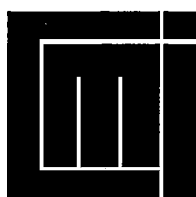


Migrant Fishermen in Congo: Tradition and Modernity

Eyolf Jul-Larsen

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¹ Other papers and articles are Jul-Larsen 1993 and forthcoming. A prior version of this publication is distributed as IDAF Working Paper no. 56, Cotonon 1994 under the title: *Migrant fishermen in Pointe Noire (Congo): Continuity and continuous change.*

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to present a systematic analysis of the background, the establishment and the development of the so-called Popo fisheries around the town of Pointe-Noire in Congo. The "Popo" in Pointe-Noire constitutes an easily identifiable group of fishermen originally from Benin who live and work in two village clusters on the beach only some kilometres from the town centre. Both in relation to Popo fishery in Benin as well to local canoe fishery in Congo, their production is characterised by a high level of specialisation and market-oriented production based on capital-intensive technology. In this respect they are a typical example of what is now generally known as the West African migrant canoe fisheries, which dominate much of the coastal fisheries from Mauritania to Congo.¹

Although a relatively large amount of literature deals explicitly with the West African fishermen in Congo, mainly due to the existence of a long-term ORSTOM fisheries research programme in Pointe-Noire, few works have systematically dealt with its historical development.² Most of them describe and analyse production (and to a minor extent the community) for a specific time-period. Such studies may provide interesting knowledge, but in order to grasp the more fundamental factors behind the dynamic aspects of the fishery, a more process-oriented approach of the fishing community is required.

The literature has also tended to concentrate on physical and quantitative aspects of Popo fishery rather than on qualitative relational aspects. On basis of the existing literature it is fairly simple to get a satisfactory picture of the demographic development in the community or the development in means of production, like eg. number of canoes, nets and outboard engines. Much more difficult, however, is to get a picture of, for instance, how wealth and power have been distributed or what types of institutions exist to solve various types of problems and how they function.

¹ For a general description and analysis of the migrant canoe fisheries in West Africa, see e.g. Chaboud and Charles Dominique 1991 and Chauveau 1991.

² Nguingiri 1991b is one of the few exceptions where the internal development is explicitly being described and discussed. However, due to lack of data, there are several inaccuracies in his presentation, particularly related to the past 10 years.

Furthermore, the available literature reflects what may be termed a certain production- and male-centrism. Means and organisation of production is focused and since it is the men who go to sea and who operate the canoes, scant attention has been paid to the role of women, even in cases focusing on distribution and trade. In view of the relatively large literature emphasising the economic role and influence of women in West African fisheries, this is somewhat surprising. The scope of this paper is broader in the sense that it includes all aspects of social life seen as important for a proper understanding of Popo fishery.

The major problem caused by the above-noted weaknesses has been the creation of certain myths concerning the character of Popo production. Simple observations related to growth in catches and means of production (particularly in the 1970s) have led authors to conclude that Popo fishery is highly dynamic. However, since no investigations exist as to the character of this dynamism, the overall interpretation has been to link it to the high degree of market orientation and capital intensity and thereby refer to the West African fisheries as a kind of pseudo-capitalistic venture. Formulations like "increased accumulation of capital", "high level of re-investment" and "intensification of production" are often used to characterise the Popo and distinguish the migrants from the local Vili fishermen. However, the documentation given, if any, is problematic and it is my aim to challenge such representations, which seem increasingly widespread particularly among agents involved in development aid and technical assistance.³

This is by no means to deny the well-documented fact that Popo fishing units have at their disposal far more means of production than do the Vili, or that their direct level of reinvestment in means of production is much higher in financial terms.⁴ Nor is there any reason to doubt that increased market integration has affected their production. However, the formulations referred to above, particularly when used in combination with other formulations like "very dynamic production systems", easily and almost unavoidably lead to an interpretation of steady growth, more and more accumulation, more and more means of production and steady increase in fishing effort in line with traditional Western concepts of growth. As will

³ J-C. Nguingiri has in various works (eg. 1990 and 1991a) pointed out how consultants (and to some extent also researchers) misunderstand the Vili fishery in attempting to distinguish the migrant Popo from the local Vili fishermen according to such categories (Popo-dynamism versus Vili-stagnation). As will be demonstrated here, they have also misunderstood that of the Popo.

⁴ See e.g. Niel 1973, Chaboud 1982, Gobert 1985b.

be shown, the main factors affecting the dynamism in Popo fishery are often others than the laws of the market. From a somewhat different perspective I have earlier (Jul-Larsen 1992) argued along the same lines at a more general level. However, only an in-depth empirical analysis can provide the data required to understand the specific logic of Popo fishermen's exploitation of resources.

A historical analysis of the Popo Pointe-Noire community also provides the opportunity to relate our findings to recent discussions concerning the underlying factors behind the migration and specialisation processes in West African canoe fisheries as such. Understandably enough literature dealing with the Popo focuses mainly on their situation in Benin. Little has been done to analyse the situation at home in light of what happens abroad,⁵ or vice-versa. P.J.M. Jorion (1985b and 1988) is among the few who has explicitly linked what happens abroad to the situation in Benin, arguing that migration and specialisation processes can be understood only in light of marginalisation of people in their original home areas. In a reply to Jorion, G.K. Nukunya (1989) argues with reference to another group of fishermen, the Anlo Ewe, that although marginalisation may have played a role, it is mainly pull factors like increased availability of fish, market outlets etc., combined with entrepreneurial qualities among the fishermen which have led to the new migration and specialisation patterns. The empirical evidence presented, however, is often unsatisfactory for drawing the type of conclusions both of them do. The following case study may in this way contribute to a better understanding of this important question.

Although the existing literature seems to demonstrate certain weaknesses, it must immediately be added that this study could not have been produced without heavily relying upon data from the same literature.

⁵ Beside Pointe-Noire, there are important settlements of Popo fishermen in Libreville, Port-Gentil, two towns near Douala and near Abidjan.

2. The Popo community of today

The community as such counts a little less than 500 fishermen and almost as many adult women. Together with some of their children they live in two villages on the northern beach of Pointe-Noire. With some very few exceptions, all the men are full-time fishermen in that they either own and/or work in a particular type of canoe fishery connected to their name. The great majority of the women smoke fish and sell it either as wholesalers or as retailers on the various markets in Pointe-Noire. The ethnonym 'Popo' makes reference to the European name of the village Grand Popo in the Lower Mono region in South West Benin. In fact, not all the Popo come from Grand Popo, as the community includes people from several groups. The great majority are either Xwla who originally come from different villages along the coastline between the Togolese border and Djegbadji near the town of Ouidah; or Xweda from Ouidah town or villages around or close to Lac Ahémé. Two Mina households of Togolese (Anecho) origin are also part of the community as well as one Anlo Ewe household and a small number of young Anlo Ewe workers. The latter group who originally come from the Anlo peninsula in Eastern Ghana, have all lived and worked in Benin before they migrated to Congo.¹ Almost all community members are directly or indirectly related to each other through links of kinship and/or marriage. This, however, does not necessarily mean that kinship is considered of great relevance in all types of internal relations.

The Popo have specialised in fishing for pelagic sardinella and ethmalosis species, using driftnets from the big motorised Ghanaian type of canoes. They occasionally fish for demersal species with lines or bottom gill nets. However, the latter fishery is mainly connected with the local Vili fishermen, who are scattered all along the 170km Congolese coastline. In Pointe-Noire the local fishermen are in the minority compared to the Popo and are less easily identified, since many live in the town suburbs and not

¹ The general literature on West African migrant fisheries has tended to reiterate an old truth: that the Popo in Pointe-Noire are a mixture of people of Ghanaian Ewe, Togolese Mina and Béninois Xwla and Xweda origin. Although this once was the case, the community must now be considered as composed almost exclusively of Xwla and Xweda people.

on the beach and most of them are part-time fishermen. In addition 200-300 young Vili² work with the Popo, often on a more or less occasional basis.

The best-known institution among the Popo is the male production unit, commonly referred to as the "company".³ At present there are 107 units, owing around 120 big canoes in addition to some smaller local dug-outs. The units are owned either individually or collectively by Popo fishermen. About half are individually owned.⁴ In collectively owned units the number of owners varies from 2 to 8, where one always is referred to as its leader or chief. About 40 per cent of the Popo fishermen in Pointe-Noire have status as owners. Depending on the number of owners who actually go fishing, units may need additional labour. The vast majority of companies therefore employ a certain number of Popo workers who stay in different types of client relationships, most often to the chief of company. The workers represent the remaining 60 per cent of the adult male population. Commonly the units also need additional non-Popo labour and this is supplied by the young Vili. The latter are not clients in the same way as the Popo workers, and they have much higher mobility in terms of switching between different companies than in the former group. Hence, the socio-economic composition of the companies varies considerably. At one extreme there may be a unit where all members are Popo and owners; another extreme would be where one Popo owner works exclusively with Vili labour. Both cases may be observed, but the great majority of units have one or more Popo owners in addition to both Popo and Vili workers.

Kinship relations between Popo members in a company can always be traced, although there is no specific kinship principle for recruitment of members. Relations (among owners as well as between owners and workers) seem to be fairly random and include agnatic, matrilineal as well as in-law relations (often several at the same time). Or a father may work

² Many of the young Vili are migrants like the Popo, coming from nearby Cabinda. The group also includes people with Zaïrian nationality and Congolese of other ethnic origins. They should in general not be considered as a uniform group. More or less detailed descriptions of the Vili and their fisheries are found in the same literature as that dealing with the Popo in Pointe-Noire.

³ The use of the term "company" varies considerably in the literature on West African canoe fisheries. Some authors use it for analytical purposes, giving it well defined characteristics (see eg. Jorion 1988 and Atti Mama 1991). Gobert (e.g. 1985a) uses it to distinguish collectively owned units from those owned individually. Both definitions are problematic. Here the term will simply be used to describe any Popo fishing unit. This is also the way it is used by the Popo themselves.

⁴ One unit is owned by a Popo woman.

together with friends and cousins, while his sons or brothers work in other companies.

The companies sell their catch immediately after it has been landed on the beach. By far the greatest part is sold to Popo women, according to certain principles of division. The sale is considered the concern of all crew members, and the internal share system is formally based on a 50-50 share between means of production and labour. The owners take their part in the labour share provided they participate in production. Accounts between owners and workers are settled once a week, and no difference is made among workers except for minor bonuses to the captain and the mechanic. In cases of co-ownership the share of means of production is kept aside and the co-owners occasionally meet (perhaps once a year) to decide how the money should be used. Groups of owners often have their own treasurer(s) and accountants, or the money is kept with the leader. The principles behind owners' internal rights are not easy to describe as they always will tend to be defined contextually, although they can at times remind of the formal principles in a modern shareholding enterprise (rights and interests according to level of investments, etc).

Assets in the companies vary considerably, although we estimate that FCFA 4 million⁵ is the minimum required to establish a viable unit. The wealthiest companies may possess values in production equipment near FCFA 20 million (new price), but the average is far less, probably somewhere between 6 and 8 million.⁶ Canoes are always bought in Ghana and transported to Pointe-Noire on liners, often after they have been navigated to Benin. Nets and engines are sometimes bought in Congo, but they may come from all over West Africa. No fisherman or group of fishermen wishing to establish a new unit will normally be able to provide the necessary financial means by themselves. They always rely on support in terms of some kind of credits.

Units are continuously being dissolved and recreated with new ownership relations. One of the reasons is obviously that the management principles give ample room for manipulation and conflicts, particularly since formal accountancy knowledge is very limited among owners as well as among workers. Furthermore, co-owners steadily seek to achieve higher social (and economic) prestige through establishing themselves as chief of company.

⁵ At the time of study the fixed exchange rate was 50 FCFA= 1 FRF.

⁶ The figures are based on "official" prices and should be handled with great caution. In real life people often find much cheaper ways of providing means of production. However, in relative terms they give an approximate picture of the variations encountered.

With demersal gill net or line fishery, the social relations are different, in that many workers themselves own nets or lines privately. Since not all owners allow or are interested in this type of fishing and many workers do not own their own gear, the formation of the crews changes completely. We will not describe the share system for this fishery here,⁷ but only indicate that demersal fisheries are relatively less interesting from the viewpoint of the owners, compared to pelagic fisheries.

When the fish is sold on the beach the price is normally set by Congolese traders early in the morning. However the majority of the catch is sold to the wives of the crew members at a somewhat lower price (FCFA 500/20 kg) than what the market is willing to pay. In principle every woman married to a crew member has the right to the same amount of fish from the canoe of her husband, but it is well known that it is an advantage to be the wife of a company leader or at least of one of the owners. Although many other factors influence marriage structures, this dilemma is clearly reflected by the fact that 70 per cent of the Popo women are married to owners and that 60 per cent of the Popo workers remain without a Popo wife in Pointe-Noire.

Each woman, whether she is the only wife or a co-wife, constitutes her own economic unit. She has her own ovens for smoking the fish she buys and her own staff of young Congolese helpers.⁸ She then either sells the fish herself in the town markets or sends the smoked fish by rail to Congolese clients for sale in all the major population centres from Pointe-Noire to Brazzaville. For every processor, access to pelagic fish is of major concern.⁹ In order to increase her supplies she can buy pelagic fish from a small industrial fleet or get access to fish in other canoes than that of her husband by providing financial support through credits. Simple observations on the beach of which women who receives fish in which companies, demonstrate that many women operate as creditors in other units than that of the husband. Information on the credit situation in a certain number of fishing units indicates that Popo women in Pointe-Noire provide at least half of all credits to the companies. Other creditors are often old well-established owners and Congolese businessmen or civil servants with whom some of the fishermen have special friendship relations. Fig.1 gives an idea

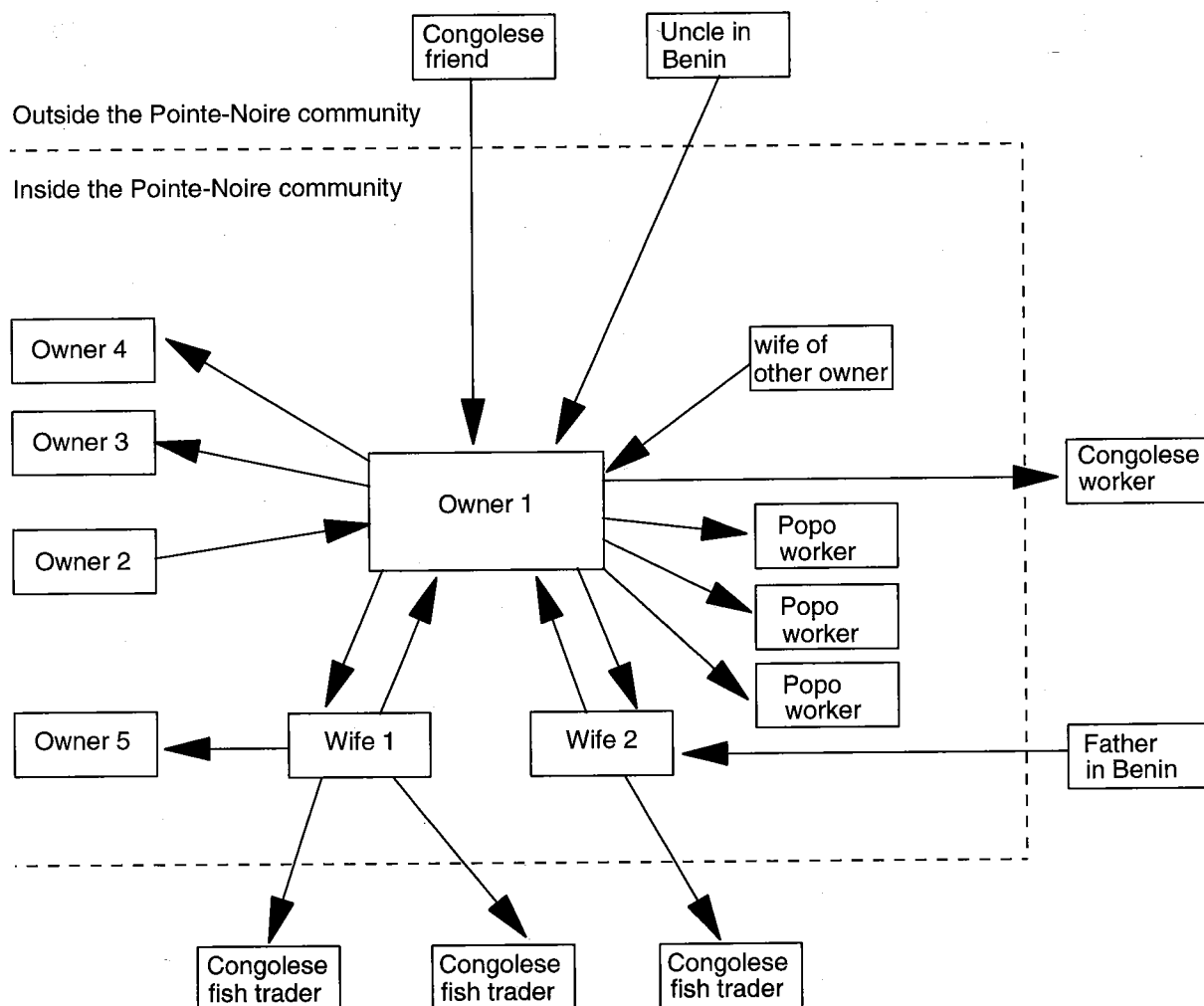
⁷ The system is described eg by Chaboud 1982 p. 25, Gobert 1985b p. 255 and Makaya 1983. Minor changes in the system have occurred since then.

⁸ A thorough description of the smoking processes has been presented by Adrien (1981).

⁹ It is mostly pelagic fish which is smoked. Simple estimates of the profitability of processing and trade of different species demonstrate that smoking of pelagic fish is by far the most profitable option for Popo women.

about the complexity of Popo credit relations. Credits often may go two ways between the same persons. Each type of credit (whether credit from processor to company owner, or from owner to workers/clients) has its own rules and logic and within each type, the context remains important, as very few credit relations are equal in terms of interests, repayment periods etc.

Figure 1
Credit chart oriented from viewpoint of one Popo owner and his two wives*



* The chart takes a specific case as its starting point, but has been somewhat modified in order to demonstrate the variation in types of credits found.

The Popo households in Pointe-Noire mainly function as reproduction units. The overwhelming majority is based on marriages between Popo, although there is no prohibition against Popo marrying a Congolese. The marriage structure is polygynous and the maximum number of wives at the

beach is four. Many fishermen also have wives living in their home village and there is a certain mobility among the women between Congo and Benin. To some extent this mobility is connected with the fact that many couples choose to send their children to Benin for further schooling. The age structure in the community shows a very clear deficit of young people (particularly boys) between 15 and 25 years of age.

Husbands and wives work in different economic units, and they also keep separate accounts where each contributes to household expenses. There is great variation as to who contributes with what and how much. In such a situation one could expect households to be of minor economic importance. To some extent this is true, but spouses do exert important influence upon each other's economic activities. Investigations on credit demonstrate that a woman who provides credits to fishermen, will almost without exception, primarily provide loans to the company of her husband. Furthermore a wife can not decide on her economic dispositions completely independent of her husband — particularly in relation to in-community economic transactions. In some of the wealthiest households husband and wife operate *de facto* as a corporate economic unit.

Another important feature is the fact that 36 per cent of the men, despite of having reached normal marriage age, have not established their own units.¹⁰ They are all workers and live single or as members in the household of their patron.

For various purposes, the Popo in Pointe-Noire are organised according to a system combining agnatic descent and village/territory of origin. This we may term, simplifying matters somewhat, the extended family system.¹¹ The system is intimately connected to Popo religious ways of thought. Extended family identity is defined according to commonly agreed genealogies which trace descent six to eight generations back, and to myths which connect the lineage to certain mythical forefathers in the more general and extended pantheon of the voodoos. Lineage voodoos and other forefathers may intervene actively in everyday life to give protection and support against other voodoos or living persons who seek to attack another person or render life difficult. Protection is most efficiently sought from those with whom an individual is identified and with whom some people in the group have direct means of communication. Forefathers and voodoos

¹⁰ Many of them may have wives in Benin, but they are not in a position to bring them along.

¹¹ Although agnatic lineage dominates as the organising principle in Popo kinship organisation, there are so many modifications to this, that it would be misleading to use the term lineage to describe it, thus the looser term "extended family".

are intimately linked to territories, and in Benin the distribution of access to land and waters is closely related to lineage identity. However since people from different lineages often live in the same areas, collaboration between forefathers is important and besides, some voodoos are connected to a territory more than to lineages.

The extended families are not formal political fora with leaders who are elected and easily identifiable. The way they work is always contextually defined. It is the nature of the matter to be handled which defines who become involved in solving it. The broader and more serious a matter is, the higher is the level at which it is treated. If it concerns affairs between patrilineal cousins, only the immediate family will be involved, and if it is a minor affair between two persons of different lineages the problem may be solved without mobilising the whole extended family. Leadership is based on seniority and formal decisions are always taken by men.

Only the most important matters are taken to the top of the hierarchy which classifies the Popo community into three main segments, often referred to as "the three communities". One involves those who come from the village of Gbéfa (Agonékamé) and other neighbouring villages in Grand Popo; its members are almost exclusively Xwla. The second group includes people from nine villages located on the inner side of the lagoons stretching from Grand Popo towards the Ouidah lagoon. In this group people are claiming both Xwla and Xweda descent. The third and least segmented part is constituted exclusively by Xweda from Ouidah town or the villages in the southern end of Lac Ahémé.

Matters like birth, marriage and death are always a concern of the extended family. In Pointe-Noire it is the extended family which regulates relations between the fishermen and their kin in Benin. One easily observable example is the death of close kin living in Benin. In such cases, the leaders of the concerned segments will allow the dependents to organise a ceremony of money collection to help the family at home. All adult members of the segment are in principle obliged to contribute at least FCFA 1000.¹² People from the other segments may also contribute, but

¹² There are no direct sanctions against someone who does not participate. However, in cases of deaths in the family of someone who does not participate, the segment may refuse to organise a similar ceremony. One of the segments has even elaborated written regulations concerning which kin in Benin are "eligible" for ceremonies and who in Pointe-Noire should participate.

that is more voluntarily. Such collection ceremonies are frequently organised and may include as many as three or four in one week.¹³

In addition, the extended families organise a range of different religious ceremonies which are important parts of Popo life abroad. Community members outside the family in question participate in great numbers. Information on when to organise certain ceremonies comes from the family elders in Benin and then implemented by the elders in Pointe-Noire. The extended families are also involved in matters related to all types of internal conflicts in the Popo community. However, as will be demonstrated below, other institutions are far more influential in this respect.

In addition to the family system, but also largely as an integral part of it, political life in the Popo community is dominated by an institution generally referred to as 'l'Association des Ressortissants BENINOIS' (ARB). Formally ARB appears as a sort of voluntary association for all Béninois residents in Pointe-Noire. It has a general board of elected men with background in trade as well as fishing and it has close connections to the newly established Benin Consulate in the town. At the beach however, ARB is organised with its own locally elected boards in the two fishing villages and where only the fishing community is concerned. This separate branch of ARB (ARB-B) has its own regulations and rules,¹⁴ besides having functions far more comprehensive than what is found in the community of Béninois as such.¹⁵ ARB-B is the dominant institution at the beach in relation to the following tasks:

- a) All external relations concerning the general situation of the Popo fishermen in Congo. This mainly involves to contacts with representatives from local units in the administration, like immigration, customs, port authorities, police and others, but includes also the relations to the Vili fishermen and to representatives of the Congolese residents in the fishing villages. Maintaining good relations to the Congolese community also includes the organisation of internal

¹³ Estimates based on the public accounts of twenty of these ceremonies indicate that perhaps as much as FCFA 30 million or more is collected annually in the Popo community in Pointe-Noire for these purposes. However, probably not more than one fourth is actually sent to Benin. As a general rule the remaining three fourths seem to be spent on ceremony costs (about 50 per cent) and the remainder is more or less secretly kept by the immediate family in Pointe-Noire.

¹⁴ The well-known written regulations of 1967 have already been presented both by Makaya 1983 and Nguinguiri 1991.

¹⁵ The fishing population represents close to 2/3 of the total Béninois population in the town.

collections of money for Congolese charity purposes or purposes related to beach infrastructure. The different contacts are sometimes handled through ARB in town, but are more frequently established directly by the fishermen.

- b) ARB-B has both legislative, judicial and executive powers related to the internal social order of the community. Phenomena like public disturbance, theft, fighting, adultery and offenses related to various other aspects of community life are regulated subject to sanctions by the ARB-B leadership. In the most serious cases people are repatriated, sometimes at the expense of the community. Probably some 20 Popo men or more have been forced to leave the community over the past 10 years.

In cases where members offend or come into open conflict with people from the Congolese community or with Government authorities, ARB-B will normally have a role to play either as defender, or mediator, or simply by taking over the case and passing internal judgement.

- c) It is involved in all matters concerning the safety and social security of community members. This is illustrated through its role in coordinating rescue operations at sea when canoes are missing and in an internal system of money collection to repatriate members who fall seriously ill. Travel costs are in such instances covered by the community. If a person dies in Congo a similar system exists for covering funeral costs. All money collection organised by ARB-B is compulsory.
- d) ARB-B also plays a major role in regulating and judging in internal conflicts of a more economic nature. Generally these conflicts concern disputes between production units over the control of Popo labour, internal conflicts between owners and workers or pure economic conflicts between co-owners or in credit relations. In order to fulfil this judicial function a system often referred to as "the transparency" has been established. This implies that major economic transactions or agreements always take place with the presence of a person "accepted"¹⁶ as an ARB-B witness.

¹⁶ Acceptance is misleading in the meaning of formally appointed people. However, the community knows perfectly well which persons are acceptable or not.

ARB-B involvement in internal economic matters normally requires that one of the parties in the conflict requests that the case be brought before it. In most cases such conflicts are handled and resolved within the extended family system. ARB-B regulations concerning economic transactions are far more particularistic in character than what is generally the basis for conflict solving within the family system. In simplified terms, we may say that for ARB-B an economic transaction is an economic transaction independent of the other statuses held by the persons involved. A consequence of this is that fishermen consider ARB-B jurisdiction to be more based on rules rather than on achieving compromise as is often considered to be the case within extended families.

One of the most striking aspects concerning ARB-B is the very high degree of authority it exercises. Once a decision has been reached (that may in many instances take time) it is generally carried out promptly. There do not seem to exist many possibilities for members to escape ARB-B jurisdiction. In money collections, ARB-B's own population register shows that 97 or 98 per cent of the population contributes, and estimates based on the same sources for 1991 and 92 indicate that ARB-B collects more than FCFA 5 million annually.¹⁷ Investigations of verdicts in economic conflicts show that a person sentenced to settle his or her debt generally does so quickly, although the sums in question may be considerable. Even indirectly ARB-B manages to impose its authority. Although economic conflicts most often find a solution at the level of the extended family, fishermen say that ARB-B's more particularistic regulations have influenced and modified the way the families solve such conflicts. The fact that any person in principle can demand to have his case judged by the ARB-B, provided he has followed the principle of transparency, has forced family elders to take the ARB-B regulations into consideration and more or less employ them in their search for viable solutions.

Thus it becomes evident that ARB can not be considered a voluntary organisation. Its power is omnipresent and includes every Popo living on the beach irrespective of whether he or she 'belongs to' the organisation or not. In many ways ARB-B must be considered as an integrated part and the highest level of the extended family system. The only way for a Popo to

¹⁷ Our estimates show the following annual distribution of money collected:

Congolese purposes:	800,000 FCFA
Repatriations:	2,000,000 "
Funerals:	3,000,000 "

escape its control is to move out of its control area. A study of the internal power basis of ARB-B shows that, in terms of lineage identity, the organisation is based on full representation and consensus or at least an overwhelming majority. However, in terms of socio-economic statuses the association is completely dominated by the owners. External institutions, like ARB in town and the Béninois Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Consulate, also have important influence on the politics of ARB at the beach.

From the above description we may conclude that the Popo community must be considered as an internally strong, well-organised social entity where economic, political and religious institutions are adapted to a particular type of migrant life. It has also been shown that relations to individuals and institutions external to the Pointe-Noire community are numerous and in some instances crucial for the survival of the unit. Relations to the Congolese authorities are a clear example, but also relations to people in Benin emerge as an integrated part of the social system. Air traffic between Pointe-Noire and Cotonou is extensive, with often as many as 20-30 Popo either coming or leaving in the same week, indicating that close contacts with people in the home areas are considered both necessary and interesting. Out of a total of 87 owners in the 41 companies in the northern of the two beach villages, only 71 of them live in Congo. The remaining 16 have retired and now live in Benin, either in their village of origin or near Cotonou.

Even though many community members have not seen their home country for a very long time (in some cases as much as 15 years) there can be no doubt that the Popo's objective in staying abroad is to be able one day to return to Benin with sufficient means to live materially at ease for the rest of their lives. However, the realism of this intention may in many cases be questioned. Studies among those who already have returned home show that most of them have done so either because of illness or because they realised that they would never become rich and left before they became too poor to afford the return fare. Others have left because the community forced them to. Only a minority of those who have returned may be said to be wealthy persons. This is however, another matter; what is important in this respect is that the Popo fishermen, to a large extent, live and continuously make their dispositions with a view to return home in honour.

So far we have treated contacts to Benin as an simple home-abroad relation. More detailed studies show a need to differentiate if we are to understand what is meant by "Benin" in this context. The home area, the Lower Mono, is today a region hard hit by problems related to severe

population pressure and ecological deterioration. Land in the area is saline and unfertile and rivers and lagoons which earlier produced great quantities of fish, shellfish and mollusc (see e.g. Gruvel 1913) appear heavily overfished to the extent that no-one can make a living exclusively relying on these resources. A visit to some of the villages also demonstrates that much of the population lives and works outside the area, in Benin as well as in a range of other West and Central African countries. The migrant fishermen probably represent only a minority of Popo migrants.

Relations of the migrants (whether they are Xwla or Xweda) to their villages are characterised in different ways. The most common feature is that a migrant Popo is expected as soon as possible, to construct a house of concrete in his home village. As a result, in some villages there are now more concrete houses than there are inhabitants to live in them. The construction of a house is mainly a symbolic act demonstrating attachment to home as well as success abroad. To demonstrate attachment to home is important in that it shows respect and affection for the forefathers and their territories. In order to have their protection, this symbolic act is crucial. To some extent it is within the same perspective we must understand why children are sent home for schooling and training. This is also linked in with the fact that the Popo fishermen wish a better and a different future for their children, not in the home areas but through schooling and thereby carriers in other sectors of society. Most other relations to the families at home concern questions related to birth, marriage and death. Very few relations of migrants to people in their home villages directly concern their economic life abroad. The only exception is labour recruitment to the companies, which takes place at this level. This, however, is not to say that these relations are of minor economic importance. As just mentioned, religion and ideology continue to be an integral part of the Popo production in Congo, even though it has not been possible to quantify the importance of the flow of money from Popo in Pointe-Noire to kinsmen at home, beyond what has already been done in the case of collective money collections for deceased kin.

In Pointe-Noire the fishermen also rely on the home country for a series of other services. Canoes must be bought in Ghana and transported to Congo, as well as other equipment like engines, nets, etc. Besides, those with enough money often wish to invest, particularly in real estate, in order to secure their return to the country. Every owner or group of owners therefore has a network of "confidants" in Benin dealing with this type of economic affairs. But confidants tend not to be close family members. Most of them live in or near Cotonou and are ideally people with some economic interests in Pointe-Noire. Retired owners are crucial as confidants, but also

other relations exist. Such combinations of interests give people a certain mutual control in economic transactions which always are considered delicate and risky and where numerous stories are told about how fishermen have been fooled. There are no institutions like the ARB-B which can handle such insecurity in the Benin/Congo relations. The family system or the formal judicial system of the state are both considered inefficient and ill-suited for this type of transactions.

The description just presented raises a range of questions. Some of those which will be dealt with later and which are connected to the development of the Pointe-Noire community are: How did the Popo production system and the various institutions develop? Who controls what in the Popo community and how are power and authority established, exercised and maintained? How has the role of women in economic transactions become so important, and what have been the consequences? In attempting to find answers to these questions we hope that they also will contribute to the more general understanding of Popo fishery in Congo.

3. Why are the Popo in Pointe-Noire?

One of the most widely circulated explanations which also seems to have had an impact on explaining West African migrant fisheries in general, is found in the works of P.J.M. Jorion (1985 a and b and 1988). In analysing two specialisation processes in West African canoe fisheries (those of the Xwla and the Ghanaian Anlo Ewe), Jorion emphasises ecological deterioration and social marginalisation (loss of access to resources) in the home areas as key factors for understanding why people turn from part-time lagoon fishery combined with horticulture and salt production, to full-time open sea fisheries. Based on assumptions borrowed from individual risk avoidance theories, Jorion's argument leads to a general conclusion concerning specialisation in fisheries: "*no one ever becomes a full time maritime fisherman other than under duress; necessity and necessity alone can force anyone to exercise such a tough, dangerous and economically risky activity*" (1988 pp. 152-3). Geographical mobility (either as seasonal moves or more permanent migrations) hence appears as a new and alternative measure to minimise economic risks. When one is deprived of land "*diversification of occupations becomes impossible and risk minimisation strategies need to take an altogether different direction: mobility in following the fish wherever they go*" (ibid.). According to Jorion, the Popo in Pointe-Noire are there *a*) as a result of their loss of land at home and *b*) as a reflection of a new risk minimisation strategy "*exiling oneself for a time under more favourable skies, where fish are plenty and buyers rich*" (ibid).

I have elsewhere (Jul-Larsen 1992) argued that phenomena like ecologic deterioration constitute an element important for understanding the development of West African canoe fisheries. However, like is the case in Jorion's work, there is a considerable danger in focusing solely on certain specific explanatory aspects to the exclusion of others. The result is that far too simplified pictures of specific change processes are created, and the debate becomes dominated by generalisations far from reality and with little explanatory value. Jorion's empirical analysis of the Xwla demonstrates serious weaknesses. Despite the interesting and valuable data presented, his analysis tends sometimes to be tautological or it is unclear, and generally a-historic since historical processes from very different time- periods are

taken to explain the same phenomenon.¹ It would be useful to confront Jorion's general conclusions with what historical literature and the case of the Pointe-Noire fishermen may tell us on this question.

The available literature on the history of the peoples of the Lower Mono² points to the close cultural, political and socio-economic relations existing among the so-called Aja peoples³ throughout the last 500 years. With an internally agreed and recognised common descent and a commonly shared religion-conceptual universe, the various tribes which constitute the Aja nucleus have a history characterised by interdependence more than by distinctiveness, despite different geographical areas of dominance and historical phases where one or more groups have exerted political dominance at the expense of the others. In the Lower Mono, the Danxomé kingdom of the Fon people which lasted from the beginning of the 18th century until the French colonisation in the 1890s, probably represents the most important of these phases even though most of the Lower Mono area lies outside what is generally conceived to have been under Danxomé territorial control (Manning 1982). It is noteworthy that the Xweda, after the defeat of their kingdom against Fon expansion in 1727, maintained certain religious functions and a politico-religious authority in relation to all of the Aja peoples through the entire period of Fon political domination; functions and authority which continue to be of relevance today.

During the time of Danxomé the economic development in the region was characterised, first by the expansion in slave export, later substituted by palm-oil exports and increased trade and commercialisation of imported as well as local produces. This affected the Xwla and the Xweda just as much as it affected the Fon, although not necessarily in the same way. The economic development in the Lower Mono must be viewed within this regional context and not, like Jorion tends to do, on the basis of production in what he calls the "subsistence economy" of the Lower Mono.

As mentioned by Jorion, work migrations among the Xwla are not of new date. There is evidence of such migrations at least as far back as the

¹ For a critique of a different kind and connected to changes in the Anlo Ewe fisheries, see Nukunya 1989.

² See e.g. articles of Karl-Augustt, Merlo & Vidaud, Wilson and others in de Medeiros 1984.

³ Two traditions of historians speak either of the Aja-Tado group (Tado being the village of common descent) or the Aja-Ewe group. The latter include the different Ewe peoples (and also to some extent the Mina) in the nucleus, while the former delimits the nucleus to peoples like the Aja, Aizo, Gun, Fon, Xwla, Xweda, Toffin, Watchi and others. These are the ones who are considered to descend from the Aja people in Tado in the 16th and 17th centuries.

early 18th century. From the Ghanaian Fante, some of whom settled in what became known as Petit Popo (Anécho) and later became the Mina, the Xwla learned to cross the coastal surf and soon became known as competent canoemen loading and unloading European vessels, not only in Grand Popo, but also in most of the other stations or factories along the Slave Coast. Unfortunately, we lack data on the number of people involved in this business. Patrick Manning (1985 and 89) has shown that, with the steady growth in trade and commercialisation during the last century, both Xwla and Xweda also came to play a crucial role as canoe transporters in a lagoon transport system which developed in parallel to the open sea transport. Manning has estimated that by the end of the century, as many as 10,000 men (mainly Xwla, but also Xweda) were involved in this business in the whole of the Bight of Benin, 5,000 of them operating within the frontiers of present-day Benin (1985, p. 62). This leads him to consider all the coastal communities in Benin as part of a much broader regional system (1989). In addition many of the coastal people were probably also involved in the transportation of salt⁴ northwards towards the savannah (Manning 1985). Manning's work clearly demonstrates that virtually all Xwla and an important number of Xweda families must have been involved in work migration by the end of the 19th century.

Equally interesting as the scale of Popo work migration is what Manning tells about the organisation of the lagoon transport business. He quotes the agronomist Savariau from 1906: "*Il existe dans tous les centres importants riverains des lagunes ou des cours d'eau de véritables corporations de piroguiers ayant chacune un chef auquel les intéressés s'adressent ...*"⁵ and concludes that "*Among the boatmen, three labour systems coexisted. The lineage system ... the slave system ...[and] the wage system*" (1985, pp.71-2). Although we should be cautious about drawing firm conclusions on the organisation of work in migration, it seems reasonable to assume that work-migration combined with alternative ways of organising production (compared to the horticultural, fish and salt producing activities in the lagoon villages at home), must have been a well known phenomenon and an economic strategy commonly practised among the Popo for at least more than a century.

The lagoon transport system collapsed in the early years of this century, mainly as a result of increased competition from roads and rail, after the colonial conquest. But new opportunities also emerged. The construction of

⁴ Salt has for centuries been produced locally in great quantities by the Xwla, but at the turn of the century imported salt was probably the most common.

⁵ Quoted from Manning 1985, p.59.

piers in the main ports meant an ongoing demand for loaders/unloaders, and the Popo now switched in their external occupations away from the lagoon transport towards work at the piers. Manning (1989, p.251) states that the labour requirements were considerably reduced as a result of this change. This certainly must have been true, although not necessarily as much as Manning seems to indicate. He only mentions the pier in Cotonou as the option to turn to (see also Pliya 1980, p.98). However, personal accounts from Xwla and Xweda fishermen both in Pointe-Noire and in Benin show that Cotonou only was one among several options. If we shall believe what numerous Popo told this author, Xwla canoemen were present in large numbers in the ports of Accra, Lomé and Lagos. Unfortunately little is known about the internal organisation of this work migration, but the fishermen relate that there were specific Popo individuals who had specialised as a kind of work-broker between the port companies and the Popo looking for work abroad, in each of the ports.⁶ At the same time others, both Xwla and Xweda from areas a bit further inland had started to migrate in order to fish in the lagoons stretching from Anlo in Ghana in the west to Lagos and Nigeria in the east, and in freshwaters like on the Volta River and even far north on the Niger River.⁷

Just as with lagoon transport system at the turn of this century, migration to the piers came to an abrupt end with the construction of the modern ports. In the course of a 15 year-period from 1955 an important economic opportunity was reduced to virtually nil. A vast majority of the older Popo in Pointe-Noire as well as the fathers of the younger ones had — for longer or shorter periods of their lives — been engaged in the work at the piers. Just as their fathers and grandfathers in great numbers had switched from lagoon transport migration to work at the piers, the older Popo in Pointe-Noire (and certainly in many other places) were forced to seek new opportunities when work at the piers came to a halt.

One alternative would have been to withdraw from migration and settle permanently at home, but this option was severely constrained by another process that was taking place at about the same time. Despite little “hard” data, there can be no doubt that since the 1950s⁸ the Lower Mono has

⁶ See also Manning 1982, p.144 and Gutkind 1989 pp.364-5.

⁷ A relatively important community of Popo is still reported located on the Niger River near Malanville (Lucien Zannou, personal communication).

⁸ The deterioration process probably started earlier, but most people seem to agree that the crisis was accentuated in the 1950s. See Pliya 1980. It has not been part of this study to seek the causes of this deterioration, which was probably due to a combination of many complex processes.

experienced a severe deterioration of its main natural resources, particularly the lagoon and river/lake fish stocks, and also to some extent arable land. Many authors (e.g. Surgy 1966, Houdenou 1971 and Pliya 1980) have emphasised on this deterioration process in explaining the increase in migrating fishermen. It would, of course, only be logical for worsened conditions in the Lower Mono to lead more people to seek new opportunities outside the area.

During the first half of this century the Popo also learned to fish in open seas. The first sea-fishing Anlo Ewe companies arrived in the Lower Mono from Keta probably during the second decade where they established seasonal fishing camps with the approval of the local population, who had not yet exploited the resources of the sea. As time passed, these Ewe seasonal camps often became more or less permanent (Pliya 1980, Jorion 1985a, Nukunya 1989).⁹ Many Popo investigated and experimented in these opportunities and started moving along the coast, first in seasonal moves. In Nigeria they were numerous as early as in the 1940s, perhaps even earlier. Work at the piers did not impede such experimentation, as pier work was generally limited to a few years at a time combined with longer or shorter periods at home. Later some Popo chose to take up more long-distance migration. In Pointe-Noire the first Popo must have arrived between 1955 and 1958. According to Dhont (1963) there were 10 Dahomeyans at the beach in 1962. However, it was only some years later, from mid-1960s, that work at the piers disappeared completely and large numbers of people began to orient themselves towards becoming migrating maritime fishermen. Contrary to what many authors seem to think, many of the Popo in Pointe-Noire (particularly among the Xweda) had no or very little previous experience of sea fisheries on arrival. Gobert's reference (1985b p. 251) to 23 company chiefs in Pointe-Noire where 10 of them are quoted as having been fishing in 9 different countries outside Benin before coming to Congo, supports the general argument of migration as a well established institution in Popo life. However, it is less certain whether they actually had that much experience from sea fisheries abroad. My own discussions with the same company owners reveal that many of them in fact had not been in these countries in order to do sea-fishing, but rather fishing in the lagoons and/or working at the piers.

The establishment process of the first Popo in Pointe-Noire from 1964 and onwards are also interesting in this respect. Again — contrary to the

⁹ The Anlo Ewe in Benin which in many cases have settled and taken Béninois citizenship are referred to as Keta. As shown in the previous section we also find some of them in Pointe Noire.

general interpretation – specialisation in sea fisheries was not an automatic implication of their establishing themselves in Congo. The economic activities undertaken by the Popo up until about 1969 was in fact characterised by variation. The increase in Popo, mainly Xwla from the beaches or the lagoons around Grand Popo, was slow and their number did probably not exceed 50 men and two or three women in the summer of 1969. None of them arrived with sea-fishing equipment; they all started by buying or renting small Vili canoes from the local fishermen, which they used mainly for the same type of fishing as the local Congolese population, whether in the immediate shore areas, in the lagoons or the rivers. Thus, although Pointe-Noire served as a kind of pivot centre, many of the Popo stayed for shorter or longer periods in areas far away from the town, both along the coast as well as somewhat further inland. They experimented with many different types of work including trade, crafts and agriculture combined with lagoon or sea fishing near the shore.¹⁰ As late as in the mid-1970s at least four or five Popo fishermen still remained in the coastal areas north of Pointe-Noire, around the Conkouati lagoon close to the Gabonese border and in the Loango bay, practising a local Vili type of fishery combined with other productive activities.

When the Popo arrived, they already knew about the possibilities and potentials in specialised open sea fisheries, as practised by other West Africans before their arrival. From the late 1940s a community dominated by Ghanaian Anlo-Ewe fishermen, but also including a certain number of Xwla and Xweda, had developed a specialised open sea fishery carried out in combination with other types of fisheries from the same beach.¹¹ This community was completely dissolved in November 1962 when political unrest in Congo led to the expulsion of virtually all its members. Very few of the Popo from the pre-1962 community returned to Pointe-Noire later, but their open sea fishing was well known among the new group of migrants.¹²

It was only in 1967 that the first Ghanaian canoe was ordered and equipped with outboard engine and drift nets, and two more years passed

¹⁰ Going to sea in the area around Point-Noire is very different from in Benin, as there is very little surf many places in the bays of Pointe-Noire and Loango.

¹¹ For a description of the first West African fishing community, see Rossignol 1955, Vennetier 1958, 1965 and undated, Dhont and Stauch 1962, and Dhont 1963.

¹² The literature on the Popo in Pointe Noire has not differentiated between the two West African communities, seeing the development from the 1940s until today as a continuous evolution (see eg. Nguingui 1991b). There are however few reasons to do so, and the Popo of today all consider 1964 as the start of their history in Congo.

before the great majority opted to invest in this type of fishery. That the new fishermen did not immediately invest in open sea fisheries is probably due to several factors, like lack of capital as well as general caution with regard to political stability in the country. However, in relation to Jorion's argument above, the actual course of the establishment process demonstrates that specialised open sea fisheries was only one of several options originally open to the Popo. For them, specialisation was not a "logical" result of migration; on the contrary, specialisation followed as one of several options after they had established themselves in the new country. There is nothing to indicate that they were forced into open sea fishery. They could probably have continued a Vili type of part-time fishery similar to that they had practised in the lagoons of Grand Popo.

We find considerable variation in the relations the Popo fishermen in Pointe-Noire had to their home villages at the time of their arrival in the 1960s and early 70s. There are cases which clearly show that some migrants were in trouble and had few possibilities to make a living at home.¹³ However, as many or even more of them would have had few problems in taking up normal village life in Benin if they so desired. Many of the Popo in Pointe-Noire belong to important families and lineages with considerable territorial rights. In Benin, individually held fishing places of numerous of the Congolese residents, were located and many of the most influential people now living in the Lower Mono have previously lived and worked abroad.

Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that there were many causes behind the migration of Popo fishermen which accelerated sharply in the 1960s and 70s. Certainly, the causes are much more complex than simply a result of the marginalisation of people in home areas due to ecological deterioration. Their establishment in Congo and the turn towards full-time marine fishing among the Popo can certainly not be explained as exclusively a question of "duress", as Jorion argues. Other factors are probably more significant; in order to understand them we need to reinterpret (compared to Jorion's interpretation) the role played by work migrations, both economically as well as culturally within the communities of the Xwla and Xweda. There is no evidence in the historical literature that work migrations developed as a consequence of people losing access to resources

¹³ Among those, many were found to have "sold" their usufruct fishing rights in lagoons or rivers to others in order to pay for the preparations and the ticket. These rights may probably be returned to the person in question, provided he can return the money he originally was given, but we have no evidence of such reappropriations having taken place.

at home by losing rights to the territories of their lineage. Nor is there any evidence that work migration as such has at any stage in history led migrants to become detached from the economic and cultural life of their home villages in the way Jorion seems to argue. On the contrary, work migration connected to possibilities within the broader regional economic systems of Aja peoples seems to have been a common economic strategy and a more or less integrated part of the Xwla and Xweda social organisation for centuries. It first developed in connection to increased trade contracts between the coastal and the northern savannah areas and the presence of the Europeans. Later it changed according to the economic policies of the colonial power and since the 1960s, work migrations have been adapted to fit the post-colonial political scene. Migration has always been combined with longer stays at home and, when age prevents productive work abroad, the final return to the home village. In this respect migration has appeared as a means to increase an individual's personal standing and this together with increased economic possibilities can give authority and power in the home communities. *Work on the "outside" in order to bring assets to the "inside" have been integrated in Popo social order and have functioned as a means to support and reproduce the features of the Xwla and the Xweda societies in the Lower Mono as such.*

Seen in this perspective, the move to Congo and the turn towards specialised maritime fishing become perfectly understandable. Work abroad is primarily a means to realise wealth which can be transferred back to the home community and converted into economic, political and religious "projects" there. Migration which does not produce tangible results to be converted in the home community therefore in a sense becomes meaningless from this perspective. The migration to Congo (and elsewhere) which accelerated in the early 1960s is first of all a reflection of the sudden disappearance of other migrating opportunities, reinforced by the problems of ecologic deterioration at home. Once established abroad, for the Popo the main question became to find a mode of work which as effectively as possible reflected the logic of their migration system. Part-time fishing similar to the mode of life in the Lower Mono was certainly not appropriate for this purpose, and other opportunities in trade and craft production were probably limited and very different from what the Popo had been doing before. On the other hand, both the pre-1962 experience as well as experiments undertaken by some of them after 1967, showed promising results well suited to the social "needs" of the Popo. Although the destiny of their predecessors also had demonstrated the insecurity connected to investing considerable sums abroad, in 1969 the option must have appeared sufficiently promising. Besides, there were other ways to reduce the risks

of a repetition of the 1962 events. The remaining part of this paper seeks to indicate how this happened.

4. A new production system and consolidation of the community: Developments in the 1970s

The period from 1969 until 1977 was characterised by a considerable and accelerated growth in the Popo population. It started in autumn 1969, when the arrival of some 60 Popo men more than doubled the male population. During the 1970s the figure continued to increase. In 1973 there were 164 (Niel 1973) and in 1976 a survey done by the Port authorities in Pointe-Noire counted 470 Popo fishermen (Nguinguri 1991b). The number of Ghanaian canoes shows a similar increase. In 1970, 24 canoes are reported (Samba 1970); this figure had reached 45 by 1973 (Niel 1973) and around 120 by 1976. The presence of women is not given much attention in the literature. From our own investigations we know that not more than five Popo women lived at the beach in 1971,¹ and according to the fishermen themselves the number of women started to increase only around 1973. In 1981 their number is reported to be 243 (Adrien 1981),² but this figure is not automatically comparable with the others since there had been a repatriation of the Popo in September 1977 which led to an immediate decrease. However on the basis of interviews the adult women population in 1977 is estimated to number between 200 and 300 individuals.

The total dominance of Xwla and the Xweda was strengthened during the 1970s. Although the main shift of origin and particularly the disappearance of the Anlo Ewe was a direct result of 1962 repatriation,³ Mina fishermen returned to Pointe-Noire about at the same time as the Xwla. Among the 164 fishermen surveyed by Niel in 1973, he reports that 153 are from Benin, 10 from Togo and only one is Ghanaian. Three years later in the

¹ These women were named by several fishermen who already lived or arrived Pointe Noire that year.

² The figure includes only Popo fish smokers. Although some few women may not be included, it may be used for demographic purposes.

³ Dhont reported (1963) the following background of the fishermen in 1962: Ghanaians 34, Togolese 21 and Dahomeyans 10. There is no need here to discuss the fact that these figures are not automatically coherent with those presented by Venetier (1958) four years earlier.

Congolese port authority survey, the number of Togolese was reduced to eight (and no Ghanaians) while the presence of Béninois had tripled. Since then, the number of Mina companies and fishermen has continued to decrease, with only one company and two fishermen left at present.

The growth of the Popo was almost exclusively based on their specialisation in open sea fishery which started in the years immediately prior to 1969. It may be worthwhile to investigate in some detail the patterns of recruitment which emerged in this first phase. Before the specialisation process accelerated, most of the Popo collaborated in small groups of two or three persons. Generally these groups consisted of people who had decided to migrate together; groups were often based on friendship rather than on formal relations of kinship. Confronted with the investment and labour needs required in order to operate an open sea canoe — this demanded considerable sums of money and 5 to 6 persons as a minimum — the switch towards open sea fisheries did not lead to increased collaboration among the first residents. What happened was that each of the original groups sought an enlarged collaboration by calling for additional members in Benin. From the activities among the first Popo in the years between 1967 to 1969, we can see that representatives of virtually all the original groups revisited Benin, even though many of them had only just arrived. It has not been possible to identify the exact number of original work groups in the 1960s; but on the basis of the number of fishermen as well as the number of Ghanaian canoes which emerged in the late 1960s, we assume that about 20 groups existed.

Case studies show that each of the groups mainly sought two things when revisiting Benin. One was money to finance the company; the other was sufficient additional labour to operate it.⁴ To a certain extent funds were found in the extended family system, but since money was scarce and Congo was far away, two or three persons were seldom able to raise enough. A common solution seems to have been to combine the two different needs by inviting new members still in Benin to invest with them in co-ownership. In addition a certain number of younger men willing to join as labourers were included. This recruitment pattern is most probably the immediate cause of the heavy “invasion” of Popo men to Pointe-Noire autumn 1969. To a certain extent, it was combined with the Klondyke syndrome of “great opportunities in the south” which also led to the establishment of companies among people who had never been to Congo

⁴ In addition they had to make practical arrangements in order to buy canoes in Ghana as well as other equipment which was scarce in Congo.

before. Many of the companies of Xweda from Lac Ahémé and Ouidah are examples of this effect.

No data exist as to how many companies existed around 1970, but we must assume that since none of them — or at least only some very few — had more than one canoe at the outset, the total number must have been close to 24, equivalent to the reported number of canoes. If the adult male population was around 100-110 this implies that there were approximately 4 Popo fishermen per canoe or slightly more than it is today (3.45). We can therefore assume that, already from the beginning, the newly established units must have had sufficient manpower to operate and that there was no need to increase their number. Besides, already very early in the 1970s ARB-B established mechanisms aimed at reducing of the number of newcomers. All the same, the number of canoes grew very fast and more or less proportionally with the number of men during the 1970s. If the companies had sufficient manpower to operate, and ARB-B tended to limit the establishment of newcomers, there is a need to investigate why the community still grew so rapidly.

In order to understand the underlying factors of the growth, we need to focus on the organisation of the companies. In 1970 virtually all the companies were co-owned with a leader who generally was the man who had taken the initiative to create it. The group of co-owners were, as we have noted, only loosely connected through kinship, and the “rules” of authority and the sharing of assets and profits were new and floating.⁵ Not unlike today, the potential danger of economic conflicts among co-owners was considerable. For such reasons, but mainly because of the whole social logic behind migration as described above, most of the “younger” co-owners were eager to establish their own units where they themselves could figure as company chief.

These two elements — the search towards increased social standing and economic control — are crucial factors for understanding the particular dynamism of the population growth in the 1970s. Fig. 2 shows a typical case of company development from its creation in 1969 until today. We can note the pattern of continuous fissions, which means that out of the first company with one canoe and six owners created in 1969 (on the basis of

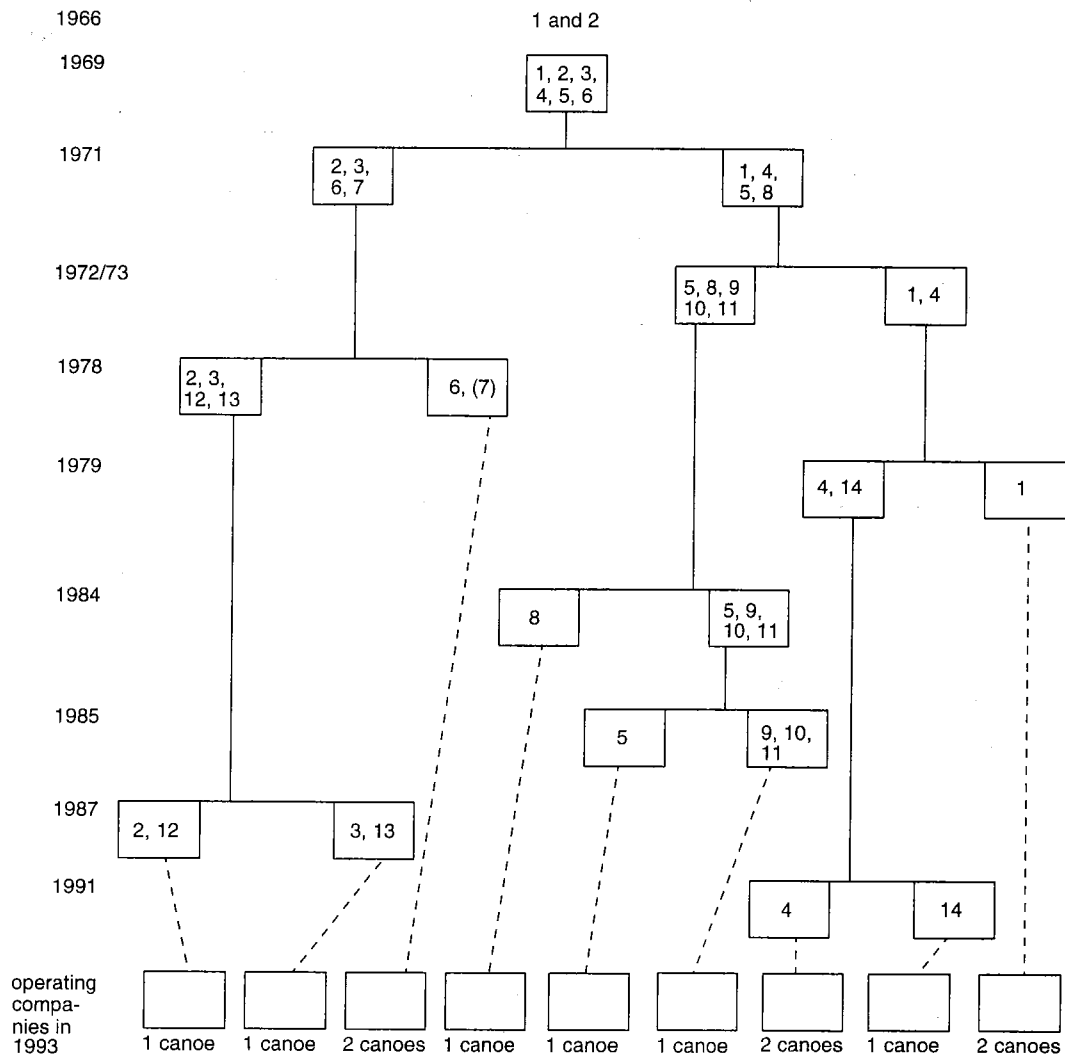
⁵ Companies based on co-ownership is rather unique among the West African migrant fishermen. No references in literature have been found indicating similar arrangements elsewhere. Companies in Ghana or Senegal seem to be individually owned. It is interesting though that the quotation from Savariau (see p.19) indicates that lagoon transport canoes in Benin at the beginning of this century may have been operated under similar conditions.

two persons who already had arrived in 1966), there exist today nine companies with twelve canoes owned by fourteen men. For each fission during the 1970s one sees that one or more of the existing co-owners really to form new units. However, in order to establish the new unit they needed financial support. Since credits mainly came from Benin, where they were difficult to obtain and most owners already had loans, the best approach was (as in the start) to invite new people to participate as owners. In Fig.2 we see that nine new owners were invited to participate in the period from 1971 to 1979. Most of them were workers in the existing company who had performed well and who were able to raise additional funds. With new companies and new canoes, each of the new group of owners also needed to provide new workers, both to cover labour needs, but also as potential allies for future fissions. In this period, the fishery was more differentiated than today, and that allowed the workers to start their career by personally buying some bottom gill nets which enabled them to accumulate funds faster than through the pelagic driftnet business. Owners were also eager to initiate and organise saving societies (*tontines*) with their workers. In this way a system of steady upward mobility was established: young Popo came as workers, (some) were later invited to participate as co-owner, and finally established themselves as heads of company. Virtually all company leaders present in Pointe-Noire today and who arrived after 1970 started as workers in a company owned by someone else. It is in this perspective we must understand the increase of the number of males in the Popo community in the 1970s. Very few came with established companies from Benin without prior involvement as workers.

Despite the considerable lack of data, the patterns in the emergence of a new production system allow us to reflect on the question of the economic growth of the system. Numerous authors who write about the Popo fisheries as being highly dynamic substantiate their views by referring to data from the 1970s, but they do not critically define what type of dynamism they talk about. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the most striking feature is that the growth in the 1970s was based mainly on demographic growth in general and that of owners in particular. The total increase in means of production (which was substantial) must be seen as largely a reflection of the greater number of people. There were, as mentioned, approximately as many fishermen for each canoe in 1977 as in 1970. However, this does not tell us very much about economic development, since we lack data on the exact number of owners and who owned what. Some data connected to Fig.2 may nevertheless give us some idea about the situation. In 1969 there were six owners for the first company canoe. In 1979, fourteen owners in five companies were operating six

canoes. That in itself means that the number of owners/canoe had been more than halved. When we also know that the average number of nets operated by the Popo canoes increased from between 150-400m in 1973 (Niel 1973) to between 500-700m in 1983 (Gobert 1985a),⁶ it seems reasonable to assume a certain increase of means of production/owner in the 1970s.

Figure 2
Development of one company from its creation until today



Each box represents a company

Each number represents a company owner (co-owner or individual)

⁶ These figures refer to the number of nets operated on a fishing trip. They do not tell us about the volume of nets owned by the companies, although there normally will be a correlation between the two. No data on outboard engines allow comparisons during this time span.

The increase in the male population combined with increases in means of production and catches⁷ soon led to problems in selling the fish. In the early 1970s most of the catch was sold to Congolese traders at the beach. They were not very numerous, each of them only bought limited volumes and they were difficult to control in terms of giving them credits. Many Popo present today recall that they themselves had to go to the market in town to sell fish at critical moments.⁸ This fact combined with the growing consolidation of the community is one of the main reasons behind the increase in the number of women, which accelerated from around 1973. Although many of the fishermen from the start had contracted alliances with Congolese women and lived in loosely established relationships with them, these women never became important actors in Popo economic life. It was the Popo women — already married to the fishermen, but who had remained in Benin — who immediately took up the smoking business and soon solved the problem. Already in 1981 the number of kilns at the beach had a smoking capacity far in excess of actual catches (Adrien 1981).

The development of a new production system and the considerable increase of people over a short period of time, represented considerable challenges. As has already been noted, although the Popo in Benin have their institutions and ways of organising community life, life and work in Pointe-Noire required its own institutions and social forms, different not only from those at home, but also from what they may have experienced in other migrating situations. In many ways a new community had to be created.

The first time we hear about ARB at the beach is in 1967. The initiative to create an association was external as much as internal. In the town, Béninois traders mainly of Nago (Youruba) origin together with other Béninois of different ethnic background working as civil servants in the Congolese administration had lived and worked in Pointe-Noire for many years and already established an association at their level. The historical origins and development of this association are blurred and complicated. It may at least be traced back to the 1930s, and emerged at that time as an association of people from present-day Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria. The fishermen in Pointe-Noire before 1962 were connected to the

⁷ Catch statistics for the 1970s are virtually non-existent. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that catches increased substantially and reached their present level (varying between 5000 and 8000) tons by the late 1970s or early 1980s. At the start of the ORSTOM's catch statistics programme in 1981, Popo catches are recorded at 4,756 tons (Anon. 1984).

⁸ A parallel situation is referred to by Dhont (1963) in the pre-1962 community.

association through an Ewe chief (Dhont 1963). Associations based on national identities emerged only in the 1960s after the various countries had gained independence, but this development was gradual and slow. In 1967 the other West African foreigners pushed for the integration and organisation of the newly arrived fishermen. This led to the election of a chief, Kassa Sévi, who rapidly elaborated the written regulations⁹ which at a certain stage were approved by the Béninois Embassy in Kinshasa. However, it was mainly after the end of 1969, when the Popo population suddenly doubled, that ARB-B started to develop as a distinct and separate institution which on the one hand was part of the network of Béninois (and other West Africans) in Congo, and on the other had its own logical and consistent place in the old Popo system of extended families.

Both for the traders in town as well as for the Popo fishermen, the main concern was to minimise conflicts with Congolese society. This is clearly reflected in the ten general articles of the internal regulations. Since the risks of conflicts with Congolese to a large extent depended on their ability to govern internally, ARB-B was given internal control functions from the outset. The way it deals with internal conflicts demonstrates very clearly its integration in the extended family system. Matters that can be satisfactorily resolved at family level are never brought to ARB-B's attention. Only in cases when the "lower levels" fail in finding viable solutions or in cases involving the whole population, will ARB-B as an institution get involved. If judged necessary, ARB leaders in town may also participate, although this is exceptional.

The selection and recruitment of ARB leaders came about gradually. There was no formal board in the first years, but as time passed a need for treasurers, accountants and secretaries emerged and people were appointed. Equally important were a group of so-called 'consultants' with whom Kassa Sévi conferred when appointing people to the various positions and concerning all major decisions. These consultants were no-one else than the elders of from the different extended families, who also constituted the bulk of the chiefs of company.

The selection criteria for leaders to ARB-B were from the outset the same as those in the families: gender, and seniority in the sense of broad personal competence. But because of the particularities in the new situation, a person's individual capacity to establish and efficiently use the relations he established in the Congolese society became a crucial element of "seniority". ARB-B quickly developed efficient and direct links with pivotal

⁹ These regulations explicitly deal with the fishermen. We are not aware of written regulations for any other group of foreigners at that time.

actors in Congolese society, in society as well as in the state apparatus. The leader of the Vili fishermen was a close friend of Kassa Sévi and actually influenced his appointment. Within the Congolese state apparatus the Popo managed to establish close contacts within all the essential sectors — which in the 1970s were the Party (PCT), the army and the police in particular. Also at the municipal level and in customs and port authorities they had close links with individual persons. In this way ARB-B as an institution gained a kind of *de facto* control of all important external relations, also those connecting the fishermen to the rest of the Béninois and West African community in the town.

Despite this monopoly, ARB-B was continuously controlled by the extended family institutions through the system of consultants. ARB-B's internal authority depended to a certain extent on consensus; but, with a range of diverging interests among the members and a constant need to organise things differently from what they were used to, consensus was difficult to achieve. Nor was it always the best tool with which to govern, so a certain amount of “repression” was needed. The most obvious and already well known tool was the “management of fear” through the active use of religion. From the beginning, ARB-B became able to use and manipulate the common ideology of the Popo in their internal governing, but since ARB-B leaders often were younger and not necessarily qualified in religious matters, their use of religion always relied on support from at least a majority of the extended family leaders. Even today the “consultants” have an important power basis; they are the ones who legitimise any changes in commonly accepted norms of behaviour through translating and reinterpreting Popo myths and basic values, and they also “adapt” the meaning of modern technology and forms of organisation into a suitable Popo mode of work.

In this way an intricate system of power-sharing developed between the two main political structures of the community. ARB-B leaders got their power through their network of external contacts which they used to serve the community. That power source was counterbalanced through the ideological control that remained in the hands of the extended family leaders. This power-sharing and the history of the establishment of ARB-B also provide us with some key elements for understanding another aspect of the demographic development: the increased numerical dominance of the Xwla and Xweda people at the expense of the Mina and Anlo Ewe.

The Togolese Mina and the Ewe fishermen, who had been the dominant groups before 1962, were included in the same political framework as the rest. Although the Mina have a different origin than the Aja and the Ewe, they have lived in the same area as the others and are integrated in the Aja-

Ewe way of life. However, they soon found themselves in the minority compared to the others, and were connected to ARB-B mainly in a formal way as the latter more and more appeared as an organisation for the Béninois. It is symptomatic that no Mina or Ewe was appointed to the board, or functioned as consultants.¹⁰ In minority and with little political influence, the few who had arrived were not able to recruit new ones.¹¹

However, the Xweda were also in clear minority before 1970. The traditional relationship between them and the Xwla has often been more problematic than that of the Xwla to the Mina or Ewe. Nevertheless, the Xweda grew in number as much as the Xwla. One obvious reason is that the Xweda were Béninois, and the external ARB leaders wished to promote a new national identity instead of the traditional ethnic ones. Perhaps equally important was that the Xweda managed to make effective use of the particular religious functions and authority which they have had in southern Benin for centuries. The secrets and the particular relations the Xweda had to voodoo and common forefathers represented a potential danger, but also a strong means for governance. And finally, closer examination of the lineages of the people in Pointe-Noire reveals that many of the fishermen who define themselves as Xwla because their home villages lay in traditional Xwla territories, recognise their "real" origin as Xweda. One example of lineages with such a type of "double identity"¹² was that of their leader Kassa Sévi. For these reasons the Xwla and the Xweda very soon came to dominate the community of the foreigners politically and thereby also demographically.

From the outset ARB-B was only marginally involved in the internal economic affairs of the community. However, with the changes in mode of recruitment to production units compared to the old systems at home, and the economic complexity of the new co-ownership structure, serious conflicts on economic matters were inevitable. Initially, attempts were made

¹⁰ Whether they in the beginning functioned as consultants or not is open to discussion, since this position is informal. However, today both groups are explicitly kept outside any significant political positions in the community. It is therefore symptomatic that the two Mina households still living at the beach have chosen very different strategies, both in their mode of work and in their relations to the Congolese society, than the rest of the population.

¹¹ Moreover, the company system of the Mina and the Ewe differed from that of the Xwla. They did not create the same type of upward mobility system as that described above.

¹² Double identity is descriptive in the sense that one observes that people of these lineages often make alternate use of Xwla or Xweda identity according to context. However, among the rest of the population, this group is often considered as "neither nor". The Xwla consider them as Xweda and vice versa.

to solve these conflicts within the framework of the extended family system, but the system quickly demonstrated its inability to promote satisfactory solutions. It was ARB-B who developed new sets of regulations for solving these conflicts, often based on far more particularistic principles than those of the families who had to take account not only of the interests of the persons present in Pointe-Noire, but also of histories and interests connected to people at home. ARB-B therefore became a dominant judicial institution in the 1970s, known to base its verdicts on "facts" instead of on the often unclear and mingled interests which so often guide the politics of the extended families. On the other hand, careful examination of a limited number of trials demonstrates that to consider ARB-B regulations as basically particularistic would be a misleading simplification. It is important to note though, that ARB-B never came in a position where it had any influence or control over one of the most important economic transactions — the credits given to the fishermen in Pointe-Noire by people in Benin.¹³ To the extent that such control existed, it remained in the hands of the extended families involved.

The political development of the Popo community from the creation of ARB-B in 1967 and during the 1970s clearly demonstrates two separate things. First that ARB-B, the way it developed, must be understood mainly as an expression of corporate political action between the Xwla and the Xweda present in Pointe-Noire. It is not a question of certain groups or individuals of Popo seeking to take control at the expense of others. The system of power-sharing between ARB-B and the extended families guaranteed equal possibilities, independent of background, to practice what in the early 70s became identified as Popo fishery. It was very difficult for specific individuals or groups to utilise the political institutions in order to achieve economic benefits at the expense of others. The economic interests of Popo workers were naturally of minor concern in this system, although both the families as well as ARB-B could be mobilised in cases where patrons abused their power. However, the economic system implied that many workers very soon became co-owners and later chiefs of companies, provided they performed according to collective expectations and could raise the required sums of money. Although it was external forces which pushed for a certain type of political organisation at the beach, the system as it developed became distinctively different from the rest of ARB. For the major part it must be understood as something created internally among the fishermen themselves as an answer to their specific needs.

¹³ We know that certain leaders like Kassa tried to create such a control, but except for some specific cases connected to his home village, he never managed to enforce it.

Secondly, the development gives clear indications of what was the corporate basis of the political organisation and of ARB-B in particular. As already mentioned, one of its most striking characteristics has been its serious preoccupation and its continuous efforts to minimise all sources of conflicts with Congolese society in general and with the government in particular. The overall concern of the Popo in Pointe-Noire was to be able to remain and to work in the new surroundings and to secure these rights. Such a preoccupation is only natural in view of their general experience from migration as well as the fact that the events of November 1962 were well-known to all. Residence and working rights could only be achieved through the consent of the Congolese authorities¹⁴ and indirectly through the acceptance of the local Vili fishermen in Pointe-Noire, recognised to have traditional rights to the coastal area including the sea.¹⁵ The latter point was initially quite important, as reflected in the close relationship established in the first years between Kassa Sévi and the Vili chief of village at the beach. In this perspective the strategy of minimising all kind of conflicts with the host population and their representatives, as well as open conflicts among Popo themselves, become perfectly logical: it was a question of ensuring one's rights to stay and work outside the territory where such rights are ascribed by birth.

Given the general demographic and political conditions in West and Central Africa where the mobility and dynamics of the various population groups are particularly high and ever changing, and where regulations and control of frontiers are weak, the question of residence permits for the Popo (independent of how this group is defined internally) becomes a collective issue. Even if individual residence permits are in principle issued by the authorities, and formal arrangements exist for a person legally to import the required means of production, these very often remain "in principle" options. The question of collectiveness is neither simple nor clear-cut. When the Béninois traders urged that the Popo be included in ARB, the only reasonable interpretation of this is the recognition among the traders that the performance of the fishermen, at least indirectly, could have consequences for their own opportunities to stay and work in the country. The question of collective access may therefore also include people of different occupations and different origins.

¹⁴ This does not only mean accepting their presence. It also implies accepting the import of gear such as canoes and to some extent also engines and nets which often were difficult to obtain in Congo in the early 1970s.

¹⁵ For the customary marine tenure system among the Vili, see Nguingiri 1988.

To illustrate the complexity attached to the question of collective versus individual residence permits, as well as the difficulties of establishing corporate political action, let us have a look at the perhaps most dramatic event in the history of the Popo in Pointe-Noire.

After the death of President Marien Ngouabi in May 1977 and the political changes which ensued, the Congolese government decided in early September the same year, and without any advance notification, to repatriate all foreigners who did not possess formal residence permits. In one week, after 20-hour detention of the whole Popo community, approximately 4/5 of them were sent home via Brazzaville. Immediately after, the authorities confiscated all 166 outboard engines belonging to Popo, with the justification that proper import permits were lacking. Most of the ARB leadership possessed legal residence permits and thus remained in Pointe-Noire. In this situation, they decided that all remaining Popo should refrain from fishing other than for pure subsistence. The decision quickly led to a severe shortage of fish in the markets in town and this situation prevailed for three months. Finally, the leaders of the remaining Popo were convoked to a meeting with "l'Etat major" in Pointe-Noire where they were asked why they did not fish. Answering that their engines had been taken from them, they were asked to come back the next day with whatever they could find of documents regarding the engines. ARB-B then collected most of the invoices and through negotiations they managed to regain possession of 150 of the 166 engines. There upon, normal commercial fishing was resumed.

Three to four months after the repatriation, and having heard about the recent developments in Congo, four Popo who at the time of the repatriation happened to be in Benin for personal reasons, decided to return to Pointe-Noire. Upon arrival they were immediately detained at the police station at the airport, and the Popo fishermen responded immediately by returning to subsistence fishing. No new meetings were held, but after a week the four were released and the Popo returned to fishing as normal. Slowly the rest of the Popo population returned. By 1982 the population had reached its former level. For the great majority it was the same people who returned.

This episode gives rise to at least two questions. First, how is it possible to talk of collective rights when the case clearly demonstrates that it was primarily a question of personal residence permits? Second, if ARB-B is to be understood as a political institution established to collectively secure the

rights of residence and work, why did it not require its members to have their legal permits and import documents in order?¹⁶

Residence and work permits can of course not be seen in isolation from what one has to pay for them. If the costs exceed the potential profit, the permit is of little use. Like anyone else the fishermen will try to reduce the costs to a minimum. On the other hand, we know that at the level of the host government, individuals or groups of representatives will try to get the fishermen to pay as much as possible. Investigations among Popo with formal residence permits in 1991 led us to conclude that the only answer to the question of cost was "it depends". Even at the level of the Congolese authorities it was difficult to get exact information about which types of documentation were required and how much it would cost. Returning to the situation in 1977 it is symptomatic that ARB-B leaders were among the 1/5 who had legal permits. Through their contacts within and their knowledge of the Congolese state apparatus they were able to get the permits at a "reasonable" price. This does not mean, however, that their contacts were willing or able to provide permits for the whole population on similar conditions. For the great majority individual access is more of an illusion than a real option, and they have to seek other solutions.

The confiscation of the outboard engines demonstrates the collective aspect even more clearly, since all the engines were confiscated. It is probably not possible to find out whether the Congolese authorities were formally right or not in demanding import permits — but from our perspective, this is not the main point either. In a floating situation where no one really knows what is required, this ignorance may be used more or less systematically according to the purposes of different actors "representing" the government. It is always possible to find something which is not in conformity with certain rules or regulations. The fishermen can in fact never rely on ensuring their stay or their access to crucial means of production exclusively through heeding more or less formal demands.

If it had been possible for each individual fisherman (or each company) to secure his own residence and work rights by formal means, there would simply not have been a need for ARB-B in the form it developed. The whole rationale behind it was to secure, as best as it could, these rights for its members on a collective basis. It was through the creativity and flexibility combined with toughness of the ARB-B leaders that these rights

¹⁶ Both questions are essential in relation to West African migrant fisheries in general. Most of the repatriation processes known in relation to fishermen have taken place on the basis of residence permits. Furthermore, it is reported from all over the region that lack of legal permits is the rule more than the exception.

were secured in 1977. Even in a critical situation like the one we have just examined, and despite the inconveniences and material losses this episode imposed on the majority of the Popo, the end result was that the rights were retained for the Popo already established there.¹⁷ As noted, they all slowly returned and took up their previous activities. Unlike the case in 1962, the political organisation of the Popo had proved itself efficient. In terms of understanding the level of legitimacy that ARB has managed to acquire among its members, its handling of the repatriation episode remains a crucial element of explanation.

However, the underlying reasons for the Popo presence in Pointe-Noire were as we argued earlier, linked to their particular relations to the home area, including the territory, the forefathers, the family system and its members as well as other individuals and institutions in the Popo community. In relation to that context, ARB-B could not be of much significance. Regulation of Pointe-Noire affairs was something completely different; it involved other people than regulation of more fundamental questions connected to the basic identity of people and questions like marriage relations, child raising, deaths as well as management of lineage territories. Only the system of extended families could guarantee proper management of these questions and safeguard the reproduction of relations to the home communities. The Popo political organisation as it emerged during the 1960s and 70s must therefore be seen, on the one hand, as a reflection of their need for corporate political action to secure residence and work rights abroad, and on the other as a continuation of the old Popo system based on relatively close contact between the migrants and their home territories.

ARB-B, although corporated around the rights of residence and work, also proved to be more efficient and useful for many other purposes related to the reproduction of a new production system. Gradually it came to play the most dominant role in everyday life. However, its own legitimacy continued to depend heavily on the system of extended families which not only reproduced but probably also reinforced the value and the use of the traditional symbols and representations, such as a particular way of Popo dressing, specific foods, the use of Popo language and not the least religious ceremonies and rituals. This particular combination of new and old, coupled with the undisputable personal capacities of Kassa Sévi as

¹⁷ In a case which dates 16 years back, we have been careful to present only the part of the story which has been possible to cross-check. Other backstage elements underline the essence of the argument even further.

leader, led by the late 1970s to a political system characterised by a high degree of internal governance.

However, with respect to the reproduction of the newly established production system, the political organisation also created certain major problems. As a consequence of the particular division of functions between ARB-B and the families just outlined, the credit relations of the owners in Pointe-Noire had to be controlled by the families and not the ARB — but the ability of this institution to ensure that people fulfilled their responsibilities was weak. As a result, this particular source of funding slowly dried up. In the problem of organising the control of credits during the 1970s lies a source for further change in the political organisation during the 1980s which on the one hand increased the capacity of internal governance, while also creating new and serious problems.

5. Changes in growth patterns and political challenges in the 1980s

The best way to illustrate that important changes occurred in the dynamics of the Popo community around 1980, is to point to an apparent paradox in the demographic development which no-one yet has investigated and which is reflected in Table 1. Although the system of company fissions, which in the 1970s probably represented the basic explanatory factor behind demographic growth, has continued through the 1980s, the growth in male population and in canoes shows virtually full stop after the return of those who had been repatriated in 1977. In 1983 the Popo male population is reported to have been 483 (Makaya 1983) operating from about 110 canoes (Gobert 1985a), and these are basically the same figures found today.¹ By contrast, the number of adult women has continued to grow, almost doubling in the ten years from 243 in 1981 to 420 in September 1991.²

¹ No reliable population figures exist for the period between 1983 and 1991. However, taking ORSTOM's yearly canoe surveys into account, and assuming that the ratio of Popo/canoe has been more or less stable, one may assume that the population increased slightly towards 1988 to decrease again towards 1991. The canoe surveys show that from 130 canoes in 1983, the number increased towards 149 in 1988 and later fell to 134 in 1991 (Anon. Undated)

A population figure of 1000 Popo fishermen in Pointe-Noire in 1985 which occurs in certain reports and articles (e.g. Nguinguiri 1991) and which is said to derive from the registration made by the "marine marchande" must be considered incorrect. ARB-B's own population register indicates that the number of fishermen never can have exceeded 550.

The difference between the ORSTOM canoe survey figures and those used in Table 1 stems from different methods of counting. The ORSTOM surveys include all canoes which have been used the last 12 months as well as a small number of Ghanaian canoes owned by Congolese (between 3 and 5). The figures used in the table reflect canoes in regular use by the Popo. The difference in 1983 is 130 versus 110 and in 1991 134 versus 120.

² All population figures from 1991 are based on thorough elaborations of ARB's own population registers, which proved of very high quality. They include only people actually present in Congo on the 11/9-93. The total number of Popo residing in Pointe-Noire must therefore be considered somewhat higher, since a certain number of them will, at any given time, be in Benin.

Table 1
Demographic development among the Popo 1970-1991

Year	# men	# women	# companies	# canoes	sources
1970	100-20 ?	5	24 ?	24	-Samba 1970
1976-7	470	200-300 ?		117	-Nguingui 1991 -Cayré & Fontana 1977
1982-3	483-500	243	75	100-110	-Chaboud 1982 -Adrien 1981 -Gobert 1985a
1991	467	424	107	120	-Own survey

Figures followed by “?” are based on estimates.

Superficial arguments have explained this change partly by saying that the beach villages now are overpopulated, and partly by that ARB-B has managed to gain full control and prevents new establishments. However, such arguments cannot be considered satisfactory. Overpopulation in this context is a relative concept, second, we have seen that the way ARB-B functioned in the 1970s did not allow this institution to prevent its members in their strive for upward mobility without seriously losing credibility and legitimacy. If our interpretation of the development in the Popo community in the 1970s is correct, then there must have been other changes in the community which altered the conditions behind the dynamics of the demographic growth.

The best way to address this question is to investigate in some depth the changes and the development in the companies. On the basis of data collected by Gobert in November 1983 (1985a) and my own data from November 1992, Table 2 gives a detailed picture of how this 9-year development has taken place within 21 units. Table 3 summarises the quantitative data which can be read from this development.

Table 2
Development in owner structure and means of production in 21 companies from November 1983 to November 1992

1983

comp no.	1	2	4	5	7	9	10	11	12	13	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24			
no.owners	4	7	4	1	1	1	1	2	2	6	7	1	5	5	6	1	3	1	3	1			
ST					1																		
SP					2															1			
'200'	11	30	22	8	9	18	8	17	30	12	15	12	5	29	18	15	12	7	13	15			
engines	3	7	4	1	3	3	2	4	3	3	4	1	1	5	3	3	2	2	3	3			
V.can					3	1				1						2				2			
G.can	1	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1			
G.can	1	1	1	1	1	1	D	1	1	1	1	D	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	D			
V.can					4		i					i		1					1	i			
engines	2	2	1	4	1	3	2	2	1	2	3	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	s		
'200'	15	18	15	16	46	9	29	10	23	15	8	28	9	8	12	18	7	8	25	26	10	22	12
'400'	3	8		6	14		7	5	5	7	9	7	2	8	5	2	12	12	8		2	8	2
K					4		1		15		7	1		15		7	7						
SP					2		v					v											
ST							e					e											
no.owners	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	6	7	1	1	3	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	1
comp.no.	1	2a	2b	2c	2d	2e	4	14	7a	7b	7c	15	17a	17b	18a	18b	19a	19b	20	21	22	23a	23b

1992

The company numbers for 1983 are coherent with the order in which the 24 companies appear in fig. 2 in Gobert 1985b (p.255). Companies 3 and 8 in Gobert's survey were not possible to identify. Company 6 was probably part of company 13 and is therefore not included. The data on number of nets in 1983 are collected from unpublished data which Gobert very kindly placed at my disposal. Number of owners in 1983 does not appear in Gobert's data (only if the unit is individually or collectively owned) and has been reconstructed in 1992. The reconstruction, however, is not coherent with Gobert's information on individual/collective ownership.

ST: Purse seine; SP: Beach seine; '200': Unit of pelagic drift nets with a depth of 200 meshes; '400': Unit of pelagic drift nets with a depth of 400 meshes. K: Unit of shark nets; V.can: Small local dugout canoes; G.can: Big Ghanaian canoes; engines: Outboard engine generally from 25-40 hp.

Dotted lines are used when the status of two or more companies is unclear, i.e. whether they are part of one company or constitute separate units.

Table 3
Development in means of production in 21 companies

	comps.	owners	own./ comp	G.can.	can./ own.	engines	eng/ own.	'200'+ '400'	nets/ own.
1983	21	65	3.09	28	0.43	66	1.01	321	4.94
1992	28	52	1.86	27	0.52	56	1.07	655	12.60

G.can.: Ghanaian canoes

engines: Outboard engines generally 25 or 40 hp.

'200'+ '400': Units of pelagic driftnets of 200 and 400 meshes depth. Since a '400' net is nothing but a double '200' net, we have for 1992 added the number of '200's to the number of '400' multiplied by 2 (200+(400x2)).

Tables 2 and 3 support the impression from Table 1 that the fissions of companies continued. The 21 companies surveyed by Gobert in 1983 had become 28 in 1992, even though three of the original ones had been dissolved (Table 2). However, the Tables also show that the number of owners decreased from 65 to 52 and the owner/company ratio fell from 3.09 in 83 to 1.86 in 92. Closer examination shows that 5 are dead and not substituted, 6 have failed as owners and become workers and 2 have retired and returned to Benin. Not a single new owner has been recruited to the 21 units during the 9 years in question.

The same phenomenon may also be illustrated in other ways. From Fig.2, we see that in the period from 1969 to 79, 1 company had increased to 5 and the number of owners had grown from 6 to 14. After 1979 the same 5 companies have developed into 9 units, but the number of owners decreased from 14 to 13 due to the death of one (owner 7). Furthermore, a survey of all 41 production units located in the more northerly beach village shows that only 3 of the 71 owners present in 1992 had become owners by 1980 or after. The remaining 68 had achieved their status as owner before 1980. In the same survey, the 20 units created in 1979 or earlier had an average of 3.09 owners per unit, while the same ratio for the 21 units created in 1980 or later had fallen to 1.19. There can hence be little doubt that while the number of owners in the 1970s grew steadily through the mechanism of upward mobility, this process must have stopped sometime before 1983.

In order to understand this demographic stabilisation we need to look into the reasons behind the stop in ownership recruitment. The financing of new companies in the 1970s was secured mainly through the relations the fishermen had to their home communities in Benin. In terms of credits this source was difficult to utilise, for many reasons. The availability of money

in home areas was limited. Those co-owners in Pointe-Noire wishing to become heads of company had already made use of such credits and could hardly expect to get more, particularly since it seems that the terms of repayment were not much respected. Conflicts concerning repayment had to be treated through the extended family system, which was ill-suited for dealing with credits of the size required by the migrants' new production system, and over such geographical distances. It is difficult to get a clear picture of the totality of these credits, but of the few cases we could investigate (including the two reflected in Fig.1), it is symptomatic that they all date from the 1970s and that at most only scant repayment has taken place. There is little doubt that the home communities slowly dried up as a source for funding new companies in the late 1970s.

At the same time a new source of funding emerged through the rapidly increasing economic role of Popo women in Pointe-Noire. Many of them quickly made good profits in their processing and trade. On the basis of Adrien's data (1981 pp.30-1) it is relatively simple to demonstrate that women processors and traders must have had at their disposal fairly substantial sums of money already at the beginning of the decade.³

In the late 1970s and into the early 1980s, the common pattern for women was personally to sell in retail the fish they had bought and smoked at the various markets in Pointe-Noire (Le Gall and Petitjean 1975, Cayré and Fontana 1977, Adrien 1981, Chaboud 1982, Makaya 1983). This approach limited the volumes of fish each woman could handle in terms of time. Adrien seems to estimate that 100 kilos of fresh fish was what a woman normally could manage to handle on a daily basis. However, slowly during the 1980s, the wholesale system as described in the first section of this study became the dominant mode of operation. That system is based on sale not only in Pointe-Noire, but in the whole CFCO railway area from the ocean to Brazzaville. The sale of marine fish products in these areas was not new, since various enterprises handling fish from the industrial fleet and with support of the Congolese government had for several years been involved in selling of frozen pelagic fish in towns and villages like

³ A proper economic analysis is not possible within the framework of this paper, nor is it the intention. However, Adrien's data reveal that a Popo woman in 1981 had a profit of about FCFA 5000 for smoking and selling 100 kg of fresh fish. If we assume that about 70 per cent of the Popo catches in 1981 were treated by the Popo women, this means that a total profit of FCFA 175 millions would have been generated among them, representing an average yearly profit of FCFA 720,000 for each woman. These figures are exclusively meant as an illustration and should not be used for further analytical purposes.

Loubomo, Makabana, Mouanda-M'Binda, Dolisie, Jacob and N'Kayi and Brazzaville (Le Gall and Petitjean 1975, Cayré and Fontana 1977).

The wholesale system in the artisan sector involves considerable risks. The fish is regularly sent by train to the clients of the Popo women, who are then expected to come to Pointe-Noire to pay their debts after an agreed period of time. Few indeed are the Popo processors who have not lost considerable sums due to payment problems. However, this wholesale system has also liberated Popo women, giving them more time to concentrate on the smoking, hence making it possible to handle much bigger volumes. A woman together with her hired Congolese labour can easily smoke between 1 and 1.5 tons of fish per day, as long as she does not have to sell it on the market herself. That volumes of this order are only very rarely treated by one woman, is probably because a woman does not have access to that much fish.⁴

The development in Pointe-Noire is hence similar to what is reported to have occurred in many other places along the West African coast: women traders, in order to get increased access to fish, have started to invest heavily in fisheries. Through providing credits to new companies, some women have managed to increase their provisions of raw materials considerably. In Pointe-Noire there have been various ways of facing this general strategy. For instance, a woman can support her own husband or another relative who wants to establish a new personal company, or she can provide credits to already existing companies. If she funds her husband, it is to increase her share of the catch (already ascribed by marriage); in the other cases it is simply the right to buy fish which is her major concern. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that credits from women to company owners, unlike the practice in other credit relations, do not include dates of repayment, or interest. It is only if and when a woman decides to renounce on her right to buy fish that the question of repayment becomes relevant.

In all cases of credit assessment, and independent of the credit strategies just mentioned, one of the main concerns of a woman creditor is the number of other women with whom she will have to share the fish. No woman can under any circumstances claim more fish in a company than what the wife (or wives) of the chief of company receives, without that creating serious conflicts and general moral condemnation. The size of the shares to the wives of the chief, depends furthermore upon the total number of wives married into the company. The lower the number of women, the

⁴ This situation concerns only the most successful among the women. There are of course many who are mainly constrained in their work by lack of money.

more fish the creditor can expect to receive. The fewer the wives in any (new or old) company, the more desirable it is for an outside woman to get access. And since the number of wives is also related to the number of men (owners in particular), a potential creditor will tend to invest in units with few owners when assessing the creditworthiness of a company (of course in combination with questions related to its general economic performance). The same logic applies in the case of supporting the creation of a new unit. If the new chief, as in the 1970s, seeks to ally with workers in order to get the funds needed, the number of wives will automatically increase. If a woman creditor provides the money, the chief can establish himself individually (or at least reduce the number of co-owners) and she is thereby automatically increasing her own share.⁵ In Table 2 we can see that in 1983 individually owned units represented 8 out of 21; by 1992, 18 companies out of the 28 existing then had become "one man units".⁶

The switch from loans provided by people in the home communities towards loans given by Popo women living in Pointe-Noire must have taken place gradually, but after 1980 no cases are known of new companies established with credits from Benin. From a situation in the 1970s characterised by the continuous creation of new production units and inclusion of new owners through a system of upward mobility, new units continued to be created in the 1980s, but now without the inclusion of new owners. An obvious consequence of this change has been a cementing or rigidification of the socio-economic statuses of the fishermen. In the 1980s Popo workers in Pointe-Noire remained workers with few possibilities of overcoming the important social barrier of owner/worker. In the northern beach village only one case exists where a group of three workers (father and two sons) have been able to establish themselves as co-owners after 1979.⁷

The alterations in the financing patterns and the subsequent changes in the dynamics of recruitment in the companies do not in themselves explain the halt in growth of the Popo male population in Pointe-Noire. Although the increase of owners stopped, the economic growth within each unit could in principle continue, which again must have had an influence on the

⁵ In the case of funding her husband, it is a bit more complicated because a wife also has to take the role of any co-wives into consideration. The "best" solution is always considered to be for each co-wife to invest an equal sum in their husband's company.

⁶ In the same article Gobert reports that 37 out of 41 fishing units were collectively owned (1985b, p. 254). In 1992, the survey of the northern village reveals that out of the 41 companies, those collectively owned only counted 19.

⁷ Some other attempts have been made either in alliance or separate from already existing co-owners. Except for the one referred to, these attempts have all systematically failed.

recruitment of Popo workers. Table 3 shows that there has been a considerable growth in means of production since 1983, both overall as well as in terms of gear/owner. However, this growth has mainly involved the volume of nets; the total number of canoes (and thereby also engines)⁸ has remained stable, and the canoe/owner ratio shows only a slight increase.

The strategy of the owners in order to increase their catches seems hence to have been to increase the number of nets without increasing the number of canoes accordingly. This can be done with bigger canoes, which permit the use of more nets per fishing trip. Data exist which demonstrate that this has indeed happened. The average length of Ghanaian canoes in Pointe-Noire has been in constant growth from 9.3m in 1973 (Niel 1973) to 11.35m in 1981 (Guederat 1981 quoted from Gobert 1985a) and 12.25m in 1992 according to my own canoe survey. The length of drift nets in operation also increased substantially; it was 500-700m in 1983 (Gobert 1985a), and in 1992 the average figure probably lies somewhere between 900 and 1200m.⁹

Although this is difficult to substantiate, the growth in nets seems exclusively to have concerned the pelagic driftnets. As a consequence, Popo fishery today appears more specialised in capture of pelagic species than ever. One immediate reason is the introduction of a new driftnet of double depth (generally referred to as the "400 meshes") which was developed by some of the Popo themselves in 1989-90 and which has prolonged the pelagic fishing seasons by several months.¹⁰ The present use of bottom gill nets is now limited either to fishing for ceremonial purposes, or when the pelagic stocks are considered absolutely out of reach. Even in these cases, only a few chiefs of company allow their canoes to be used for demersal fishing.

⁸ The decrease in the number of engines cannot be considered significant since there are great uncertainties as to when to stop including an outboard engine. In the 1992 survey, all engines which were not considered "savable" were excluded.

⁹ No systematic data collection was performed, but continuous daily interviews and observations for 8 months support this estimate.

¹⁰ In general terms there are two fishing seasons for pelagic species; the main one starts in March or April and lasts until September; there is also a shorter one lasting approximately one month in December and January (Gobert 1991). The introduction of the "400 meshes" prolonged the season substantially in 1991 and early 1992. However, due to the variability of the resources, the timing and the duration of the fishing seasons as well as the selection of technologies vary considerably from one year to another. In autumn 1992 the potential use of "400 meshes" was reduced substantially compared to the year before.

To what extent these strategies — on the one hand the specialisation into pelagic fishery, and on the other, an almost exclusive concentration on increase of nets — can be judged to be economically most profitable, is highly uncertain. Regarding pelagic specialisation, both price trends for the past ten years as well as a recent economic analysis (Tutuanga 1991) indicates that, from the point of view of the fishermen, the development in pelagic fisheries has been less interesting. However, when we consider the economic position of the Popo processors as it has been described, this specialisation becomes easier to understand. For the processor, the main profit potential is arguably connected to smoking of pelagic fish and reflected in credit strategies. According to all owners, loans from Popo women are easiest to obtain for gear believed to increase the availability of pelagic fish. Popo women do normally not fund bottom gill nets. Despite the very high costs involved in introducing the “400 meshes” driftnets, by 1991 as many as 30 per cent of the companies in the northern beach village had acquired a sufficient number of these nets.¹¹ And this was only one year after two companies used them successfully for the first time. Most of these sudden extra investments were financed by the Popo women. As one fishermen put it: “Suddenly the women were queuing to finance our new ‘400 meshes’ since they had seen the year before that the nets could extend the sardinella season by several months.”

This concentration of growth in nets at the expense of other means of production is a more complicated question. On paper, it would probably be in the economic interests of both owners and women creditors to invest in a more balanced way and increase the number of canoes as well. Here we have to take into account the level of administration and risks involved in operating several canoes. If the trend seems to be towards individually owned units, an owner (usually a man without any formal education) who wishes to invest in an additional canoe will have to face a range of challenges: a substantial increase of the involvement of his network of confidants in Benin and thereby also a considerable increase in his risks; a doubling in the number of Popo clients whom he will also have to finance in order to get them to Pointe-Noire; and finally a substantial increase in the time he has to spend in general administration of the unit, at the expense of other tasks. It is symptomatic that the few individual owners who operate more than one canoe, and who are all considered particularly competent in administrative matters, are unanimous in saying

¹¹ At least 5-6 units are needed. This represents an approximate cost surpassing FCFA 1 million. From Table 2 we see that more than half of the companies (15 out of 28) had enough “400 meshes” as of November 1992.

that for them, two canoes is the absolute limit to what they can manage to control. One canoe seems to constitute a sort of "marginal utility" for individual owners.

In a situation with such dramatic changes — first in relations between men and women, and second in those between owners and workers compared to the previous decade — we must assume that the political situation has also altered. In the 1970s the community had certainly not been homogenous in social and economic respects, whereas in the 1980s differentiation became more visible and pronounced, partly as a result of the increased economic role of women and partly due to the stop in upward social mobility among men. Women never had a place in the political institutions of the Popo; and, as noted, ownership among men largely followed lines of seniority in Pointe-Noire, usually coherent with the general conception of seniority underlying the extended family system. This meant that both women and workers were seriously constrained in their direct political participation, whether concerning extended families or ARB-B. In order to avoid conflicts which easily could lead to severe problems for the whole community, the new situation had to be addressed in one way or another.

We can discern considerable differences in how the interests of the two groups have been dealt with in Popo politics, and in the consequences. With a gender-differentiated economy, Popo women have in principle long enjoyed same economic rights as men. When it became natural and necessary to regulate and control the new credit relations, women's interests as creditors were taken care of in basically the same manner and according to the same rules as the relations between co-owners had been handled since the early 1970s. And since the women were members of Pointe-Noire community, their economic affairs were generally integrated under ARB-B jurisdiction and control. This was unproblematic and no doubt facilitated access of loans for some, as well as liberating the production system from dependence on people in the home area who only indirectly were integrated in the political system of the migrants. It also increased the dominance of ARB-B as the main political body. The only economic affairs not integrated in ARB-B regulations seem to be those between spouses. Economic relations within marriage become too delicate for ARB-B to determine on the basis of "particularistic" economic regulations which easily may conflict with the overall ideology of husband dominance in the household. Household matters always remain within the household, unless the case is so serious that the lineages (including that of the woman) have to become involved.

With their growing economic power, women could easily become a challenge and constitute a threat to the established order of the owners. For

example, one could imagine that women creditors, in order to increase their provision of fish, started offering loans to workers who wished to create their own companies. Or, as their Ghanaian and Togolese sisters have done, they could start to invest directly in fisheries by establishing their own private companies (Overaa, forthcoming). Except for some few cases where workers have received assistance from women, and, as already mentioned, one company created in 1990 and owned by a woman, this does not seem to have taken place.¹² A more detailed investigation of these questions may help us understand how the game of gender politics is played and why these strategies do not seem to be chosen by wealthy women.

Popo workers are extremely valuable to their patrons. In most cases the latter will have brought them, forwarding their travel and resettlement expenses. The owners very much depend on their Popo labour in work. Substituting them with young Congolese cannot be considered an alternative because the owners lack similar means of control over them. Therefore, the Congolese work force continuously goes in and out of the various companies, and if a worker has a conflict with one owner, that automatically leads to the withdrawal of the worker to the benefit of another. Also, if the catches have been good, the Congolese worker will often choose to withdraw temporarily until he needs money once more. For these reasons, Congolese labour has always been considered unreliable by the Popo. And likewise, any attempt by Popo workers to liberate will be strongly opposed by their patrons, and ARB-B effectively regulates and controls the transfer of the Popo work force from one company to another.

Any woman planning to fund such a liberation must take several factors into consideration. It is always the owners who remain in control of her access to fish. Provoking an owner may easily affect her deliveries, even if they derive from other companies. As head of household her husband (here we should recall that husbands are owners in 70 per cent of the cases) retain control of her stay in Congo. To provoke him or one of his colleagues may result in being moved back to his family in Benin. To profit from ARB-B jurisdiction and protection, any economic transaction must be carried out in front of witnesses approved by ARB-B. Funding workers in secrecy is too risky; doing it in "transparency" quickly leads to sanctions from the owners the woman depends on. A woman who wishes to support other fishermen (whether they are owners or workers) can only do so with a sort of publicity which implies the knowledge and consent of

¹² Another female-owned company (no. 24 in Table 2) had existed earlier. It was dissolved on the death of the owner in 1988. However, that was a Mina unit where the woman had inherited from her husband and had continued his work.

her husband. He in turn is unlikely to agree on support to any Popo worker, as that would lead to severe conflicts between him and the owners concerned, and ARB-B would deem him responsible for the problem. As long as the owners have common interests in preventing Popo workers from establishing themselves, the owners can use their political control to limit the undesirable consequences of the economic power and influence of their wives.

More or less the same constraints apply for a woman who wishes to establish her own company. The husband in particular will resist such an investment, unless he himself is given command and management, which in that case means that her investment simply becomes like any other credit. It is worth noting that the only woman owner now operating is divorced; she herself has said she has to remain not married to a fisherman as long as she wants to continue operating as an owner. On the other hand, divorce generally means that the woman loses control of her children, and is not seen an alternative economic strategy.

To a certain extent, the economic interests of women as they have developed during the 1980s can be said to have been integrated into the Popo political system. Through the inclusion of their credit transactions under ARB-B jurisdiction, women creditors have been given the protection necessary to ensure the reproduction of these relations. Furthermore, the system puts upon the women's economic dispositions clear limitations which diminish potential tensions between them and the owners, particularly if the women gain too much economic power.¹³ It is the ARB-B system which provides women with the required material protection. Marriage relations and thereby the extended family system restrict their economic options, but as the marriage institution includes so many other functions and considerations, a woman will rarely opt to avoid marriage so as to pursue economic goals. Thus, ARB-B's more particularistic principles in economic affairs do not represent a threat to the owners. When the female company owner in 1990 sued the person she had selected to manage her company because he had started to act as if he was the owner and refused to present accounts to her, the case was judged and the woman awarded full support according to the general rules regulating relations between owner and manager.¹⁴ However, the underlying precondition for

¹³ This has led to a situation where close economic collaboration between wives and their husbands seem to emerge as a viable strategy for both parties, particularly within the wealthiest households.

¹⁴ Some cases of managers operating male-owned companies exist, and managers have also to be appointed when e.g. the owner travels to Benin.

this verdict was that the case never could have been brought in front of ARB-B if she had been married, and her husband was the manager.

During the 1980s, economic relations back to the home community were considerably weakened due to changes in financing patterns. In such a situation, one might have expected that the extended family system would slowly loosen its grip on politics in Pointe-Noire. One main reason why this does not seem to have been the case is probably the role the family has come to play in controlling the challenges emerging from the greater economic role of women. In addition, the extended families are still important in the recruitment of Popo workers, and children are still sent home to the extended families for schooling and socialisation. The changes in the economy caused by the arrival of women have to some extent strengthened the principles of the extended family system in its dealings with ARB-B. We may say that new gender relations have favoured the reproduction of the extended family system; this, in its turn, has required continued and perhaps even enforced insistence on Popo ideology and traditional Popo values. However, this insistence also reproduces the value of returning home, as well as the general Popo norms and expectations concerning the role of migration and migrants, as was described in Chapter 3.

In the face of qualitatively altered conditions, this continued insistence on Popo symbols and values has created serious problems for Popo workers. Not only have they had to encounter new types of constraints which seriously delimit their possibilities for financial success. The insistence on ideology also produces a rhetoric which emphasises that the reason for every Popo being abroad, is to earn money to bring back home, to pay respect to and augment prestige of oneself, the lineage and the village. In a production system which developed as it did in the 1980s, and which excludes around 60 per cent of the adult male population from doing exactly what the rhetoric preaches, the situation is bound to become problematic. And indeed very soon this paradox created problems of increased tensions, problems which have not yet found a solution.

Workers' representations of this conflict are closely linked with the death of Kassa Sévi in May 1987. According to them, that is when the problems began and the owners started to become "greedy", not giving consideration to the needs of their younger brethren. For them Kassa has become the symbol of the egalitarian aspect of Popo values. The community leadership and the owners, seeking to reproduce the basis for their dominance, also make systematic use of Kassa's memory as a symbol. But now it is taken to represent order, collaboration and prosperity — in other words qualities connected to ARB-B. In this manner Kassa has become an extraordinarily

potent but ambiguous symbol, applied to two directly opposed groups of interests.

The conflict between workers and owners has become largely one of ideology, where the workers challenge the rhetorics of the owners. In such a situation, where the workers assert that they represent the true essence of Popo values, "management of fear" loses its strength. Thus it seems that the Popo political system as it developed in the 1970s, has lost parts of its power-base in relation to the Popo workers. Nevertheless, ARB-B's overall authority appears to be as strong as ever. Workers may fight their owners and grumble about corruption and selfishness among their leaders, but few seem to challenge ARB-B as an institution. If management of fear has become less effective, we must therefore assume that new sources of power have also emerged in recent years.

In this respect, particular significance seems to attach to ARB-B's relations with the rest of ARB and with the government, or more correctly two governments — since both that of the host country as well as the government of their country of origin obviously play a role in Popo politics. When ARB-B was established in 1967, the Benin Embassy in Kinshasa was contacted, and it gave its approval to the written internal regulations. It has also been reported that the Embassy later circulated the regulations as a kind of model to other Popo fishing communities abroad (particularly in Gabon and Cameroon). However, the overall impression is that the Bénin government during the 1970s played only a limited role in Popo politics. One should notice that no reference has been made to any direct participation or contribution in the repatriation episode in 1977, nor in the months which followed. However, ARB in town was important, particularly as a guide to how to establish contacts with the Congolese authorities and with whom.¹⁵ We have seen how, as the Popo — Congolese contacts developed in the 1970s, contact with various parts of the administration became an important power-base for ARB-B in its demarcation vis-à-vis the extended family system. Although we only have limited information about the character of these relations, we assume that initially they must have been mainly personal. Kassa and some of his secretaries knew of individuals who could be contacted whenever a specific problem arose.

¹⁵ A certain number of Béninois in town actually held positions in the Congolese administration. Although none of them, as far as we know, held positions of particular interest for the fishermen, it seems likely that they have played a catalytic role in this process.

It is probably correct to say that in the 1970s, ARB — Congolese relations gradually became stronger, not only in number, but also in character. For the Congolese authorities, ARB began to demonstrate many useful sides. It supported a wide range of money collections launched by Congolese authorities,¹⁶ and it proved useful in a great many matters relating to tasks allocated to the police, the municipal authorities etc. where the same authorities realised they would have great problems in solving them alone. When the port authorities in 1981 had to relocate many Popo (and Vili) due to the expansion of the petrol off-shore industry, ARB played an important and constructive role. This list could be continued, but a statement from a high-ranking Congolese civil servant in 1992 may serve as a good illustration: *“If only our Congolese brothers were organised the way the Popo are, we would have far less problems in this country.”* But ARB-B also demonstrated strength and internal authority. In connection with the repatriation episode, the ARB-B organised “production strikes” led to a virtually empty fish market, making it clear to all that the presence of the Popo had at least some advantages. If relations between ARB and Congolese authorities have been characterised by a certain mutual understanding, part of the explanation is that “everyone” knows what the impact would be if the Popo were sent away.

It is probably safe to say that relations between ARB-B and the Congolese administration have gradually become more institutionalised — if we by institutionalisation mean that relations become less dependent on individuals. There is little doubt that many Congolese government institutions, probably by gradually realising the utility of ARB-B, today often have a fairly permanent type of relation with ARB-B, not exclusively dependent on the individuals involved. A good indicator of this is that relations seem to be upheld despite considerable changes in personnel as a result of the recent democratisation process in the Congolese administration. This is not to say that relations have been formalised, neither that the overall relationship between the Congolese government and ARB-B has ceased to be delicate and often problematic. In mid-1991, the great majority of the Popo continued to live without residence permits and other legally required documents. This situation has formed the basis of recurrent complaints from Congolese authorities as well as the general public.

¹⁶ During 1991 and some months of 92, almost one million FCFA were collected for “Congolese” purposes: school benches in Pointe Noire, support to families of railway-accident victims, participation of the Congolese national team in the African football championship in Dakar, and road maintenance in one of the beach villages.

Various events in the most recent development of ARB-B state relations underscore the point of increased institutionalisation, as well as an increased role of institutions from both governments in the organisation and functioning of ARB-B. After a Béninois consulate was established in Pointe-Noire in 1991, contacts with the Béninois state have increased noticeably. In connection with the establishment of the Consulate, ARB and its branches were restructured, and new boards were for the first time formally elected. Analysis of the election process at the beach illustrates very clearly how Béninois consulate officials directly influenced the ARB-B elections in support of the old established leadership. Established Popo leaders were given valuable support against an opposition of workers and a few young owners. A new mandate and new internal regulations were also introduced.¹⁷ The initiative for this restructuring came from government sources. One of the consequences was that, for the first time, three women were elected as members to each of the boards. Although much of the restructuring must be seen as a formality, and the elected women were handpicked by the existing leadership, the process still demonstrates how Béninois Government officials today may and actually do intervene in internal Popo politics.¹⁸ The Béninois Government plays its hands very carefully in respecting the way "things work", but there is clearly an implicit wish from the authorities for a more "modern" ARB, with greater emphasis on pragmatic matters relevant to Pointe-Noire, instead of traditional ideological concerns.

Illustrative here are the meetings with ARB leaders in Pointe-Noire in November-December 1991, held by the Minister of Justice in Benin as part of an official trip to Congo. At a time when the issue of the Zairian immigrants to Congo was very tense and a daily part of the Congolese political agenda, the meeting mainly focused on the question of residence permits for the Béninois, which had also been a recurrent headache for the Consulate. Partly as a result of this meeting, ARB started to work systematically in order to get the legal position of all their members regulated. In this connection ARB-B also started participating in and helping Congolese authorities to organise different population surveys. In

¹⁷ These documents are a sort of blueprint for mandates and regulations of any voluntary organisation, and are thus very different from the old 1967 regulations which are much more pragmatic and normative. However, it was explicitly stated that the new internal regulations came as a supplement and not as a replacement for the old ones.

¹⁸ The intervention was facilitated by the fact that the president of the overall ARB in town has been appointed as consulate staff. He is himself from Grand Popo and can therefore without problems speak and act with reference to both the ARB and the extended family rhetoric.

1992 this led to a noticeable increase in the number of Popo with legal residence permits.¹⁹ In many ways, ARB-B has now started undertaking functions earlier conceived as typical Congolese Government tasks, tasks which ARB-B, through their particular relations with the Congolese administration, had tried to escape.

However, if ARB has started to play a more active role in fulfilling functions on behalf of the two governments, this is — according to what has been shown above — possible only if the governments themselves start responding more to the needs of the Popo. Part of ARB's *raison d'être* remains the question of collective residence and work rights. In this respect, the "random" approach to defining the costs of residence permits, licences and other forms of taxation is unacceptable to the Popo. In the process of regularising the residence permits of the Popo, ARB has successfully turned to high-ranking Congolese civil servants in order to avoid falling prey to people from certain parts of the Congolese administration all too ready to abuse the possibilities which this campaign represented. As a consequence, costs in 1992 seem to have become more regulated, with the official prices well known among the Popo. In the question of reintroducing a new municipal tax, ARB-B was, when we left the area in November 1992, "negotiating" the level of taxation with representatives of the municipality of Pointe-Noire.

As mentioned, part of ARB-B's power-base has always derived from its relations and networks to representatives of the two states. The recent social and economic changes in the community have probably increased the importance of external sources of power. Enforcing their relations to the two governments has made it possible for ARB-B and the system as such to handle the social tensions of internal differentiation between owners and workers which have emerged in the 1980s and reduced the escape possibilities of the Popo workers to an extent where they are left in a squeezed situation with very few alternatives. In the 1980s ARB-B ceased being an institution almost exclusively corporated around a common interest of residence and work permits, as it may be said to have been in the 1970s. Today it is also an important tool for the owners and to some extent their wives, for maintaining their economic interests at the expense of the Popo workers.

Although the Popo community may appear to be an autonomous and strong socio-political unit, its development, in particular since the end of

¹⁹ No figures on this increase have been obtained, but according to own estimates perhaps as much as 50 per cent of the Popo held legal residence permits by the end of 1992. Among owners and their wives, the figure is considerably higher.

the 1970s, clearly demonstrates the limitations inherent in viewing it in isolation, independent of the other social entities with which it relates. The community continues to be part of the greater Popo community, and in order to govern in Pointe-Noire, community leaders continue to depend on a certain extent on acceptance and approval from family and religious leaders in Benin. This explains, for example, how the leaders are able to place restrictions on the economic activities of the most powerful women. On the other hand, the character of ARB-B has forced Popo society into particular forms of articulation with the rest of the Béninois and with the Béninois and Congolese authorities which seem to influence the politics of the states and how they deal with matters of direct relevance to the Popo, but which also have become crucial elements for how Popo leaders handle internal conflicts in their own community.

Popo political leaders today employ at least two different systems of governance, depending on which seems immediately the most opportune. There is hardly anything surprising in this. More interesting is that the analysis demonstrates how the old Popo ideology still emerges as a useful and efficient tool for governance, and how that in its turn reproduces and reinforces values which at times challenge the interests of the owners and processors. Finally it demonstrates how attempts are made to meet these challenges. This does not mean that ARB-B remains negligent to the new problems caused by the halt to upward mobility. On the contrary, it works actively to find viable solutions to a conflict which many owners view with great concern because they realise the potential threat to their own future. Besides, current conflicts between owners and workers already affect production negatively.²⁰

Finally, one specific consequence of the Popo political organisation should be highlighted. We have seen how much of Popo politics in general and their relations to government authorities in particular must be understood on the basis of a collective need for rights of residence and work. "Collective" in this respect only means a limited number of people already part of the community — not the Popo in general. The complete stagnation of the male population the last ten years demonstrates this point clearly. With respect to Popo living outside Pointe Noire, the special alliance existing between ARB and Congolese authorities effectively regulates the recruitment of new Popo fishermen into Congo. It is the same

²⁰ One of the more dramatic (but probably not very viable) suggestions forwarded by an ARB leader was to introduce time-limited contracts of three years for all Popo workers. Another suggestion is to seek workers among other groups of foreigners (eg. Ghanaians). They will not automatically fall under the same ideology as the Popo.

particularities of Popo politics which ultimately explain how the Anlo Ewe and Mina who tried to resettle in Pointe Noire after 1962 have gradually become marginalised and why they have left the community.

Through their particular relations to the governments, the Popo in Pointe Noire have established a *de facto* monopoly of residence and work among migrant fishermen, and this monopoly contributes strongly to their almost exclusive access to certain types of resources. Other foreigners are not able to settle; and Congolese fishermen who would like to compete for the same resources fail due to the lack of similar forms of political organisation crucial to the reproduction of the production system. All the Congolese who have tried over the years to enter into "Popo" fishery have had to do so on individual basis, and all have failed. The only competition for pelagic resources comes from the small industrial purse-seiners which generally operate in areas further off-shore compared to the Popo. But even against those, the Popo are competitive, and several authors have noticed that in periods where catches are big, the industrial fleet has to reduce and sometimes even stop their fishing (e.g. Niel 1973). Through the processing and distribution network established by themselves (on which the purse seiners also depend to a certain extent), it is the Popo who dominate the market in pelagic fish. Their only competitors for resources are granted access as long as the market is not saturated, but when this happens it is their competitors who have to yield.

6. Some concluding remarks

This paper has analysed the development of the Popo migrant fisheries in Congo as it has developed during a 30-year period. In a certain respect the story told is banal: community development is always a result of how its members, in cooperation and competition, internally as well as towards individuals and groups external to them, manage and choose to organise, and how values, symbols and more material sources of power are manipulated in the interests of the one or the other. The Popo community in Pointe-Noire is certainly no different from others in this respect.

However, the main reason for presenting the analysis in this form has been as a response to that part of the literature on West African migrant fisheries which, through a series of oversimplifications, has interpreted its development within the well-known framework of uni-lineal modernisation. Our empirical analysis demonstrates that there is nothing automatic or "natural" in the development of the specialised migrant fisheries in West Africa. The development processes to date has been characterised by i.a. a certain growth both demographically and economically. Canoes and motors are getting bigger and better, the volume of nets per unit and per owner has increased and many women processors are emerging as relatively wealthy economic actors. However, we have also seen how this development has been fought daily, and how it has come as a result of a combination of variables, ranging from the personal qualities of the leaders, internal matters of legislation and organisation and the insistence on values and beliefs which community members identify with, to particular forms of external relations to people in Benin and in the host country. In this manner the Popo community in Pointe-Noire emerges as both more "traditional" and more "modern" than what many seem to think.

Further changes and developments will depend on how these variables are handled by the main economic, religious and political actors. Just as the demographic growth of males came to a sudden stop in the early 1980s, there is nothing to guarantee that economic growth will not follow the same path. It is easy to agree on the importance of the threat of expulsion and repatriation in this respect. However, this is only one in a range of uncertainties connected to the further development of the Popo community. At present, the conflicting interests between owners, workers and women processors are under control, but these conflicts are also vital for

understanding further changes. The particular type of relationship to the home community in the Lower Mono is crucial in maintaining the present level of governance, as are the close contacts to both the Béninois and Congolese governments. Nobody can tell what these relations will look like ten years hence. The lack of opportunities among Popo workers and the dependence of the processors on company owners for raw material are also central to the question of how politics are being defined. With the steadily growing contacts into Congolese society, this picture must be expected to change in the years to come. Already we may observe how women try to liberate themselves financially from their husbands by increasing their provisions of fish from the small Congolese purse seiners that land catches in Pointe-Noire.

Whether the Popo fishery will continue to grow or whether it will stagnate and perhaps even fall into recession will therefore depend partly on changes in the social surroundings of their community. Primarily, however, it will depend on how members of the community are able to handle conflicts — the existing ones as well as those which are bound to emerge as a result of changes in their social or natural environment. If one overall lesson can be drawn from this particular study, it must be that the main key to understanding the wide-ranging developments which have taken place over the past 30-40 years in West African canoe fisheries must be sought in the ability of the fishing communities themselves to find viable solutions.

Despite its empirical focus, this study may also serve as an entrance to discussions of some broader issues related to fisheries development in general, and in West Africa more specifically. At this stage these issues can only be indicated, pending a more in-depth treatment later. First, the analysis serves to remind us that understanding economic development processes requires more than merely a study of the immediate organisation of production. In much of the literature on West African canoe fisheries, emphasis has been put on the emergence of the companies: this is certainly not uninteresting, but in this paper we have seen how vital a role is played by the political organisation of the community. Thus it is unlikely that the necessary availability of funds for reinvestments could have been maintained over time, without the judicial functions in economic affairs which ARB-B has managed to establish.

Similar arguments have long been voiced in the literature dealing with West African trade. A. Cohen's (1969 and 1971) and later M. Agier's (1983) works on the Haussa cattle trade and J.L. Amselle's work (1971) on the Kooroko traders, all reveal the crucial importance of a particular type of political organisation which Cohen called the trading diasporas. In many

respects this shows formal and functional similarities to the ARB-B system in Pointe-Noire. Little work as yet has been dedicated to the study of these aspects of social life within the West African canoe fisheries, although references to similar institutions among many groups of migrant fishermen abound. I. Odotei (1989 and 1991) shows that Fante, Ga and Ewe fishermen in Abidjan as well as in Cotonou have established similar associations. A. Dia (1993) has stressed the internal organisation among Wolof from Senegal, fishing near Nouadibou in Mauritania, as Bouju (1991) in dealing with the Sierra Leonian Temne fishermen operating in Guinea. Through interviews with Popo fishermen who have operated in Cameroon, Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire, we know that "ARB-Bs" exist and operate in these countries as well. In the case of the Popo it is interesting to note how *Novincha*, a Xwla voluntary association which was created in Grand Popo in 1917 to deal with matters of common concern in the area and which still plays an important role in the politics of the Lower Mono, is often used as model for organisation abroad. In Pointe Noire however, the role of *Novincha* is to a certain extent under-communicated due to the important presence of Xweda. Although the character and the strength of these internal associations abroad will vary, there is good reason to assume that the internal political organisation of the migrant West African fishermen constitutes an important element for understanding the considerable developments in the canoe fisheries.

One of the most important issues concerns the very interesting types of relations which have been established between ARB and the different governments. No doubt, these relations indicate conflicting political strategies between the society and the states, but the analysis also reveals an intricate and increasingly important web of collaboration, and this is a crucial element for understanding the governance of the community. The way these relations have developed, and the way the functions of one institution seem to be taken over by another, makes it highly problematic to insist on any clear dichotomisation between ARB as "society" and the different government offices as "the state". Just as the political system of the Popo from the outset should be seen as an integration of the extended families and the more recently established ARB-B, the later development indicates that, in many ways, the Popo political system may be seen as an integration of society and state institutions.

The analysis of ARB/government relations links in directly with recent debates about the role of politics and of state/society relations with respect to development. But whereas many current views tend to emphasise the dysfunctions of this relationship, seeing it as an impediment to economic growth and social development, our analysis of ARB state relations has

indicated that the relation may be more differentiated. A major weakness has been uncritically to classify ARB relations with individuals and offices which formally represent the government as society-state relations. This is too simplistic, as the persons or institutions in question may well represent other structures and interests in addition to those of the state. However, if we ask what have been the underlying reasons that have driven ambassadors, consulate employees, army colonels, party officials, police officers or town majors to enter into more or less reciprocal relations with Popo leaders, it becomes difficult to ignore the factors directly connected to their professional status, and a realisation on their part that collaboration with ARB-B represents the most efficient means to exercise the kind of control expected of them and connected to their positions as government employees. This, however, does not mean that other factors like personal gain or the interests of other parts of the society to which they belong, may not also play a role in the total picture.

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