

# Fanti and Ewe Fishermen's Migration and Settlement in Côte d'Ivoire

Karine Delaunay  
University of Paris I

## Dominance and strength of Ghanaian fishermen

### The fishermen

In Côte d'Ivoire artisanal marine fisheries are at present largely dominated by fishermen from other countries, while the Ivoirians are only represented by a few Alladian handline crews established near Abidjan. Along the rest of the coast, maritime fishing is no longer carried out, except in certain villages on an occasional basis, or to supplement the diet. However, even if it is frequently considered that Côte d'Ivoire has no maritime tradition, and although the lagoons effectively formed a protected area more favourable for fishing, sea fishing itself would appear to be an ancient occupation in the case of the Alladian who were based south of the Ebrié lagoon. This allowed for early exchanges and underwent important developments at the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition, in the east and the centre of the country, the expansion of the plantation economy and the rapid growth of industrial fishing since 1950 have turned the coastal populations away from 'traditional' fishing on an individual basis. Meanwhile, the migration of youth to the towns, the inaccessibility of the western region well into the 1970s and the growth of the 'Kroumen phenomenon' (men embarking as crew on board European vessels) did nothing to develop fishing other than as a small-scale means of subsistence.

Therefore, amongst the some 10,000 small-scale fishermen working on the Ivoirian coastline in 1989, 8,000 to 9,000 were of Ghanaian origin, especially Fante and Ewe, the others being mainly Liberian or Senegalese.<sup>1</sup> The Fante fishermen, from the central part of the Ghanaian coast, are presently settled all along Côte d'Ivoire. Their expansion, which began at the beginning of the twentieth century on several different sites along the coast, is distinguished by their great ability to adapt to ecological and/or economic conditions, both in terms of the privileged sites chosen and the techniques used.

The Ewe fishermen (Anlo/awlan)<sup>2</sup> from the east of Ghana (more rarely from Togo) have mainly settled in the Abidjan area since the 1930s. Their settling in Côte d'Ivoire is characterized by a certain stability in their place of settlement and in their fishing strategies (see Table 1).

The Fante and the Ewe are the two main groups of Ghanaian origin. A community of Ga line-fishermen from the Accra area has also settled in Abidjan since the 1970s. As for the Nanakrou, organized in small units of 1 or 2 line fishermen from Liberia, and

The evolution of Ghanaian artisanal fisheries in Côte d'Ivoire

Periods	1st phase: beginning XX cent. - 1970	Ca 1950: BEGINNING OF INDUSTRIAL FISHERIES	2nd phase: 1950 - 1970	Ca. 1970: BEGINNING OF FROZEN FISH IMPORTS	3rd phase: since 1970
General characteristics	First Ghanaian fishing settlements in various points along the Ivorian shore.		Opening of Abidjan port and development of industrial fisheries. Artisanal fisheries in crises.		Stagnation of industrial fisheries production. Rapid increase of frozen fish import. New impetus for the artisanal fisheries and that of the Fante in particular.
Fante fishermen	Establishment of camps in the coastal ports, main axis being Gd Bassam. Abidjan. Exportation of fish towards Ghana. Use of encircling sardinella gillnets ( <i>adi</i> ) from motorized canoes; use of setnets ( <i>tenga</i> ), also from non-motorized canoes.	Ca 1950: BEGINNING OF INDUSTRIAL FISHERIES	Geographical and numerical reduction, abandonment of the Abidjan area. Focus of settlements-west in SW C.I. (Sassandra). End of fish exports to Ghana. Use of <i>tenga</i> set-nets from small non-motorized canoes; decline of <i>adi</i> first and then revival linked (?) to the introduction of the motorized canoes around 1960. A few attempts of adopting the beach seine.		New geographical and numerical expansion with greater density of settlements along the Ivorian coast. Diffusion of the purse seine ( <i>seeg</i> ) from large motorized canoes, reconversion of the <i>adi</i> into common drift net. Use of <i>boso</i> drift nets from motorized canoes, <i>tenga</i> nets employed from small non-motorized canoes.
Ewe fishermen	Establishment of a settlement in Port Bouët which extends eastwards, small settlements in Tabou and Gd Lahou. Various types of beach seines ( <i>yevudi</i> ); <i>kpakpado</i> of <i>fafalo</i> for mackerels, <i>deido</i> for sardinella, <i>abodibo</i> for anchovies. Also sardinella drift net ( <i>afif</i> ). Non-motorized canoes.	Ca 1950: BEGINNING OF INDUSTRIAL FISHERIES	The fishing units try to prevail but with great financial losses while fishermen quit for jobs in the port. The Ewe women from Port-Bouët Bassam take over the trade of sardinellas landed in the port. Use of beach seine ( <i>yevudo</i> ) (the <i>kpakpado</i> tending to disappear) from non-motorized canoes. Abandonment of the <i>afif</i> net.		Most units settle west of the Vridi canal at the expense of the Port Bouët settlement. Ewe women tend to loose their monopolistic position in trade of fish landed by the sardine vessels (sardinères). Tendency of amalgamation of the <i>yevudo</i> and the <i>abodibo</i> seines, the others having disappeared, still non-motorized canoes. Adoption of the <i>watsa</i> purse seine from large, motorized canoes - limited to the Vridi settlement.

the Senegalese line fishermen using big motorised canoes, these groups are settled to the west of Côte d'Ivoire.

### *Production*

Official statistics on small-scale sea fishing generally estimate the production at 15,000 to 20,000 t a year for the 1980s, that is less than a quarter of the total national production.<sup>3</sup> However, other estimates take this amount to more than 30,000 t a year for 1984-1985, thus comparing favourably to the tonnage landed by the industrial fleet based in the port of Abidjan (Ecoutin et al. 1990). The vitality of the small-scale sector is also shown by the noticeable development (during the last ten to fifteen years) of fishing camps in the Abidjan area (near the port) where fishing Ghanaian units came to compete with the industrial sardine fishery by providing a cheaper and better quality produce (Guingueno 1986) into the market.

Whereas in the early stages (between 1950 and 1960) the rapid development of industrial fishing may have caused a crisis for the artisanal fisheries, the latter have undergone remarkable expansion since the 1970s, while industrial production has tended to stagnate, even to diminish, and the import of frozen fish has greatly increased.<sup>4</sup>

## **Organisation of Fante and Ewe fishermen: Migratory Structures in Côte d'Ivoire**

### *Fishing Camp: Establishment Structures<sup>5</sup>*

The Ghanaian fishermen's campsites, presently located all along the Ivoirian coast, make up the backbone of migration movements: they form a series of permanent reception centres around which seasonal movements and migrations as such<sup>6</sup> between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, and along the Ivoirian coastline, are organized.

Retracing the history of these camps exposes the fishermen's migrations, not as a straight-forward phenomenon only motivated by the search for fish, but as an expansion movement. Multipolar from the start, it is marked by advances and retreats related to ecological conditions and to the evolution of commercial outlets.

Fante and Ewe fishing camps are of different composition, the two groups having followed different patterns of expansion. It is also rare to find Fante and Ewe fishermen in the same camp, and in the few cases this occurs (e.g. Vridi), they form two different communities, each having their own chief, organisation, etc.

Fante camps are made up of clusters of fishing units whose numbers vary from one site to another depending on the time of the year. The permanent campsite structure is ensured by a nucleus of practically sedentary fishermen, some of whom perform prominent roles, such as headman and head fisherman. Although each camp practices numerous techniques, some specialisation according to type of production does occur in camps within the same area. For instance, Sassandra is an important centre for landing sardinella, while nearby Drewin is reputed for its rock lobster production.

Among the Ewe, to the contrary, technical specialisation according to campsite is very clear. In the Vridi camp near Abidjan the units use purse seines while the other camps specialise in beach seining. In the latter case, because of the contiguity of teams along the coast, every unit tends to form an autonomous entity. However, a certain

coherence is ensured in each sector by the presence of a headman, who is at the same time judge in internal matters and community representative in external matters. Despite the wide sphere of influence his authority does not extend to the economic domain as it does among the Fante.

### *Fishing units<sup>7</sup>*

A survey carried out in August and September 1989 on the Alladian coast (Ewe fishermen using beach seines) and at Sassandra (Fante), coupled with various interviews with camp headmen and craft owners, allows us to understand certain socio-economic characteristics of the units.

Generally, the boats belong to a sole owner and rarely to a group of owners. This is usually a man of Ghanaian origin, more rarely a woman or an Ivoirian.<sup>8</sup> The team is recruited in Ghana for a specific length of time, at the end of which the sharing of profits takes place back home after making accounts of expenses and earnings. However, the fishermen are sometimes recruited on the spot, in which case the earnings are shared out on a daily (in fish) weekly or monthly (in cash) basis. Married fishermen are accompanied by their wives while bachelors travel alone or with a 'sister' (real or otherwise). Although not truly a part of the unit, these women have an important role to fulfil in the smoking and selling of the fish. Usually the women buy the fish from the fishermen but only pay for it after it has been sold at the market, the profit made on the sale being theirs to pocket (any loss also being their responsibility). Thus each unit is associated with a group of women who sell the produce.

The surveys also highlighted certain existing differences between Fante and Ewe units. Ewe units use the same gear all year round. Beach seine units are large groups of about thirty men, 'the sons of the net' (*edovio*), recruited in Ghana on a 5 year contract. These groups are characterised by the need to preserve the capital invested, combining a collective management of expenses with a share system which favours the owner (sharing into four shares being the most common) on the one hand; and on the other hand by their longevity which sometimes spans successive generations through patrilineal inheritance. The Ewe owners also form a close-knit group with those who have been 'successful' at the centre: those who have managed to put together several nets and are therefore at the head of several fishing units.

The nets used by the Fante units are of several types. In addition, the units using purse seines often have secondary gear at their disposal for seasonal use. The teams are made up of 3 to 15 fishermen according to the gear used. Both the ways in which the teams are put together and the share systems appear to vary. A contract is not necessarily signed upon recruitment and usually extends to no more than 2 or 3 years. In the case of purse seines units in Sassandra for example, the most frequently used system of sharing gives 3 shares to each input (canoe, motor, net) and one share to each fisherman. The running costs (fuel and everyday net maintenance) are charged to the units while repairs, replacements and investments are solely the owner's responsibility (however, the latter may borrow from the communal account). Generally speaking, such units sell their catches not only to the fishermen's wives, but also to other women with whom they do business in order to have access to cash whenever needed. In the case of the smaller

fishing units using set nets, relations of production are more linked to domestic relations (father – son and husband – wife) or to associations.

Besides, if at present most of the units are run on the basis of single ownership, in the early 1960s collective ownership was very frequent (cf. de Surgy). Lastly, the longevity of a fishing unit appeared shorter and the concentration of the means of production by one person appeared less frequent and less important than among Ewe fishermen.

#### *Migration factors*

In most cases the fishing units presently found in Sassandra and especially on the Alladian coast were created in Côte d'Ivoire, even though the owners primarily came with units created in Ghana. This however does not imply that ties are broken with the native country or that periodical or definitive movements back do not take place.

Within the teams, operating principles imply periodical splits leading to the return of the fishermen-crew members to their native country. However, the teams are frequently centred on a core of permanent fishermen, often members of the owner's family, particularly among the Ewe. In addition, on-the-spot recruitment as practiced by some headmen and possible debts contracted with the owner are factors contributing to prolonged stays for the 'employees.'

The migrations and settlements of the fishing units tend to follow that of their owners. In this respect the Ewe units using beach seines are characterised by their permanence in Côte d'Ivoire in a limited area, even though certain owners invest in nets back home as they grow old (so as to eventually return to Ghana) or they maintain shares in 'family' nets operating in Ghana.

Although quite large cores of more or less sedentary Fante owners can be found in nearly all camps, mobility remains an important element in the operation of Fante units. It essentially occurs between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, and along the Ivoirian coastline. These temporary or seasonal moves can be motivated by the abundance of fish, but also by the prospect of better prices and the search for cash;<sup>9</sup> they can also provide the opportunity to buy cheaper equipment. In addition, a number of Fante owners might have chosen a policy of spatial risk spreading by having a boat operating in Côte d'Ivoire and another one in Ghana.

Settling in Côte d'Ivoire may have been preceded by earlier migrations to other countries, especially to Benin for the Ewe and Liberia for the Fante. I have not been able, however, to pinpoint definitive departures from Côte d'Ivoire.

#### **The Role Played by Fante and Ewe Fishermen in Côte d'Ivoire: Nomads or Settlers?**

##### *Relationships between the Ghanaian Fishermen and the Ivoirians*

Relationships between the fishermen and the Ivoirians, whether authorities or village people, are certainly complex. The nomadic nature of the Ghanaian fishermen makes them an uncontrollable and suspect population, but one cannot ignore the important impact of this same population on the economic life along the coast, directly through its fishing activities and indirectly, by the financial resources it represents and the parallel

activities it sustains. The Ghanaian fishermen amplify this economic role, but each individual knows his situation is precarious (the Ewe still recall the expulsion measures against them in 1958 and more recently Ghanaian fishermen's homes were destroyed on the Aby lagoon).

If mutual exchanges between communities are distant and distrustful, individual relationships can exist with respect to mutual favours rendered (for example, fish supply made easier in return for tolerance of certain deals).

Ivoirian politics are also complex with regard to maritime fisheries, especially to the role given to fishery centres created in the west of the country. One of their main preoccupations is supposed to encourage the native population in taking up fishing so that the country's natural resources do not enrich foreigners.<sup>10</sup> Another aspect of their activities has been the creation of cooperative groups (Groupements à Vocation Coopérative – GVC), through which fishermen have had access to loans from Ivoirian banks and to tax-free petrol. However, the enforcement of these measures has been problematic, having to come to terms with the internal organisation in the camps while adhering to a desire to modernise small-scale fishing but also to encircle and control it.

As for the spreading of fishing techniques, the Ghanaian fishermen have had little or no lasting effect on the Ivoirians; not that attempts have not been made to adopt Ghanaian techniques. The authorities even supported these efforts which they saw as a means of modernisation, but they ended up in failure.

In the case of villages of the Alladian coast which attempted to adopt the beach seines in the 1950s and 1960s,<sup>11</sup> it would appear that failure was due to sociological problems rather than a technical incapacity or a lack of know-how. These attempts appear as an achievement of the new social relationships brought about by the development of plantation agriculture. Their failure seems to stem from the fact that net owners (often important planters, chiefs or village headmen) could not pin down the village workforce they hoped to mobilise by using their hierarchical position in the lineage (the young people refused to be 'proletarianised' in this manner).

##### *Reasons Behind Migration*

Generally the fishermen explain their presence in Côte d'Ivoire by their taste for travel or the need to leave their families behind in order to make some savings; reasons noted by A. de Surgy some 25 years ago. However, these explicite personal motives appear insufficient in accounting for the complexity of the expansion process of Ghanaian fishermen in Côte d'Ivoire.

As already shown, Ewe and Fante migrations are inspired by different dynamics. For Ewe owners along the Alladian coast (beach seining), migration leads to real establishment. This has allowed the setting-up of a network of hierarchical relationships which tie the group up and in which the possession and accumulation of capital is translated in terms of social power through increased prestige. Organised in large units where the relations of production are based on kinship models, they appear to follow a 'Big Man' type of logic where the concern is the preservation of social relations rather than strict economic gains.

With regard to the Fante, migration appears to have been inspired originally by the desire to find funding sources in Ghana, outside the 'traditional' circuits, through the

creation of collectively owned units which later made possible the local emergence of a group of owners. The migratory forms underwent some modification, but the search of and for profitability and gain than appears stronger among the Ewe group. This is expressed by the greater mobility of Fante units and more diversified fishing activities. Organised in small fishing units conceived basically as working teams, the Fante appear to follow the logic of the small businessman concerned primarily with minimising risks. Thus, in as much as it is not linear, the expansion of the Ghanaian fishermen in the Côte d'Ivoire is neither uniform nor univocal.

However, if their presence in Côte d'Ivoire appears to be the result of the above phenomena, the fishermen nevertheless maintain firm ties with Ghana. They have houses built and invest in nets and plantations. They also portray a true migrant spirit in declaring themselves prepared to travel to other countries should the presently strained situation in Côte d'Ivoire deteriorate.

## Notes

\* Translated from French.

1. According to figures produced by the CRO in Abidjan (J. Konan) based on lists established by CRO agents in the east and centre of the country and those of Centre de Pêche in the west. Unfortunately the total figures do not specify the distribution of fishermen according to ethnicity and origins.

2. The term 'Awlan' used in Côte d'Ivoire for these fishermen is a very derogatory one (Awlan is particularly associated with human sacrifice). This probably explains why the fishermen of this group established in the Côte d'Ivoire prefer to call themselves Ewe. By assimilation they are also called Beninois or Popo, having been accepted by people of that origin (as in Tabou) or having previously migrated to Benin themselves.

3. Although estimations concerning the volume unloaded per type of production vary, one may retain those established by J.Y. Weigel for 1984 in order to give an idea of the relative importance of different fishing types within national production:

Industrial fishing	31,960 tons	Lagoon fishing	12,500 tons
Small-scale fisheries	18,000 tons	River and lake fishing	16,000 tons

4. These imports rose to the record figure of 140,000 tons in 1989, representing FCFA 20 billion (Direction des Pêches, Abidjan).

5. The Ghanaian settlements are generally located on the outskirts of towns and native villages. Although the houses are mostly flimsy structures, they are permanent. The fishermen have their own authoritative structure (with a chief and notables), but each is dependant on the town or village that has allowed him to settle there and which more often than not deducts taxes or fees for this privilege. These characteristics lead us to consider these settlements as camps rather than villages or quarters.

6. Distinction made by Jorion (1988).

7. The fishing unit as portrayed here is made up of technical assets belonging to one or more owners and of a team (which may or may not include the owners). Each element may evolve or change. Both a working unit and a management unit, it is also the scene and expression of certain social relationships and

as such may last a long time, beyond going to sea and beyond the accounting exercise taking place between two rounds of recruitment and sharing.

8. Without neglecting the role played by these factors in financing fishing activities, especially that of the Ghanaian women. The participation of external fish traders in the financing of equipment is limited, mainly to specialised fishing units pursuing high value species (for instance lobster fishing in Drewin), and is found mainly in urban centres.

9. Although a group of women usually comes along with the teams moving in to settle, Fante crews migrating on a temporary basis usually go by themselves; they then have to give their production to women they have no regular relations with and who are not in association with the team. The fish is then bought cash, with no discount.

10. This idea is clearly displayed in certain articles published in the daily national 'Fraternité Matin,' one of which is significantly entitled 'Fishing in the south-west: a lucrative activity slipping away from the native population.' It had an insert saying: 'Encourage the young to fish' (19.09.1989).

11. Generally these villages first tried to adopt the sardinella surrounding net, but the growth of industrial sardine fishing forced the Alladian to abandon this type of net.

## References Cited

- Ecoutin, J.M., K. Delaunay & J. Konan  
n.d. La pêche artisanale 1990 maritime. In: P. Le Loeuff et al. (ed.), *Environnement et ressources aquatiques de la Côte d'Ivoire*. Tome 1. Le milieu marin (in press).
- Guiguenno, A.M.  
1986 La pêche artisanale et la transformation de la pêche sardinière à Abidjan. Université de Paris I: Mémoire de DEA.
- Jorion, P.  
1988 Going out or Staying Home. Seasonal Movement and Migration Strategies among Xwla and Anlo-Ewe Fishermen. *Maritime Anthropological Studies* 1(2):129-155.
- Surgy, A. de  
1969 De la pêche traditionnelle (maritime) à l'ancienne 'Côte de Guinée', 2. Situation et fonctionnement des unités de pêche. Université de Paris I, doctorat de 3ème cycle.
- Weigel, J.Y.  
n.d. *La commercialisation du poisson en pays lagunaire Ivoirien*. Paris: Editions de l'ORSTOM.