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## Going Out or Staying Home

Seasonal Movements and Migration Strategies among Xwla and AnlQ-Ewe Fishermen<sup>1</sup>

*Paul Jorion*

### Maritime Fishing in the Gulf of Guinea: The Historical Context

Information on the development of maritime canoe fishing in the Gulf of Guinea is scanty and contradictory. It is in fact impossible to assess with any certainty whether or not a maritime fishery was in existence prior to the coming of European travellers and traders. A lagoon and riverine fishery was no doubt in operation at the time of the first contacts at the end of the fifteenth century. When particularly clement weather conditions allowed and where no surf-"bar" constituted an insuperable obstacle to small dug-out crafts, lagoon and riverine fishing techniques were probably occasionally practised at sea, as is still the case today.

Little more can be said. We have no evidence that the large dug-out canoes essential to the maritime fishing enterprise were in use as such in earlier times: references to such canoes<sup>2</sup> concern "war-boats" to be used only on rivers or in estuaries (Hargreaves 1984:6). Evidence relative to beach-seining at the time of the first contacts is controversial: some authors speculate that short lagoon dragnets in locally produced fibre may have been traditionally used for this purpose, while others suggest the deliberate introduction of the beach-seine by European settlers. Portuguese and Danes are mentioned in this respect. Local linguistic usage seems to confirm foreign introduction as a common name for the beach-seine in the region is "the white man's net" (AnlQ: *yévr-dQ*; Xwla: *yQvQ-dQ*; but also AnlQ: *puta* and Xwla: *agéne*. I am resorting to the type Q for the open o as in "otter").

Historical evidence converges in suggesting that common use of dug-out canoes in sea operations developed as a consequence of local involvement in commercial activities associated with unloading merchant vessels in a region largely lacking harbours. The presence of a surf-bar constituted a real danger for passengers and goods in inexperienced hands. The early reputation of Fante, "Kru" and "Popoh" as skilled sea-farers grew from their craftsmanship at unloading ships rather than from any special ability as maritime fishermen (Tonkin 1984).

Similarly, the first sizeable migrations of maritime populations were linked to such commercial activities rather than to the operation of a fishery. Developing undertakings in sheltered harbours (such as Cape coast) or the building of wharfs (Lomé, Cotonou, etc.) attracted populations of "specialist" unloaders; such moves being sometimes encouraged by private initiative or by the colonial authorities themselves (Pliya 1980:97-98).

The first authentic populations of maritime fishermen observed practising their activities on a regular basis belonged to groups who had emigrated in num-

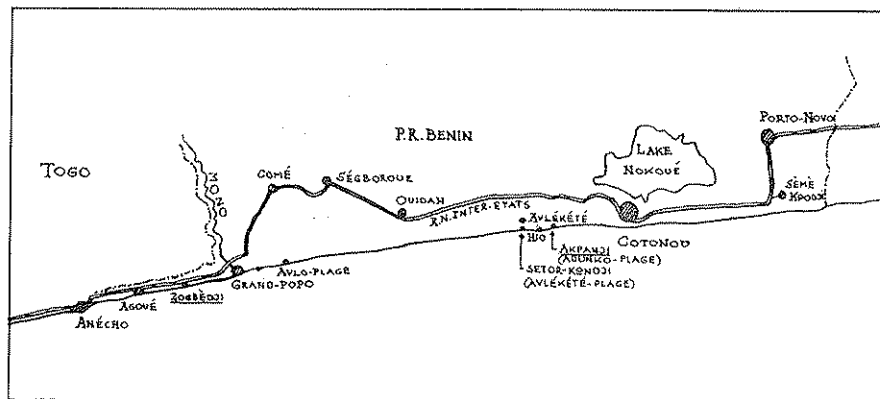
bers to become part of the ordinary manpower of a colonial port as “surfcrossers.” One can therefore accept the view that the properly maritime small-scale fishery in the Gulf of Guinea developed as a sideline of such commercial operations, using gear of European origin (or at least inspiration) rather than from any local adaptation of lagoon or riverine techniques (apart from the single hook and line)<sup>3</sup>.

As soon as larger canoes of Ghanaian make<sup>4</sup> and fishing gear of imported twine (cotton, then nylon in the early nineteen-sixties) became more readily available, the coastal populations were faced with a choice of alternative orientations towards the rapidly developing maritime fishery: either to regard it as a seasonal occupation which could complement another still prevailing activity, or to turn to it as a full-time occupation.

The first attitude was adopted by most coastal populations who still had an important foothold in horticulture. Fishing at sea would be practised in the idle times left by the exploitation of land, but the latter activity would retain an absolute priority. A concomitant of this was that fishing would be a sedentary activity operated in the immediate vicinity of the home-village and implying neither emigration nor even seasonal movements; it would depend entirely on the momentary passage of large shoals of fish (essentially Clupeids, “herring,” and Carangidae, “horse-mackerel”).

The second orientation leading to maritime fishing as a full-time occupation was adopted first by the populations whom we saw specializing in the unloading of merchant vessels. In the process they had become increasingly dependent on the economic life of ports, having severed their links with the countryside thus irreversibly losing any access to land.

The contrast between the two orientations towards maritime fishing is particularly apparent where they have been adopted in the same location by different components of the population. Thus within a sixteen kilometres stretch of coast, between Dénou and Agouin in the PR Bénin, the population is divided into two



Gulf of Guinea Coast.

groups: on the one hand sixteen settlements (population 50 to 200) of alien Xwla and Ewe family ventures or “companies” living on the beach in palm-frond huts, on the other hand nine villages (population up to 700) of “indigenous” (of late eighteenth to early nineteenth century settlement) Fon families living in concrete houses with corrugated iron roofs on either side of the lagoon (here 50 to 500 m wide) that parallels the coast.

In fifteen out of the sixteen beach settlements, the main activity is maritime fishing, while in the remaining one it is coconut oil extraction. Among the nine lagoon villages maritime fishing is the main activity in only one; horticulture comes first in four villages, while lagoon fishing prevails in the other four. Salt production from boiling water washed through soil is the main female economic activity in four of these lagoon villages. The quantities produced are sometimes considerable (70 metric tons was brought to the market from Avlékété, the largest village in the zone, during a seventeen day period in March-April 1986; Atti Mama, pers. comm.)

This paper aims at shedding light to the seasonal movements and migration strategies of full-time fishermen along the West African coast. These phenomena cannot be understood without giving consideration to risk-minimizing strategies of the West African coastal population in their economic realm in general. Before going into these strategies, I will briefly present some information on the Xwla and Anlo-Ewe, upon which this paper focuses.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the Fante turned massively to full-time maritime fishing, acting as spearhead of the movement and colonizing



West African Sea-going Fishing-canoes. Photo Birgit Meyer.

the coast from the Gambia to Pointe-Noire (Loango) in the Congo. Other ethnic groups who joined in the sea-fishing can be said to have learned the trade from the Fante. Among them are the Anlo-Ewe and the Xwla.

Anlo and Xwla are the names these two populations assign themselves. Among their neighbours, the Anlo are essentially known as "Kéta" from the name of the main town in the Anlo peninsula in Ghana. Similarly, the Xwla are commonly referred to as "Pla"; their place of origin being a sandy stretch between Grand-Popo and the outlet of the River Mono at Bouche-du-Roi both in the PR Bénin. The zones inhabited by the Anlo and the Xwla are therefore not contiguous: other Ewe groups populate the coast to the East of the Anlo peninsula, from Blékusu to Agbodrafo (Porto Seguro) in Togo. From there to the outskirts of Grand-Popo lies the "Mina" enclave which was successively colonized in the seventeenth century by Ga leaving Accra and in the early eighteenth century by a group of Fante from Elmina (Central Region of Ghana), hence the name "Mina". The "Mina" are sometimes referred to in the literature as Ané-Fante, Anéhó being a Togolese town near to the border with the PR Bénin. Anéhó was called "Petit-Popo" by the early European traders (*Xwla* vi as opposed to *Xwla* gan = Grand-Popo).

Although "Kéta" and "Pla" are clearly distinguished as ethnic groups in their countries of origin (Ghana, Togo, PR Bénin), in further locations where they have emigrated they are regarded as a single group, the "Popoh". Thus, as I was able to establish in 1985, at Pointe-Noire (PR Congo), the "Bénois" and "Popoh" labels are used as synonyms encompassing as well the Ghanaian Anlo-Ewe fishermen present there. The same applies to the West in Liberia where I established in 1986 that, in the absence of Xwla fishermen, the "Popoh" label applies exclusively to the Anlo-Ewe. Thus Popoh-beach in Monrovia has a mixed population of Anlo-Ewe and Kru, the latter having emigrated to the capital from Sinoe-County. In Liberia, Ewe fishermen are clearly distinguished as "Popoh" from the other Ghanaian fishermen (essentially Fante) on a professional basis, as is the case in Ghana, because they practise the beach-seine to the exclusion of any other gear (this is not the case for the eastward migrating Ewe who hold a high reputation as experts in the use of the purse-seine and the sardinella gill-net).

#### Risk-Minimizing Strategies Among Xwla and Anlo-Ewe

It is important first to have some global view of the economic logic prevailing among coastal West African populations living in a still underpopulated self-subsistence oriented milieu (the specificity of Anlo and Xwla circumstances being precisely that of localized overpopulation leading to a type of colonizing behaviour which runs counter to the traditional rules of land appropriation).

The fact that some households (essentially those of coconut plantation owners) devote their entire productive activity to cash-crops, and the concurrent fact that each household sells at least some of its products on the market, does not detract from the fact that the local rural economy remains in the absence of any

actual security in provisioning inceptively subsistence oriented.

Among the rural element of the population, any ranking of priorities puts subsistence crops, i.e., food-crops, first. It is only among that part of the urban population – however small – which has lost immediate access to food-crops that the accumulation of cash or money incomes is accorded priority. As has become clear in the recent literature on the ups and downs of the cash-crops economy (e.g. Yung 1985), populations massively involved in cash-crop production are quick to revert to subsistence-crops as soon as cash-cropping turns – because of fluctuations in price on the world-market – into a threat to subsistence. Also, within the category of food-crops itself, peasants rank these according to their yearly reliability under the whimsical and sometimes nefarious climatic circumstances of the region.

Just as portions of cash-crops – though only minimal – are retained for household consumption (there is neither cocoa nor cotton production in the coastal regions here described), under favourable circumstances surpluses may develop among households producing essentially for subsistence. This leads to inflationary gifts through the existing kinship and clientship networks as well as to an increasing part of the harvest finding its way to the market. The main "subsistence"-crops in the region under scrutiny are provided by horticulture and lagoon fishing. Maritime fishing, coconut oil extraction, shallot farming (Nukunya 1975; Hill 1986), production of salt and palm brandy (called *akpeteshie* in Ghana and *sodabi* in both Togo and the PR Bénin) are the main components of the cash-crop economy.

If, for the sake of simplicity, we consider the local inhabitant a "free economic agent" (being in a position to select his economic strategy on his own terms) he will no doubt choose to concentrate on horticulture as being the safest activity. He may try to complement this with some cash-crops (such as growing palm or coconut trees, or devote part of his time to the lagoon through the ownership of weirs, for instance, or maritime fishery). This is indeed what most of the lagoon villagers of the coast of the PR Bénin are actually doing. Of course such a pragmatic strategy is much too "scrappy" to be *globally economically rational*. The complex order of priorities which ensues from individual policies of risk-minimization implies that the developer in particular is faced with a puzzle which may turn into a nightmare: an often blatant sub-optimization of the local economy as a whole and concomitant production strategies of an apparently irrational nature.

The sociologist or anthropologist has been traditionally tempted to regard maritime fishing as one particular type of economic activity among a number of others to which a population may have decided to turn in all freedom of decision at some point of its history. This applies no doubt to these part-time fishermen who are to be found all along the West African coast. But it does not apply to full-time fishermen.

The recurrent disappointments with which developers in the fisheries have been faced are mostly due to the fact that they have been under the impression that West African part-time fishermen (the only ones who – being sedentary –

are readily reachable for a development agency) aspire to become full-time fishermen. In fact, part-timers desire to remain part-timers while full-timers would be quite happy to regain access to land they or their forefathers have lost because of some particular misfortune<sup>5</sup>. Only these populations who deliberately specialized in sea activities linked to the development of ports of international trade can be said to have relinquished their rights to land lightheartedly; most – if not all – of the others have done so in the absence of any viable alternative, having lost a foothold in horticulture which remains under the local circumstances the best guarantee for a successful risk-minimizing economic strategy.

Risk-minimization will therefore take two different forms according to whether or not one has retained access to land. For those lucky enough to hold ancestral rights to a large enough portion of arable land to sustain a profitable “farm,” cash-crops are developed as much as priorities assigned to subsistence-crops will allow. For those who have lost access to the land, the priority given to maritime fishing – which provides one with what is essentially a cash-crop – means that risk-minimization can only be achieved through high mobility either in following seasonally more rewarding types of fish (i.e., those which move in shoals), or in adopting the more drastic strategy of emigrating to less sought-after fishing grounds.

There is no big mystery as to why Anlo-Ewe and Xwla turned in large numbers to full-time maritime fishing: their countries of origin – although somewhat distant (some 80 km between Blekusu and Grand-Popo) – were subjected to exactly the same process of land erosion through sea action, erosion which has narrowed dramatically the portion of land between beach and lagoon, reducing it in places to a single sandy dune.

In the PR Bénin, hardly any arable land remains on the coastal part of Xwla country, the seaside of the lagoon between Grand-Popo and the outfall at “Bouche du Roi” where sizeable villages such as Avloh or Gbèffa are located. Neither road nor path remains on the peninsula. Only light four-wheel drive vehicles find a way through. Ordinary traffic is via boats on the lagoon. The lagoon is rather wide at this spot because it is fed by the Mono river. A census made by the *Direction des Pêches* in August 1984 revealed only fourteen sea canoes in operation on the peninsula. This figure contrasts with the many hundreds of canoes operated by Xwla people originating from the peninsula who have settled in a multitude of beach settlements on beaches or in ports to the East, from Djèg-badji (“Wydah-beach,” PR Bénin) to Pointe Noire (PR Congo), and also in the shanty town of Pla-kondji (“Xwla-village”) on the border of Cotonou’s merchant harbour. In August 1986, for example, out of 139 sea-fishing canoes in the port of Cotonou, 47 had a Xwla crew, 13 an Anlo-Ewe crew, while the remainder belonged to other ethnic groups; respectively “Pédah” (23) (Xwéda, from the region in the PR Bénin around Wydah of slave-trade fame), “Toffin” (22) (from the Fon word for fisherman, local population of Cotonou living either on the firm shores of the Nokoué Lake or in the world-famous lake-dwellings of Ganvié, Zinvié, etc.), Fante (16) (from Elmina, Komenda, etc.), Ga (7) (Greater Accra), 3 from other Ewe groups, etc.

The Anlo peninsula remains much more populated, with the town of Kéta still very lively despite the gradual destruction of its more exposed houses on what is now a receding beach. The shallot growing industry is still flourishing from Abutiakope (southern outskirts of Kéta Town) to Dzita. Salt production from scraping seasonally dried-up parts of the lagoon shores appears to be another active industry practised from November to January (although there is some literature of shallot growing – Nukunya 1975; Hill 1986 – salt production remains unmentioned; see however ten lines in Asamao 1986:18). The practice of lagoon fishing increases during the lean season of the maritime fishery, i.e., from October to May. A fish-breeding technique famous in the fisheries’ literature under the Fon name of *acadja* is here practised under the name *atshiza*: briefly said, fish is lured over a period to a shallow spot of the lagoon where branches have been gathered underwater in heaps; fish find here shelter and food. Every three months or so a net is set round the *atshiza* and the entrapped fish is scooped from within the enclosure by a variety of unsophisticated techniques. Crab-pots are also commonly used in or on the edges of the lagoon, and in the periods when sea and lagoon are joined oysters and prawns soon proliferate.

A census published by the Ghanaian Fisheries Division in May 1986 recorded 466 canoes in operation on the peninsula from Blekusu to Atiteti. Having been held in the Volta region during the anchovy season, the census figure is most probably inflated. It probably registers a number of Ga (especially from Kpone, Ningo and Ada) and Fante crews in their seasonal moves. The tarmacked road which once ran unbroken from Denu to Anyanui has been washed away by the sea in places such as Vodza. Currently (September 1986) a stretch of the coast of about 1 km between Blekusu and Kedzi, where the tarmacked road has been destroyed (“Kedzi Canal”), is only passable for heavy lorries. These ferry loads of passengers along the swampy edge of the lagoon from one surviving end of the broken road to the other.

Prior to the current dramatic developments in the two regions under study, caused by sea erosion, there already existed a tradition of seasonal movement in the fishery. In both cases it consisted of an up-river move (Volta and Mono) where only small gear such as hooks, set-nets and traps would be used – a “transhumant” move of an entirely different nature than what is observed nowadays in maritime seasonal moves and migration, which will be dealt with in the next two sections.

#### Seasonal Movement in the Maritime Fishery

The reality of seasonal movements among the fishing population is assigned by West African fishermen themselves to a decline in the fishery which has forced them – and more often their fathers or grandfathers – to start following the fish at some point in the past. There are sufficient grounds for remaining skeptical about such particular explanations as it is a universal feature in the world of small-scale fisheries that fishermen would follow in their seasonal movements the large schools of fish which alone can make a crew a profitable economic unit.

Depletion in the fishery – although sometimes real – is also too often mentioned in circumstances where figures show the facts to be otherwise (Delbos & Jorion 1984:248-51) to be regarded as information to be trusted. Fish population dynamics are indeed sufficiently subtle with their pseudo-stochastic variations to account for any subjective feeling that a particular fishery has been in decline from time immemorial (see Jorion 1978).

In the part of the Gulf of Guinea stretching from Sierra Leone to Nigeria, the seasonal moves of fishermen are essentially linked to the seasonal eastward movement of shoals of “herring” (*sardinella aurita*, *sardinella eba*; Anlɔ: *abléwe*; Xwla: *mahun*) spanning from late Spring to October. A map indicates nicely how fishermen move along the coast accordingly, most of them covering a stretch of coast of between 100 and 300 km over the period, which allows every crew a sardinella season of about three months.

Thus, to give a few examples, some fishermen from Ningo (Greater Accra Region) would start the season at Axim (Western Region), would spend some time at Komenda (Central Region), to end up at Ningo again, i.e., an exacting voyage of a little over 300 km. By then some other Ningo fishermen would start their own eastward seasonal move ending at Abutiakope (Kéta Town), in the Anlɔ peninsula (Volta Region), an overall 120 km move. In the PR Bénin, the fishermen of Sétɔr-kɔndji (“Avlékété-beach”) would start at the Togolese capital Lomé on the Ghanaian border, some halting for a while at Anéhɔ at the opposite end of the Togolese coast on the border with Bénin, and ending up at Sétɔr-kɔndji, i.e., a move of slightly over 100 km. Etcetera.

The very set-up of the seasonal movement for individual crews varies a lot and has much to do with the actual size of the towns or villages where they will seasonally settle. Hence provisional arrangements range from renting a room in town at Winneba (Central Region), to building or rehabilitating a straw hut in a seasonal beach-encampment such as “De Gaulle”-kɔndji (“Hio-beach”) in the PR Bénin (“De Gaulle” is the nickname of a Mr. Lawson, owner of an impressively effective 3-canoe Company). Constraints of different types are here essentially geographical or historical in the sense of being linked to the particular history of family-based crews or of “Companies”<sup>6</sup>. As in many historical processes involving complex systems, the particular forms the system takes in later developments depend on the so-called “initial conditions”. In the present instance this would be the early pattern of colonization of the coast. Thus Kedzikope (Volta R.) and Zogbèdji (PR Bénin) are both outposts of Kedzi (Volta R.), while in the PR Bénin, Assion (“Agouin-beach”) and Akpanji (“Adoukɔ-beach”) are both outposts of Avlɔh (Xwla country, near Grand-Popo), etc.

Progressive motorization of crafts operating the sardinella gill-net and purse-seine in the nineteen-sixties and -seventies has led to major modifications in the material organization underpinning seasonal moves. In particular, the setting up of permanent accommodation is rendered much less necessary than before. Thus, for example, in the nineteen-forties, a fisherman of Osu-beach (Accra Town) had, apart from his house at Osu, two other permanent settlement places,



West African Fishermen. Photo Birgit Meyer.

one at Winneba (Central Region, 50 km to the West), and one at Kpone (Greater Accra, 40 km to the East). In each of these three settlements he had a wife and family; each wife would process and sell the fish he would catch when staying locally. When absent his wives would buy fish from other boats to process and sell. Nowadays it is possible for a fisherman of Osu to go and fish on a particular day in the vicinity of Winneba, to land the catch in the port, sell it to local women and be back home at Osu by the end of the day.

A factor distinct from motorization but strongly linked to the general development of the small-scale fisheries and the increasing imbalance between capital investments and revolving funds is the rising dependence of crews in seasonal movement on middle-people, especially on "fish-mammies". The most common arrangement nowadays when a crew is staying at a particular port for a period extending from one week to up to three months (depending on the catch secured), is a special agreement of a financial nature with a local fish-mammy who will provide food and accommodation for the crew in exchange for a monopoly purchase of their catch at a discount price to be negotiated daily on the basis of current selling prices.

Both parties see such agreements as beneficial: fish-mammies are thus assured of a regular supply of fish which will keep the girls employed recruited for the processing and selling of the fish. The discount price obtained from the "lodgers" allows comfortably for the cost of food provided to the crew and their accommodation, the latter being most often quite spartan as a crew of twelve may have to sleep in a single room of West African dimensions. The crew on their part reduce expenses by not having to bring around any of their women to deal with the cooking. They are also assured of having a buyer for their catch without having to spend time and loose tempers in the nerve-racking process of haggling over prices. Most important, they can count on the boarding lady to act as "social security" should the necessity arise. Examples would include advances in cash to pay for medicines needed by a sick or disabled member of the crew, or to pay for repairs to a broken out-board engine, etc. Such advances in cash are reimbursed later (with no interest accruing) by the owner of the boat or of the Company.

To establish such mutual agreements diverse strategies may be adopted. Contacts may be first established between a boat owner and a prospective "official fishmonger" during some social or family occasion such as a funeral, or a funeral's different types of anniversaries. If a boat owner intends to stay at a location in the future, where he has never fished in the past, he will send a scout to obtain some formal agreement with a local fish-mammy which will take force as soon as the crew arrives. It is customary that the scout has got a recommendation in his possession for a local personality (who does not always belong to the fishing milieu). He will proceed in his exploratory contacts therefrom. But a more adventurous crew may simply land at a place of its choice, knowing that local fish-mammies are themselves scouting on the beach where they will vie with each other to offer attractive conditions to newcomers.

But not all crews have moved to these novel types of contracts and some still

adhere to the traditional resettlement in a seasonal encampment of straw huts. This presents the disadvantage of always necessitating some extent of house rebuilding or rehabilitation. Thus in the case mentioned earlier of "De Gaulle"-kondji at "Hio-beach" in the PR Bénin, Mr. "De Gaulle" Lawson resides in this place every year from about October to May along with his Company and attached women and children. An Anlo-Ewe by birth, he spends the rest of the year at Lomé. The Company owns three motorized canoes, two purse-seines, two sardinella gill-nets and one beach-seine. There are 48 full-members (male) in the Company, among whom 38 are proper sailors, the other 10 being old men helping with mending the nets and "heir designated" boys who are being familiarized with the job (an original system of rotation in the crews is here in operation following the Fon market calendar: at each Zogbodo rest-day, i.e., every eighth day, sea-going crews are reshaped).

In November 1984 there were 161 persons at "De Gaulle"-kondji (87 males; 74 females), in May 1986, there were 151 (84 males; 67 females). I remind the reader that the encampment is deserted entirely from June to September. The structure of the population reflects the fact that the settlement is seasonal. In order to show this visually, I have in Figure 1 superimposed the age pyramid of

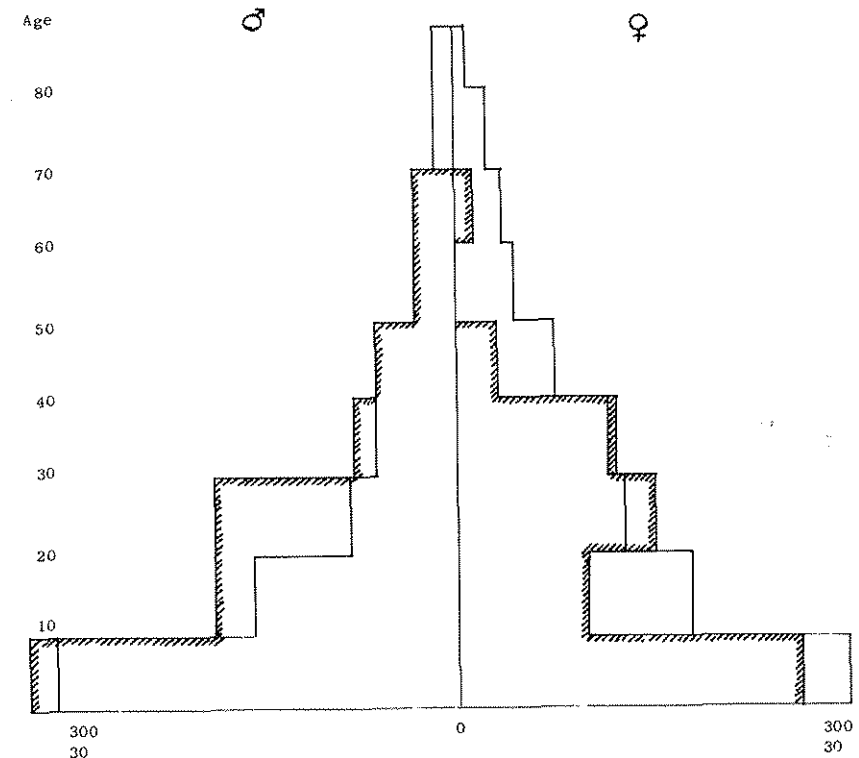


Figure 1. Age pyramids compared: seasonal encampment (hatched), four sedentary villages (plain)

“De Gaulle”-kondji on another produced syncretically from the data obtained in May 1986 in four sedentary lagoon villages of the same region (Adounko: 211 inhabitants; Hio: 570; Avlékété: 606; Zogbèdji: 304). The differences in structure between such a seasonal encampment and a sedentary population are clearly visible on the diagram: in the former the proportion of old people, especially aged women is much smaller; conversely the male population is inflated, especially in the 20 to 29 year class. The number of young children is very similar as they accompany their mothers in the seasonal move; there is a clear deficit however in girls aged 10 to 19, many of them being involved along with their grandmothers in the fish processing and selling business at Lomé.

In a very interesting paper published in 1969, entitled “Migrant Anlo Fishing Companies and Socio-political Change: A Comparative Study,” Robert W. Wyllie has studied a group of Anlo fishermen who, unlike the “De Gaulle” Lawson Company, move seasonally westwards. These people are from Srogboe in the Anlo peninsula and go each year to the village of Muniano, 3 km from Winneba (Central Region), i.e., a voyage of about 200 km. I would like to reproduce here a few passages from that paper which are of special relevance to my discussion here. Wyllie reports that

Srogboe is one of those villages from which the migrant fishermen and their relatives set out each August. It is the home to which they return each April. Muniano is the kind of settlement to which Anlo migrate and in which they live and work for eight months of the year. It is not ‘home’ even for those who have spent most of their lives there (1969:397).

Contrary to “De Gaulle”’s Company, which practises a variety of fishing techniques, the people from Srogboe resort only to the beach-seine when at Muniano. Wyllie adds that

The economy of Srogboe relies heavily upon the annual return of the migrants for periodic injections of cash, very little of which is dissipated at the company’s base of operations (ibid.).

On the subject of the organization of the seasonal move, he provides interesting details:

After the men are recruited, they are brought from their homes to Muniano at the company’s expense. Normally one or two lorries are hired specially for this purpose, the idea being to get all the men and equipment to the fishing settlement at the same time. When they arrive, they are provided with accommodation by the owner or, if none is available, with assistance in building a house (ibid.:400-01).

As we will see in the following section such “heavy” material provisions involving lorry transport are more common in proper migration than in seasonal moves. Polly Hill reports from her interviews with Anlo fishermen in 1963 that some remembered the women *walking* from Kedzi to Aneho (60 km) in order to accompany their men in their seasonal move (1986:21).

Wyllie says also that

Although some of Muniano’s inhabitants remain in the village throughout the year, and many come season after season to fish or trade, its character as a seasonal settlement is quite pronounced (1969:402).

Muniano is therefore what I have called a *satellite-base* (Jorion 1985:5), to contrast such a settlement with a proper *seasonal encampment* which remains entirely deserted for part of the year. On the subject of population, Wyllie reckons that

Only one-third of Muniano’s population remains behind at the close of the fishing season, while about one-third of Srogboe’s population is away from home during the season (1969:403).

Seasonal moves are somewhat less justified for beach-seining Anlo-Ewe than for those who have turned now to a wider range of techniques, in particular for those who use the purse-seining of the sardinella gill-net and who might therefore benefit from following the “herring” in its yearly migration. Profitability of the beach-seine depends indeed on the turbidity of seawater, a condition which varies very much in the same way along the Ghanaian coast over the year. In August 1986 I met at Nyeaye (2 km east of Elmina, Central Region), Anlo beach-seiners from Woe (Volta Region) who stay at Nyeaye from September to April and while some would return to Woe during the lean season to practise the beach-seine and do some horticulture at the home village, others would try to find seasonal occupations in the vicinity of Nyeaye, essentially as labourers.

I have tried in this section to describe the pattern which emerges from the seasonal movement of small-scale fishermen of the Anlo-Ewe and Xwla ethnic groups. As I suggested at the beginning, the history of each village (or sometimes of every family of each village) is much less “neat” than the picture I may have unwittingly provided. Early contacts or chance meetings may influence global strategies. On the spot decisions may be made according to the assumed daily movement of the fish. Therefore, over a particular season, moves along the coast by the transhumant fisher-folk are more of the nature of a Brownian motion than of a neat and integrated movement. Momentary concentrations of fisherman on the coast, however, do reflect clearly the corresponding movement of the fish-schools.

### Migration among Maritime Fishermen

As the reader may have noticed, I have used the word *migration* with the utmost care. There is a good reason for this: observers who have not been as lucky as I have usually describe fishermen (Wyllie is a notable exception) from the static point of view of a resident in a particular place with the accompanying tendency to see any sedentary fisherman as an *autochton* while any *allochton* is liberally

labelled a "migrant." For instance in the PR Bénin, there is a tendency to regard any Ghanaian fisherman as a migrant. Some may indeed be proper migrants, having settled in Bénin, but others should be considered only regular but seasonal visitors.

I believe there is no necessity for any further description of what I have called *seasonal moves*, I now want to contrast this notion with *migration*, defined as the temporary settlement of a family-based crew or of a "company" at one or at a number of places (fishermen may move seasonally from their new home-base) sufficiently distant from the original homebase to prevent any return to it for at least a number of years. A distinctive feature of a migration is that while in seasonal moves the boat normally travels at sea, in the case of a proper migration the canoe is usually transported on board a steamer, the crew and accompanying family travelling to the port of destination either by road (using bush-taxi, minibus or specially hired lorry as mentioned by Wyllie) or often nowadays, by air.

The contrast between *seasonal movement* and *migration* is crucial for the economic anthropologist, as it is only by making this distinction that one may understand varieties in profit sharing among crews and circulation of cash related to the fishery between coastal West African countries. This contrast is also of major importance to understand the developmental cycle of the family: migration and seasonal movement correspond indeed in most cases to two successive moments in a fisherman's life strategy: migration corresponding usually to the early years when a young man (16 up to 30) joins a "Company" to earn large amounts of cash the hard way, while seasonal movement – if less financially rewarding – is more easily compatible with a proper family life.

There is, however, considerable confusion in these matters: government representatives for instance are accustomed to discussing movements in the fishery only in terms of the (assumed) *nationality* of the fishermen involved, i.e., nationals versus aliens. Out of the necessity of acting through governmental bodies, international and non-governmental agencies refer to the fishermen in similar terms. In countries where the great majority of fishermen do not hold a passport, the issue is muddled indeed.

In such a context the nationality of people as mobile as maritime fishermen is assigned through a quite complex mechanism where ethnic group membership and professional affiliation are the more determinant elements (see for more details on this, Jorion 1985:1-3). Tonkin (1984) deals with the same subject with respect to the "Kru" of Liberia whom, as she convincingly shows, are assigned this ethnic label primarily on an ethnic basis as well as on professional grounds, and more often than not for entirely arbitrary reasons. This can lead to absurd situations when a government regards as aliens people who are actually its own nationals and conversely. From this stems the unreliability of figures mentioned in these matters, even when all parties are apparently in agreement. An example which springs to mind is the figure of 45% of aliens in the maritime fishermen population commonly mentioned in the PR Bénin.

The massive presence of Ghanaian fishermen in the sub-region here studied

has contributed to confuse the issue even further. While Ghanaian fishermen operating in Liberia or Sierra Leone are beyond any possible doubt *migrants* – just as are the Beninese fishermen in the Congo or Gabon – most Ghanaian fishing in Togo or in the PR Bénin are only driven to these countries as part of a seasonal move (as in the case of the seasonal encampment at "De Gaulle" - kɔndji discussed above). The narrowness of the Togolese and Beninese coastlines alone accounts for such apparent "migrations." Some cases are however equivocal, as in both the Ivory Coast and in Nigeria a mixed situation is to be found where some Ghanaians are present as part of a seasonal move while some others have properly migrated to these countries.

When fishermen evoke past strategies, seasonal moves are referred to as a quite normal evolution once maritime fishing had become a full-time occupation. However, as I have said earlier, increasing scarcity of fish is always blamed as a prime mover. The beginnings of proper migration however, because of the element of personal drama attached to it, are more particularly remembered: the first member of a family to have migrated is always known and his name is mentioned with emotion and reverence, such an enterprising man being either the father or the grandfather of the fisherman being interviewed. Sometimes even precise dates are remembered, e.g., the first (Fante) fisherman of Komenda (Central Region of Ghana) to have settled at Monrovia (Liberia) is known to have done so in 1914.

Concerning more specifically the Anlo-Ewe, Nukunya reports that

Scores of families of Anlo fishermen started (because of land shortage) to migrate in search of fresh and rich waters. Some settled permanently in Abidjan in the Ivory Coast and Badagri in Nigeria, but others were content to spend periods of up to three years before returning home. Other important locations are Senya Beraku (Central Region), Shorkor (Accra Town) and Grand-Popo in Dahomey. Today colonies of Anlo fishermen can be found on the West African coast from as far north as the Gambia right down to the Congo (1975:61).

When discussing the issue of migration, fishermen are quick to underline how much even provisional settlement in a foreign country depends on a variety of circumstances all linked to international politics, such as for instance the many inconveniences for the fishing populations that arose from the closure of the border between Nigeria and the PR Bénin for the whole duration of the "Naira Operation" (more than one year, 1983-1985) or of the border between Togo and Ghana (for a couple of months, late 1986-early 1987). Sympathy between political regimes does ease things for migrants: this was clear during the late fifties and early sixties when the Ghanaian fishery flourished in Guinée without any hindrance because of the congeniality of N'krumah's and Sékou Touré's political stances. Similarly, the massive presence of Beninese fishermen in the Congo nowadays would pose much more of a problem if the two countries did not see themselves as brother-nations because of a similar Marxist-Leninist creed.

Sympathy or antagonism between governments have less direct implications than the operation or the interruption of a shipping line. Such a facility spec-



tively assists or hinders migration by fishermen to countries far away from their homeland. Fishermen are entirely dependent on such facilities for transportation to distant goals. Thus when in the late seventies sea traffic was interrupted between Takoradi (Western Region of Ghana) and Conakry (Guinée), the Ghanaian fishery in the former French colony came to an end. Ghanaians who wished to go back home were forced to sell their boats and fishing gear locally before their departure. Needless to say decisions about the operation or interruption of a shipping line never take into account the interests of small-scale maritime fishermen.

As a matter of illustration I will report here the case of a fisherman who – although neither Anlo nor Xwla – found himself in this position of being blocked in Conakry. The person in question whom I met at Elmina in August 1986 is a Fante from Half Assini (Western Region, at the border with the Ivory Coast), who has been working as *bosun* (boatswain) for a wealthy Elmina boat owner who is not himself a fisherman. His wanderings lasted for twelve years, beginning in 1965 when the canoe was put on board a steamer at Takoradi sailing to Bathurst (now Banjul) in the Gambia. In the course of these twelve years he stayed successively at Dakar, Conakry (where he remained for an overall period of seven years), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Monrovia, Abidjan, then back to Conakry. He was staying in Conakry when sea traffic between Guinée and Ghana was suspended. Deciding to return to Ghana he sold all his equipment including the boat, making – as he underlines – a nice profit on the operation.<sup>7</sup> He adds with a fisherman's typical candour that the women who had joined the expedition at its inception – most probably Fante – were brought back along with their children, while all those who had been “acquired” locally during his wanderings were left with their progeny in their country of origin.

The single motive behind migration is quick profit. The people of Komenda still show with some pride the somewhat lavish “Liberia House” which the first local fisherman (to have emigrated to Monrovia) managed to have built in a matter of years back in the nineteen-twenties. Other Komenda townsmen were then quick to follow his example.

Polly Hill quotes in this respect the words of an old Anlo beach-seiner whose father had been a dealer in rubber in Togo before turning to fishing:

On returning from an expedition, his father was more likely to have built a house, or to have bought land or a coconut plantation, than to have invested the proceeds in a new canoe – though he might have bought one later (1986:18).

The reported order of priorities accords with what I have said earlier about risk-minimization: developing one's foothold in agriculture holds a higher priority than developing one's capacities as a fisherman – provided, of course, that one has still got access to land. Most fishermen who live in straw huts on the edge of the beach are indeed staying there on borrowed land, being forbidden to build a house of permanent materials or even to grow a tomato plant, let alone a palm-tree!

Building a house is only conceivable on one's own land, i.e., family land. Let me summarize in a few words the traditional system of land appropriation: the first family to settle at a particular place appropriated for itself a portion of land suitable for its slash-and-burn horticulture. The second family appropriated part of what was left, and so on, until the whole surface of arable land in the vicinity of the village had been divided between a number of “clans.” By the time maritime fishing developed fully, involving both seasonal moves and migration, the coast had been entirely appropriated.

Building a house therefore tells a lot about one's own personal relationship to the land, which has become quite problematic for most full-time maritime fishermen in West Africa. Nevertheless, it can hardly be regarded as an economic investment. Building a “proper” house is more of the nature of “symbolic capital” in Bourdieu's felicitous terms (1972). But as the French sociologist rightly stresses, prestige materialized in the guise of “symbolic capital” has never any difficulty in being converted back into proper “economic capital.”

On the contrary, for those who have lost access to land (and these are numerous nowadays), purchasing a new boat with one's own profits in the fisheries is a quite sensible move. It may only be weighed – as we will soon see – against the no less sensible move of investing one's profits in acquiring a new wife.

We saw that crews involved in seasonal moves were either organized on a family base or as “Companies.” The proportion of Companies is higher however in migration than in seasonal moves. The reason for this should be obvious: in migration the human environment is always foreign, i.e., more or less hostile: men are antagonistic and women diffident. In such circumstances it is reasonable to choose the more profitable option: home-sickness is a powerful incentive for working hard and making as much money as possible in the shortest time.

The Company type of organization is very efficient but very demanding on fishermen as well: only young men can adequately sustain its pressures. The inconveniences of seeing the profits of the venture only shared after a long period of time (three or six years being the norm) are outweighed however by the possibility of receiving a quite considerable advance on one's forthcoming share at the time of enrolment. The somewhat irresponsible life of a Company man is not without appeal either. The owner, or the *bosun* acting as his representative, deals with all practical matters (including everyday justice!). Pocket-money (referred to over the whole region under the Fante word *asibetshi*, “market money”) is also relatively liberally provided in circumstances where very few temptations exist (in 1985, the monthly *asibetshi* for Companies in the PR Bénin amounted to 1,500 CFA for “poor” ones and 3,000 CFA for “rich” ones, i.e., \$3.50 to \$7.00 a month at the then current rate of exchange).

For those fishermen who belong to a Company, returns to the home country are statutory and take place after the agreed one, two, three or six years. The sharing of the accrued profit and the settling of all accounts are carried out at the Company's owner's village or town where the expedition began. The owner has then to decide whether or not to restart a similar venture, and if so, in the same waters or somewhere else. If he chooses to go ahead one more time, there

will be a considerable turnover in the crew in most cases, as many men will have had enough of such a stressful experience. Except for the spendthrifts, Company members will have gathered sufficient cash to take a first wife. They may then try to get a job on a family-owned boat belonging, in the case of the Anlo and Xwla to their patrilineal group (father, father's brothers, father's brothers' sons) or in the case of the Fante (Quinn 1971:115-17) to the matrilineal group (mother's brothers, mother's sisters' sons). Such family-centred crews will most often restrict their fishing operations to seasonal moves from the homebase.

It does happen however that family-crews also migrate. The duration of the stay abroad will not have been decided beforehand and will depend on the amount of profit intended to be made. But as the profitability of family-crews is much lower than that of Companies (down to one tenth in some cases I have analysed over a four months period for "Adounko-beach" in 1984-1985) the stay abroad may turn out to be very long indeed. The reason for this difference is in fact quite easy to understand: if the reader refers back to Figure 1 he will see how much the population pyramid for a Company-centred seasonal encampment gets inflated in the 20 to 29 male year-class compared to that of a sedentary population. Contrasting with this, the population around a family-based crew reflects the availability of crew members from the sedentary villagers. A family-crew has no choice but to employ all able men: this single factor is sufficient to explain the lower productivity of family-crews.

Fante Company men encountered at Robertsport (Cape Mount County, Liberia, close to the Sierra Leone border) reckoned they visited their home country every two to three years (thus accounting for a "break" in the case of a six year contract). Fante family crews met at Gbantor (Virginia, near Monrovia) similarly mentioned two to three years between visits to Komenda, their port of origin, as did some wealthy Anlo beach-seiners of "Popoh-beach" (Monrovia). Other Anlo interviewed at Robertsport mentioned periods of seven to ten years. Sometimes they added the sad acknowledgement that there might not be any return at all. This was more especially the case for small groups of Anlo (down to five or six men) operating a beach-seine with the help of hired local manpower. In cases such as these, migration has in fact turned into proper emigration. It is a conclusion difficult to escape, but one which is not easy to be admitted by those involved.

The time spent home whenever one returns varies much from crew to crew. Figures mentioned ranged from two to nine months. Short stays correspond to simple parental visits, longer stays are usually associated with resuming work in the homeland. Here are two examples.

Mr. Dossou Atti of Gbeffa, a coastal village of Xwla county, arrived at Pointe-Noire (Congo) in 1969. He has two canoes and a crew of ten Xwla people. He has two wives with him, the first one he married before migrating, the second he met in the Congo. His six younger children born to his local Vili wife are here with him at Pointe-Noire. The four children born to his Xwla wife are staying back home at Gbeffa with their grandmother. The eldest, a girl of nineteen is undergoing secondary education at Grand-Popo. From 1969, when he arrived,

to August 1985, when I met him, he had returned to his village four times, i.e., every three to four years, on each occasion for four months, from August to December.

Mr. Yahovi Anani arrived in Pointe-Noire from Gbékon (the first coastal village east of Grand-Popo) in 1978. He has one boat with a Xwla crew. His first wife remained in Gbékon with their three children; his second wife is Congolese and has borne him two children. Between 1978 and August 1985 he went back three times to the PR Bénin (i.e., about every two years) for respectively six, eight and nine months. Each time he resumed fishing locally for the duration of his stay. In the meantime his crew in the Congo would keep on fishing in his absence.

On the whole, and apart from the interruption of sea connections I mentioned earlier, working abroad does not seem to constitute *per se* a considerable problem for transhumant fishermen. As one of them put it: "As long as you're no troublemaker, you're O.K. anywhere!" Ghanaians and Beninese are quick to add, however, that they are looked upon with suspicion in countries with a more right-wing regime, especially at times of revolutionary turmoil in their countries of origin.

Most governments are trying to make a profit out of the presence of foreign small-scale fishermen in their waters. For example, 300,000 CFA in excise duties must be paid for a canoe unloaded from a steamer in the Congo, plus 25,000 CFA for a place to build a "house" in the shanty towns of "Tantine Yvonne" or "Nouveau Quartier" (1985). Furthermore, \$40 must be paid yearly (1986) by foreign crews (which many manage to escape paying through astute seasonal moves) as well as a berth fee of 20,000 CFA for each boat lying at Lomé harbour (1986).

Excise duties on new fishing gear crossing a border is regarded by fishermen as a greater problem. Sums demanded may be somewhat arbitrarily defined by customs officers at the border (who may be very greedy indeed). Thus on an out-board engine crossing the border from Togo to the PR Bénin, up to 60,000 CFA may have to be paid on a motor worth 500,000 CFA. Passports are regarded as a non-issue as most fishermen do not have one and a small fee (e.g., 500 CFA, 150 Cedi) will satisfy a customs officer. A single passport for a full Company is apparently regarded as sufficient in most West African countries. There is therefore little difficulty involved in operating abroad. The only serious disadvantage is that an alien cannot expect to rely on any state-organized help of any sort, unless he can successfully pretend to be a national. Thus Xwla and "Mina" (Anè-Fante) fishermen of Bénin benefit from the Togolese medical system if they care to cross the border.

Neither is settlement in another country regarded in itself as a serious matter. Founding an entirely new beach settlement however is a more complicated operation as it involves lengthy formal and informal negotiations with a variety of local authorities. The legal owner may be distinct from the "moral" owner, i.e., a deity on whose behalf the *vaudoun* (Fon, Xwla) or *trou* (Anlo) priest will be acting. Matters are usually settled with the gift of a couple of bottles of spirits (gin, palm brandy). There may be formal agreements on a yearly fee to be paid,

but these seem to be soon forgotten. Courtesy gestures such as donations for funerals or village festivals are however expected from new settlers.<sup>8</sup>

Matters are more straightforward when settling in a town, as in most cases some members of the community of origin will already be present locally and would introduce a newcomer to the authorities. Thus, for instance, in every port abroad where Ghanaians stay, one of them acts as the official representative of the Ghanaian community in all dealings with the local population.

### A Comparative Study of Two Beach Settlements

I will end this essay with a comparative study of two beach settlements in the PR Bénin which are interesting to compare as they have made opposite choices as far as fishing policies are concerned. The great majority of fishermen at "Zogbèdji-beach" have opted for seasonal moves (only two men, i.e., 5.7% of the male population aged 20 to 55) have chosen migration to Gabon. By contrast, in Akpanji, no fisherman has opted for seasonal movement, but ten men are currently fishing in Gabon and in the Congo (i.e., 52.6% of the male population aged 20 to 55 (see map)).

"Zogbèdji-beach" is a twin beach-encampment located in the PR Bénin in what is in fact a coastal enclave in Togolese territory. It was founded in the late twenties by Mr. Kossi Mana Ahougnon from Kedzi (Anlɔ peninsula), and he was joined over the years by other families from Kedzi, the Gnamadi family from Dzelukope (Anlɔ peninsula, south of Keta), the Folly family from Aflao (Volta region also, but on the coastal border with Togo), and more recently by some people from Tegbi (Anlɔ peninsula). In May 1986 there were 219 people on the beach (October 1984: 221), 100 males (1984: 101) and 119 females (1984: 120), all of whom regard themselves as Anlɔ-Ewe (although the Folly family is clearly of Fante origin). Zogbèdji proper is a lagoon village about 1 km further inland, on the opposite side of the coastal inter-state road, with a population in 1985 of 304 "Mina" (Ané-Fante) horticulturalists. There are five crews at the beach. One crew (21 full members, 10 aids) using the purse-seine<sup>9</sup> and belonging to a most remarkable personality, Mr. Tchabassi Amadossi, a voodoo priest (*vodunɔn*) of "international" reputation; one centred around the Ahougnon family (17 full members, 3 aids), which uses both the purse-seine and sardinella gill-net; one centred on the Gnamadi family (9 crew members) and using the set gill-net only (*tɔnga* and *sɔvi*). Another two crews using the sardinella gill-net and set gill-net respectively are made up on odd occasions of members of the first two crews mentioned above.

Akpanji is part of "Adounko-beach" at about 10 km west of Cotonou on the poorly maintained dirt-track known as "Route des Pêches". The encampment was founded in 1946 by Xwla people from Avloh (M. Raïs, pers. comm.). In May 1986, there were 118 people at Akpanji (1984: 122), 54 males (1984: 56) and 64 females (1984: 66). The other part of "Adounko-beach" is "Kpanou," a seasonal encampment centred around a very effective Anlɔ-Ewe Company headed by Mr. Kpanou Gozo (59 persons in January 1985). Adounko "Huègbɔ"

(primal) is a lagoon village quite distant from its beach. Its population of 211 (March 1985) is composed of Fɔn horticulturalists and lagoon fishermen.

There are six crews at Akpanji including one "Cooperative," a state-introduced system of poor profitability.<sup>10</sup> The latter supposedly practises the purse-seine and has a statutory crew of 15, all Fɔn men from the lagoon village. This crew is undertrained as far as sea fishing is concerned, which explains some of its difficulties. The other five have small crews of four to seven men using the set gill-net from small unmotorized crafts. Two of these crews get together during the "herring" season to operate a sardinella gill-net. Both Zogbèdji and Akpanji are thus outposts of their villages of origin, but they are clearly not seasonal encampments as a considerable part of their population stays there permanently. Both "satellites" were founded for the same reason, the relatively overcrowding of the village of origin due to the pernicious action of the sea I mentioned earlier on. But the strategy adopted by the beach-settlers of these two villages is – as I have hinted – entirely different: fishermen of Zogbèdji have adopted a pattern of well-organized seasonal moves between their home-base and the outpost, with long stays at Lomé and Aného in Togo, while the fishermen of Akpanji have opted for long-time migration to Gabon and the Congo.

Although the anthropologist will always emphasize socio-historical factors in explaining such a divergence in strategies, it would be unforgivable for him to ignore other types of factors which may play a role, in particular ecological factors. Fish schools feed on zoo- and phyto-plankton which develop essentially in "upwelling zones," where layers of cold water which ordinarily remain on the sea bottom rise to the surface. This happens in the vicinity of the coast in places where the currents allow the phenomenon to develop. The usual eastward limit of the upwelling in the region under scrutiny is off Lomé, with occasional moves as far eastward as the waters off Cotonou or even Badagri in Western Nigeria (Pliya 1980:37-38). The stretch of coast between, say, Kedzi and Zogbèdji is therefore – although not ideal – quite favourably located in terms of fishing grounds. Akpanji on the contrary is dangerously close to the maximum eastwards extent of the upwelling. Even if the people of Zogbèdji and Akpanji have no clear concept of the mechanism at work, they have noticed its empirical consequences.

There is only a short distance (about 75 km) between Kedzi in the Anlɔ peninsula and Zogbèdji in the PR Bénin. In spite of two borders to cross and a bad sandy stretch ("Kedzi Canal") which as I have already said requires a heavy lorry to pass, it is still possible to do the trip by bush-taxi in four to five hours for the modest equivalent of 750 CFA. Thus going back and forth between Kedzi and Zogbèdji is easily done. On August 30th 1986, for instance, one Zogbèdji fisherman made what was his sixth trip to Kedzi for that year. He would stay in his ancestral village for periods of up to two weeks. Moving from one place to the other by sea is not any more difficult, especially since Aného and Lomé can be used as stepping-stones. This explains why Zogbèdji fishermen can so easily be pragmatic about following the fish. In the meantime only canoes beyond repair would be lying on the Zogbèdji beach, giving the village a desolate appearance during the slack season.

By contrast, the people of Akpanji have severed links at the professional level with their village of origin, Avloh. Although it is still customary for a man of Akpanji to find a wife in Avloh, stays there are only motivated by family occasions such as funerals and funeral anniversaries, or village festivals. But Akpanji crews do not go to Avloh to fish anymore.

I have already mentioned in the preceding section the case of some Xwla people in the Congo. They return home every two to four years, dividing their life between wives and children in Bénin and in the Congo. Families who have remained in the home country are sent money entrusted to visitors passing backward and forward or by postal orders, the amounts transferred being sometimes substantial. I unwittingly shamed a Xwla fisherman when in the course of a public interview he felt obliged to admit he was only sending his wife 10,000 CFA monthly, a sum he knew his colleagues (listening to the conversation) would regard as quite small.

Along with other Xwla present in the Congo and Gabon, Akpanji fishermen regard the move as a very profitable one. Indeed in these two countries Ghanaian and Béninois fishermen hold a quasi-monopoly over the local fishery of pelagic species, and Central African waters are particularly well-stocked. It is possible for a sufficiently skilled young man to join a Company in Gabon or the Congo, but the Company type of organization is far from being as popular among the Xwla as it is among the Anlo and the Fante. A man of Akpanji would therefore usually wait until he has raised the necessary capital to equip a boat before joining his co-villagers abroad. The investment is, however, considerable. In August 1985 it was reckoned that a boat would cost 600,000 CFA (covering purchase of the hull, work supervision fees, towing to the beach by tractor and sea transport from Ghana to the PR Bénin), 450,000 CFA for a 25 HP outboard engine, 900,000 CFA for a sardinella gill-net (the purse-seine is not used in the Congo simply because fishing at night is incompatible with the timing of local markets), 200,000 CFA for transport of the canoe from Cotonou to Pointe-Noire on board of a steamer, and finally 300,000 CFA in excise duties - i.e., a global investment of 2,450,000 CFA or \$7,000 at the August 1986 rate of exchange.

It is obvious therefore that seasonal moves and migration imply different investment policies. This topic however deserves proper treatment and cannot be dealt with adequately here: it will be developed in a separate paper. I will content myself here with mentioning a single revealing fact. In 1985 and 1986, both villages were involved in similar development projects which in each settlement allowed a crew to make substantial profits. Now the way this additional profit was used by the beneficiaries was entirely different in Zogbèdji and in Akpanji.

In Zogbèdji, the young men in the crew found here an opportunity for acquiring a first wife at a much earlier age than usual. Although among the Anlo-Ewe there is no bride-wealth in the strict meaning of the term but rather a series of marriage gifts given by the bridegroom to the bride and to the bride's mother, complemented by the providing of drinks (see Nukunya 1969:92-96). A young man obtains the necessary cash for these prestations from the elders of his paternal extended family. Thus the family head is in a position to decide about the

convenience of a particular union. Having obtained cash independently through the subsidized experiment, the young Zogbèdji fishermen had managed to bypass their elders' authority. The latter reacted by making it clear to everyone that the experiment was from then on unacceptable to them.

In Akpanji a crew was constituted for the experiment, mixing lagoon village Fon and Xwla beach settlers. The former were rightly regarded as amateurish by the latter since the Fon crew members continued to give horticulture priority whenever there was a conflict between sea fishing and jobs to be done in the garden. Consequently, the Xwla component in the crew tried to evict the Fon crew members and have them replaced by young Anlo-Ewe who would be as highly motivated in the maritime fishery as themselves. Asked about the developing dissension in the crew, the leader declared confidently that his purpose was to migrate to the Congo for several years. His reasons were that fishing in the Congo was much easier than that involved in the experiment and that he would anyway earn twice as much there. Every fisherman in the village would do the same, he added, if only he could afford to pay for the expensive sea-fare

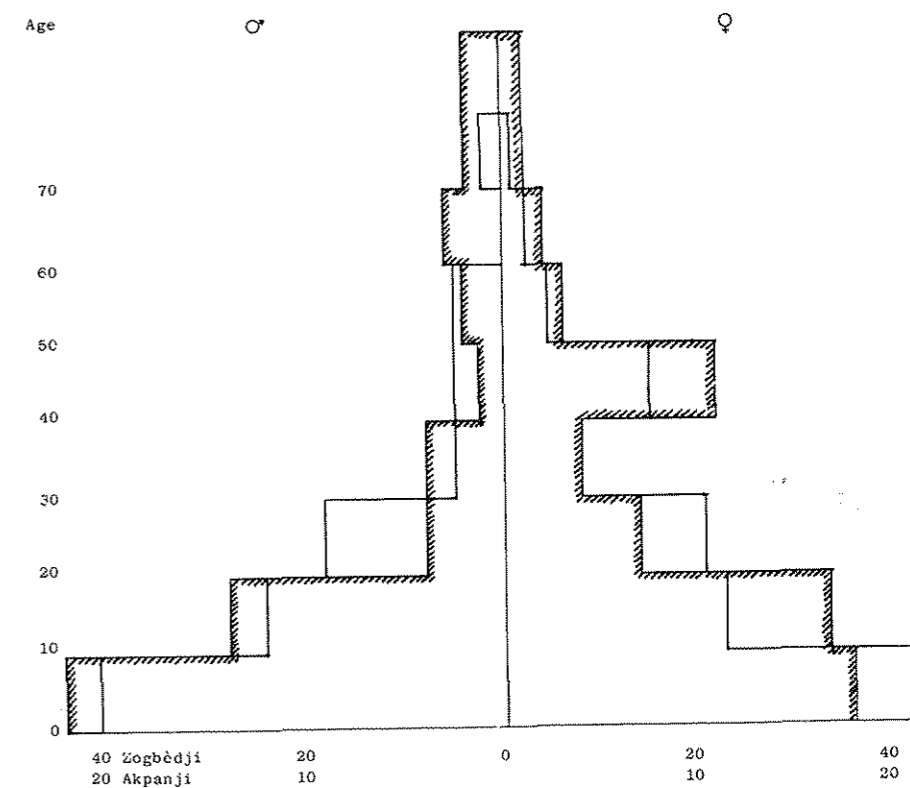


Figure 2. Comparison of two beach settlements. One (Zogbèdji) turned to seasonal moves (plain), one (Akpanji) turned to migration (hatched)

and taxes (M. Raïs, pers. comm.). This young man was thus quite open about what were the tactics of the Akpanji men taking part in the experiment: to raise the capital necessary for migration to the Congo.

The contrasting features of Zogbèdji and Akpanji are in fact reflected in their population structure. In support of this I present Figure 2 where the age pyramids for the two beach-settlements (May 1986) have been superimposed.

In Table 1 the male population has been divided in age-classes. For comparative purposes I have added figures for another fishing village, Ayiguénou (population 692 in November 1984) which contrary to Zogbèdji and Akpanji is no outpost of another village but is, so to speak, its own "stem-base."

The fact that Akpanji has severed links with its village of origin and Zogbèdji has not is clearly visible in Figure 2. In Zogbèdji indeed there is hardly anyone over the age of sixty. This part of the population has returned to the village of origin. We already noticed a related fact when the population of the beach-settlement at "De Gaulle"-kòndji was examined, i.e., that a large number of girls aged twenty to thirty would stay with their grandmothers to help with fish processing and selling. Figure 2 shows hence a clear deficit in this age-class at Zogbèdji compared with Akpanji. Also, the impact of migration as opposed to seasonal moves is clearly visible in the twenty to thirty age-class for both men and women, the absentees being, as we now know, for the most part in Gabon or in the Congo.

## Conclusions

When one examines the history of a community of maritime fishermen the world round, there is always a moment to be found when the men turned from part-time fishing to full-time fishing. This moment is always of a dramatic nature, coinciding with an economic, climatic or demographic event. In other words, becoming a full-time fisherman (when one has been a part-time one) is never a voluntary choice. It is something one has been forced into doing by adverse circumstances. One may even go so far as to consider it as a (universal) sociological law that *no one ever becomes a full-time maritime fisherman other than under duress*; necessity and necessity alone can force any one to exercise such a

Table 1. Percentage of male village population in each age-class.

Age-class	Zogbèdji	Akpanji	Ayiguénou
0- 9	40	39	33
10-19	22	20	23
20-29	22	11	18
30-39	5	11	7
40-49	5	4	6
50 +	7	16	13

tough, dangerous and economically risky activity. It is not the continuous dangerous nature of the occupation which makes full-time fishing so unattractive, it is too risky in economic terms. It is risky because it amounts to putting all one's eggs in the same basket: in economic and cultural environments such as those current in coastal West Africa, diversification remains the best guarantee at household level that day in day out subsistence will be assured.

I have been dealing here with two ethnic groups, the Xwla and Anlo-Ewe, who have turned to full-time maritime fishing for similar reasons: scarcity of land. Once access to land has been severed diversification of occupations becomes impossible and risk-minimization strategies need to take an altogether different direction: mobility in following the fish wherever they go. There are two distinct qualitative ways of doing this. Follow the fish over a stretch of coast centred on one's beach settlement, an outpost of the ancestral village, which I have called *seasonal moves*, or, via what I have called *migration*, turning to the more drastic solution of exiling oneself for a time under more favourable skies, where fish are plenty and buyers rich.

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## Notes

1. The field material used as data for the present paper has been collected by me in my capacity of either Expert or Consultant for the F.A.O. The views expressed here do not constitute however the official or unofficial position of the F.A.O. in these matters.

2. The so-called "Ghanaian canoe" comes in various sizes: Poli: about 18 metres; Watsha or Ali (respectively names for the purse-seine in Ewe and Fante): about 15 m; Anifa: about 12 m; Kpanya: from 8 to 10 m; Tonga (entangling drift- or set-net): 5 to 6 m (Coakley, pers. comm.).

3. This applies to a lesser degree to some very sheltered parts of the coast of West Africa where, in the absence of any threatening surf, rivertine-type circumstances prevail quite far out at sea. I have in mind, for instance, the Sierra Leone coast around the "Colony".

4. In June 1986, Coakley numbered sixty to one hundred "companies" of dug-out canoe carvers in Pram-Pram (Greater Accra) alone (pers. comm.).

5. In *La transmission des savoirs* (Delbos & Jorion 1984) we were able to show that the same policy of retaining or regaining a foothold in agriculture is quite common even in very discrepant circumstances. The example treated in the book (pp. 61-73) is that of the traditional salt-producers of the Mès (Loire-Atlantique, France). Salt-producers are share-croppers at the bottom of the social ladder; their only ambition is to transform the money they will (occasionally) make from the salt into arable land. A particular family life-cycle is followed over the period 1945-1980, Figure 6 in the book (p. 71) shows graphically the successful strategy of developing the "croft" (3 ha) into a farm (24.5 ha) over the period.

6. The Company is a contractual type of fishing venture of a pre-defined duration: one to six years. Men enrol by signing a contract with the Company's owner. The owner is most often not a fisherman himself, his representative on the boat is the Bosun or skipper. Financial matters are dealt with by the Treasurer while the Secretary acts as a representative of the crew proper. There is no sharing of the profits while the fishing is on, but crew members are entitled to statutory distributions of food and to pocket-money called in Fante *asibetshi*. If they so wish crew members can also mortgage some of their forthcoming share in the profits (most do so at enrolment). Reports on the financial success of the fishing are regularly given, but actual sharing of the profits is only done at the end of the one to six year period during which the Company is operating. Companies are much more effective in economic terms than family-centred crews (for more details see Jorion 1985:35-37).

7. Price differences for the same items may be considerable between countries. Thus, in 1985, a similar sardinella net panel is worth 20,000 CFA at Cotonou and 65,000 CFA at Pointe-Noire. Although the tree used for dug-out canoes (*Triplochiton scleroxylon*) can be found in the Congo, it is still cheaper (including excise duties) to have a boat carved in Ghana and brought by steamer. I met a Congolese (Vili) fisherman pretty pleased to have purchased a battered and punctured hull for a price I knew to be that of a new one at Pram-Pram (Greater Accra).

8. A complex symbiosis exists between beach settlements and lagoon villages at the economic, alliance and ritual levels. It is based on individual and communal gentleman's agreements. This important issue will be dealt with separately.

9. Beach-seines are operated by their crews from the beach, but the net is set from an unmotorized canoe, generally a medium-sized Kpanya (see footnote 2). Set gill-nets do not either require a motor, they are used from the smaller Tonga (name of the largest set gill-net) crafts. The purse-seine and sardinella gill-net require the larger Watsha (Anlo name for the purse-seine) canoe equipped with an outboard engine (25 HP or 40 HP). Because of high fuel costs, the latter two nets are only operated by well-skilled crews.

10. "Cooperatives" were introduced in the PR Bénin to help fishermen to have their boats motorized allowing them to turn to the more effective nets (purse-net and sardinella gill-net). As the credit terms offered were not competitive full-time fishermen snubbed the scheme. Part-time fishermen alone applied, but they had neither the expertise nor the motivation needed and the experiment failed (see for more details Jorion 1985:21-24).

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