How Debt Became Care: Child Pawning and Its Transformations in Akuapem, the Gold Coast, 1874-1929

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How Debt Became Care:

Child Pawnning and Its Transformations in Akuapem, the Gold Coast, 1874-1929

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Abstract

Studies of slavery in Africa have noted the persistence of those relations in different forms, such as through pawning, allowing social changes in power, status, and wealth to be weathered more gradually. As pawning itself became less frequent, did other kinds of relationships take its place? Some scholars have argued that pawning was folded into marriage and fatherhood, others that there are continuities with fosterage and domestic servant arrangements today. This paper examines the question of pawning’s transformations in Akuapem, a region in southeastern Ghana involved in forms of commercial agriculture that were heavily dependent on slave labour and the capital raised by pawning. Ultimately, it argues that debt became key to fatherhood and fosterage relations between children and adults, changing from a short-term exchange to more lifelong reciprocal relations of care.
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Studies of slavery in Africa have noted the persistence of those relations in different forms, allowing social changes in power, status, and wealth to occur gradually. The flexibility of social life in Africa has meant that rather than social collapse and crisis following the abolition of domestic slavery, social relations emerged that allowed for some continuity in dependency relations (Clark 1994, Kopytoff 1988). In particular, Gareth Austin (2004, 1994) has argued that what allowed wealthy and powerful men in the southern Gold Coast to weather the transition from slave labour to free labour without great losses in wealth or social prestige was debt pawning (see also Grier 1992). 1 Pawning (also called pledging; in Twi, awowagye) entailed the temporary transfer of a person from one household to another as security for a loan. While residing in the creditor’s house, the pawn worked for the creditor and, once the debt was repaid, the pawn was returned to his or her family. Like slavery, pawning was illegal in the Gold Coast from 1874 onwards, but it continued for a much longer time than the internal slave trade. Still, its illegality meant that creditors and debtors were in some danger of being reported to the police and that creditors could not rely on the court system to have their debts repaid.

This essay extends the analysis of the transition from slavery to pawning by exploring what pawning became. In looking for replacements for a practice under threat, people sought out like practices, but they did not fully transform those existing practices into the rights and obligations associated with practices that were in decline. For example, a pawn did not become a slave, even though pawns might now provide some of the labour and access to capital that slaves
previously had. In this paper, I will examine court cases in which situations were defined by one party as pawning and by another party as something else, suggesting that disputants saw those relations as similar or contiguous to pawning in some way. Because many pawns were children in terms of their age, I will particularly focus on relationships involving children. In looking at these questions, I hope, on the one hand, to understand better how people negotiated their present and future wellbeing, including access to labour and capital for cash-crop agriculture, by re-interpreting older practices; and, on the other, to highlight the often overlooked significance of children for African social and economic relations (see Gottlieb 2004).

Other scholars have examined the legacies of pawning, arguing, on the one hand, that pawning turned into marriage and fatherhood, and on the other, into current forms of domestic servitude and fosterage. Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian (2000) have argued that pawning became folded into marriage and fatherhood, through the growing significance of tiri nsa or brideprice, during the expansion of cocoa-farming in Asante. The transfer of brideprice from the husband’s family to the wife’s family became, in essence, a loan for which the wife and children served as the husband’s pawns. In exchange for the brideprice/loan, the children belonged to the father more than to their matrilineal relatives, as would otherwise be the case. For instance, the father could pawn his children, as he would not otherwise be able to do, and he was more responsible for whatever debts they accumulated. Allman and Tashjian explain, ‘The fact that pawning, rather than disappearing, became hidden within a changing family economy had implications that were profound and enduring. As the status of pawn was collapsed into the categories of son and daughter, rights, duties, and obligation in Asante were broadly recast. The rights of the colonial father . . . became the rights of the nineteenth-century pawn-holder’ (96; see
also Allman 1997). This change did not occur without conflict and negotiation on the part of women, whose families were reluctant to receive brideprice. Their interpretation has been criticized for overstating the degree of historical change (Boni 2001), a criticism which I will examine more closely below in light of the evidence of the particular cases I present.

Nicholas Argenti (2010), working in the Cameroon Grassfields, has also traced the legacies of slavery in the present, arguing that the collective memory of the slave trade is present in children’s folktales centered on maternal and paternal neglect, cannibalism, and the destructive stranger or husband. This collective memory of slavery remains charged for children today because of the prevalence of children being sent as foster children and house servants to more distant kin and non-kin in urban areas and other countries like Gabon, at risk of exploitation and abuse. Thus, Argenti argues, ‘in less than a century, the West African trade in slaves and the labour resource that these represented has been replaced to a greater or lesser extent by the imbrication of fosterage institutions and networks within global market capitalism’ (249). Like him, I too was interested in contemporary fosterage arrangements for their elements of continuity with past relations of slavery and pawning. As with other studies of the legacies of slavery in the present (such as Shaw 2002), the connections between present practices and the history of slavery sometimes seem tenuous, but their similarity is occasionally marked in contemporary people’s actions, imagination, and words.

This paper will examine these claims in turn, focusing on the area of Akuapem, a traditional kingdom composed of seventeen towns on a low-lying ridge located thirty miles from Accra and the coast in the southeastern Gold Coast. Ultimately, the paper will argue that what runs through both these two approaches is the idiom of debt and reciprocity, an idiom which
currently infuses children’s relations with adults.

Michael Herzfeld’s brilliant examination of the dowry in Greece is helpful in any discussion of cultural continuity and change (1980). Herzfeld reminds us that we as scholars tend to objectify social practices like pawning and marital payments into generalizations and rules, whereas people’s experience instead gives them a range of lived examples of the phenomenon (my daughter did this; my brother did this). In their abstract meaning, it might seem absurd to argue that marriage is like pawning and vice versa; but in people’s lived experience, they may share certain features that makes the definition of the situation liable to negotiation under those very terms. Secondly, Herzfeld argues that we assume that a term refers to the same practice or phenomenon whenever it is used, in which ‘survival of the term means survival of the institution’ (236). Yet practices change, even when the word itself does not.³ His discussion helps us focus on variations of pawning as practice (in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu [1977]) and the ways that pawning itself changed over time.

AKUAPEM AND COURT RECORDS

While the first settlers of Akuapem were Guan-speaking, later settlers were Akan, and all the towns—Guan and Akan alike—were organized into a traditional Akan hierarchical kingdom. Contemporary Akan and Guan peoples mark their ethnic differences in terms of religion, modes of descent (the Guans as patrilineal and the Akan matrilineal), and language.⁴ Both Guan and Akan families were organized around the corporate unit of the house, which comprised all descendents of a common ancestor, including the living, the dead, and the unborn. The house was ‘most important in matters of land tenure, funerals, inheritance, and any sort of “trouble,”
including debt, arrest by the police, help in school fees, or finding employment’ (Brokensha 1972: 78). The house head, an elder member of the family, was responsible for safeguarding property belonging to the house and using it in ways to help the house as a corporate body, such as helping junior members get out of debt or paying for funerals. The house helped bury its members and chose inheritors for their property. In a patrilineage, the successor to a man who died ought to be the deceased’s father’s younger brother’s son or someone in an equivalent relationship; in a matrilineage, a man’s sister’s son. However, perhaps because Akan and Guan peoples have lived amongst one another in Akuapem, families were not strictly patrilineal or matrilineal but also acknowledged ties to the other parent’s family. One knowledgeable anthropologist of Akuapem, David Brokensha, noted:

There are many aberrations, such as the ‘patrilineal’ Guan allowing children to inherit . . . from their mothers, or the ‘matrilineal’ Akim [or Akan] indulging in testatentory [or inheritance] disposition in favor of sons [as opposed to sisters’ sons, as would be usual among matrilineal people]. It would perhaps be better not to think of ‘systems’ being either patrilineal or matrilineal, but of using ‘double-descent,’ [kinship through the mother and father] with a strong emphasis on one side or the other. (1972, 78; see also Middleton 1979)

Wealthy men in matrilineages in Akuapem tried to provide in their lifetimes for their sons as well as their houses, just as wealthy men in patrilineages also tried to provide for their sisters’ sons (Hill 1958; Johnson 1972). Other scholarship on pawning in the Gold Coast has been done in matrilineal, Akan areas in which men had greater rights to their sisters’ children than to their own children, an important contrast to the growing importance of fathers (Asante by Allman and
Given the ‘aberrations’ of Akuapem family organization, Akuapem becomes an interesting place to examine whether fatherhood became more significant than the lineage or house, including in patrilineal towns where fathers had greater rights to their children than they did in matrilineal towns.

Like the neighboring Krobo, Akuapem people began cultivating oil palm in the valleys below the ridge in the 1830s, a product mainly exported for use in British industries (Johnson 1972; McPhee 1926, 30-36). Palm oil production was controlled by chiefs and large-scale plantation owners (Haenger 2000). Palm oil had intense labour needs, particularly in its processing and porterage to the coast, work which was done mainly by slaves (Sutton 1983).

Because of its involvement in oil palm agriculture in the nineteenth century, Akuapem was a destination for slave traders who brought slaves from the north and Ewe refugees from the Asante invasion in 1869 (Getz 2004, Gilbert 1995, Haenger 2000, Jenkins 1970a).

From the early 1890s onwards, Akuapem people turned their attention to a different kind of cash crop, cocoa. Cocoa required less labour and produced higher profits than oil palm (Sutton 1983). While palm oil production was in the hands of the chiefs and wealthy plantation owners—and they certainly became interested in cocoa too—more ordinary individuals were also involved in cocoa production. Seized by what was termed at the time as ‘cocoa fever,’ farmers moved from their towns on the Akuapem ridge to forest areas further west to plant cocoa farms in associations, getting initial capital to gain access to land in ‘foreign’ regions from their earnings as migrant craftsmen and clerks, from trade, from oil palm and rubber, and from pawnning (Hill 1972, 1963). The towns on the Akuapem ridge in the early twentieth century tended to be deserted because everyone was working on their cocoa farms far away (Ofori 1907).
Men also traveled to the inland city of Kumasi for trade or the coastal city of Sekondi to work on the railway, sometimes plowing their earnings into buying land for cocoa. The farm and labour migrants brought home the wealth they had acquired elsewhere, building houses, churches, and schools in their hometowns. In the early twentieth century, colonial rule was present through the district commissioner’s periodic visits to settle numerous chieftaincy disputes (Akuapem was thought particularly quarrelsome), the building of roads and railways, and the presence of police officers at nearby Akuse and later Nsawam (Akwapim Native Affairs, GNA, ADM 11/1/1101).

In order to understand how and for what reasons Akuapem people used slavery and pawning, I have relied on two kinds of sources. The most significant are court records. Situati

ons that came to court were those of conflict, in which people had differing interests and conceptions of what ought to be. As Anne Griffiths (1997) argues, rather than viewing court systems as fixing and making static what were fluid and flexible ways of relating to one another, we should see the courts as one element in a range of strategies that people were using to negotiate their relationships with one another. As a result, the court records reveal relationships that were troublesome and conflictual at a particular historical moment (Fallers 1969; Roberts 2005). In particular, they highlight metaphoric, contiguous social relations: people could make different claims about a situation, on the basis of their similarity, showing that these claims were considered analogous. Even as these relations were like, in that they could be argued as the definition of a situation in court, they were also un-like, since the rights associated with these relations differed.

As was the case elsewhere in Africa, there were multiple court systems operating simultaneously, both British courts drawing on English common law and chiefly courts using
‘customary law.’ Cases involving Akuapem people appeared infrequently in the High Commandant Court in Accra from 1866 to 1902 and its replacement, the Supreme Court in Accra, 1902-09. A criminal court opened in the Eastern Province at Nsawam in 1896 and a Supreme Court for the Eastern Province in 1909. Beginning in 1905, one can also find extensive court records from four different chiefly tribunals in Akuapem, some serving Akan towns like Akropong and Aburi and others serving Guan towns like Adukrom and Abiriw. These tribunals existed previously, but the extensive records in the archives demonstrate that they came under greater colonial oversight during this time. Most—but not all—of the courts I examined provided detailed accounts of the court proceedings, including questioning of witnesses, although the written account is an English account of a verbal exchange in Akuapem Twi, Larteh Guan, or Okere Guan. In the records I discuss below, brideprice is termed ‘dowry,’ and I will use the term ‘marriage payment’ in my own discussion. As in other African communities (Griffiths 1997), marriage payments could be made at the beginning of a marriage, but often was not and instead was paid in dribs and drabs over a long period of time. Most of the court cases I analyze below come from the chiefly tribunals, rather than the less accessible colonial courts. Only in colonial courts was the outright charge pawning or slavery, brought by the government, although in the chiefly tribunals, pawning or slavery was often an important piece of the background to a case.

This kind of source material has limitations. Courts were part of a process of contestation, some of which is visible to us and some of which is not. What is missing from court records are conflicts that never made it to court due to practical matters such as the cost or difficulty of traveling and getting witnesses to the court. It is evident from the archival records that those who
lived closest to the colonial courts were most likely to use them, particularly in the earliest period, and that in later periods, as the courts became more accessible due to easier transportation, some people were pursuing the same cases simultaneously or serially in the chiefly tribunals and the colonial courts, hoping for a more favourable verdict in one or the other.  

Court fees and fines were critical to ‘the impoverishment and reduction in status and class’ of ordinary citizens to the benefit of those who sat on the chief’s council (Grier 1992: 307). Court fees were a significant source of revenue for chiefs, who jockeyed amongst themselves over who had jurisdiction in a particular village and delivered trumped-up charges to ordinary citizens (Adukrom Native Affairs, 1906-20, ERA, ADM KD 29/6/3). The Basel missionary Groh commented in 1896, “Since our people [in Akuapem] are very addicted to palaver, and the chiefs and the elders who sit in on court sessions do not lack the means for getting people they know with something they could get their hands on involved in a dispute and consequently fleecing them, a general state of wealth cannot arise” (cited in Haenger 2000: 168). Because court fees from extensive legal proceedings were a cause of indebtedness for individuals in Akuapem, court cases caused pawning, as in a case involving a ten-year-old boy who was seized by a village chief in 1907 because his father was unable to pay a court fine of 22 pounds (Complaint against Kwaku Yeboa at Aburi for making an oath and fighting with Kwamin Chi, 4 May 1907, GNA, ADM 29/4/2).

Because of the limitations of the court records, they are supplemented with contextual information from the Basel Mission which was active in Akuapem, in particular, letters and reports from the European missionaries and articles by African Christians in a monthly Twi-
language periodical, *Kristofo Senkekafo*, published by the Basel Mission 1883-1888, 1893-1895, and 1905-1917, to which I had access through the Basel Mission Archives in Basel, Switzerland, as well as through individuals in Akuapem who had retained copies as part of their personal archives. The Basel Mission began mission stations in the towns of Akropong and Aburi in Akuapem in the 1830s and grew rapidly in the late nineteenth century in southern Ghana. The Basel Mission was very involved in shaping slavery and pawning among its converts and particularly because, as a mission, it had labour requirements in building its schools, churches, and farms (Getz 2004, Haenger 2000). Some of their students lived with and were domestic servants for European missionaries, and converts who were in danger of being pawned or bought were rescued by the Mission, a debt that they then worked off through employment at the Mission, well documented in Peter Haenger’s work (2000). These practices were understood by Akuapem people through the idioms of fostering, pawning, and slavery. For instance, a woman in a court case in 1914 testified that she and her brother were pawned to the Basel Mission in previous years (perhaps her youth) for their father’s debts, arguing on this basis that she had rights to the land under dispute (Robert Darko vs. Kwame Donkor, 10 October 1914, ERA, ECRG 16/1/18). Basel Missionaries fought against pawning practices, on the one hand, trying to replace it with wage employment, and, on the other, used pawning and fosterage to meet their own labour needs and populate their schools. Finally, I will draw on Polly Hill’s research notes from oral history interviews she conducted with Akuapem farmers in the 1950s in preparation for *The Migrant Cocoa-farmers of Southern Ghana* (1958). These papers are available in the Northwestern University Africana Library.

In order to establish a historical baseline, as Stefano Boni (2001) urges, I will first
describe practices of pawning in the late nineteenth century prior to the Emancipation Ordinance of 1874, before turning to its subsequent transformations.

PAWNING IN AKUAPEM IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

As anthropologists have noted, African relations of pawning and slavery were closely linked to kin relations. Kin groups acted as corporate bodies that had rights in and responsibilities to family members, which they could transfer to another family house or person in return for goods or money. ‘The individual, usually a child, would now be totally at the disposal of the recipient lineage [or house], to which he would ‘belong,’ and which could do with him as it wished, just as it could with those born in the group’ (Miers and Kopytoff 1977: 10). Within this understanding of the kinship, agency has meaning only “as domesticated agency,” or agency subordinated to collective goals, argues Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2002: 115), since all individuals belonged in some way to a house or person for whom they worked during their lifetimes. However, some people’s agency was more domesticated than others. Not all individuals in a house were equally likely to be pawned or sold: the most favoured were the indebted person him- or herself, or the indebted’s brother or sister, niece or nephew, in both patrilineal Guan and matrilineal Akan families. Girls prior to their puberty ceremonies, unmarried boys, and slaves and their descendents were also favoured pawns. Women could be pawned or sold to repay the marriage payments owed their husbands when they divorced (Basel Mission Archives, Basel D-20.4).

With the transfer of a pawn to a creditor came particular rights for the creditor. First, the pawn came to live with the creditor, indicated by the fact that ‘staying with’ someone was a
common euphemism used for pawning. Residence was closely tied to rights in labour. While
slaves in Akuapem mainly worked in farm villages at a distance from the major towns (Jenkins
1970c; Sutton 1983; Regina vs. Qubinah Sikar, 20 August 1888, GNA, SCT 2/5/4), pawns were
more associated with domestic work to their masters, probably because of their smaller numbers.
Nathaniel Asare, one of a few African ministers in the Basel Mission of his generation and from
Adukrom, Akuapem (Hall 1965), described Christian practices of pawning in 1894, which were
probably not much different from those of non-Christians:

*Awowa de, kristofo mu nnwetiwa nhina daso gye; ebinom gye mpanyimfo a. s.*

*mmerante awowa ma w Jye adwuma nna-nna, na ebinom nso gye mmeawa ne mmarriwa awowa a w Jtete w Jn nkyen se asomfo kosi se mmono ko no awofo a. s.*

*w Jn a w Jde w Jn beree w Jn benya sika abegye w Jn.*

As for pawns, all the richer Christians continue to receive them; some receive
adult or young male pawns to do daily housework, and some also receive boy and
girl pawns to live with them as servants until the children’s own parents or those
who brought them find money to redeem them. (Asare 1894: 79)

During this period of residence and labour, which could last for many years, the creditor was
responsible for feeding and clothing the pawn.

The pawn was supposed to stay with and work for the creditor until the loan or the loan
and interest were repaid. In the 1870s, debtors generally paid high interest (up to 50 per cent) on
loans guaranteed by a pawn (Jenkins 1970b). While some pawns were redeemed after a few
months, the high interest rate generally made it difficult for debtors to reclaim their relatives
and they essentially became equivalent to slaves. However, by the second decade of the
In the twentieth century, pawns tended to serve in lieu of interest. For example, in 1914, Kwasi Ahamfro, a farmer from the Akuapem town of Dawu said that he got a loan of ten pounds ‘and gave my son Aboagyi [Aboagye] to plaintiff to stay with him to forfeit the interest and if the boy failed to stay I will pay interest to plaintiff’ (Eller Kwadjo Konor vs. Kwasi Ahamfro, 24 June 1914, ERA, ECRG 16/1/12). Running away from one’s master signaled the end of that relationship, which then provoked the creditor to bring the debtor to court to repay the loan. Running away was an informal and nonlegal mechanism for dependents seeking release from pawning, an action by which they put pressure on the debtor to repay the loan. Allman and Tashjian claim that as marriage payments increased in value in the twentieth century, women became like pawns to their husbands. However, marriage seemed a bit like servitude before the advent of cocoa farming, as Jonathan Bekoe Palmer, a prominent Akuapem Christian, made a comparison between marriage and slavery in the early 1860s:

Na o béa no nya kɔ okunu no fi a, adyuma a o bɛ ye nyina, o ye ma no.
ɔ tess n’afana. o ye n’abɛ, o soa ne nno, o dɔ w n’afuw so, o noa n’aduan

Once a woman goes to live in her husband’s house, she will do all the work; she is like his slave. She prepares his palm nuts into oil, she carries his palm oil, she works on his farm, and she cooks his food. (Basel Mission Archives, Basel D-20.4, p. 85-86).

However, in Akuapem in the nineteenth century, a wife’s labour for her husband was not connected to the marriage payment, and it does not seem as if fathers had rights to pawn their children as a result of having made a marriage payment. When the Basel missionaries were summoned to the chief’s court to help with a case regarding a child’s death, they heard the
proverb ‘ɔ ba ṣe, oṣe na wọ wọ mmusua,’ which they took to mean, as was written in a marginal note to a description of the case: “the child takes after [or resembles] the father, but he has relations (the father can’t sell the child without the relations of the mother) the relation[s] have more to say than the [father].)” (Basel Mission Archives, Basel D-20.4, 20 May 1864, p. 177). Only those men who had children with a slave wife had rights to pawn or sell those children. Men certainly sought control over their wives through pawning and slavery: in 1864, a powerful Akropong chief redeemed a woman in pawn to the Basel Mission, saying that as a result she was his slave (afenaa), an assertion that was disputed by her family (Notebook, Basler Mission Archives, Basel, D-20. Sch. 3.10). While the metaphor of marriage to slavery has some longevity, and wives were supposed to work for their husbands prior to cocoa farming, Allman and Tashjian’s argument (2000) that the meaning of marriage payments changed to make wives more like pawn-wives is a better interpretation of the data from Akuapem than the argument that there was continuity in marriage arrangements, as Boni (2001) argues from his research in Sefwi.

Thus, in the pawning cases that came to the attention of Akuapem Christians prior to Emancipation in 1874, all involved an Akan or Guan man pawning a sibling and/or a sibling’s children—that is, members of his house—except where the children of a slave woman were pawned by her family and masters to pay her debts from a dispute with her husband (the case of Rosine Opo, described in Haenger 2000). For instance, a Christian from the Guan town of Larteh in 1858 pawned his siblings who were minors, and the family of a Christian man pawned two of his nieces to pay his debts in 1864 or 1865 (both from a Notebook in Basel Mission Archives, Basel, D-20. Sch. 3.10). In a case that came before the government Court in Accra, in 1871 a man pawned his sister’s children (Oklamie Larbee of Aquapim vs. Larbee Quajoe of
Pawning was not considered morally wrong. At the same time, it was not done lightly, but in a crisis situation, when there were no other avenues for help. One witness testified to the High Commandant Court in Accra in 1872 about his younger relative, Appiadjaye, a debtor who had pawned his niece: ‘Appiadjaye was in any trouble and he could not get rid of it. A man would not do wrong if he put his daughter [or niece] in pawn to get him out of trouble. I did not see any of his family coming forward to help him out of his trouble’ (Edward Repino Pinto of Ningo vs. Appiadjaye of Ningo now at Accra, 14 February 1872, SCT 2/4/10). While not a case from Akuapem, there is nothing in the Akuapem court records to suggest that Akuapem people felt differently about pawning.

The Emancipation Ordinance of 1874 outlawed slave dealing within the Gold Coast Colony, stipulated that the children of slaves were born free, and allowed slaves to buy their own freedom. Pawning was treated as a form of slavery by colonial officials. In the late 1870s and 1880s, many cases involving slavery and pawning were brought to the colonial court in Accra, as people tried to rescue their slave relatives from bondage and as masters tried to force slaves who had run away to return. In general, the colonial courts treated slaves’ freedom with ambivalence, only pushing for it in cases of outright cruelty, as colonial officials were concerned about disrupting existing social hierarchies (Haenger 2000). Decisions in cases of slave-dealing or pawn transaction were more likely to go in favour of the slave or pawn’s release than those in which people had been slaves or pawns for many years.

Relationships of slavery continued into the late nineteenth century in the southeastern Gold Coast, although changes in these relationships occurred as well. Children were popular as
slaves in the decades after the Emancipation Ordinance, because they could be more easily hidden from colonial officials, presented as the slave trader’s own children, and were quicker at learning local languages, thus disguising their non-local origins (Dumett and Johnson 1988; Haenger 2000). The Basel missionary Rössler commented in a letter in 1893 that the slave trade south of the Sahara in the Gold Coast was almost exclusively in children, aged seven to twelve years (cited in Haenger 2000). Another Basel mission report a few years earlier in 1888 reported that in Akuapem many young girls and boys were brought as slaves from the north in the past year (Jenkins, 1970d).

While Akuapem people had many slaves, the Emancipation Ordinance did not disrupt these relations because very few slaves ran away in Akuapem. The Basel missionaries thought that the paucity of slaves running away, in comparison to Akyem Abuakwa to the west where they also had mission stations, was because slaves were better treated in Akuapem than in Akyem Abuakwa (Jenkins 1970e). Slaves and their descendants became incorporated into powerful and wealthy families in Akuapem, although their origins were remembered. Many slaves and descendents of slaves served as tenant farmers (‘caretakers’) for absentee owners of the new cocoa farms. Slaves expected to inherit those farms but were prevented from doing so by the chiefly courts which upheld their understanding of customary law that slaves’ property reverted to their master and their master’s descendents. Cases involving slave inheritance of property were particularly prominent during the 1910s, signaling the passing of a generation of tenant slaves.

Nathaniel Clerk, a pastor and teacher for the Basel Mission, felt in 1894 that while pawnning was definitely in the church, he was not sure whether slavery was. The last trade in
slaves that was prosecuted in the Eastern Province occurred in 1900 (Queen vs. Dedy, 29 March 1903, GNA, ADM 29/4/1). The first ‘slave-calling’ case in which someone brought another person to court for calling his mother a slave appeared in Akuapem in 1905, and ‘slave-calling’ cases were an active part of the court docket into the 1920s (Afriyie vs. Ayi Kofi, 13 November 1905, ERA, ECRG 16/1/1). In 1924, a man called another man the grandchild of a slave sold to Accra, and an inheritance case involving the grandchildren of a man and his slave was heard, suggesting that active dealing in slaves was an experience of two generations back (Osae Kwadwo vs. Kwaku Amaka, 22 April 1924, ERA, ECRG 16/1/24; Kofi Agyei vs. Akosua Nsemi, 13 October 1924, ERA, ECRG 16/1/21). Taking the court cases and the comments by the Basel missionaries and African Christians together, it would seem that the active buying and selling of slaves in Akuapem declined rapidly around the turn of the early twentieth century.

It is difficult to determine whether as slavery declined in Akuapem, the demand for pawns increased, as Gareth Austin (1994) so carefully documents in Asante. Very few Akuapem people traveled to the colonial court in Accra before the turn of the twentieth century, so there are not enough records of pawning cases from Akuapem to establish incidence rates for pawning before and after the Emancipation Ordinance. The average rate of a loan for a pawn increased slowly from the 1870s to the 1920s, suggesting that there was not a sudden increase in demand for pawns, perhaps because so few slaves had run away in Akuapem or because loan rates for pawns were less subject to sudden increases between ‘parties whose relations with each other were often not simply economic’ but were also patronage relationships (Austin 2004: 149). However, Nathaniel Clerk’s remark in 1894 suggests the prevalence of pawning during that time.

An observer in 1907 made a similar remark. ‘Pawning is common,’ said a witness in a
court case in the Akuapem town of Berekuso (Rex vs. Osaku, 15 January 1907, GNA, SCT 2/5/16). One of the reasons for its prevalence in the 1890s and 1900s was because commoners required capital for new commercial ventures and to buy land for cocoa. Polly Hill’s interviews with elderly Akuapem cocoa farmers in the late 1950s show that many of them raised the capital to buy their land through pawning, although others used profits from oil palm and rubber or their earnings from trade or crafts work (Hill 1958). For instance, in 1958, E. O. Walker of Larteh remembered from his childhood in the early twentieth century that he did not want to go to school so he could be pawned to help his parents buy land (Notes on the Manuscript Book by James Lawrence Tete, The Polly Hill Papers, Box 4, Folder 7, Africana Library, Northwestern University). On the basis of being pawned to pay for a piece of land in their youth, male and female adults later made claims to inherit that piece of land, as we have already seen. One former pawn, a man, reported in a land case, ‘I then said I will go pledge myself to pay for the debt. I have paid the debt so the land belongs to me’ (Kwaku Nipanka of Akropong vs. Kwame Awuku of Akropong, 6 April 1910, ERA, ECRG 16/1/5; see also Kwasi Apema vs. Kwaku Adade, 6 October 1928, ERA, ECRG 16/1/27). That fathers could pawn their own children and that their children then laid claim to their direct inheritance of the father’s property in matrilineal and patrilineal families signaled a new kind of relationship between fathers and their children, that I will discuss further below.

Besides land for cocoa, another reason for the prevalence of pawning had to do with the ubiquity of debt among commoners in Akuapem, as part of the monetization of the economy that accompanied cash-crop agriculture, as Trevor Getz (2004) suggests. Debt formed the largest percentage of cases before the chiefly tribunals. People got into debt through legal affairs,
primarily through fines generated over legal disputes over land and adultery; to gain access to land; and to make marriage payments, particularly among Christians (Opoku 1895). Both men and women became indebted, although more men than women served as creditors because of their greater access to cash. Men paid the debts of their wives (or sometimes wives’ family members) before they married them, a person who stood security for a debtor became the new creditor, and the heir of a deceased person also inherited his or her debts. Pawning was one way in which debt was transferred, in that younger male and female relatives generally served for an older or more powerful person’s debt, but sometimes served on behalf of their own acquired debt. Debt was thus a complex phenomenon which indexed social relations of dependence, patronage, and responsibility within and beyond families.

In 1911, the government successfully prosecuted two debtors and a creditor in Akropong, Akuapem for pledging two girls and punished them with several months’ imprisonment (Rex vs. Oben Cudjoe and others, 24 Apr. 1911, GNA, SCT 2/5/19). In his judgment, the district commissioner said that should the debtor fail to pay back the debt (and thus fail to release the pawns from service), he should pay the two pawns with portions of the land bought for the loan, on which they could work for their freedom. Because a Christian was the creditor in that case, the Basel Mission church reviewed its guidelines regarding Christian pawning, reaffirming that pawns held by Christians should be paid a monthly wage and that Christian debtors should find creditors who were fellow Christians so that Christian children would not be raised by pagans (Kristofo Separko 6:1 (31 January 1911): 11 and 6:8 (31 August 1911): 93-4). Although pawning continued after 1911, it became more risky for creditors. For example, in March 1912, in Berekuso, a man asked Kofi Adoo for a loan of thirteen pounds in exchange for a ‘young girl.’
A witness testified, ‘Kofi Adoo told him that this was illegal and that he couldn’t do that. And that if [he] could give him a farm as surety or if someone would be surety for him, he would give him the amount’ (COP vs. Ofosu, 1 March 1912, GNA, SCT 38/5/2). Since most pawning cases were brought to court by the creditor, pursuing the repayment of debt following the running away of a pawn, creditors were concerned about how to force the debtor to repay the debt. Given the complexity and prevalence of debt, which people managed through practices of pawning during the emerging cocoa economy, how did Akuapem people cope with the illegality of pawning under colonial rule? What happened, in particular, to child pawns?

PAWNING IS LIKE FOSTERAGE

The reason why child pawns could be hidden from the law more easily than young or middle-aged adults was because they could be presented to colonial officials as children who were being fostered. Fosterage is a common practice in West Africa (Goody 1982): unlike pawning, fosterage has no local term in Akuapem, indicating its naturalness and prevalence. In Akuapem and Accra in the late nineteenth century, it seemed to be most often practiced between women, in which women gave their children to other women, whether kin or non-kin, to raise and take care of for a variety of reasons. Colonial officials were aware of the slippage between fostering and pawning: in 1890, the colonial government issued a circular ordering all district commissioners that as they enforced the abolition laws they should pay particular attention to ‘apprenticed children’ (Opare-Akurang 1998).

In what ways were pawning and fostering similar? Like pawning, a fostered child went to live with an adult, and in living in that person’s household, did everyday domestic chores. Both
indexed networks of relationships and patronage between adults, which might include other favours or exchanges (Bledsoe 1990). These similarities are illustrated in a court case brought to the Civil Commandant Court in Accra in August 1871 (Tawiah vs. Johanna, 2 August 1871, GNA, SCT 2/4/8) in which a woman Tawiah brought Johanna to the court for pawning Tawiah’s daughter to another person for twelve heads of cowries without her knowledge. Four months before, Tawiah had given her daughter to Johanna ‘to teach her to work.’ Johanna argued (implicitly) that Tawiah’s daughter was her pawn by saying that Tawiah had received a small loan from her of three heads of cowries, although this amount was far less than the usual loan exchanged for a pawn. \(^{22}\) It is clear how fosterage and pawning might be confused with one another: in both cases, a girl lived with a woman who was not her mother and worked for her. The girl’s mother even sought a small loan from the foster mother, suggesting that the relationship was as much a patron-client relationship between Tawiah and Johanna as a relationship in which Johanna would teach Tawiah’s daughter to work.

Fosterage, then, served in a metaphoric relationship to pawning, prior even to the Emancipation Ordinance. Looking like one another, a situation could be presented as one or the other. Yet participants agreed on the conceptual distinction between them in terms of the rights to Tawiah’s daughter, particularly who had rights to pawn her. In court, Johanna and Tawiah each proposed an interpretation of the relationship that corresponded to their interests. In two other court cases in the 1870s in the Accra court, in which the custody of a girl was at stake, the woman with whom the girl was living presented the situation as one of pawning, whereas the girl herself or her closer relatives presented the situation as one of fosterage (Quamin Yaw vs. Mansah, 22 July 1873, and Adooquaye Lydia of Accra vs. Lum Yoccor of Accra, 11 February
1873, both in GNA SCT 2/4/10). Pawning thus implied that a creditor had more control over a child’s labour and residence than a foster parent would (for a similar distinction between pawning and fostering in Nigeria, see Renne 2005). The three court cases were brought on by an event—the death of the creditor or the debtor or the transfer of the child to a third household as a pawn—that may have prompted the re-definition of the relationship that had otherwise been able to elide the question of who exactly had rights to control a child’s residence and labour. Further, rather than in Akuapem, they took place in an urban area, which is probably where fostering as a work apprenticeship with non-kin was more prevalent. People therefore considered fosterage to be ‘like’ pawning even prior to the Emancipation Ordinance, with pawning giving the creditor greater rights to the child than due the foster parent.

Once pawning began to be prosecuted by the colonial government, the adults with whom the child stayed reversed their argument: now they presented the relationship as one of fosterage. Did this change the rights of the foster parent to become more like those of a creditor? Given that a relationship of pawning might look like fosterage, one might expect that as pawning became more risky because of its illegality, pawning might not only be camouflaged by fosterage arrangements but that those presenting themselves as foster parents might try to gain greater control over the labour and residence of their foster children. In other words, fosterage and pawning might become more similar, not only in terms of their everyday routines, but also in terms of rights to the child ‘staying with’ them.

Let us look at a case from 1918 in Nsawam, a cocoa-trading and commercial town in Akuapem which grew rapidly after a railway linking coastal Accra and inland Kumasi, two important cities of the Gold Coast, reached the town in 1910 (Delphina Ocquaye vs. Afua...
Fearon, 26 July 1918, GNA, SCT 38/4/1). Delphina Ocquaye had received a girl into her household eight to ten years before in exchange for a loan of eight pounds to the girl’s mother, a situation that, to my eyes, suggests pawning. Like other creditors, the reason Delphina brought the case to court was because the girl had run away and she wanted the debt to be repaid. However, instead of presenting the situation as one of pawning, Delphina portrayed herself as the girl’s foster mother. She said that the girl’s mother ‘wanted to place the girl [with Delphina] because she was so proud she needed checking by someone.’ Delphina was thus suggesting that she had rights to control the girl’s residence and labour based on the girl’s status as her foster child, placed with her by her sick mother, who subsequently died. The girl’s maternal aunt, on the other hand, suggested instead that Delphina owed her niece her wages. The colonial court decided in both contestants’ favour: the aunt’s claim for wages erased the mother’s debt. Any rights to the girl on the basis of fosterage were dismissed, considered extraneous to the issue at hand.

Custody of children was very much under negotiation in the Akuapem chiefly tribunals in the 1910s and 1920s, primarily a result of increasing marital conflicts. Some of these custody cases involved foster parents, as fathers brought the foster parents of their children to court for marrying their daughter, burying their child, or something else that they felt was abrogating their parental rights. For instance, a father of two girls and their uncle were in dispute over who had the right to decide who the daughters would marry and thus receive their marriage payments. The father had left the daughters with their uncle eleven years ago after borrowing eighteen pounds from him, while the father traveled to Kumasi. The uncle testified, ‘I have greater power over the girls Ofosua and Otubea than their father bec. [because] he left them with me when he
went on journey. He only returned one and a half years ago.’ Like Delphina Ocquaye, the uncle did not portray himself as a creditor in this situation, which one would assume would give him rights as a pawn holder over the girls, but as a guardian to them, taking care of them in their father’s almost ten-year absence. His argument suggested that their co-residence with him, rather than with their father, meant that the uncle had rights to them which the father did not. The chiefly court dismissed his claim, ruling in favour of the father’s right to control his daughters’ marriages (George Paul Kumi vs. Kwajo Budu, 15 October 1914, ERA, ECRG 16/1/18).

Similarly, Baidoo Kwaku, a male hammock carrier for the chief of Adukrom, Akuapem, had given his son to another man, Obeng Kwasi, a labourer from the same town, shortly after his son’s birth, for reasons that were not recorded. Baidoo brought Obeng Kwasi to court for burying his son without his knowledge. While Obeng pleaded that someone else had done so while he was away on a trip to the north, the court ruled in Baidoo’s favour (Baidoo Kwaku vs. Obeng Kwasi, 15 March 1913, ERA, ECRG 16/1/13).24 These cases in the Akuapem chiefly courts in the 1910s demonstrate that foster parents did not gain more rights than they had in the cases in the Accra court in the 1870s, and so, at least in this regard, foster parents did not gain the rights of creditors. Fosterage and pawning remained like but unlike one another.

In my discussions with contemporary Akuapem people about fostering, slavery came up only in discussions of non-kin fosterage, which people equated with being a servant or a housemaid, although some people care for non-kin children for compassionate reasons. The number of young women involved in being a housemaid seems to have increased in more recent times, which may speak to changes in fosterage arrangements or a decline in Akuapem’s relative wealth in more recent decades. On a continuum of degree of care and hardship for the child,
parenthood is at one end with fosterage by non-kin at the other, and kin fosterage in the middle. These relationships can be portrayed as analogous situations, and as quite different, in everyday conversations.

**PAWNING IS LIKE MARRIAGE AND FATHERHOOD**

In case after case in Akuapem, in the 1910s and particularly in the 1920s, men claimed that the money they gave women was a marriage payment, while women claimed it was just a loan. For example, in a typical case from 1925, a woman from the Guan town of Dawu came to a stool bearer in the Akan town of Akropong for a loan. He reported, “She put it before me to pay it for her because she would stay with me as a labourer” but he refused this offer. She then offered to marry him, bringing him people who testified that her husband had died and she was free to marry; so he married her for 10 pounds. However, he said, she then refused to marry him, claiming that the money was “not [a] dowry, but a loan” (Ohene Kwaku vs. Adwowa Asi, 12 January 1925, ERA, ECRG 16/1/21). Similarly, in 1912, a woman with her son approached a chiefly linguist (ɔ kyeame) for a loan; if she stayed with him as a wife for three months, he told her, she would not have to pay interest, but she did not want to marry him (Linguist Kwasi Asare vs. Anyankobea, 8 February 1912, ERA, ECRG 16/1/11). Women wanted a loan in exchange for labour but not marriage, while men wanted to marry. Women often used marriage payments or loans to pay off their existing debts, including previous marriage payments that needed to be repaid if they were to divorce their husbands, so they were very aware of how marriage payments could entrap them. Unlike comparable data from Sefwi (Boni 2001), women and their families did not refuse marriage payments outright, but preferred a loan instead.
That women argued that a relationship was that of debt rather than marriage, and men the reverse, implied that marriage gave men greater rights over women than a loan did. Pawning became, instead, more like employment, with greater freedom for the labourer. The situation in Akuapem thus mimics what Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian (2000) and Beverly Grier (1992) have described in Asante during the 1930s and 1940s. As the value of marriage payments increased in the twentieth century, marriage to a free commoner became equivalent to marrying a pawn or slave, giving husbands greater control over their wives’ residence and labour.

Men expected their wives to travel away from their hometowns to reside at the husband’s village, growing food crops on his cocoa farm. One man complained that he could not help his wife with the repayment of her marriage payment to her previous husband “because she cannot [does not] assist me to work” (Akosua Ayim vs. Asare Kwame, 12 February 1924, ERA, ECRG 16/1/23). In another case, after a dispute with one of his wives, a man needed to pacify her and her family. He paid a debt which released his wife’s mother from pawning, and expected his wife to then come live with him. His wife responded that that she agreed to marry him and go to Kumasi, a large market city, but not Akyeremateng, a cocoa village, founded by Adukrom farmers (Kwame Bah vs. Kwaw Aboagye, Meansah, Afua Wusua, 10 March 1909, ERA, ECRG 16/1/13). Marriage was clearly a way for men to gain more permanent leverage over their wives’ labour and residence during the cocoa boom, which a loan, surprisingly, did not.

In the past, a man’s marriage to a slave made the children of that union belong to their father, rather than to their house, governing who could pawn or sell them, as we have seen. In the early twentieth century, custody cases between mothers and fathers, and between the uncles of children and their fathers were common during this time period. The courts tended to uphold
the custody rights of fathers in cases where they had made marriage payments to the wife’s family, in both patrilineal and matrilineal towns. In one case, a man from the Guan town of Adukrom had married a woman who then died, leaving behind their two children. He gave the children to his sister to raise. The father said that the maternal uncle then came to claim the children, saying that the mother’s spirit was troubling them, and subsequently sold the two children at Adawso, a cocoa-marketing town in Akuapem. The maternal uncle, in his defense, said that the father had already pledged the eldest child, a girl; the uncle said, ‘I have paid all necessary fees to ransome [sic] the child, therefore I have the power of using them.’ The court decided in favour of the father on the basis of his having made a marriage payment: ‘In the native laws, if a man has married under the rules of the natives and has paid any dowry in so doing after the death of the woman, the husband has to claim all children. A father’s custody and rights over his children was thus dependent on his having made all the marriage payments (see Kwasi Donkor of Dawu vs. Kwadwo Kumi of Akropong, 16 July 1910, ERA, ECRG 16/1/5). During a time when men were losing access to the labour of slaves and pawns at the same time as new cocoa farms required inputs of labour, they turned to wives and children as a labour source. The case material from Akuapem thus supports Allman and Tashjian’s argument that pawnning became absorbed into marriage and fatherhood. In Akuapem, this same phenomenon was taking place, even in the patrilineal towns where fathers already had some rights in their own children.

In the staking out of fathers’ rights, fathers were supported by the chiefly tribunals. Fathers were supposed to pay for their children’s debts, maintenance, and medical expenses and to help male children get land and marry. In exchange, male children should stay with and serve these men during their lifetimes (and to the extent they did not, they put their inheritance of their
father’s property at risk). Those fathers who did not pay their children’s debts or give them land were not entitled to their service, as was the case for one father from the patrilineal Guan town of Larteh (Ofei Kwasi vs. Gabriel Ayisi, 19 January 1914, ERA, ECRG 16/1/17). While sons’ labour was especially at stake in custody cases, for daughters, it was their marriage, because the marriage payments their father would receive had become a significant source of capital for older men. Fathers’ rights in children solidified in both matrilineal and patrilineal towns, so long as they had made marriage payments for the children’s mother. Father’s rights were modeled on creditor relationships, and debt became central to the court’s definition of fatherhood rights during the early twentieth century. However, this is not the whole story, as others could gain custody of children by paying their debts, as I detail below.

DEBT AND CARE?

Fathers’ rights to children did not go uncontested by mothers and their relatives, or even by fathers’ male siblings. Rather, the rights of other kin to children’s labour, as with fathers, became dependent on a creditor-debtor relationship with the young person. For example, as we see in the court case above, a Guan man claimed the right to pawn his deceased sister’s niece because he redeemed her from pawning. As shown in court cases from 1906 onwards, family members who had customarily had kin rights in children but were not birth parents—generally paternal uncles in patrilineal Guan towns and maternal uncles in matrilineal Akan towns in Akuapem—sought to control the residence and service of their dependents by paying their debts.25 In 1910, a man testified that when his uncle paid only part of his debt which he had contracted while traveling, he stayed with another man who did pay it (Kwaku Adae vs. Kwadwo
Yeboa, 23 March 1910, ERA, ECRG 16/1/5).\(^{26}\) The uncle then reported to the colonial officials in Accra that his nephew had been pawned, and as a result, the creditor had to set the nephew free. The nephew then brought the uncle to court for severing his relationship with the creditor. The uncle thus sought to control his nephew’s labour when he only paid a little bit of his debt, even to the point of preventing him from pawning himself to another man. In a sense, the uncle expected his nephew to be pawned to the uncle himself, not to another.

Likewise, in patrilineal towns, paternal uncles, also called fathers, expected young men to treat them as their fathers in exchange for paying off their debts. The inheritor of a deceased man, a paternal uncle, said about his nephews who were minors, ‘If the children would take me as fa. [father] then I would pay all the debts, take the children, and let the land remain unsold [whose sale would otherwise pay for the nephews’ schooling]’ (Mrs. Amaney vs. Yao Dode, 19 September 1912, ERA, ECRG 16/1/14). In essence, those who were non-fatherly kin to dependents and children sought to gain access to their residence and service (or use them to raise further capital) through paying their debts.

Mothers and their kin also contested father’s rights on the basis of debts. When a woman from the Guan town of Adukrom felt her husband owed her money, she took their daughter away from him and gave the daughter to her brother (the girl’s maternal uncle). However, the courts determined she was in the wrong, and she lost custody of her children (Kwaku Agyemang vs. Kwadjo Manyah, 4 March 1912, ERA, ECRG 16/1/11). In another case, a father from the Guan town of Obosomase brought his wife’s brother to court for burying his child ‘without his knowledge.’ The maternal uncle claimed that he—not the girl’s father—had the right to bury his niece because he—not her husband—was paying for his sister’s debts and he had paid for the
girl’s medical care. He claimed, ‘I am the caretaker of the daughter’ and won the case (Thomas Sakie of Obosomase vs. Kwame Fruko of Obosomase, 14 January 1911, ERA, ECRG 16/1/9). The courts were not consistent in accepting other kin’s claims to child custody on the basis of debts and care; those in patrilineal Guan towns tended, in particular, to agree with fathers’ arguments, although not always.

All different kinds of adults, then, were trying to gain rights to children through debt. While fathers could use marriage payments to claim rights, guardianship and custody could be claimed by others through the provision of medical care, the payment of school fees, everyday ‘maintenance’ of food and clothing, and the payment of the mother’s debts, although these claims were not as consistently successful as father’s rights through marriage payments. As Stefano Boni argues, “whoever catered for the child (paid debts, maintenance, medical expenses) was often recognized as having privileged rights over the youngster” (2001, 27). Care thus became a debt incurred by the young person, which gave the adult providing care certain rights. When multiple adults provided care, those rights could be disputed.

Today, in Akuapem, as in other parts of southern Ghana, care between parents and children seems modeled on debt relations, in which care is seen as a form of entrustment, to use Parker Shipton’s term (2007), part of the reciprocal exchanges between the generations. The care of an adult for a child is expected to be acknowledged and reciprocated when the child becomes old enough to work and the adult becomes too weak from old age (Aboderin 2004, van der Geest 2002). The idiom of debt in parent-child relations has resulted in a longer period of time in which the debt will be re-paid than was the case with pawning.
CONCLUSION

I argue, then, that what pawning became was, most broadly, debt relations with children, in which care and maintenance of children gave adults rights to children’s residence, labour, and marriage payments, but increasingly in a diffuse and long-term way, as entrustment rather than direct exchange. Debt relations with children encompassed both fosterage and fatherhood, as guardians and fathers claimed rights to children on the basis of their care of them: paying their debts, providing their medical care, training them, and giving them food and clothing. Increasingly, they found the care of children more expensive, with school payments added to their list of care obligations; another way to put this is that children became increasingly indebted.

In the early twentieth century, people in Akuapem found fosterage and fatherhood to be meaningful likenesses of pawning, as they had in the previous century. A relationship could be interpreted and argued as fosterage or marriage/fatherhood in one claimant’s eyes, just as it could be interpreted and argued as pawning by another. Fosterage, fatherhood, and pawning were simultaneously like and unlike, different interpretations of the same situation with different rights associated with them. What these practices meant in relation to one another were argued out in ongoing conversations and arguments, some of which were made more public through the courts. As they were elsewhere in Africa (Chanock 1985, Griffiths 1997), the courts were a place where the meaning of pawning, fatherhood, and fosterage was being re-shaped during a time when people were, with competing interests, trying to secure labour and their livelihood under a new form of cash cropping. Foster parents never got the rights that creditors did over pawns, but
fathers and husbands were more successful in doing so, particularly in patrilineal towns, changing the meaning of marriage and pawning alike. At the same time, other kin argued about their rights using similar terms, expanding the idiom of debt to more long-term relationships of entrustment and care.

In making these points, I hope I have illustrated some of the ways that children were crucial to the changing social and economic context of the Gold Coast. Children are at the center of the processes by which social life and family life are reproduced. Their labour contributed to the growing and harvesting of cocoa and oil palm, the main cash crops grown in Akuapem, and they were a source of capital for their elders through pawning and marriage. Fathers, husbands, and other kin tussled over who had rights to care for and control children, such as their burial, pawning, and everyday maintenance. In the period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the reciprocal responsibilities that young people and adults owed one another were being negotiated, generating wider and more diffuse webs of obligations under new ways of organizing production and labour.
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ENDNOTES

1Trevor Getz (2004), on the other hand, disagrees with Austen’s conclusion, noting that while slavery declined and pawning increased in the Gold Coast in the late nineteenth century, it was less that pawning was taking the place of slavery, than that an increase in debt-producing practices like funerals and high interest rates caused a greater use of pawning.

2Ti nsa, in Akuapem Twi.

3Allman (1997) shows how a term can have different meanings over time, as one definition becomes less meaningful given other changes.

4For more on Akuapem, see Michelle Gilbert’s extensive and insightful body of work.

5While inheritors could be any member of the matrilineage, the line of inheritance gradually narrowed to the matrilineal issue of a man’s own mother and her sisters, a process which the cocoa migrations of Aburi and Akropong people sped up (Hill 1963: 135, drawing on Fortes’s work among the Asante).
See for example, the cases in 1906 and 1913 in which men had been away for many years in Sekondi (Kofi Botwe vs. Akosua Nkoma, 20 January 1906, ERA, ECRG 16/1/1; Kwaku Mensa vs. Akua Asi, 5 February 1913, ERA, ECRG 16/1/13).

One record book among the many was written in Twi, which I can read.

Vallenga (1974) sees a similar phenomenon in a later period in Ghana.

On the keeping of archives by individuals in Ghana, see Miescher (2006).

Another illustration of corporate kin relations during the 1870s was the practice of ‘panyarring,’ in which family members of a debtor were seized by the creditor and sold into slavery to pay for the debt.

Despite high interest rates, one debtor was able to redeem his grand-daughter after four months (Queen by Iyee Coffee vs. Takee Ammah of Akropong, 28 March 1870, GNA, SCT 2/4/7).

One woman had been pawned as a baby thirty-eight years ago and, with her children, was still living with her creditor (Quamin Yaw vs. Mansah, 22 July 1873, GNA, SCT 2/4/10).

On the strategies of legal inferiors, see Bledsoe (1980).

A sibling (onua) means, broadly, a member of the house or family.

Nathanael Clerk was the son of a Ga woman and a Jamaican teacher who had come to Akuapem in 1843 under the auspices of the Basel Mission (Oku-Ampofo 1981).

Translation of the Twi, ‘Wogyewwaw yan asafordoro dipi mu; nkoda de, minnime wɛ to bi ana.’ (Clerk 1894: 75).

One loan in 1883 was 4.5 pounds; one in the 1890s was 6 or 10 pounds (people said different things); the average loan for one person in 1900-09 was 9 pounds (with a range of 3-50 pounds);
the 1910-19 average was 11 pounds (range 3-16 pounds); the 1920-29 average was 11 pounds (range 3-100 pounds).

18 Christiana Adwowa Asante gave 1 pound to the Amanokrom church as thanksgiving in 1914; one of the reasons for her thanksgiving was that she had finished paying the debt from a dispute over land (‘Amanokrom Ase da Afre [Amanokrom Thanksgiving Offering],’ *Kristofe Sekafo* 9:7 (July 1914): 92.

19 This case reappeared as a land case in 1946, when it turned out the debtors had in fact pawned ten family members (Kwabena Atiemo, Successor to Kwame Abudu, Mansah, Ama Oforiwa of Akropong vs. Kwadjo Abudu, 17 June 1946, ERA, ECRG 16/1/58).

20 Other changes also resulted in a shift in the balance of power towards debtors. As mentioned above, although in the 1870s, very high interest had been charged for debts involving pawns, a pawn tended to serve in lieu of interest on the loan by the second decade of the twentieth century. Pawns also began to be treated with increased care by both debtors and creditors in the twentieth century. Some pawns were asked by debtor relatives if they would be willing to be pawned. For instance, in the Okorase chiefly tribunal, in 1918, a man brought his two step-siblings to the chief’s court and ‘put the matter before them that I was going to pledge [pawn] them for a loan in payment of the debt due by their late brother.’ Upon their refusal, he put land up as a pledge instead (Ofosu v. Linguist Kwadjo, 19 November 1918 in Hill 1964). Increasingly, in the second decade of the twentieth century, pawns were given land by the creditors on which to work, which they sometimes claimed as their own later (Kwasi Mensa vs. Otete Kwasi, both of Larteh, 21 August 1908, ERA, ECRG 16/1/2; Kwasi Panyin vs. Kwasi Sakyi, 28 October 1924, ERA,
Sometimes pawns wanted to be pledged, knowing that it would result in greater family wealth that would benefit them later (such as E. O. Walker). Court records show that pawns did not serve very long, running away after a month or a year (Adawura of Amanprobi vs. Kwaku Donkor of Akropong, 25 June 1910, ECRG 16/1/5). Pawning thus began to turn into wage employment, as encouraged by the Basel Mission church and the colonial government. A second change was in using land rather than people to secure a loan, illustrated by court cases beginning in 1907, a move favored by creditors because of the shift in the balance of power towards debtors and pawns but which also caused legal disputes over land to become more complex.

In some cases, the mother felt that the foster mother could train her child’s character or give her particular occupational skills. In many cases, the foster parent was living in a commercial town and attracted dependents through his or her relative wealth or access to commercial opportunities that could use a child’s assistance. In a few cases of crisis fostering, babies and toddlers were fostered by female relatives after their mothers had died (Yao Ofori vs. Akrong, 31 July 1914, ERA, ECRG 16/1/12; F. N. Adum vs. Kwabena Ntow, 8 April 1915, ERA, ECRG 16/1/18).

Beginning in the late 1910s and particularly in the 1920s, some boys were sent to live with men in Accra for schooling (Charles Amponsa for Ya Odi vs. Adu Kumi, 29 April 1919, ERA, ECRG 16/1/15).

The average loan amount for which a pawn served as security mentioned in the Accra courts during the 1870s was 104 heads of cowries (n=17) with a range of 12-450 heads.

It is unclear whether he was their paternal or maternal uncle.
The court decision may have been also influenced by Baidoo’s position in the chiefly court.

Unfortunately, it is not always clear from the records how these young people got into debt, but there is one case involving a boy in which school fees were viewed as a debt (Charles Amponsa for Ya Odi vs. Adu Kumi, 29 April 1919, ERA, ECRG 16/1/15).

This case was tried in the Omanhene’s court in Akropong, but it is unclear whether the participants were from Akropong and whether the uncle was on the paternal or maternal side.