (in Egyaa, at least) durable for a long time are positions: lineage leader (*ebusua panyin*) and other chiefships or stools belonging to the *ebusua*. Informants talked about the inheritance of position in the same way that they talked about the inheritance of property. All stools or chiefships (except possibly for some *asafo*⁹ and occupational "guild" positions) stay within particular lineages (cf. Christensen 1954: 30 f., 109).

2) House sites stay within an *ebusua* normally, but are common enough in Egyaa not to be worth fighting over. Houses themselves seem usually to last 20–30 years at most before needing rebuilding. (This refers to traditional wattle-and-daub or adobe houses. More recent concrete block houses will probably last longer.) Houses, then, may pass down one generation of inheritance, but not much further.

3) Personal property (clothes, utensils, etc.) also seem to have a short useful life, i.e., 10–20 years.

4) Fishing boats have an expected life span of 10 years, nets around 5 years, and motors around 3 years.

5) Women's fish-smoking ovens only seem to last a couple of years.

6) An active farm will be inherited when its owner dies; in fact, however, particular farms (in

7 The pattern would seem to account for statements by ethnographers that slave descendants in a lineage could only normally inherit a position if the original line of the lineage died out (cf. Christensen 1954: 42) – since the position was "created" by the founder of the lineage from whom the slave lines are not in fact maternally descended.

8 This account of inheritance differs slightly from those of Christensen 1954: 42–46 and Fortes 1950: 257–260, both of whom speak of a single ordering of heirs at any one time rather than the variable situation that I found. Except for this, the Egyaa case is similar to what they have described.

9 *Asafo* companies were originally community defense companies, but now function more like Chambers of Commerce.