

The Anlo-Ewe and Full-Time Maritime Fishing

Another View

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ABSTRACT In an article on the Anlo-Ewe and Xwla of West Africa which appeared in *MAST* Vol. 1(2), 1988, Paul Jorion puts forward what he calls a universal sociological law. In effect the law states that full-time maritime fishing is so dangerous and economically risky that only people who are forced by socio-economic factors engage in it and they do so under duress. Among the Anlo such a determining factor is land shortage. Our view is that among the Anlo the law does not apply because those who take to full-time maritime fishing do so not under duress but because of the lucrative monetary returns and their love for the profession. While we do not deny the risks and dangers involved in the profession, we feel that these are more than compensated for by the monetary returns. There are, moreover, many alternatives to fishing in the area such as shallot farming, salt-making and *kente* weaving, among others.

Introduction

The area generally referred to as Anlo country¹ extends from the Volta estuary in the west to the Togo border in the east (see Fig. 1). From the estuary the coastline runs roughly in a northeasterly direction for about forty miles. Inland, the most northerly town is just over twenty miles from the coast. The area therefore surrounds the entire length and breadth of the Keta lagoon, a brackish water of nearly 200 sq. miles. It is the land separating the lagoon and the sea that forms the home of the Anlo-Ewe fishermen whom Polly Hill (1963-64) has dubbed The Pan African Fishermen.

Anlo-Ewe fishermen and their activities have been so well documented that there is now very little information about them which cannot be found in the literature. In this regard thanks must go to such authorities as Hill (1963-64, 1970, 1986), Wyllie (1969), Jorion (1988) and the Ghana Department of Fisheries, among others. Despite this vast literature and considerable interest, many of the interpretations and factors responsible for the development of the industry in the area have remained only tentative and at best generalized. The present paper is prompted by the recent study of Jorion (1988) in which he proffered what he called a universal sociological law based on Anlo and Xwla data. In his view,

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 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 (Jorion 1988:152-53).

Taken to its logical conclusion the law implies that people engaged in full-time fishing do not have a genuine interest in, or desire for, the occupation and that they are forced into it because of socioeconomic, environmental and demographic factors. In the case of the Anlo-Ewe, it was the economic circumstances resulting from the scarcity of land that led to the adoption of the profession. It will mean also that those in possession of sufficient farm lands would not take to full-time fishing. There is the additional implication that people turn to fishing because it is the only viable alternative to farming. It is further asserted that in financial terms full-time fishing is a precarious and risky occupation which does not ensure any guaranteed income and comfortable living.

A universal law of this nature can only be sustained if all the available facts have been examined and found to generally conform to all that is implied in it. One wonders whether this procedure has been followed here. In the case of the Anlo at least, there is little doubt that Jorion has been rather selective in the aspects of the profession he has chosen to prove his case. In this paper we intend

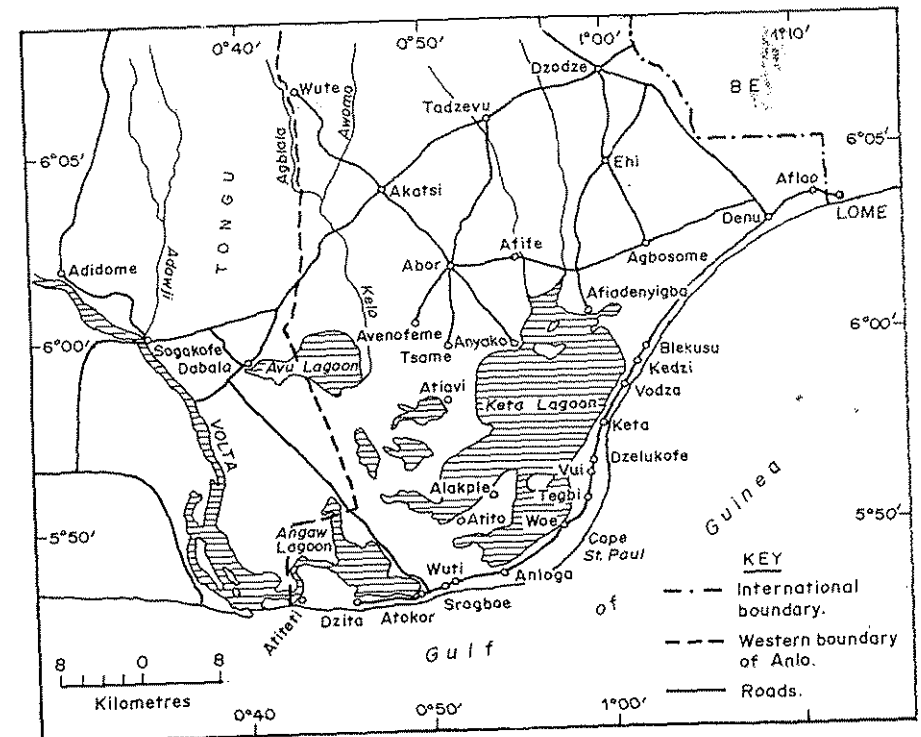


Figure 1. The Anlo Area

to show that the Anlo material does not support the tenets of the law. Specifically, data and evidence will be adduced to show that among the Anlo, full-time fishing is a lucrative occupation followed by people who go into it because of the financial results it promises and they do so because it falls within their competence. Many Anlo families and individuals turn to fishing despite their own self-sufficiency in land, knowing very well that financial rewards from it are much better than anything else. Nor are the Anlo incapable of pursuing occupations other than fishing: the flourishing *kente* weaving industry in the vicinity is a case in point. Also not to be forgotten is the agricultural intensification associated with the shallot cultivation along the coast which still leaves room for expansion and further development. Before amplifying these points, however, there is need for putting the genesis of the full-time coastal fishing and the subsequent migratory practices into a proper geopolitical, historical and demographic perspective.

The Seine Industry in Historical Perspective

It is generally known in the Keta area that the first *yevudor* (European net) or seine net was purchased by a Woe women named Afedima, a wealthy daughter of a prominent local man called Anatsi. Afedima was born around the first quarter of the 19th century and died towards the end of the century. Genealogies and other calculations put the genesis of the seine at between 1850-60. The number of net owners increased gradually and by the beginning of this century no less than fifteen owners, each with his company of operators, were recorded at Woe alone. Comparable numbers were mentioned for other towns. It is instructive to note that activities of these companies were for the most part localized until after the First World War. In fact, the mass exodus of fishermen for Badagri took place in the 1920s with the peak years put at 1925-26 (Nukunya 1987:20). This was also the time that the shallot industry started to assume a more commercialized character, especially around Anloga but also at Dzita, Whuti and Woe. Migrations to Abidjan started several years later.

The timing of the introduction of the seine or European net and the beginning of effective migration of fishing companies to Badagri is quite instructive. Although effective colonial administration in the area did not start until 1883 with the passage in the Gold Coast of the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance, there had been considerable European presence. Fort Prindsenstein was built at Keta in 1790 which assured the Danes, the first European power to operate there, a foothold. The Danes remained in the area until the British took over the Fort in 1950 and with it some measure of political control.

It is quite certain that British presence increased commercial activities between the Anlo and the Europeans (particularly the British), culminating in the introduction of the seine. By the turn of the century, with the partition of the continent in 1884-85, the establishment of effective colonial administration across the West Coast reduced the traditional hazards of interethnic travels, making it possible for the settlement of members of one ethnic group in another's terri-

tory. Conditions, however, did not seem to have settled sufficiently before the First World War started. After the War conditions improved considerably, resulting in the migration on a fairly large scale of those who could afford it. The need to migrate was no doubt caused by population pressure, which was so grave that all available land "including cemeteries [was] put under cultivation" (Benneh 1971:74).² The intensification of cultivation in the shallot industry was only a partial solution; nor was the poultry for which the area has been traditionally noted (Winnett 1850) of much help. Again, though other occupations (especially those associated with copra which was dependent on the then ubiquitous coconut trees, salt making, *kente* weaving and trading) were available, they were not satisfactory enough to resist the appeal of the rich coastal areas of Benin (Dahomey) and Nigeria. Other factors concerned the favourable conditions created throughout the region following the cessation of the wars and the increasing use of European money. For instance, the transfer of Togo from German to French hands meant that only one colonial administration separated Ghana (Gold Coast) and Nigeria which were both under British rule.

Local Full-Timers and Migrant Companies

For a proper and thorough appraisal of the reasons behind people's decisions to move towards full-time fishing there is the need to consider the backgrounds of those who turned to fishing, their individual socioeconomic circumstances and their attitudes towards the profession, that is, the extent to which they considered it dangerous, risky and hazardous both physically and financially.

Since Jorion purports to make his law applicable to full-time fishermen of all kinds throughout the world, he does not find it necessary to distinguish between the various types of Anlo fishermen beyond categorizing them into full-timers and part-timers. For our purposes, in addition to this broad division, there is the need to separate local sedentary full-time fishermen from the migrant full-time ones since their modes of operation and socioeconomic circumstances are sometimes quite different.

Jorion also seems to have lumped together both the plights and opportunities of company owners and those of ordinary company members. In view of the differences in the risks taken by the two groups, it would be ill-advised not to consider them separately, at least among the Anlo. It is also necessary to emphasize the point that the activities of the Xwla and the Anlo-Ewe groups do not always tally. In particular, what he calls seasonal movements appear to be more prevalent among the former than the latter who rarely practise it, if at all. Again among the Anlo the migrants who return home for periods of up to three or four months do so in order to attend to family problems, to rest and to participate in local social and community affairs. Only occasionally are they found engaging in any serious or sustained economic activities. Those who remain at home for longer periods (but still temporarily) invariably simply join local companies or take to lagoon fishing. Company owners can leave the business in the hands of others while they take this time off.

Several considerations may necessitate a fisherman's permanent return home. What he does on his return will be determined to a large extent by the factors responsible for his decision as well as his status, that is, whether he is a company owner or ordinary member. If it is just homesickness, it will be difficult to predict his activities at home. A company owner in this category may take any of the following steps: He may (1) put the business in the hands of a son or younger brother while he lives at home, (2) bring his fishing gear and equipment home to start local fishing, (3) sell off his business and go into a venture other than fishing, (4) bring his gear and equipment home and with his increased wealth combine fishing with additional ventures such as farming or trading or (5) just retire from active economic activities after selling off his business or handing it over to a son, brother or other relative. An ordinary member's options are equally open. If he is dexterous and ambitious he might have saved enough to set up a company by himself or in cooperation with one or two others. He may join a local company, take up lagoon fishing, farming or other occupation. Here it will be useful to mention that some ordinary fishermen save enough money when on migration to set up their own companies. While some of these remain in their residence or move to foreign shores, others return home to operate locally in order to enjoy the prestige and power which go with company ownership. The options mentioned are based on concrete examples, some of which will be substantiated as the article unfolds.

The Risk Element

Jorion's law is predicted on the assertion that full-time fishing is so risky and hazardous that only those who are economically hard-pressed will be forced to take it up. There is no doubt at all that risks of all kinds beset the fishing industry, both physically and financially. Physically the hazards associated with it are particularly serious and often fatal: drowning, encounters with sharks and other predators, injuries from handling the boats and such like present grave dangers to fishermen. The normal schedules of work are equally demanding, especially during the high season when extreme weather conditions serve as no excuse and sleepless nights may be routine. These physical hardships directly involve the ordinary fisherman, however, not the company owner and other leaders of the group, though the latter naturally share the concerns of their subordinates.

It must be pointed out that fishing is by no means the only high-risk occupation. Moreover, to use the level of risk to formulate a law as Jorion has done ignores personal interest and the liking people have for specific occupations. Fatalities and serious injuries are much higher in car and motor cycle racing, in boxing, flying, driving and some other occupations; but many, if not most, who take these up, do so not because they are forced by economic hardships but rather because of their liking for them and their financial rewards. Sometimes even the financial aspect becomes either secondary or irrelevant. Their occupations have become part and parcel of their lives. One has to remember that many of those who become fishermen along the Anlo coast virtually grow up with the sea. By

about age ten, they have already mastered the art of swimming and acquired the skills to join the fishing expeditions. Those who come from inland areas and are not initially conversant with the sea take to maritime fishing because of its financial rewards and their admiration for the industry and its practitioners. Due to their background, they have to learn seafaring on the job. For these and those who grow up by the sea (so to speak) there is no element of compulsion or of being forced into it under duress or necessity. One simply has to listen to these fishermen recalling some of their famous exploits at sea, the challenges they faced and the heroism required to meet them, their big catches, the big monies they earned, etc. etc. Again during the off season, when they appear idle, they look forward to the onset of the next season, no doubt with some financial motive, but also for the joy the activities bring, because fishing is their life.

If fishermen were always forced into the occupation under duress, it would be reflected in their everyday discussions, their folklore and their music. If the hazards of their profession were foremost in their minds, they would not keep silent about it. Yet no one considers it worth thinking about or mentioning. The Anlo saying that death is everywhere applies to the fisherman as it does to everyone else. But when it happens in the course of active service, through accident of one kind or another, it is treated in the same way as any other death or mishap. The attitude towards it is never different, nor do people tend to panic as a result.

In terms of the financial risks one may well start by noting that but for the sea and the lagoon, the Anlo physical environment (especially its coastal strip) may be counted among the harshest. Poor soils, unpredictable rains, flooding alternating with drought and sea erosion, all add up to a rather unpleasant habitat. But any visitor to the Anlo coast can only be impressed by the achievements of the people. The quality of their housing alone is sufficient to tell him he is in an area which is, at least, less poor than most parts of Ghana and Togo. The Accra road touches the littoral between Atorkor and Srogbe and from that point to Kedzi and beyond all the houses are built of concrete blocks with roofs of corrugated iron, aluminium or asbestos sheets. The traditional mud and thatch houses have been completely replaced, all within the last forty years or so, and today nobody goes in for the traditional type. In terms of education the Anlo coast has more than its fair share of facilities, with five secondary schools and a technical institute along the coast alone and an equal number north of the lagoon. In Ghana today this is a great achievement for a District when it is noted that most of these schools have been built through local rather than government initiative. Furthermore, the area is very well represented in government, commerce and the professions.

We mentioned only two aspects of contemporary developments in Anlo to show how the harsh environment has never prevented progress and modernization in the area. Two factors can be identified as the principal reasons for this. The first is the highly successful and extensively studied shallot industry centred mainly around the traditional Anlo capital of Anloga and extending across the western littoral from Atiteti right up to the vicinity of Dzelukope (see especially Grove 1966; Benneh 1971; Hill 1986; Nukunya 1975, 1978). The other is the fish-

ing industry. The fact that the latter has at least partly helped in changing the Anlo landscape and enriching its human resources is an indication that the risk element mentioned by Jorion is exaggerated. The financial rewards of fishing may come in fits and starts and assembling the financial outlay may be quite demanding, but the cumulative effect, the end result, is usually worth the trouble. One has to be careful here. We are by no means belittling the risk element. Neither are we extolling the financial returns associated with the industry. As we have mentioned earlier, any economic venture carries an element of financial risk. It is a question of degree. On the evidence, however, the financial returns of the industry are satisfactory.

It is quite appropriate that in discussing this particular issue the circumstances of the company owners should be distinguished from those of the members just as we did in the case of physical risks. Here it is the owners who carry the greatest, if not the sole burden. Concentrate for the moment on the seine, the most popular of the methods in the area: in order to form a company, one needs a boat, a net and other accessories to start with. For local operations, the items just mentioned should be sufficient. In monetary terms it comes to something like the following: boat including transportation from the forest zone: £1,000,000, net and ropes £1,500,000. In addition one needs initial mending instruments and threads which may also cost up to £100,000. Altogether, therefore, one needs an initial outlay of something close to £3,000,000 which according to the present exchange rate of £360 to one dollar will amount to just below \$8,500.

For migratory expeditions more items of expenditure are required including transportation of both the fishing gear and the men as well as their dependants and their families. The company owner, in addition, has to provide advances for his men to the current tune of between £10,000 to £50,000 each, that is, for about thirty men.³ For international expeditions, customs duties, cross-border bribes and extortions should also be considered. Clearly transportation costs vary according to distance and whether or not international boundaries have to be crossed. For trips to Mumford, Elmina and Half-Assini, the current popular spots in Ghana, distance alone matters. But for the more daring expeditions to Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone and still further afield, much more than transportation costs is involved. Thus, apart from the initial expenses on equipment of up to £3,000,000 or \$8,500, an expedition to Freetown or Congo or Gabon will require an extra capital of about £2,500,000 or about \$7,000, making a total outlay on the equipment and the trip of about \$15,500. Equivalent figures for the Ghanaian centres may range between \$10,000 and \$12,000.

To get the kind of monetary value we are talking about in local (Ghanaian) terms we just have to remember that this is a country in which the gross annual salaries and allowances of top civil servants and university professors average about \$1,000. The question then arises as to how these rural, mostly illiterate entrepreneurs, manage to get their capital and what kind of risks they run or face. A study of selected company owners from Woe, Cape St. Paul, reveals a variety of sources. A town of about 5,200 inhabitants (cf. Population 1984), it has twenty-two local companies and at least twenty others operating elsewhere.

Of the number outside, only those maintaining regular contacts with their hometown are included. The fact is that many emigrants from the town have made a permanent home in their places of domicile and are very difficult to study. These permanent homes are mainly in western Nigeria (between Badagry and Lagos) and in Abidjan, in the Ivory Coast.

Biographical sketches of two local company owners and six emigrant ones give us some idea about the sources of funding. Mr. E.K. Gbedemah, 48, made his money as a policeman and (on leaving the service after the overthrow of the Nkrumah regime) in 1967 established a commercial transport business. In the 1970s he sold his vehicles and set up a fishing company which was locally based. He now runs three large passenger buses together with his fishing business. Fugo, the second man, is about the same age as Gbedemah. He belongs to a prominent family of fishermen, his grandfather having formed his first company as early as 1928. In 1959 the company moved to Half-Assini, in the Western Region of Ghana, with Fugo, then a young man, a member. Through Fugo's initiative and drive a second company was formed which he brought home in 1975.

One of the prominent emigrant companies from Woe is one operated by Dogbevi, 55, a grandchild of one of the earliest net owners. In the 1950s the company migrated to Half-Assini where it is still based and has grown into two, with Dogbevi the owner of one and his paternal cousin Kofi the owner of the other. Both are actually run by Dogbevi because Kofi is in charge of the family shallot farm at home. Another well-known company is that of Nani, a man of outstanding personality and forceful character. His father was a farmer of modest means and he himself started life as a farmer. In the late 1940s he formed a local company which he eventually took to Half-Assini in 1950. He now lives at Woe while the company at Half-Assini is run by one of his sons. The example of Hanyabui (Hale Baya), 60, is also quite instructive. As a young man he was a driver's mate and from his savings he acquired his own second-hand passenger lorry in 1957. In 1968 he sold the lorry and purchased a large long distance motor trawler based at Tema Port. When he found this somewhat unmanageable, he sold it to his younger brother and formed a seine company which he is now running at Elmina in the Central Region of Ghana. Of the companies operating in Abidjan, one of the most successful is that of Butsome, a lady of about 75. The company was originally formed by her husband and taken there in the 1930s. Her trading activities helped to sustain the company when things started to go bad in the 1960s. On the husband's return home in 1960 and eventual death in 1968, she became the effective owner of the company which is now run by her son. Equally of interest is the case of Agbodogli, 59, also a son of a company owner. His father and his twin brother took their separate companies to Abidjan in 1936. While his father was still alive, he set up his own company in 1965. On his father's death in 1968 he took over the company which he runs together with his own. But perhaps the most spectacular example and the most recent is the case of Kudo, 55, originally a mason (bricklayer) by profession. In 1975 he left for Abidjan with virtually no capital to practise his trade among the migrant fishing community there. After only three years he abandoned his original profession to set up a fishing company.

The eight examples just given of Woe company owners (though by no means exhaustive) are quite representative of the area. From this we can see that these entrepreneurs come from varied backgrounds, though they can be roughly divided into two main groups. There are those who hail from longstanding fishing families and have grown to take over, or build upon, what their forbears had started or left. The other group, whose backgrounds are also varied, can be described as hardworking, self-made and ambitious people who want to make a successful living from the fishing business. They see in the business an opportunity to make more money and leave behind not only enough wealth but also a prosperous business for their children and relations. This second group comprises people who made money in other occupations and professions and used it to start the fishing business, while the first is made up of those who inherited the business from their forebears. Even in the case of the latter, the original fund for the fishing industry came from other occupations, especially trading. Where the need arises to borrow, this is only to supplement capital already obtained from a previous enterprise. No one starts maritime fishing only with borrowed money. In any case, no money lender will lend money to anyone without a strong financial standing. All this adds up to the fact that company owners are people who are men and women of substance, people who are already well-to-do and want to improve their financial standing by investing in the fishing business. In fact, the histories and experiences of these people are so fascinating and diverse that they raise many interesting issues into which we cannot go in this paper.

As for the question of financial risks, it is perhaps sufficient to say that the fact that the business has continued to flourish from generation to generation in many families, and new entrepreneurs are continuously entering it must be a pointer to the low priority this factor occupies in the minds of these enterprising people. Naturally there are failures and the level of success differs considerably. But success or profitability of business owes to many considerations of which the nature of the profession is only one. Thrift, management, hard work, organizational ability, good human relations and leadership qualities, among others, are always necessary. There is also the need to have a successor (son, brother or other relative) to carry on the operation after the death of the original owner. These are required in any business enterprise; that is why there are always failures as well as successes because not everyone has the required qualities in the correct proportions. But the profession continues and new people are joining it, with many more contemplating to do so, not under duress, but because it offers good income to those who follow it with the right approach and ability.

The financial guarantees of the business can be seen in the fact that company owners are easily among the richest men, not only at Woe but also in all the settlements along the littoral, with the exception of Anloga, where the seine fishing tradition has never really caught on, as we have discussed elsewhere (Nukunya 1975) and will return to later in this paper. Their names always remind one of the industry and what it stands for, that is, wealth. In the immediate vicinity of Keta, for instance, the names which readily come to mind include Binah, Dovo, Gavor, Zagbede and Zaglago and around Woe, Avawayi, Nani, Dekpe,



Anlɔ-Ewe fishermen mending their nets before going on to the next trip, Borliānor beach, Accra.

Gadah, Gafatsi, Zagada and Anthonio II may be mentioned. It is worthy of note that Anthonio II was the chief of Woe and a prominent leader in the Anlɔ traditional area. It is also a fact that beyond the lagoon and elsewhere in Anlɔ country few approach these company owners in wealth and influence, and all except the chief are full-time fishermen.

As noted earlier, Jorion never mentions whether he is concerned with the financial risks of company owners only or included the ordinary members as well. What constitutes a risk of this nature for the owner is not difficult to identify. The financial outlay is considerable and inadequate returns could land one in deep trouble from which one may never recover. For the ordinary member, however, the position is quite different since he does not directly invest in the business. But he also runs some risk. If a migrant, he normally takes an advance to prepare him for the trip. On reaching the company's destination and place of operation he begins receiving monthly pocket money which together with the advance has to be repaid at the end of the tour. Here the understanding is that the payments will be made from the proceeds of the expedition and nothing else and therefore the risk weighs heavier on the owner than on the recipient member of the company. Of course the latter as a responsible person who takes along his family on such a trip must expect something to show for his work at the end of the period which may run from eighteen months to three years.

It will be unrealistic and even naive to suggest or imagine that every expedition is successful or profitable. In 1987, for instance, on the return of one company from Abidjan, the members waited for over six months before their leader managed to render accounts to them. This would definitely entail considerable suffering by the members during the interim period. Such people would have to depend on their relatives and friends or money lenders while awaiting their share of the proceeds. Sometimes even when the proceeds are shared promptly, the deductions leave some with very little take-home income. Though they and their families have been fed during the period of the expeditions, a low net income could be a serious disappointment. But these setbacks are exceptions rather than the rule. The end result of most expeditions is a joyous and triumphal return home with new clothing provided by the company for both men and women as well as children. Moreover, competition among companies over the size of their shares and the threat of possible desertion or boycott of a company due to cheating, cruelty or something unbecoming, are important reminders and sanctions that ensure equity, fair play and pleasant ending to many trips. Also to be noted is the fact that marketing and curing of the fish, done by the wives, relations and friends make up substantial supplementary incomes to many families and may serve as veritable insurance against any unforeseen financial mishap. There are also certain associate members of the companies who go on their



A typical scene on the beach near Keta.

own to carry on non-fishing activities to provide some essential services to the companies. These include masons, tailors, carpenters, diviners, et al. Though their fortunes are linked with those of their companies, the importance of their professions may insulate them against any seasonal failures, putting them in a position to help their relatives. Whatever its importance, however, their position is not germane to our thesis and a passing reference is enough. The point of our argument is that the migratory expedition has enough self-reinforcing mechanisms to make it an attractive and lucrative venture.

If the migratory expeditions are generally rewarding, how do they compare with the local operations, at least for the ordinary company member? To answer this question it is important to remember that the main reason given for the tendency of the Anlo fisherman to migrate is the belief that the home shores are being overfished. This will suggest that there are too many nets chasing the limited supply of stock. Nonetheless, considerable fishing still goes on and the area may be regarded as one of the busiest fishing communities in the world. In 1958-59 there were about 900 canoes between Anloga and Aflao, a distance of 30 miles, of which 839 were used with seine nets (Grove 1966:405). Thus the figure of 466 canoes counted in 1986 between Blekusu and Atiteti, a shoreline of roughly the same distance in the same vicinity, is by no means inflated as Jorion seems to suggest (Jorion 1988:135). If anything, it rather shows the depletion of the fishing fleet due to increased emigration and the recent tendency to develop bigger nets and companies. Even at the level of 466, however, the number of canoes for the area is considerable, emphasizing the continued importance of fishing as the dominant occupation of the Anlo coast.

The Nature and Amount of the Catch

Some earlier accounts of maritime fishing along the Anlo coast give the impression that it was solely dominated by the catch of *afafa* (*Caranx hippos*) or horse mackerel (Halcrow 1956; Lawson 1958; Hilton 1962). However, the importance of other aspects of the industry has been recognized in the more recent studies especially in the works of Hill (1963-64, 1970, 1986), Grove (1966) and Wyllie (1969). Though *afafa* still occupies an essential place in the area's fishing, it is by no means the only important feature. Three major seasons are recognized, namely *afafa* which lasts between September and December, *amuba* which follows this (December to May) characterized by a mixture of fish including cassava fish (*cynoscion* spp.), silver eel, mackerel, barracuda, *vomer gibbiceps* of which the local name is *ngogba*, and sole, among others, and thirdly the herring and anchovy season which lasts from July to August (Nukunya 1978:45, 64). The seasons do not allow daily or even continuous weekly activities. They are seasons in the sense that within these periods the activities centre around catches of these various types of fish. Sometimes the minor seasons within these major seasons may last for a day or two or even ten days or two weeks interspersed with days or weeks of no activity at all. Nor do the minor seasons always occur simultaneously throughout the region. They stagger and overlap and the composition of

the catches may also differ from place to place. Even during the *afafa* season other types of fish may be fished for.

An indication of the amount and value of the catches is that at the height of the *afafa* season a good daily catch by a single company can reach eight thousand, and sometimes catches of fifteen thousand have been reported, though the latter figure is quite rare. One procedure about the *afafa* operation is that the fish are shared on the day of the catch, therefore allowing no manipulation of accounts of any kind. The division is usually two to one after expenses have been accounted for, with the company owner taking one part and the crew two. Members of the company then share their portion equally with only additional numbers for special officeholders and smaller portions for children. A catch of 4,500 may mean between 25 and 30 fish for the ordinary company member on a single day. Some successful companies could make catches of up to 40,000 in a season. It should be added that the horse mackerel is a fairly big fish, the adults weighing between 10 to 20 pounds. In 1988 it cost £5,000 or about \$15, enough to buy at least three bags of cement or one bag of maize. But the seasons are not always good and for the past twenty-five years the amount of catches has gone down considerably, a fact which has been blamed on the Akosombo Dam whose construction has been said to have adversely affected the spawning habits of the fish. Today with even bigger nylon nets good catches could exceed the former maximum of 15,000, but they are rather few and far between with more modest catches of between 500 and 2,000 a time more common. But at £5,000 even these modest catches can sometimes earn the ordinary man an income comparable to that of most government employees and other salaried people in the area. When supplemented by earnings from other seasons, annual earnings of over £150,000 are not uncommon. Occasionally also many companies earn some windfall giving them a vintage season which can be the envy of even the most prosperous migrant company owner or the *afafa* operator in a good tour. That was the fortune of Mr. Gbedemah, mentioned earlier, who in 1987 and twice the following year netted hauls of the adult giant species of the cassave fish (*cynoscion* spp.) in excess of 15,000 on each occasion. At the 1988 generous price of £2,000 for a fish weighing over twenty pounds one catch fetched about £30,000,000! Such a windfall is, however, rare and not evenly distributed. It may come once in a long while, but it does happen, and for some lucky ones like Mr. Gbedemah Lady Luck may be a regular visitor! The long and short of what we are saying is this: Fishing is an unpredictable occupation especially for the local full-time ordinary company members. But their lot is not hopeless. Their incomes compare favourably with those of their counterparts in farming and other occupations. The large fish content of their diet means also that they eat better than their counterparts.⁴ The changes in the Anlo landscape we mentioned earlier have not been brought about by company owners and shallot farmers alone but also by these ordinary hardworking company members.

The conclusion to be drawn from the preceding pages and paragraphs is that full-time fishing involves risks to both the company owner and the ordinary company member. For the former the risks are mainly financial, while for the latter

they are largely physical. But in a sense each shares part of the risk of the other as well. However, it has been noted that the risks involved are not peculiar to fishing and for all the categories of fishermen involved the monetary returns more than compensate for the risk element. Moreover, it has been shown that despite the risks people don't enter the occupation under duress but either for the love of it or for its financial rewards.

Alternatives to Full-Time Fishing

The second part of Jorion's law asserts that people turn to full-time fishing only because they have nothing else to do, so dangerous and precarious is the profession. Having dealt with the risk element we wish now to tackle this second aspect. Here it would have been seen from what we have been saying about the backgrounds of some of the company owners that factors other than necessity have motivated their entry into the professions. Some were born into it, some left other jobs to follow it, while others make it a goal of their lives.

In order to fully address this issue it is necessary to know a little bit more about the habitat and some of the other economic activities the environment offers. For this purpose the littoral has to be divided into two, namely the side to the northeast of Keta and the side to the southwest. In the former, the land area between the lagoon and the sea is so narrow, mostly less than half a mile, that very little cultivation is possible. The only areas wider than this are Denu and Aflao, especially the latter where cultivation is quite important. Despite its narrowness this northeastern part in the past supported a flourishing copra industry before the trees were destroyed in the 1940s and 1950s by the Cape St. Paul wilt.⁵ The southwestern portion, with its wider land area, supports a variety of crops of which shallots have become the principal sort, as well as coconuts before the outbreak of the disease which indeed originated from this section. On both sides of Keta, lagoon fishing (which preceded maritime fishing) is an important preoccupation of many and in the pre-seine days occupied the majority of the people. Other precolonial occupations throughout the littoral included the weaving of the local *kete* or Keta (*Kente*) cloth,⁶ wicker-basket weaving and spinning with locally grown cotton (Grove and Johansen 1968:1388). The coastal fringes of the lagoon also yield considerable amounts of salt in the dry season which has for long formed an important article of trade and income for the locals (ibid.:1386).

Before the emergence of shallots, copra and the seine, however, it was for poultry that the area was noted. Monrad for instance, giving an account of observations he made during the period 1805 to 1809, had this to say:

Near (Fort) Prindsenstein (Keta) poultry abounds, which is for the greater part sold to the fort, the commander of which profits considerably from selling it on to ships that come in to the fort in order to provision . . . Hardly anywhere do we want poultry, but there are turkish ducks everywhere, several kinds of chicken and even turkeys and guinea fowl. I have sometimes seen the ships so well provisioned with them that they looked like large floating poultry houses (quoted in Grove and Johansen 1968:1407).

Again in 1850, Winnett, the British Governor of the Gold Coast who took over the Danish Fort (Prindsenstein) at Keta, reported the importance of the industry in his Journal thus:

Bounteous nature supplies the natives with an ample share of the necessities of life: turkeys, ducks, fowls, bullocks, sheep, goats, etc., abound along this part of the coast ... Indeed it was from this part of the country that nearly all the livestock consumed by the Europeans and respectable natives

throughout the Gold Coast was supplied (Winnett 1950, 30 March). Forty years later, in 1891, Keta was still "the poultry market of the Gold Coast" according to the Government Census Report of the year (Census Report 1891:11). Today, although Keta does not occupy such a prominent position in this regard, poultry is still important in the area's economy. "Almost every Anlo settlement is a poultry farm, where fowls, goats, sheep and pigs are reared, but the cattle population is now quite small" (Nukunya 1978:11; see also Nukunya 1969:6-8).

The brief sketch of the economy of the Anlo coast is meant partly to list the range of economic opportunities and potentials in the area and partly to show that fishing as a full-time occupation does not have to be followed by so many people under duress. We wish to pursue the point further by examining the economic performances of the three largest settlements southwest of Keta since the introduction of the seine and the commercialization of shallot cultivation. The settlements are Anloga, Woe and Tegbi which occupy a continuous stretch of shoreline about seven miles long with the town boundaries dividing the land area almost equally among them. As their portions of the sandbar represent the widest sector, the distance between the lagoon and the sea exceeds two miles in certain areas, it is in these towns that horticulture offers a good alternative to maritime fishing. Indeed, as has been mentioned earlier, Anloga, which also happens to be the traditional capital of Anlo, is the centre of the shallot industry.

One interesting feature about these three towns is that though they lie on a continuous stretch of land which has the same physical characteristics, the economic activities of Anloga are quite different from those of Tegbi and Woe. The former's population of 19,000 (1984) is also much bigger than those of the latter two put together namely 7,900 and 5,200 respectively. The entire indigenous population of Anloga is engaged in shallot cultivation, the only exceptions being the few hundred artisans, tradesmen, and those engaged in salaried employment in government, commercial and educational institutions. For reasons which we shall give later, the seine fishing tradition has never really caught on at Anloga. As a result, there has been a more intensive and judicious utilization of the available land for cultivation. Hardly a space in Anloga remains fallow for even a shallot season of three months. At Tegbi and Woe, however, this is not the case. Though they are equally important as shallot growing areas, seine fishing is also important. Consequently, many tracts of potential cultivable land have remained untapped. The owners have either left for fishing expeditions elsewhere or taken up local fishing. It is also interesting to note that due to this development

some farms at Woe and Tegbi are actually worked by Anloga farmers under various kinds of arrangements including sharecropping and the *woba* system of pledging shallot growing lands (see especially Nukunya 1973:76-78; 1975:62-63; 1978:32-36). In the opposite direction we have companies from neighbouring towns operating at Anloga.

Since seine fishing often leads to emigration on fishing expeditions enquiries have shown that Tegbi and Woe have less stable populations than Anloga. This in turn explains the differences in the population densities of Anloga, on the one hand, and those of Tegbi and Woe, on the other. But the position is not as simple as that. Anloga as the traditional capital has always been bigger than its neighbours. The earliest records we have of the population of the area do not give specific figures. In 1784, for instance, Woe was described as a large town yet "slightly smaller than Anloga" yet bigger than Keta. It had an army of 400 men, compared with 1,000 for Anloga, 70 for Tegbi and 100 for Alakple (Grove and Johansen 1968; Nukunya 1987:10). By the earliest time for which accurate figures are available (1948), Tegbi had grown to the same size as Anloga while Woe had shrunk to less than half of both. The population developments for the three towns since then are presented in Table 1.

Woe's comparatively small population in 1948 can be explained by the fact that the exodus of fishermen started much earlier there.

At the beginning of 1926 many people from the town left for Badagri in Nigeria on fishing expeditions. This migration affected both the church and the school as many parents went along with their children including school pupils. This virtually destroyed the school as the number of pupils fell dramatically, forcing the ... Director of Education to close down the Junior school (Nukunya 1987:20).

The emigration at Tegbi occurred much later and appeared much more gradual although it is now virtually on the same scale. But at Anloga where no seine fishing is done on any appreciable scale, the migration for fishing purposes has been virtually unknown. In this connection it is instructive to note that while in 1948 Anloga and Tegbi had about the same number of inhabitants, only twelve

Table 1. *Populations of Anloga, Woe and Tegbi, 1948-1984**

Year	Anloga	Woe	Tegbi
1948	6,358	2,977	6,773
1960	11,038	3,450	5,924
1970	14,032	4,060	6,628
1984	19,100	5,200	7,900

* The 1984 figures are available only to the nearest hundred. Source: Population (1984:92), and Report (1962, Vol. 1) which also contains the 1948 figures.

years later in 1960 Anloga's had increased by 5,000 while that of Tegbi actually dropped by over 800. The difference between the two population figures had increased to over 7,000 by 1970 and 12,000 in 1984. Though the population of Woe has been increasing steadily, it is clear that of the three places it has suffered most from the emigration process.

The lessons to draw from this population differences are of vital significance for our purposes. The first is that population pressure, poverty of the soil and harsh environment need not lead to embracing full-time fishing as a profession. Secondly, the evidence suggests that the relative absence of emigration at Anloga, which in turn has led to a rapid growth of its population, has been caused by a more extensive and effective use of their land area for cultivation than has been the case at both Tegbi and Woe. Thirdly, the fact that these differences developed despite uniformity of habitat and ecological factors shows that alternative occupations do exist for the people of the Anlo coast other than an ineluctable recourse to full-time fishing. Finally, we suggest that the inhabitants of Woe and Tegbi together with their brothers northeast of Keta chose to take up fishing and to remigrate partly because of their inability or unwillingness to stay at home and engage in intensive agriculture and partly because they find fishing more congenial and more lucrative.

No definite point can be made about the relative profitability of shallot farming and full-time maritime fishing. Without a doubt successful company owners are much richer than most, if not all, shallot farmers. As for the ordinary fishermen the least that can be said about them is that in terms of achievement, measured in buildings, clothes and food habits they can hold their own against the average farmer. One point which should not be forgotten, however, is that financial risks are not unknown in shallot cultivation. Unreliable rains, drought, flooding and pests can result in complete crop failures some of which can render a farmer without any funds for many years. These hazards do occur quite frequently (Nukunya 1978:7-8, 45-48). Thus neither shallot cultivation nor full-time fishing is a safe escape route from the harsh environment. They are both problematic. *But is there any profession without risks?*

Before concluding, however, we wish to enlarge a bit on the different approaches adopted to the environment by Anloga and its neighbours not only Tegbi and Woe but also those further to the east as far as Kedzi and Blekusu. In earlier comments on the enterprise of Anlo fishermen we observed that by the time the seine was introduced in the area, the coastal Anlo had already gained considerable entrepreneurial experience by several decades of trade with Europeans (Nukunya 1978:198-202). They had also, we might add, learnt the art and the skill to deal with the sea. If this is accepted, then the inability of Anloga to take up the challenge posed by the seine may be explained by its inability to participate in this early European trade. The main reason is that up to about 1900, Europeans were practically banned from Anloga only by virtue of the fact that they used to ride on horseback or by horse carriage. This is because the horse is sacred to Nyigbla, the Anlo War God whose main shrine is at Anloga. Therefore, it has always been taboo for horses to enter Anloga and its immediate en-

vironments. Since Keta was the first port of call for the Europeans, and the location of their fort, the nearest they could get to Anloga was Woe, which was also a very important European centre. Indeed, apart from Keta, Dzelukofe and Woe were the important victualling centres. As we have already seen, the seine was introduced into the area by a woman from Woe, Afedima. Thus following the developments of the wake of the First World War, which made the seine an important investment and emigration a lucrative undertaking, the people of Anloga found themselves unprepared to take any advantage of it. They therefore did the only obvious thing, namely to make the best of a bad situation by concentrating on agriculture for which they are now very famous.

Conclusion

Jorion is correct in designating full-time maritime fishing as a risky profession. But as we have tried to show the risk element is never a factor seriously considered by the fishermen themselves. Moreover, risk is an aspect of business and there is hardly any profession which is completely devoid of it. It is a matter of degree. Full-time fishing may be a high risk occupation, but people pursue it not because they cannot find anything else to do. They do so because they like it and know that the financial returns are good. Also, as the Anloga case has shown, a harsh environment such as the one we find along the Anlo coast, offers many alternatives, of which fishing is only one and shallot cultivation another.

A universal law ceases to be one when a significant exception is found to it. In the case of Jorion's, the exception is particularly relevant since the law derives directly from the data we have used to disprove it. As far as we are concerned, people turn to full-time fishing not under duress but voluntarily. We therefore opt for the traditional sociological or anthropological position he tries to debunk, that maritime fishing is "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" (Jorion 1988:133). This is exactly what has happened among the Anlo-Ewe.

Notes

1. Anlo country represents the extreme southwestern portion of the larger group known as the Ewe who occupy southeastern Ghana, southern Togo and the southwestern coastal strip of Benin Republic. The writer is an Anlo who spent the first fifteen years of his life seven miles southwest of Keta, the administrative capital. The data presented here have come from his childhood experiences as well as from a major ethnographic survey in 1962-63 leading to his Ph.D. (London) in 1964 and many field trips since.
2. I have never seen any cemetery being used in this way, but the statement emphasizes the scarcity of land in the area, especially the portion northeast of Keta.
3. An additional risk is the possibility of a prosperous migrant getting advances from more than one company owner. Such a man may just disappear. If he is found one of the company owners may lose his money if the culprit has spent it. In some cases it may mean the eventual company

he would join paying for the money the other has lost. This double advance taking is not common but it does happen at times. (See also Hill 1970:46-47).

4. The diet of the coastal Anlo like that of their inland counterparts is dominated by corn flour and cassava dough with relish prepared with fish. Rarely is meat a regular component of the meal except on festive occasions. In this respect the littoral is better placed than the inland area mainly because the former is served by both the sea and the lagoon. On the coast the professional (full-time) fishermen definitely eat more fish than others.

5. The Cape St. Paul wilt is named after the place of its first attack. Its root cause is not officially known but it is generally believed to be an insect pest whose stings cause the death of the trees. It has wiped out considerable parts northeastward of this spot as far as the Togo border, and towards the south its effects have reached the Volta estuary.

6. *Kente* is the indigenous Ghanaian cloth traditionally woven with cotton yarn but recently also with silk. The Anlo version locally called *kete* differs from the more popular Akan (Ashanti) one mainly in its more subdued colours and design and the continued emphasis on cotton.

7. *Woba* among the Anlo-Ewe refers to the pledging of shallot beds for an indefinite period, that is, until the pledger has the funds to redeem them or the pledgee wants them redeemed. When the pledgee wants his money back at a time the pledger is not ready, the latter can repledge them to another man to get the money for the first pledgee.

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