

**KINSFOLK AND WORKERS :
SOCIAL ASPECTS OF LABOUR RELATIONS
AMONG GA-DANGME COASTAL FISHERFOLK.**

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Abstract :

(In artisanal marine fisheries on the Ga-Dangme Coast)

The paper discusses social aspects of labour arrangements in canoe fisheries among the Ga-Dangmes, with particular reference to the place of kinship in labour contracts. Important social features of labour relation in these fishing communities include : the dependence on the family as a labour pool ; family-based informal training and financing arrangements ; pressure on 'owners of capital assets' (canoe owners, fish smokers/traders) to admit family members into their enterprises, resulting in overcrowding ; a local welfare/social security network that encourages an extensive redistribution of wealth from 'owners of capital assets' to their 'worker' relatives ; the incorporation of authority structures in fishing into local community political power structures.

The implications of this overlap between social interests and business interests for the future of the Ga-Dangme artisanal fisheries industry are addressed. In conclusion it is noted that kinship ties promote effective labour management. On the other hand they frustrate the bargaining position of both canoe owners and their crew, and may thwart innovation in labour transactions.

Résumé :

Ce document discute des aspects sociaux de l'organisation du travail dans la pêche piroguière chez les Ga-Dangmes. Le rôle de la parentèle dans ces relations est particulièrement traité. Les caractéristiques importantes du travail familial dans ces communautés de pêcheurs incluent :

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La dépendance de la famille comme réserve de main d'oeuvre; la formation et les arrangements financiers dans la famille ; la pression sur les possédants des investissements effectués (dans les pirogues, le fumage et les commerce du poisson) afin qu'ils engagent des membres de la famille dans leur entreprise, ce qui entraîne une surcapacité de main d'oeuvre ;

Un système de protection sociale qui encourage la redistribution extensive des richesses acquises par les investisseurs vers les parents des travailleurs ;

L'incorporation des structures hiérarchique des pêcheurs dans les structure de pouvoir politique des communautés locales.

Les implications de ce recouvrement entre les intérêts sociaux et les intérêts des entreprises, pour le futur des pêcheries artisanales Ga-Dangme sont traitées. En conclusion il est établi que les liens de parentèle poussent à un gestion effective de la main d'oeuvre. En revanche cela affaiblit les capacités de négociation à la fois des armateurs des pirogues et de leurs équipages, ce qui peut stériliser l'innovation dans l'établissement de relations de travail.

1. Introduction

Ghana continues to be heavily dependent on artisanal marine fisheries for over 70 percent of the fish landed locally, an impressive increase from about 40 percent of the total national catch in the late 1960s (Fisheries Research Institute, 1994; Fisheries Division, 1966-67). This industry is therefore an important source of relatively cheap animal protein in the country, providing an average of over 200,000 tons of fish per year (personal communication, Koranteng, 1994). Pelagic fishery dominated by sardinella, is the most widespread type of fishery in the artisanal sector.² Since the bumper catch of 1972 however, annual yields from sardinella during the major "herring" season (July to October) have been unpredictable causing great concern among all interested parties (Koranteng, 1989).

Technological innovations that have been introduced at different stages since the late nineteenth century have brought about the remarkable increases in artisanal fisheries yields, and to some degree, modernized artisanal fisheries compared to 30 years ago. But certain aspects of the organization and operations have persisted. Canoe fisheries remain a highly labour intensive activity, and every fishing unit provides on the average two incomes, first to the fisherman, and second to the fish processor. Among the Gas where separate residence for men and women is common this may be viewed as separate incomes for separate households.

Of particular importance in the legacy of the old order in present day artisanal marine fisheries is the continued dominance of kinship as a basis for labour organization. Previously thought to be a thing that would disappear with

2. Sardinella is popularly known in Ghana as "herrings". The two main types found here include the round sardinella and the flat sardinella (Koranteng, 1989).

modernization, the importance of kinship organization in persisting African modes of production is now widely recognized. Scientists who are revisiting the Gulf of Guinea fisheries resource base now recognise the need to adopt a holistic approach. They acknowledge that several aspects of the non-biological and technological features of artisanal fisheries need to be more closely examined to improve our understanding and policy for the sector. Among the issues that call for greater attention is the centrality of the kin group in this business and the social norms, expectations and pressures that arise from that context.

The objectives of this paper are first to outline ways in which major decisions and practises in artisanal fisheries are shaped largely by kinship relations, and their implications for change within the sector. Second, the paper addresses the overlap between power and authority structures in fisheries, and the wider socio-political organization of the fishing communities. For the discussion of these objectives various aspects of fisheries organization in which kinship considerations appear to be quite influential have been identified as follows :

- labour recruitment and training
- ownership/inheritance/investment
- migrating fishermen: "aprodo".
- authority structure, management and supervision
- cooperative elements in artisanal fisheries
- labour conflicts
- gender relations in fisheries labour force
- consequences of kinship relations for transformation

Information for this paper forms part of a wider study on artisanal fisheries among the Ga-Dangmes in the Greater Accra Region, which was conducted at the Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER), University of Ghana (1988 to 1990). A lot of the discussion is limited to this regional context in view of the important differences arising from the varying cultural backgrounds to be found along the Ghana coast. Very useful studies that have been undertaken on the socio-economic organization of Ghanaian fisheries include the works of Lawson (1953), Lawson and Kwei (1974), Vercrujse (1984) on the Fantis, Nukunya's study on the Ewes (1991) and Odotei's (1991) work on the Fantis.

2. Background of Ga-Dangme Artisanal Marine Fisheries

The Greater Accra Region of Ghana, traditional home of the Ga-Dangmes is quite important in the local production of fresh fish, and until recently was the leading coastal region for the highest number of canoes, outboard motors and fishermen. About 25 percent of the fishing communities that have been identified by the Canoe Frame Survey in 1992 are located in the Greater Accra Region (Koranteng et. al., 1993). Many of them are small villages with populations of less than 5000, but there are also big towns on the coast with populations of over 20,000. From the 48 fishing communities that have been recorded between Lanma in the west and Ada in the east of the Region, Ga-Dangme fishermen and fish

processors operate from about 69 landing beaches including Lanma, Teshie, Nungua, Kpone, Old Ningo and Prampram, where the ISSER study collected primary data. Presently about 31 percent of marine canoe fishermen in the country are also to be found here (ibid). In production as well the Greater Accra Region is quite important in coastal canoe fisheries. Over 40 percent of the domestic marine catch in 1992 was landed along this coast (Fisheries Department, 1994).

Poli and ali canoes for pelagic fisheries make up 63 percent of the canoe fleet in the Greater Accra Region, and at a national level, the region carries over one-third of all the poli/ali canoes along the Ghana coast. In addition it has over 50 percent of the line canoes in the country, which is not surprising giving that Ga-Dangme fishermen are traditionally known for hook and line fishing (Koranteng et.al., 1993).

Artisanal marine fisheries is founded on a highly age and gender based segregated division of labour. In Accra this has its roots in a family residential pattern commonly found in traditional Ga families, in which men and women live in multi-generational separate sex compounds. From these compounds and closely related ones a canoe owner or fishsmoker normally recruits young male or female relatives to form work groups.

Most of the people involved in fisheries work on the Greater Accra coast have had little or no formal education (over 70 percent). Many of those who have been to school completed less than six years of education. The most educated operators are to be found in the big towns like Teshie, where a few fishermen have completed secondary school. The early age at which boys and girls are recruited into apprenticeships in the industry interferes with their enrolment and retention in school. As in most traditional industries, young people are left with little choice in career selection.

Men and women become involved in fishing and related activities as a matter of course. It is part of the tradition. They remain in it because of the general lack of mobility from this sector elsewhere, imposed by their lack of skills (Lawson and Kwei, 1974). Besides, alternative jobs are few in and around many fishing communities. Perhaps this rather than a social stigma attached to fishing as Lawson (ibid) suggests, more realistically explains why fishermen and fishsmokers remain in the sector. In any case crew members would find it difficult to combine fishing with other occupations because of their long or frequent periods at sea. The women on the other hand are noted for being very versatile in their occupational pursuits, often combining fishsmoking with other micro enterprises such as kenkey making or petty trading. In the lean season they may concentrate fully on these other trades until fish is in plentiful supply. At Lanma the women are seasonal farmers growing cassava and vegetables during the lean season.

Independent fishermen and fishsmokers tend to be older rather than younger members of the compound. It is this group that owns the means of production and provides the needed working capital in a work group. This is not surprising, as one more often than not inherits capital inputs in this occupation from an

older relative. On the average people stay active in fishing and fishsmoking well past their sixties barring ill-health. As they grow older they move from heavier to lighter tasks.³

3. Recruitment and Training of Work Group Members

As can be expected in family based business, a high degree of homogeneity in ethnic composition is found in the work groups (95 percent Ga-Dangmes), even in the large town of Teshie. Apart from the fact that lack of exposure to the sea restricts people in the hinterland from entering marine fishing, fishermen generally remain among their own people.

A majority of fishermen believe that one does not need to come from a fishing family to be a fisherman. But their own recruitment experiences suggest otherwise, and they admit that the process of becoming a fisherman or fishsmoker is not very open. About 80 percent or more of the fishermen at Lanma, Teshie and Prampram described themselves as close kinsmen of the other members of the crew on their canoes. Invariably most of them were related to the owner directly or by marriage. Young boys can join canoes on either their mother or their father side; in addition it is quite common for men to foster their nephews and recruit them for their canoes. Normally the recruitment age is quite low, especially for sons and foster sons who may one day inherit their fathers' gear. Very young boys of five to seven years old may be taken on board as helpers, to shove water out of the canoe. These are regarded as the first steps in training.

Fishermen are however not averse to recruiting outsiders into the work groups and this happens more often now than in the past. The adoption of the larger ali, and later, poli and watsa nets have made this necessary. While about fifty years ago the average canoe crew size was about 3 men, it had quadrupled to about 13 in 1986 and by the time of the study some poli canoes were carrying over 20 crew members.

Most crew members learn their skills through apprenticeships with canoe owners. The periods of training tend to vary between one year in small communities like Lanma, while at Teshie it may extend to five years, though the reason for this long period is not clear. My impression is that the extended period may be due to the long line of senior fishermen ahead of the trainees in an intense fishing community like Teshie. It could also be due to the age at which one is recruited into apprenticeship, as the younger you start the longer the period of training. But on the average trainees are considered to be ready for full membership of the crew after two years.

Typically, apprenticeships are informal and therefore "fee free". In contrast there are relatively expensive formal apprenticeships, in which a father or uncle formally hands over his ward to be trained on a particular canoe. The owner then

3. Retired fishermen or net menders for example, may take up roles as "negotiators" at the beach, where they help the fishermen to bargain for good prices. This is quite common at Teshie.

specifies the costs that come with this assignment, and the thanks offering that is expected after graduation. There are no fixed amounts that have to be "paid", but the items usually include alcoholic beverages, and cash.

Besides apprenticeships there are no regular and easily available alternative training facilities for preparing fishermen and fishsmokers. Occasionally fisheries extension services organize short orientation courses to teach the use of new technology and techniques of maintenance of outboard motors. Very few fishermen however have the opportunity to attend such programmes. No more than 20 percent of the men we contacted had been at such workshops, mostly from Teshie. Occasionally a full fledged fisherman "applies" to join a company from another canoe. He may be interviewed by the canoe owner regarding his skills and experience at sea; he is also briefed about the financial state of the company (debts owed on capital inputs, etc.), and is charged a bottle of schnapps if he is accepted.

In the apprentice system of training older men are respected for their experience on the sea, and valued as a very critical resource for the practical training they can provide. However, as the crew gain experience the old are strongly discouraged from taking part in fishing trips, although one or two older people on the trip is seen as useful for maintaining peace, and for advice during emergencies at sea. But conflicts often arise between different generations in this highly multi-generational labour force. Because of their advanced age and reduced physical strength, some of the younger crew feel that older men are a liability. In addition they are accused of constraining others by autocratic ways of behaviour.

Women like their male counterparts tend to rely on their daughters, sisters and other female relatives to form a fish processing work group. Young girls of about five years start running errands during smoking sessions and in this manner they learn fishsmoking and handling from their female relatives. Their responsibilities and experience grow with time and age, until eventually they can take charge of a batch of smoking unsupervised. Unlike in fishing training there is hardly ever a formal apprenticeship in fishsmoking. None of the three communities reported any such experience.

Until the early eighties when ILO assisted the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) to organize short training workshops on improved fish processing there were hardly any extension programmes in this area of activity. The key aspect of this project was the introduction of the rectangular multi-tray Chorkor smoker, named after the township of Chorkor where it was first developed and tested by the FAO and the Ghana Food Research Institute (FRI). As this programme was very limited in coverage the majority of fishsmokers we met had never heard of extension services. Prampram however was one of the project sites, and so had benefitted greatly from the training and credit facilities that came with the project. Here many women proceeded to build their own Chorkor smokers with assistance from the project.

4. Ownership, Inheritance and Investment

The idea of African modes of production such as artisanal fisheries evoke images of subsistence-based primitive communalism, driven by egalitarian distributional forces rather than personal interests and the quest for private property. By most accounts any such communalistic system of production and distribution was already in decline in African political economy well before colonial conquest (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1978). On the contrary there is evidence that indigenous forms of production have for a long time been characterised by strong market orientation, even where they have retained their kinship-based organization. By bringing to the study of artisanal fisheries an analytical framework that recognizes its pro-capitalist characteristics one is able to identify various capitalist interests in the investment and distribution of resources in this sector. It is important to take this step in order to shed some of the stereotypes that have hindered work in this area.

Widespread misconceptions in the past that work groups in fisheries operated as de facto cooperatives led to inappropriate assistance programmes that failed to facilitate improvements in the fishing industry. Issues of ownership and investment in artisanal fisheries have for a long time been misunderstood by outsiders (Lawson and Kwei, 1974).

Among fishermen and fishsmokers at present there are clearly identifiable owners; they are the ones who have made all or most of the capital investments, and are able to mobilize other key resources to sustain their operations. Vercrujse (1984) maintains that this represents a significant shift from the past in which the industry apparently was dominated by independent operators involved in hook and line, set net and cast net fishing. Each fisherman more or less owned his own gear. Labour and capital were thus united in a petty commodity mode of production. As the larger nets and canoes overtook the small vessels and gear, fishermen became polarised into owners of capital and workers on canoes. A change in the authority structure where less financially independent fishermen had been forced into subordinate positions vis-a-vis their better off compatriots, was therefore already noticeable by 1903 (ibid).

A separation of labour and capital appeared with the introduction of the larger ali net and the Mfantse canoe, which required a larger workforce and higher financial outlay (ibid). The changes were not taken lightly. He reports further on protests and clashes between different factions of fishermen either supporting or denouncing the new technologies. There were strong fears on the opposing side that the new gear would deplete the fisheries resource, and at the same time depress fish prices through increased supply on the market. Many Ga towns including Teshie were involved in the clashes. The conflicts could also be seen as the result of a perceived loss of autonomy and income among fishermen who could not afford to switch to the more expensive and higher capacity gear (ibid).

The new imbalance in the relationship between owners and workers notwithstanding, it has not been easy to interpret their relations in conventional

class analysis as Vercrujisse (ibid) has tried to do. Several complications stand in the way of such an exercise. One finds that the key parties, namely owners of capital and workers, are traditionally found in the same family and bound by several social and economic ties. To a large extent the obligations enshrined in these family relationships competes with other personal interests that may arise out of their opposing relationships to the means of production.

Given the bonds of kinship and other norms and values shared by the crew and canoe owners, the idea that the crew members and here we might add "assistant fishsmokers" might be considered as «a class of "free" labourers» (Vercrujisse, 1984 :112) seems to be an over-simplification of the real situation. This description in effect isolates the worker-owner relationship from its wider context of kinship relations, and attributes to it a free bargaining position on either side, that does not really exist. It is fair to say however that, the group of owners tend to perpetuate itself as some sons inherit their fathers gear and canoes, and others inherit their fathers' places in the companies.

Theoretically any crew member can be a canoe owner as there are no customary restrictions barring any member of the community from such investments. But the prospects for advancement in this direction for many of the fishermen are very slim due to financial constraints. There are hardly any credit facilities available for a newcomer who wants to invest in fishing gear, except from one's own savings and borrowing from friends and relatives. In some of the big fishing towns like Teshie, fish traders have for a long time been valued informal lenders. Even among line fishermen where one expects to find a higher proportion of gear owning fishermen, in the Greater Accra Region it seems that line gear are still concentrated in a few hands.⁴

Among fishsmokers there are similarly those who have their own ovens and those who borrow the use of their relatives' ovens after the latter have finished smoking. Age is an important denominator here dividing women in the smoking compound into the owners versus apprentice/assistant smokers. Each work group is made up of such a multi-generational team. The oven owners are typically responsible for mobilizing all the resources that are needed for purchasing and processing fish, and for arranging the marketing of the fish.

In both smoking and fishing ventures, workers who find themselves in subordinate positions are continually seeking ways to reduce their dependence and to acquire their own assets. Younger women borrow ovens in the compound to smoke their own fish whenever they are able to purchase fish on their own. They can raise the necessary capital from sales of their share of smoked fish, earned through assisting an independent smoker. Young fishermen also have options that have traditionally been a means to accumulate savings, from which they can finance investments of their own. The most significant of these savings

4. In the Central and Western regions line fishermen are more likely to own their own gear and to jointly own a canoe with others (Koranteng and Nmashie, 1987).

strategies is to go on migrant expeditions outside one's own fishing community, or better still outside the country. In all of these attempts to establish their own independence local norms dictate that young people should receive maximum cooperation from the older generation, both in terms of moral support and material assistance. The old after all have a stake in making this work. In the context of a family based social security system, successful children are a guaranteed source of support in one's old age. Unfortunately, the older generation is not always able to assist their children to stand on their own feet, because of their own poverty. As one fisherman put it «when you are not able to help your son with extra cash, or you cannot even guarantee loans for him it is a source of great shame, we cannot do it because we do not have the means.» (Assistant Wolei Atse, Teshie, 1989). For this reason young men are encouraged to undertake migrations whenever possible.

5. Migrating Fishermen

Ghanaian fishermen are well known for their migrations to other fishing ports in the West African sub-region. Though the Fantis and Ewes have been more active in this area than the Gas-Dangmes, there are certain fishing communities along this coast who regularly undertake such trips. They include fishermen from Kpone, Old Ningo, to some extent Prampram. In many of the other towns some sporadic migration takes place.

Migrations may be for very short periods of a month or less, or very long periods of one year or more. The local system of classification of such movements distinguish between "aprodo" and "hefoo", where the former refers to long migratory trips and the latter implies a short spin abroad. Local migrations such as "hefoo" may no longer be as attractive as "aprodo" in foreign waters. It is also worth noting that the Ga-Dangme fishing communities no longer attract migrant fishermen as they did in the past, when Fanti and Ewe fishermen regularly came to Chorkor, Jamestown and other places for the lucrative markets.

Kinship ties continue to influence the composition of crew members on "aprodo". Fishermen indicate that it is particularly important when going on "aprodo" to travel with kinsmen or well trusted close friends, because of the potential dangers the crew might face.

Young men migrate because they find it difficult to save at home. Here there are numerous obligations that one is unable to avoid. In contrast when on "aprodo" the fishermen save their money to be drawn in bulk at the end of the year. About 90 percent of the fishermen at Prampram and Kpone had been on migratory expeditions in the past. Their exploits took them to fishing communities in Lome (Togo), Lagos (Nigeria), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) and Libreville (Gabon). Because of the potential dangers and hardships that they can encounter, proud returnees suggest that embarking on "aprodo" is a test of manhood for the young fisherman. There is no indication however that, this a formal requirement of initiation into the occupation as a fully qualified member of the company.

During their stay abroad, the crew continue the same communal style pattern of living that they practise at home. Their housekeeping and meals for example, are usually jointly catered for and the costs are shared by the whole group. Migrant fishermen tend to rely heavily on their kinsmen who have already settled at the foreign fishing ports. On trips to Abidjan for example, fishermen from old Ningo contact the Ga Wotse (Ga senior fisherman) in this settlement. He in turn may identify a host from within his own migrant quarter of the community or from the indigenous population among whom they have settled. If the fisherman already have a direct contact they may contact this person, quite often a woman fish dealer at the foreign port to serve as their host; this usually involves making arrangements for fishing rights, board and lodging, marketing outlets and credit facilities if necessary (petrol money). Prior information about the situation of kinsmen and women or alternatively, local hosts at the foreign port is therefore critical in the selection of an "aprodo" destination.

Women are not excluded from migrations, though they typically join the crew by road rather than accompany them by sea. At Prampram and Kpone about 25 percent of migrant labour in the past had been made up of women. Senior wives of the most senior crew members are allowed a turn on the trips before the other wives. Where egalitarian norms are really strong, the wives rotate so that all the wives (or sisters of unmarried fishermen) have a chance to stay with the crew in the foreign country to earn some extra money. They go to provide housekeeping services for the men, for which they receive a share of the catch or direct wages. Whether the women are able to deal in fish or not at the migrant site depends on the graciousness of the local fish dealers. Not all fishermen are in favour of taking women on "aprodo". They describe the exercise as expensive.

Changes are beginning to take place in the terms under which Ga-Dangme fishermen migrate to other countries. Fishermen by the 1980s were no longer restricted to migrating through the traditional companies of mostly kinsmen. By that time some were leaving Ghana under independent contract arrangements with foreign canoes. A number of fishermen from Old Ningo reported being recruited from here by Gabonese and Beninois canoe owners to work for them in the major season. Other types of contracts have also developed, which involve the conscious transfer of skills from Ghanaian fishermen to their foreign neighbours. Foreign canoe owners who come to Accra to buy Ghana canoes, sometimes recruit Ga fishermen to train their own crew in the use of the canoes in their home countries (Sheves, 1991). Whether such contracts are based on the share system or on fixed wage payments, the fishermen described them as normally very profitable and less complicated than travelling in a company from home. Whatever the terms under which fishermen work in a company, outwardly they display a high degree of cooperation which is necessary to make their highly labour intensive enterprise work.

6. Cooperative Elements in Canoe Fisheries

Fishermen work on the canoes not as employers and employees as can be found on industrial fishing vessels, but rather as “partners” with prior agreement on their share of the catch. The share system replaces fixed wages for the crew. Share arrangements tend to differ for different kinds of fishing operations, and sometimes from one village to the next.

Superficially the share system contains elements of an egalitarian cooperative set up. Nevertheless in this cooperative all men are not equal. On the one hand it casts the crew in the company as equals of the canoe owner, while at the same time it recognises and rewards his/her greater investment in the enterprise. The arrangement is probably a residual from the time when all crew members owned their own gear but not all owned a canoe; they would therefore surrender a part of their catch to the canoe owner after a fishing trip as compensation for the use of the canoe. In all only about 3 percent of canoes in the study were owned either by the whole company or jointly with a canoe owner. In all the communities we visited about 96 percent of poli nets and outboard motors were owned by the canoe owner.

On poli/watsa canoes typically used in pelagic fisheries the owner and the crew share equally the overheads of an expedition, which can be quite substantial depending on the size of the canoe and number of crew. Typically overhead expenses are first deducted from the catch. Fuel bills are the highest costs, but the crew also have to finance food, rope and ice as well as sundries such as kerosene. The remaining portion is divided into equal halves; one half is shared by the canoe, the net and the outboard motor which invariably is owned by the same person, whilst the other half is shared among the crew. If he accompanies the crew the owner in the share system counted as a member of the crew, and is therefore, entitled to a crew member’s share, in addition to shares awarded to the capital inputs. In this manner the canoe owner hopes to be able to recover the costs of his/her investment, and also make enough profit to finance major repairs and spare parts.

Where very close bonds exist between the owner and crew the latter may go to great lengths to help to ease the owner’s debt burdens. At Lanma a company agreed to make special deductions from the catch to assist the owner pay off a loan he had taken to purchase a new net. Here it is common for canoe owners to forfeit the shares that are normally paid out to the canoe and gear, during the minor season when the catch is low and the shares of the fishermen are reduced.

In contrast some canoe owners at Teshie complained bitterly that the crew had refused to make any extra deductions to help them pay off their loans quickly. The crew members felt that they were not receiving any extra assistance from such owners in their times of need, so there was no need to make any allowances for them. Compassion for the crew when they were faced with hardship earns a canoe owner considerable respect and allegiance from their crew.

In spite of this high degree of cooperation that is practised by fishing companies, past and present formal attempts to form fishing cooperatives all over the Greater Accra Region have been disappointing. They have been used

mainly for channelling fishing inputs to the fishing community. As fishing inputs are normally not jointly owned by the crew members they find cooperatives irrelevant to their work. At Teshie only canoe owners or their bosuns belonged to the cooperative when it was active. A lengthy discussion on the experiments with fisheries producer cooperatives is given by Lawson and Kwei (1974). At present there is a National Association of Canoe Fishermen to which all chief fishermen belong. They represent the interests of the fishermen in their communities whether or not they have a registered association. The Chief Fisherman of Tema represents the Greater Accra Region at the national level. Given the weakness of the cooperative effort, leadership in artisanal fisheries has remained with the traditional structures.

7. Authority, Management and Supervision

In every community where fishing is a major occupation it is supported by a hierarchy of offices that form an integral part of the local traditional power and authority structure. The hierarchy of authority in fishing comprises the chief fisherman and his assistants. It is this team that monitors the observance of all the local fishing rules and regulations. Though the office holders normally must be fishermen, their positions are not by appointment but attained through inheritance. The chief fisherman draws his council from the canoe owners in the community.

The chief fisherman and his officers govern and monitor affairs among fishermen and fish dealers in their respective communities by local ritualistic norms and values. These typically have practical as well as spiritual significance, and are initiated and regulated by the chief fisherman and his office holders. Some of the most important of these include the ban on fishing on Tuesdays, purification rites that are performed periodically, the blessing of new canoes and the control of migrant fishermen. Migrant fishermen have certain conditions to fulfil before they are allowed to stay in a host village, which often involves the payment of fees to the chief fisherman. The Tuesday ban though considered to be a day of rest, provides a time for meetings among fishermen to resolve problems, disputes and to perform minor repairs on their gear. The women also find it a convenient time to transport processed fish to the market. In many ways the chief fisherman and his heirs and council enjoy an elevated status in their communities, in which the ordinary crew members do not share.

At the operational level most of the management and supervisory duties on a canoe for example are performed by people selected by the owner of the canoe/gear. In practice these offices are hereditary rather than appointive, though in the absence of a reliable sibling or younger relative, owners can invite outsiders to represent them in management / supervisory capacity. However due to the introduction of modern technology new offices have emerged in the company which are largely based on merit and skill rather than kin affiliation. These include the position of motor man and accounts clerk/secretary, quite often they are young men with relatively higher education than the rest of the crew. When it comes

to technical decisions their expertise is respected by the crew, which in some cases is a constant source of irritation to the traditional leaders in the company.

A typical fishing company crew has the following offices :

- Lelena Tsee (canoe owner)
- Bosun (representative of the canoe owner)
- Assistant Bosun
- Motor man/ engineer (in charge of the outboard motor)
- Paado molo (paddle man)
- Wolei (crew members)
- Bookman (accounts clerk)
- Apprenticès

Outside direct fishing operations the crew are bound to the canoe owner in a kind of patronage system, where the owner is expected to provide material assistance from his or her private resources for fishermen when they have emergencies, or on festive occasions. This creates a network of indebtedness between the two parties that force them to overlook some of their misgivings about the fishing operation.

Fishsmoking compounds have far less intricate office designations than can be found in fishing, though here too the hierarchy of seniority is quite strictly observed. Within the compound there are clear norms guiding ownership, smoking operations and sharing arrangements between the smoker and her assistants. In some communities there is a Loonye or "fishmother" but her position is not hereditary; she is selected by her peers for the size of her operations, hard work and perhaps credit facilities she is able to provide for the others. She represents them in an informal capacity, and helps to settle disputes among the women, or to organize boycotts against the fishermen when the need arises. Not many communities today have a loonye, and there is a general feeling that her influence has somewhat declined.

8. Labour Conflicts

In spite of the familial ties that bind crew members and further links them to the canoe owner, antagonism, competition and conflict are not uncommon among the crew. They are quite often inter-generational confrontations in the same team, but there is a gender dimension to this as well. Fishsmokers often find themselves in direct confrontation with the fishermen over prices and other terms of trade.

Canoe owners are not spared these tensions, and increasingly they have been the targets of confrontations with the crew over their operations. Anything from the system of sharing to the selection of fishing spots and landing beaches can bring about conflict. At sea these can be quite dangerous and all efforts are made to contain conflicts for settlement on ground.

Another type of conflict which can have very grave consequences is inter-company rivalry between different canoes; normally this remains at a level of jesting especially on festive occasions, but it can easily degenerate depending

on the occasion and the issue at stake. A few lives have been lost in many fishing towns in Accra as a result of such rivalries. The chief fisherman and his council of elders try to handle these matters on their own. In criminal cases however, the police are called in. The main line of cleavage though is between the older fishermen on the one hand and their subordinate crew members. Among the women it is the lead fishsmoker (the one who owns the ovens) against her assistants. Now and again younger sisters complain of domination by their older sisters or mothers, but smoking compounds appear to be less prone to conflicts than fishing companies.

Canoe owners talk openly about their misgivings about some of the trends in activities of companies. Growing suspicion on both sides is gradually undermining the traditional camaraderie that has existed between the two parties. At Teshie there were numerous complaints that the younger crew members had become disrespectful and dishonest. The canoe owners believed that they were being forced to retire early from seafaring so that the crew could interfere with the catch. For the fishermen, keeping the owners out of fishing trips reduces the number of men receiving a share in the catch, which boosts the size of their own shares. The companies have been accused of far worse crimes in recent times. Several cases of disappearing catches had apparently been reported where the canoe owners suspected the crew of landing their catch at other beaches. At Teshie a fishing company had actually been caught landing at Nungua instead of Teshie. Much of the misunderstanding is centred around the relatively high portion of the catch that eventually goes to the canoe owner (the canoe, the net, the outboard motor), especially in these times of poor catches. If it continues this could lead to a confrontation that may bring important changes into sharing arrangements in the future. Whatever differences are threatening to break their front, one thing fishermen and their canoe owners have in common is their uneasy with fish dealers who by custom are almost entirely women.

9. Gender Relations in Fisheries Labour Force

The artisanal fisheries sector is heavily dependent on close cooperation between the men and women involved in this industry. Apart from the traditional tasks that are segregated by sex, the two parties have come to provide strategic support for each other based on their peculiar positions in the production and distribution of fish. To a large extent women in the community rely heavily on their male relatives involved in fishing to supply them with fresh fish for processing. Traditionally, wives and female relatives have the first serve of a fisherman's share of the fish, before he would sell to non-relatives. In the past this carried with it softer credit conditions for the relatives than was available to other women, but the economic hardships and the need for ready cash has forced fishermen to demand cash payments upfront from all their customers including their female relations. This is problematic where the fishermen are indebted to their customers. When they find themselves in such a fix the fishermen sometimes take quite drastic steps to protect their interests.

At Lanma the fishsmokers on a number of occasions had to chase their fishermen to Bortianor about 2 miles away, when they got hint that the crew had diverted the catch to this beach where they could obtain cash payments for their fish from non-relatives. The women were not only infuriated by their breaching custom, but perhaps more for the fact that most of the crew members owed money to the women, which they had agreed to pay for with their share of fish !

The fishermen on the other hand rely greatly on the women not only to process and market their fish but also for much needed credit facilities. They turn to the fish dealers for loans to purchase capital goods, for working capital and for tiding them over the lean season. The situation where women are the financiers has arisen largely because of their prominence in the processing and marketing of fish after it has been landed. Invariably these women who provide substantial credit facilities to the companies become their favoured customers, and with time supersede the female relatives in the preferential supply of fish. The "petrol women" as they are known by the crew come to be very influential in determining the beach price of fresh fish. In a place like Teshie many of them have acquired their own canoes and have their own companies of fishermen. Webs of indebtedness binding various fishermen to women dealers are thus built up from which the men find it difficult to extricate themselves, because of their perpetual cash flow difficulties.

Many fishermen believe they are cheated by their female trading partners, though they have not yet been able to secure alternative and accessible sources of credit to replace these partners. A company at Kpone that returned from an "aprodo" from Lome without repaying loans they owed to their petrol woman, were chased by this dealer to Accra, where she managed to put pressure on the chief fisherman to help her recover the loans.

While the outside world may be convinced that fishermen would have to break their indebtedness to fish dealers in order to make any headway in their standard of living, the fishermen view the situation differently. Many of them believe that in the present circumstances they cannot do without the support of the women. It is this fear that undermined the successful implementation of the FAO assisted modern wholesale fish market at Takoradi, established in the 1950s. Here fishermen would have been able to auction their fish to the highest bidder rather than to their traditional customers at low prices.

10. Implications of Kinship Organization for Artisanal Fisheries Development.

Dependence on kinship as the organizing principle in artisanal fisheries has several implications for its future development. Though some of these appear to be detrimental to progress there are several strengths of the system which have enabled it to survive into these times. Organizing around kinship has been relatively effective for controlling and supervising the fishing company. The canoe owner has a well established normative base in community traditions that are understood by all members of the company, to guide and support him/

her, as well as arbitrate in cases of conflict. Financially the kinship base has facilitated borrowing and lending among operators in the sector, a situation that cannot be taken for granted in the absence of alternative sources of credit in most fishing communities. Many loans given out by relatives are interest free, compared to the high rates (50 to 100 percent) demanded by professional lenders.

Other features of the organization of artisanal marine fisheries however, may pose difficulties in attempts to streamline the sector to make it more "efficient". As it continues to operate a closed family-based recruitment policy it is very difficult to introduce modern criteria into this process. A more pertinent issue arises over the ability of canoe owners to keep the size of their companies within reasonable limits when indeed the extended family remains the basis of labour supply. Some fishermen at Teshie complained that the companies were too large because all the young men in the family expected to work on their father or uncle's canoe. They blamed this on the lack of employment in general, which gave such young people few alternatives. The young age of recruitment for training through apprenticeships, though it is cheap and accessible, has important drawbacks. It may be partly responsible for the low educational status of most fishermen in Accra and elsewhere in the region. Whereas fishermen have adopted technologies that have revolutionized their movement at sea and the size of catch, their lack of formal education could be the reason for the slow appreciation of other basic technologies. The echo-sounder which is regarded as a fairly simple technology for spotting schools of fish has been tried and effectively demonstrated here but fishermen have not shown interest (Kwei, 1973).

Haakonsen's (1988) analysis of the prospects for young people in fishing is more optimistic than most. He has a point about the vibrant nature of the sector, and its impressive contribution to domestic production. But perhaps he relies too heavily on the continuous stream of labour into the industry as an indication of its prosperity. Whether this expansion can actually be attributed to potential gains to be made in this sector, or it is merely a reflection of limited employment avenues would need further study. Canoe owners have hinted that sometimes they take on board more young men than is necessary because they are in the family. Haakonsen further makes an important observation that there is never a shortage of buyers for outboard motors and nets. It would appear however that a significant proportion of buyers tend to be existing canoe owners, with a limited number of new newcomers. Several people have noted the wide gulf between the tremendous increase in the labour force in contrast to the limited expansion in the number of canoes since 1953.⁵

5. In 1953 there were an estimated 8000 canoes with 56,000 fishermen. By 1986 there were an estimated 8,288 canoes with 108,000 fishermen (Odoi-Akersie, 1988).

11. Summary

Artisanal marine fisheries as it operates in the Greater Accra Region and indeed in most parts of Ghana, is still largely organized and sustained by the family. Leadership in the sector is in several instances hereditary rather than appointive, and forms an integral part of traditional authority in the community. This brings to the work groups strong social obligations in the way people relate to each other. The effects of this are most pronounced in the nature of recruitment, authority structure and management, as well as gender relations in the industry.

Fishermen and fishsmokers thrive on mutual assistance in material terms and in the form of mutual support. This is practised for the benefit of people within the same work groups, but it also operates between work groups. Coupled with the strong kinship base however is a significant individualistic and capitalist economic orientation which guides the way business is conducted in artisanal fisheries. Based on this kinsmen and women involved in the same work groups are clearly divided into the owners and the workers. Whatever cooperative elements exist in the industry therefore, (and there are several) excludes joint or communal ownership of the means of production. Poor understanding of this fundamental fact has led fisheries planners in the past to introduce socialist style producer cooperatives with negative results.

For almost all the parties involved fishing and related activities is not just an occupation but a way of life. Although some members of fishing communities have ventured outside to seek employment in other sectors, fishing remains a popular avenue to young people. Their early entry into fisheries and long periods at sea precludes their preparation for any other form of occupation, and limits their interaction with the wider society. Given the rather high expense involved in owning poli fishing gear, and the relatively few who ever achieve this status the average fisherman has little hope of being an independent canoe owner in his lifetime. Fish processing gear is considerably cheaper to acquire than fishing gear, which makes it possible for more women to set up on their own. Women are also aided by their versatility in occupational skills to combine fish processing with other activities to boost their incomes.

A handful of canoe owners and big fish traders can erroneously convey very positive images of prosperity in the sector to the onlooker. But closely examined the standard of living for both men and women in the industry appears to be relatively low. Detailed studies on this aspect are not readily available; it is therefore difficult to state conclusively that fishing communities are poorer than others in comparable indigenous occupations. My impressions of fishing communities however, are of widespread poverty among both men and women. These are illustrated in poor housing, limited infrastructure and high levels of illiteracy. The situation appears to be the same in both the large and small fishing communities.

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